



Teachers talk about NCEA

**Research report on
focus groups
with secondary teachers**

**Judie Alison
NZ Post Primary Teachers Association**

NZPPTA
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Wellington
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www.ppta.org.nz

Author: Judie Alison,
Advisory Officer, NZPPTA

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SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

REVIEWS

1. That the following aspects of the NCEA be reviewed by the Ministry of Education and NZQA, in consultation with the profession:

- **URGENT:** An **external** review of NZQA's processes in relation to external assessment.

(The goal of this review would be to ensure that in future all NCEA exams are high quality and deliver acceptable comparability of results from year to year, standard to standard and subject to subject, this review to be completed by the end of Term 2, 2005, so that it can provide benefits to students entered for NCEA this year.)

- **URGENT:** The change management processes of NZQA and the Ministry of Education.

(This review would ensure that in future, any changes in standards or other assessment requirements or processes are signalled in a reasonable timeframe which allows teachers to adapt their practice without undue pressure. It would also consider communication systems in both agencies to ensure that teachers, students, parents and the wider community were all kept well-informed and in a timely manner.)

- The relative credit values of all standards used in secondary schools to ensure equity between standards.

(This review must include both the relative credit values of unit standards against achievement standards, and between achievement standards within and across subjects.)

- The 80 credit requirement for attainment of the Certificate at each level.

(This is required in view of the indications in the research that the 80-credit requirement tends to de-motivate some students.)

- The possible benefits of introducing at least a Merit level into unit standards in conventional school subjects.

- Whether the current range of Excellence, Merit and Achieved levels of achievement in achievement standards is sufficient.

(This review must give particular attention to the wide range of achievement currently covered by Achieved at Level 1.)

RESEARCH

2. That the Ministry of Education **urgently** commission research into the impact of the NCEA on student motivation.

(This research must include consideration of the effects, both positive and negative, of the design of the system on student motivation.)

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

3. That the Ministry of Education re-establish its capacity to adequately resource professional development (including sample resource development) for the NCEA.

(This would require the capacity to co-ordinate professional development delivery, and to ensure the ongoing provision of new sample assessment resources, including for unit standards commonly used in schools. As was done in the early years of the development, teachers would need to be released to facilitate professional development and to work on development or refinement of resources.)

4. That at least two days per year of Ministry-funded professional development for every teacher, focused on the NCEA and largely subject-based, be provided each year for at least the next three years, starting in 2005. This professional development must enable teachers to work with colleagues within their own schools and with colleagues in other schools, and must share models of successful school and subject practices in the following areas:
 - The effective school-level management of internal assessment.
(This must include the sharing of ideas on the development of robust systems for flexible and holistic assessment, and manageable approaches to providing further opportunities for assessment.)
 - Ensuring a proper balance between curriculum and assessment.
(This must include issues raised in this report such as curriculum fidelity, ensuring appropriate learning time, focusing on depth of learning rather than credit accumulation, and course coherence.)
 - Effective school-level practice in relation to student pathways guidance.
(This must include issues such as setting of course pre-requisites, teacher up-skilling in careers options, and systems for guidance of students.)

WORKING PARTIES

5. That the following issues be referred to Working Parties established under the Secondary Teachers' Collective Agreement 2004-2007, as follows:
 - That the Teacher Workload working party provide solutions to address the time requirements of school-based assessment under the NCEA.
(There should be special consideration given to the issues for teachers in small isolated schools and teachers in single-teacher departments in larger schools, and the issues for middle managers in all schools. The workload impacts of the increasingly complex student pathways resulting from the NCEA must also be considered.)
 - That the Career Pathways working party, consultation with NZQA, give urgent consideration to the establishment of an enhanced external moderation service staffed by secondary teachers.
(This service needs to be available to visit schools and to provide information and advice to teachers as needed, arising out of the moderation processes. It will necessitate additional staffing because it is clearly not feasible to expect busy teachers to provide an adequate service on top of their full-time positions.)

RESOURCING

6. That secondary and area schools Operations Grant funding be increased urgently to recognise the continuing financial impact on schools of qualifications assessment.
(Small and rural schools must receive extra funding in recognition of the lack of economies of scale in such schools, as highlighted in this report.)

GENERAL

7. That no level of the NCEA be made entirely internally assessed unless there is clear evidence that such a change is supported by the secondary teaching profession.
(Such support would not be forthcoming until at least the following conditions were met: a robust system of external moderation in which teachers had faith; teachers were confident that such a move would be in the interests of their students; and that the internal assessment of the NCEA had become manageable for teachers.)

8. That two positions on the NZQA Board be reserved for nominees with secondary teaching expertise.

1. INTRODUCTION

In late 1997, the New Zealand government announced a policy called 'Achievement 2001'. This policy involved a complete overhaul of the secondary school qualifications system, to shift it from a mishmash of norm-referenced qualifications, to a completely standards-based system. Under the new system students would be assessed at three, or possibly four, levels of the same qualification, to be called the National Certificate of Educational Achievement and registered on the New Zealand Qualifications Framework.

Over the next four years, the new qualification began to take shape, thanks to the Herculean efforts of a wide range of teachers working in subject panels developing standards and preparing sample assessment activities, in other working groups on issues like professional development, working as facilitators of professional development, beginning to modify their programmes at school level to prepare for the change, and much, much more. In 2000 the start date for the new qualification was delayed a year, to 2002, because the system was deemed to not be ready, neither at school level nor at central agency level.

In 2002, the first group of students and teachers began to experience the new qualification, at Level 1 (Year 11). Over 2003 and 2004, Levels 2 and 3 were successively introduced, and also the separate Scholarship examination which was registered on the Framework at Level 4, but whose content derived from the Level 3 standards. As each level was introduced, the previous qualification at that level was discontinued, except that the Year 12 qualification, Sixth Form Certificate, was allowed to continue to be used for a further two years by those schools who were not happy to move straight to Level 2 in 2003. That has now also disappeared.

Not surprisingly, given the massive size of this undertaking, the qualification has rarely been free of controversy, nor has the path of implementation been smooth. Nevertheless, by the end of 2004, it could be said that the qualification was firmly entrenched in New Zealand schools, and that the first phase of implementation was complete. At the same time, the teaching profession believes that there is still work to be done to refine the qualification, and that the implementation period for it should more properly be seen to be at least 6 years from 2002, taking it to the end of 2007 at least.

At this point, halfway through the real implementation period, the Executive of PPTA decided that there was a need for solid data on what secondary teachers were thinking about the NCEA. There has been too little research of any kind conducted during the initial implementation period, and secondary teachers' stories about the giant enterprise they have been engaged in have certainly not been told. Therefore, the Association decided to embark on a series of focus groups with teachers in a representative range of schools across the country. This report is the result.

In addition, the Minister of Education, Hon Trevor Mallard, announced at PPTA Annual Conference in September 2004 that there would be a low-key review of the NCEA during 2005, involving collection of a range of data to inform strategic planning of future work to refine the qualification system. The government has acknowledged that this PPTA research will be a vital source of information to inform that review.

While participants were told that the purpose of the focus groups was to discuss future directions for the senior secondary school in general, including implications of changes in the senior school on the junior secondary school, it was probably inevitable that the discussion would invariably home in on the NCEA, since this is the biggest challenge

currently facing teachers in the senior secondary school. However we were pleased about the extent to which discussion ranged wider into issues of curriculum and pedagogy and of the fundamental purposes of secondary schooling.

The report focuses on the voices of secondary and area school teachers, hence its title 'Teachers talk about NCEA'. It portrays a profession which is engaged on a hugely important project which is challenging the intellectual, emotional and physical resources of teachers to the maximum. Teachers talked in the focus groups about some really fundamental issues about teaching and learning, and the assessment of learning. They were wrestling with huge dilemmas brought upon them by the design of the system, but they were also excited about the opportunities for creative approaches to teaching and to curriculum organisation that the system presents. Many of them expressed a belief that they had been let down by the central agencies, who had failed to support the change to the new system adequately in a wide variety of ways. It is quite clear that without their professional commitment to putting their students first and to delivering for them whatever the shortcomings of the support provided, the implementation could never have been successful.

But on balance, despite the continuing controversy about aspects of the qualification, and despite the continued attempts of some people and groups to totally discredit it, it can be said that the implementation to this point has been successful, thanks to that commitment of teachers and professional leaders.

Nevertheless, this report makes no bones about the fact that there is considerable work still to be done. As Chapter 3, 'The Future of NCEA', makes clear, while the vast majority of teachers do not wish to return to the previous system of qualifications, they are almost unanimous that there is fine tuning, or as one teacher described it 'rough tuning', to be done over the next few years. Some of this fine tuning will need to be done by central agencies such as the Ministry of Education and the New Zealand Qualifications Authority. The rest of this fine tuning will need to be done by schools as they find their own solutions to the challenges and opportunities the system presents, but the union will continue its calls for better support and resourcing to schools to enable them all to complete their part of this exercise successfully.

2. METHODOLOGY

The data for this research was collected from 16 focus groups of secondary or area school teachers, held over 8 days during November and December 2004. The groups were timed to coincide with the senior external exam period, when it was hoped that teachers would be able to be released more easily from their teaching duties than at any other time of the year.

SAMPLE

A representative sample of schools was drawn up as follows:

- Two area schools, one High and one Mid Decile, both with rolls of less than 500 including their primary level students
- One small rural co-ed school, Mid Decile, about 1 hour's drive from the nearest major centre, roll less than 500
- One 'rural fringe' co-ed school, Mid Decile, a short drive from the nearest major centre, roll in 501-750 range
- One co-ed school in a provincial town, Mid Decile, roll in 1001-1200 range
- One urban co-ed, Low Decile, roll in 501-750 range
- One urban co-ed school, Mid Decile, roll in 501-750 range
- Two large urban single-sex schools, one a boys' school and one a girls' school, both High Decile and both with rolls above 1200

(School descriptors give decile and roll range to protect the confidentiality of participants.)

There was also a deliberate attempt made to include in the sample some schools which were known to be enthusiastic supporters of the NCEA, and some schools which were believed to have strong reservations, in order to ensure a spread of views.

Principals of the identified schools were contacted. All were happy for their schools to participate in the research and they agreed to find 'willing volunteers' to participate. Except in the area schools where only one group was held, schools were asked to set up two groups. One of these groups consisted of heads of department, teachers in charge of subjects and senior managers responsible for qualifications or curriculum, and the other group consisted of classroom teachers with no curriculum leadership responsibilities.

Groups were to be a maximum of 10 and a minimum of 6 teachers, if possible. Final group sizes ranged from 4 to 10, with an average size of 7 teachers. Money to cover teacher release time was offered to schools. It was anticipated that the groups would take one and a half to two hours, and in fact none ran for less than two hours.

ETHICAL REQUIREMENTS

On arrival at the focus group, teachers were provided with a letter from PPTA thanking them for giving up their time and reiterating that their participation was voluntary. The purpose, design and methodology of the research was explained in the letter. Teachers were also promised that their school's participation in the research was on a confidential basis, and that neither they nor their school would be named in the final report. They were given an opportunity to leave if these conditions were not satisfactory to them, and encouraged to feel free to leave or to not contribute at any point during the discussion.

Participants were advised that a summary of the data would be provided to enable them to see how the opinions of the teachers in their school compared with the opinions of teachers in other participating schools. Every school would also be provided with multiple copies of the full report.

All focus group discussions were taped and transcribed, with descriptors, e.g. 'HOD English', rather than names attached to comments. The qualitative data analysis package 'N6', from QSR International, was used to code and analyse the data to ensure that the analysis was a true reflection of the views expressed.

DISCUSSION SCHEDULE

The discussion schedule used was as follows:

- Now that all three levels of the NCEA are in operation in schools, what would you say is working well in the senior secondary school, especially with regard to qualifications? (You may have some other national certificates being offered in your school as well as NCEA, and if so, feel free to talk about them as well.) *Participants encouraged to talk about what's working for students, for teachers, for schools, for employers and tertiary providers, and for parents.*
- What would you say is not working so well in the senior secondary school, and what is causing that? And are these problems caused by the system beyond the school or are they to do with how the school is doing things, or a combination of both, do you think? *Participants encouraged to talk about what's not working for students, for teachers, for schools, for employers and tertiary providers, and for parents.*
- Thinking about the things that are not working so well, what do you think needs to be done, by whom and how urgently?
- On balance, is the new system of qualifications working better than the old system of School Certificate, SFC and Bursary or not? And if you think it's not working better, what should be done about that? *Participants encouraged to talk about what's working or not working for students, for teachers, for schools, for employers and tertiary providers, and for parents.*
- Is there anything that we haven't covered that you think PPTA should be saying to the government about all this?

REPORT

To keep the report to a manageable size, only some of the many relevant quotes from participants have been used. Numbers have been provided only occasionally; in most cases, descriptors like 'a few', 'some', and 'many' have been used as a guide to how common a view was. This is qualitative rather than quantitative research, and the voices chosen reflect the views of others who also spoke in similar vein.

Note:

The descriptors after quotes used in this report use the following pattern: participant's core position e.g. 'HOD Maths', 'Principal's Nominee', 'PE/Health' (main teaching subjects of a classroom teacher, or in the case of an HOD, other subjects taught); decile range and description of school; roll range of school. It will be noticed that some teachers, especially in the smaller schools, hold a number of roles, e.g. 'Deputy Principal, Principal's Nominee, HOD Science'. Where a Head of Department taught a number of subjects within the essential learning area for which they were HOD, these were not

listed separately, e.g. the HOD Social Sciences who taught three different subjects within their learning area.

Data was collected on the number of years participants had been teaching, but this is not included in the descriptors as in most cases it did not appear to be relevant. Where it was relevant, the information is provided in the text.

3. THE FUTURE OF NCEA

*“I’d like to fine-tune this one.
I think it’s fairer, to all kids, not just some sections.”*

At the end of every group discussion, a question was asked to try to establish the participants’ overall views of the NCEA, by asking them ‘On balance, is the new system of qualifications working better than the old system of School Certificate, Sixth Form Certificate and Bursary or not? And if you think it’s not working better, what should be done about that?’ Sometimes a further probe was used, along the lines of ‘Would you want to go back to the old system?’

This question was included because while the groups began by talking about what was working well in the senior secondary school, they then moved to what was not working so well. It was important to bring them back at the end to the big picture, and to get a clear indication of how deep-seated their concerns were. It also became an important indicator of teachers’ readiness or otherwise for further change in the qualifications system. Twenty-two of the participants (21%) did not give a clear answer to this question. In most cases, it was that they were not present in the last few minutes of the discussion because they had to leave early. In a few cases, it was simply that their comment was not clearly able to be classified. The numbers given in this chapter should be treated with discretion because this was qualitative research and a small sample of teachers.

GO BACK TO THE OLD SYSTEM

In only one group was there a complete consensus among the seven teachers present that the problems with the new system were so major that it would be better to return to the old system, but almost all of this group still qualified their comments by saying that the old system would have to be modified. This particular group was the HOD group in a small rural school which seemed to be struggling financially, to the extent that the HODs said that they had no ancillary staffing available to them for curriculum support. They did all their own typing, their own photocopying, their own shopping, their own lab technician work, their own filing. Interestingly, the group of classroom teachers in that same school were more divided in their views, with two saying without qualification that they would like to return to the old system, and three saying they wanted to stay with the new system but with modifications.

Although the comments of the HODs in this school do not refer to the lack of ancillary support in the school, it seems likely that their views were coloured by this:

Well I’d have to say the old one, because I like to grade...rather than just this Achieved, Merit and Excellence...(HOD Art, Mid Decile Rural Co-ed, roll <500).

I think the old system, but it wasn’t... It needed changing. Like Sixth Form Certificate was just nonsense... So, if I had a choice, I think that the old system is better in comparison to NCEA, definitely (HOD Languages, Mid Decile Rural Co-ed, roll <500).

I would [go back to] the old system, with ... The qualification system definitely I think needed to be improved and I like having some internal component for English, for those skills that you can’t test in an exam. But I would like to see external exams with much more of a grading scale, rather than Not Achieved and just three others, particularly for the kids that just missed out (HOD English, Mid Decile Rural Co-ed, roll <500).

That rural school group of seven HODs constitute most of the eleven teachers in the whole sample who would prefer to go back to a modified previous system. Two of the other four were classroom teachers in the same school as the seven HODs, and the other two were in the same department in another school but not in the same focus group. Of these other four individuals who wanted to return to the previous system of qualifications, almost all of these qualified their comments in some way:

I think in Maths I'd rather have the old system. In Music, it doesn't really make a difference (Music/Maths, Mid Decile Rural Co-ed, roll <500).

I have to be honest and I was talking to my daughter about that last night and we both agreed that it [the previous system] had a lot of good things going for it. The main problem that it had was that they wanted to make the cut-off point 50%, which was the most ridiculous point to make it, because as long as it was normally distributed, that's where you've got everyone grouped together and there was little or no distinction between the individuals, and that was its fundamental fault (HOD Maths, Mid Decile Urban Co-ed, roll 501-750).

If I had the option between how it's going at the moment and the old, I think I'd go for the old... I think the final satisfactory system is going to be a combination of the new and the old. I'm disappointed that the holistic, the overall thing, is gone unless you do Scholarship, and then it becomes bloody hard (Maths, Mid Decile Urban Co-ed, roll 501-750).

STAY WITH THE NEW SYSTEM

All the other teachers in the groups who responded to this question supported the retention of the NCEA, however a wide range of degrees of enthusiasm was demonstrated.

One group of six teachers could be described as resigned to the new system:

We're stuck with NCEA and we're stuck with the concept. Not Achieved, Achieved, Merit and Excellence, and I guess grade point averages too, but each subject needs to perhaps have a unique, custom assessment way to go about it. They've put this NCEA umbrella over everything, and expected us to work within the same framework. Well it just doesn't work. That one big NCEA assessment umbrella doesn't work for English, Classics and us all at once (HOD ICT, Maths, High Decile Urban Boys, roll 1200+).

I'd like to go back but you can't (HOD Biology, High Decile Urban Boys, roll 1200+).

One teacher was absolutely definite that he wanted to return to the old system, but then agreed with a colleague who said that was not a viable position to adopt:

Actually, I would like to see the whole thing scrapped, because it's been a trying, gruelling exercise. In hindsight, having been an HOD for a while and having marked Bursary and School Certificate, and being a marker for achievement standards and a moderator, I sort of see it as too cumbersome, and we need to go back to the more simplistic system that we had before because it actually worked. There was disgruntlement about it, but it was actually... The employers don't understand it, parents don't understand it, if you get a mark and you get the average, I mean, that tells you a lot. [Colleague: Well I think the theological wars are over.] Well yes I realise that, but I was just trying to balance the views (HOD Science, High Decile Urban Boys, roll 1200+).

The largest grouping of teachers (37 of the 105 participants, 35%) was the group who said that the new system was definitely better, but qualified their comments by saying that there were improvements needed. There were too many comments of this kind to quote them all, and many of them are covered in other chapters, such as those on workload generators, the balance between curriculum and assessment and on resourcing, but the following is a representative sample:

I wouldn't go back, for two reasons. One we have come too far down this road to say after four years 'Bugger this, let's go back to what we had', that to me would be a total waste of time, but I believe that what we have set up now is something that, with a little bit of tinkering, can actually benefit everybody. I think that we are the meat in the sandwich here as teachers though...(Principal's Nominee, Mid Decile Provincial Co-ed, roll 1001-1200).

Most of the issues are resolvable given the willingness on the part of the Ministry and NZQA to actually help resolve them and the time within school I guess. So on the whole I think it's working really well (Principal's Nominee, HOD Science, Low Decile Urban Co-ed, roll 501-750).

I think that it has got good things about it, because we are able to assess internally, and in a more realistic manner and students are achieving. The workload is horrendous and is killing us, and at times, I really don't like being the assessor as well as the teacher (HOD English, Mid Decile Provincial Co-ed, roll 1001-1200).

I think it's good for the students, but I think it's diabolical for the staff, so again, continue to develop it, but with much more support (Science/Biology, Mid Decile Provincial Co-ed, roll 1001-1200).

I think that there are issues, there are certain problems, but overall I think it's much more equitable and fairer and I think it is growing with the times (HOD Humanities, Mid Decile Area, roll <500).

I certainly wouldn't like it to go, I think we're making good ground on it. I still don't think it's perfect yet, but I wouldn't want to abandon it and try something else. And I mean, the Level 2, far, far outweighs Sixth Form Certificate, yes definitely... (Science/Chemistry, High Decile Urban Girls, roll 1200+).

I think there's heaps of potential to be able to use NCEA to really tailor our teaching programmes in really exciting and interesting ways, to be able to use this assessment tool to really help us to do interesting programmes. I don't think at the moment ... because it's in that implementation sort of phase and it's really stressful, but I think that in a few years' time, it will be much better (English/Drama, High Decile Urban Girls, roll 1200+).

Although there was no group where every participant gave the NCEA an unqualified tick, in twelve of the sixteen groups there was nobody who said that they would wish to return to the old system, and teachers' summing-up comments were generally supportive. These groups were:

- Both groups in the Mid Decile Urban Fringe Co-ed
- Both groups in the Mid Decile Provincial Co-ed
- Both groups in the High Decile Urban Girls
- Both groups in the Low Decile Urban Co-ed
- Both groups in the High Decile Urban Boys
- Both area schools

It is hard to see any pattern in this group of schools. While the participants in the area schools were all generally supportive, the participants in the rural secondary school, which was of a similar size, were not. While the participants in the Mid Decile school on the fringe of a major city were supportive, the participants in the Mid Decile school of a similar size in the same city were much more muted in their support. It was not surprising that there was strong support from participants in the Low Decile Urban school, yet at the other end of the scale there was also strong support from participants in the High Decile Urban Girls school.

The most likely explanation of this lack of obvious pattern is that school-based factors are also significant, including opinion leadership by key individuals, a factor which is likely to have operated within each focus groups as well.

In all these twelve groups there were some participants who gave the NCEA an unqualified tick, and these participants form 28% of the total. The kinds of positives which these participants attributed to the NCEA included fairness, motivation of students, parity of esteem of different subjects, and flexibility in developing courses to meet student needs. A sample of these comments follows:

It's just totally fairer than the old system (HOD music, Mid Decile Urban Fringe Co-ed, roll 501-750).

I think it's heaps fairer. The old system worked really well for some kids, but this seems to me to be fairer for all kids (Assistant Principal, English, Mid Decile Provincial Co-ed, roll 1001-1200).

Yes I think on balance it's working, I agree with what's been said so far. It gives students the opportunity to achieve and they know they are achieving, they know that at the end of this particular assessment they've passed it and they've got it, and that's really comforting, it's inspiring. So on balance I think it's working really, really well, it's providing opportunities that weren't there before...(HOD Health/Careers, Low Decile Urban Co-ed, roll 501-750).

I think it is [working well] because it's provided our faculty with equity with other subjects, in that the credits are counting towards the same thing as everyone else (Health/PE/Food/Outdoor Ed, Mid Decile Urban Fringe Co-ed, roll 501-750).

Huge flexibility. Targeting for the kids and the kids getting the best out of it (Technology/Food & Nutrition, Mid Decile Urban Fringe Co-ed, roll 501-750).

It's more flexible. It allows students to achieve credit for areas where credit is due and it makes the qualification available to a greater range of students (HOD Science, Principal's Nominee, Mid Decile Area, roll <500).

CONCLUSIONS

There is no general will on the part of secondary teachers to return to the previous system of qualifications. 63% of all those participating in the groups expressed a view that the NCEA was either definitely better than the previous system but there were improvements needed, or that it was simply definitely better with no qualifications. Only 10% wanted to go back to the previous system, and a small number (6%) appeared resigned but unwilling to commit themselves to the NCEA being definitely better.

There were only two schools of the nine visited where there were teachers who wanted to return to the past system, and this was much more marked in one of these schools, the small Mid Decile Rural Co-ed. Yet even in these schools there were teachers who were willing to swim against the tide in their groups and say that they wanted the NCEA to stay and to be refined rather than to go back.

Clearly as far as teachers are concerned, the NCEA is here to stay and it is incumbent on everybody involved to make it work.

4. CURRICULUM V. ASSESSMENT

“There's sort of a balance sometimes between covering the curriculum, teaching what students need, and good teaching really, because sometimes by covering the curriculum, you teach a student nothing.”

In all the groups, teachers expressed concerns about the balance between curriculum delivery and assessment under the NCEA. Concerns included worries about whether the integrity of the national curricula was being broken down under the new system; about whether curriculum was driving assessment as it should, or whether assessment was driving the curriculum, and, related to that, whether student behaviour demonstrated a greater concern with credit accumulation than with learning; and about the sheer quantity of assessment being done, including the impact of that on the amount of teaching time available.

Not all the comments on this were negative. Some teachers viewed positively the breaking down of subject barriers and the ability to create new courses by combining content and assessment from different subject disciplines. Some believed that the motivation of credits was important for students who previously would have had nothing to show for their learning. Some were finding creative ways to make assessment a part of the learning process, so that time spent assessing was not seen as time lost to learning. However on balance, this area was giving many teachers some cause for concern.

A closely related issue is teachers' views of the modularisation of assessment and its impact on the concept of a course. This is dealt with in the next chapter. The issues dealt with in both these chapters are partly about the design of the new qualification system, and partly about school level decision-making about how to implement it in their own context.

CURRICULUM FIDELITY

The set of achievement standards for each subject was generally written to reflect the achievement objectives in that subject's curriculum statement, where that existed. Teachers expressed concerns that when they made decisions not to assess against an achievement standard to reduce the amount of assessment, they ran the risk that students would not cover the whole curriculum. Linked to this is the issue of credit accumulation as a student motivator (see later section in this chapter), because many teachers claimed that students in their school wanted to know whether there were credits attached to a task before they would complete it.

Teachers worried about whether they were covering the curriculum, or even whether they were obliged to do so, and what the implications might be of a decision to not cover it:

But if you're given a curriculum document, and you choose not to do a unit standard or an achievement standard or whatever, and you are assessment driven, are you actually covering the whole of the curriculum? And that's what it was originally, you taught to the curriculum, not to how you were going to assess (Commerce/Computing, Mid Decile Urban Fringe Co-ed, roll 501-750).

I don't think we've ever mentioned the curriculum the last three years. Had this brilliant new curriculum brought out in every subject area, and I know it's not compulsory Year 11 onwards, but it was there, and we considered the curriculum, we considered all those aspects that came out with the curriculum. NCEA has come in and squashed it flat (Science/Biology/Horticulture, High Decile Urban Boys, roll 1500).

Quite often the temptation is to cut corners to save time... Cutting out parts of the course, cutting out the teaching. Don't teach organic Chemistry, don't teach animal nutrition and excretion if you're only going to expect the students to be examined on the rest (HOD Biology, Mid Decile Provincial Co-ed, roll 1001-1200).

It's tricky though, well at least with Art History, because the course is designed to cover various specific skills which were previously taught as a whole throughout the year and so if you drop a standard, then you have dropped something out of that skill set...(Art/Art History/Design, High Decile Urban Girls, roll 1200+).

Are we here to provide an education as outlined in the curriculum, or are we here to assess so that we can get the students through to the next level? I feel that what we are doing in the classroom is being driven by assessment and no longer being driven by the curriculum that we trust has been put together as a result of sound educational research and practice, and you know, the curriculum is good. And here we are modifying the curriculum... (Biology/Science, Mid Decile Provincial Co-ed, roll 1001-1200).

Others did not see curriculum coverage as a concern, or had found ways around it:

The fundamental question is are we supposed to be challenged to deliver knowledge, or are we challenged to deliver transferable skills? And I guess that's....I mean if people have got the skills to problem solve, to access information, to process information, to synthesise, to analyse and have those generic skills and the technological know-how to know how to use those tools, is that what we should be doing? Or is it more important that we give students very, very specific chunks of knowledge that relate to a particular subject? And I guess our thinking in our school is that we want to give them the skills to unpack whatever they want to unpack in the future, rather than say we are going to deliver this very specific chunk of knowledge about whatever the subject is. And we know internationally too, that this is the way things are going, that there is this whole thing of skill-bases and it's becoming... We're talking like that, and I would say that teachers have got a much better idea as NCEA is developing about what is important and I think that people who are really analysing what education is all about are probably realising that those transferable skills are tools and are more important than a very specific piece of information that you can get in two seconds off the Internet (Deputy Principal Curriculum, Visual Arts, Low Decile Urban Co-ed, roll 501-750).

I feel I do [cover the curriculum]. The assessment, it's like, it's not summative assessment in P.E., a lot of it is formative assessment, so we're chipping away as we go...and we branch out as well in Level 1 and look at other aspects as well. But yes, that formative part I think helps us to cover...well you're taking care of the assessment as you go, but it gives you time also to look at other parts (PE/Health/Social Studies, Mid Decile Urban Fringe Co-ed, roll 501-750).

Well, I mean, we have to teach the curriculum, that is a given isn't it, and so schools should not be in a situation where they're choosing to not teach parts of the curriculum because they're not going to offer that piece of assessment, because they have an obligation to teach the curriculum. I think there are occasions when you can perhaps downplay some areas of the curriculum if you want to and concentrate on others, and I suspect that goes on in schools all the time anyway, because schools will take into account the nature of their students. Because for instance, if you've got a low ability class, you might not teach to the curriculum (HOD Physics, Quality Manager, High Decile Urban Girls, roll 1200+).

We all have the ability as heads of departments to take that out of our course if we wish. No-one has said anything about that 'If you're doing English at Level 1, you must have 1.1 to 1.8'. You could take out research and put in something else, a unit standard for example. You could take a Level 2 standard and bring it down to put in the 101 course...(Principal's Nominee, Mid Decile Provincial Co-ed, roll 1001-1200).

Well we got around it by covering the content for that external that we dropped in another internal that we did, and we chose not to cover that topic in so much detail, so that the students wouldn't say that 'Oh, we're not doing that external though', we didn't offer it to them and then we just took what we had covered in that topic and based an internal assessment around it. So we covered the curriculum, but we didn't offer the external standard (Art/Art History/Design, High Decile Urban Girls, roll 1200+).

In Japanese you have two speaking internals, a prepared speech and a conversation, and you have a writing one, so it was one of the speaking ones [that we dropped at each level]. In Level 1 and Level 3, it was the conversation, and in the Level 2, it was the prepared speech...[Researcher: Oh, so the idea is that over the three years...?] Yes, that you would do one conversation and two prepared speeches. Well basically in the way that the conversation assessment is set up, it is basically a prepared speech anyway, we've just dropped one of the speeches (Japanese, High Decile Urban Girls, roll 1200+).

We for example have dropped the language research from the year 12 program next year, but it's not that we're not going to teach language anymore, it's going to be taught in conjunction with the other achievement standards that we are offering, so that's how we're coping with that (HOD English, High Decile Urban Girls, roll 1200+).

I've dropped Geology as a major teaching topic - I taught it for a week this year, and Astronomy Level 1, I don't teach that. You know, they added in at the later stages Astronomy and Geology into the School Cert programme, which made it incredibly difficult to get through everything, because just teaching Biology, Chemistry and Physics is huge. And I don't feel that...well, the astronomy is done really, really well at primary schools and the kids are really good at it, but I don't feel that I have time to get through three main areas and teach astronomy and Geology, and I think a large number of schools are dropping those standards. I haven't changed Level 2 and Level 3, the teaching programme hasn't changed very much, except at Level 2 we actually squish Physics and Chemistry in order to encourage more students to take those two subjects - we've modularised and we have a short module of Chemistry and a short module of Physics which offer half a...about 14 credits each (HOD Science, Principal's Nominee, Low Decile Urban Co-ed, roll 501-750).

Technology follows the curriculum a lot more now - it is to the curriculum where before it often required a lot of interpretation. If you look at the curriculum and read the achievement standard, you can actually see quite clear links to the curriculum... The past would have been just more designing and making, where now, the kids can go out and find out what they're making... (Technology/Graphics, High Decile Urban Girls, roll 1200+).

The ability to assess more validly under the new system is seen by some teachers as providing greater curriculum fidelity than in the past:

Another positive in terms of English is that we are assessing, in a realistic way, areas which were previously assessed externally, such as delivering speeches and doing research, and it was very possible for students to actually not do the task in a realistic manner and just pick up on what other people had done and report it onto the exam paper, and still do very well if they were actually able to present their ideas in written form. Whereas now it is a far more honest assessment for things like speaking and research (HOD English, Mid Decile Provincial Co-ed, roll 1001-1200).

In the Sciences, a positive is that it is very good to be able to assess the practical skills, which couldn't possibly have been assessed before in an external examination. Because there is a lot of focus on kids developing their practical skills and often previously it didn't really mean anything, because they weren't assessed (HOD Biology, Mid Decile Provincial Co-ed, roll 1001-1200).

I think that in Maths, and I think in all curriculum areas, the fact that the standards are written from the curriculum ultimately means that we are following the curriculum and in some ways, almost following the philosophy of the curriculum, because of the range of the assessment tools and I think that's significant ... I think for example in Mathematics, it would have been rare to have seen teachers doing a great deal of practical work on measurement under the old system and it wasn't that they didn't have to do it...but they wouldn't have done it in a practical sense. And that practical assessment is there now and so you see a lot more teachers out with their students and measuring things, and I think that's bringing the Maths part a little bit more in line with the curriculum philosophy (HOD Maths/Physics, Mid Decile Area, roll <500).

WHICH IS IN THE DRIVING SEAT?

PPTA has been hearing for some time concerns from teachers that 'assessment is driving the curriculum'. It is a common feature of the introduction of new assessment regimes that for a time at least, assessment will seem to take up the driving seat, and it

certainly will occupy inordinate amounts of teacher time as they adapt to the new system. There is also a tendency for teachers to assess more at the beginning of a new system than they do later. Teachers' experience with Sixth Form Certificate is a good example of this.

Teachers' comments on the place of assessment need to be read with all of this in mind; nevertheless, at this point anyway it is clear that teachers believe that their teaching is 'assessment-driven', and ways need to be found to change this and to put learning back into the driver's seat.

Many teachers talked about losing richness and fun from their courses because of trying to get their students success in the assessment work:

I think for Visual Arts, it's got a lot more restrictive; it kind of gives them a recipe now. There's no time to sort of muck around using different sorts of techniques or any sort of difference, exploration of technique or style, you know their personal style... because you've got the unit standard that you need to get through in x amount of weeks, so we'll do this and this and this, and that covers the assessments, and we have a pass...next. And as soon as you give them the brief, the first thing they look at is 'How much is this worth, miss?' And you know, 'This is what I've got to do for this, so this is what I'm going to do. I won't do this, I won't do research, you know, why I came up with this idea and all that'. So it comes down to...and that's good for me because we've got units we've got to get through to do to get through our internals, for us to assess, for them to gain credit, so, you know, but in terms of personal trial and development of own technique and stuff like that there's not really that much time for them to experience that any more (Art/Design, Low Decile Urban Co-ed, roll 501-750).

There's not the time to do the learning-rich things, that people want to do, because there's not the time. And if you believe that you've got to give them the best opportunities to achieve at internals, then you've really got no other time and it really...it's very demanding (HOD English, History, Mid Decile Rural Co-ed, roll <500).

PD people here... said we should always, as teachers, be mindful that we're not just here to see them get their credits, but to teach. You know, that's just teaching for the sake of teaching. You go off with the kids and do things that aren't, you know, completely ... just for fun. A book, study a book let's say. You know, we are teachers, not just assessors. And I said to her, 'We can't do that though, they've got to get credit in order to pass, our school looks good, and the kids get what they want, they want the credits, and we just don't have time to do that if we...', you know, it's a time management thing. It was an interesting idea about teaching, but I don't have time to do that, or I'm too scared to pursue that course, in fear of losing the time (English, Low Decile Urban Co-ed, roll 501-750).

I really do think that we're taking the passion out of it. You know we really are, we are so bogged with organising the assessment and like [colleague] said, changing a 'must' to 'might' or 'may' or whatever. And I mean this year, I made a conscious effort to get through the curriculum for Level 3, failed miserably. I don't expect any passes other than their internal if I'm honest. But I had every one of those students come up to me and say how much they'd enjoyed the course and that to me was 'I have succeeded'. If they ever go away and pick up a history book again or an historical novel and they enjoy it with the background that they've got. And we literally are, 'Oh have I got this done, have I covered this part of the topic, have I dotted this 'i', have I crossed that 't'?' And I think teachers are getting worn out, so their own passion is going and we're not instilling it in the kids (HOD History, English, Low Decile Urban Co-ed, roll 501-750).

I totally agree with [colleague] about losing the passion. You know we are just so driven by getting these students to the credits and you've got to give them as many credits as you can, doing your best, that becomes the primary focus. I know that this is an education system and you have to deliver learning to the kids and they are entitled to pay their school fees and come out with this many credits at the end of it, but I don't know, it's too much a 'buy and sell' kind of thing and surely education is about more than that, more than just 'We are selling credits and the kids are buying them and we're assessing whether they've got the right currency to pay for it'. And for me too, a successful time of teaching for me is not, well it's a big buzz when the kids achieve, 'Yay, they've finally handed some work in', that is very, very good, but it's even bigger when they catch fire with

something and they go off-limits and somewhere you never expected them to go and they go somewhere completely unexpected, and you know that in some way that has changed their lives. But I guess, you know, we are talking about indefinables here (HOD Music, English, Low Decile Urban Co-ed, roll 501-750).

I'd like to have time to broaden my subjects, rather than have them so directed toward the exams or the internals, make it a lot more interesting and develop more individual things, but really we have so much to get through in order to cover what's needed at what time (Science/Biology, Low Decile Urban Co-ed, roll 501-750).

The majority of teachers who talked about this issue believed that the assessment was driving their curriculum:

I think there is a feeling that assessment is beginning to drive the quality of the course, it is a convenient way of packaging the curriculum into chunks throughout the year. I think there's probably, in terms of how the curriculum relates to assessment, I think assessment is now taking over, or the method of collecting evidence is taking over the way in which we've actually taught the curriculum (Deputy Principal Curriculum, Visual Arts, Low Decile Urban Co-ed, roll 501-750).

I think we do start with standards that are going to be assessed and then we teach the pieces of the curriculum that match (HOD Humanities, Low Decile Urban Co-ed, roll 501-750).

I feel that in Geography a lot of good skills have gone by the wayside, that we can't, we are limited to three internals. The good thing that I said about it is that the workload has gone down a lot in terms of internal assessment marking, but the negative of it is that a lot of excellent skills that we could test, the variety of them is just squashed down... I'm just talking about what we had in terms of the internals for the old Fifth Form exams, for the internal component, we had seventeen activities and that covered a heck of a lot of skills, and now we've narrowed it down basically to repetition of the same skills (Geography/Social Studies, High Decile Urban Boys, roll 1200+).

I personally feel that teaching NCEA, I'm a lot more assessment driven than I have been in the past. One of the first things that I pick up is, what's the standard that they are trying to get to? And then I'm just trying to get them to that standard. It's not as black and white as that, there's still plenty of teaching and learning, but I don't think as much as there was when it was 'I need to teach then anatomy and physiology'. You taught them that and then you assessed. Whereas now for a biomechanics test, we will be out doing volleyball only, because biomechanics of a volleyball serve is what is in the test, not golf, tennis, we're doing volleyball. So, you're just a little bit more aware of what they are going to be looking at. I think I'm a lot more driven by the assessment and what they're going to be looking at for their final test than I was under the old system (PE/Health, Mid Decile Urban Fringe Co-ed, roll 501-750).

I just find in terms of time, and in a content-based subject, that I just have to teach to the assessment to a certain extent, particularly if they have to do it in class for authenticity reasons. There's not a lot of time in the year to really do much more with them (Technology/Graphics, High Decile Urban Girls, roll 1200+).

The group of HODs at the High Decile Urban Girls' school had a lengthy discussion about whether it would be possible to stop assessing at all three senior levels, but came up with no final solution. They discussed overseas models where Year 12 and Year 13 worked towards a qualification based on the two years, but were concerned about locking students into a course at the beginning of Year 12, and about students who left at the end of Year 12 having nothing. They also talked about not assessing in Year 11 as a solution, and because most of their students stayed on through Year 12, for them that was the most feasible year to drop high-stakes assessment, however some participants saw the assessment as a motivator for Year 11 students and were reluctant to drop it for that reason. A teacher in a different school mused about the loss of Sixth Form Certificate, which they saw as being something of a 'honeymoon year' when students did a lot of research-based work, discussed current issues, and so on:

But now it's just exam, exam, exam, so it means that for three years there is no break... (Economics and Accountancy, Mid Decile Rural Co-ed, roll <500).

The sheer amount of assessment that is happening, not just in individual subjects but across the school, has an impact not only on teachers but also on students:

I think they [students] also haven't the time for other aspects of school life, like maybe the sports and taking Music and things like that as well. They are bound by all these commitments (HOD PE, Mid Decile Rural Co-ed, roll <500).

Any extra-curricular activities are very hard to fit in, because they've got all these assessments, or they've got a major assignment, so that does impact on the extra-curricular activities that they do get involved in, and the quality of the extra-curricular activities as well, because you can't actually spend the time on them, because it's for nothing, you know, other than personal gain, but it's not for getting credits and stuff (English, Mid Decile Rural Co-ed, roll <500).

Some teachers or whole schools had found solutions to these problems that they were happy about:

The cap [of 20 credits per course] came about as a result of our decision to totally engage with NCEA when we were debating about Sixth Form Cert, you know, that period of time. So when we made that decision, we went for this cap idea. So it was partly a workload issue for teaching staff, and a workload issue for our students. And it was somewhat driven by the rule of 80 credits for an NCEA. At Level 2 it's a range of 16-20 and the same sort of applies at Level 3 (HOD Social Sciences, Mid Decile Urban Fringe Co-ed, roll 501-750).

I suppose the key word for us is flexibility. We have a core in which we enrol automatically all of our kids into, but then we discovered that after this cap [of 20 credits per course] was imposed, that there are some kids for example that are very good at producing static images and definitely want to be assessed against that, or putting on a media presentation. And, so we thought, 'Why should we be saying that 'No you can't assess against that because it doesn't suit us'?' So we provide a limited number with the opportunity to do it. An example of how that works is at Level 2, where we decided that we would drop speech, but then we could say 'Okay, you can do a speech as part of the senior speech competition final in the auditorium. It's one opportunity and we'll assess it for you while you deliver your speech' and it works for them and it works for us (HOD English, Mid Decile Urban Fringe Co-ed, roll 501-750).

It's easier, I think, if you find yourself running out of time, to leave out an achievement standard. Where in the past, if you left out a topic that disadvantaged your students in the overall exam, this time you just click on a box and withdraw them from a standard, and they might miss 3 credits or 2 credits, but it's not disadvantaging the other work that they've done (HOD Science, Principal's Nominee, Mid Decile Area, roll <500).

Geography is the same, and inevitably it is because it is all based on time and the number of achievement standards. And I know some schools elected for six, and some like us went in the middle and went for five. And last year I actually went for four, because it gave greater time and depth of knowledge and also in skills as well. So, I find with four, I guess for me, as a teacher, it has been more beneficial for me to do that, and we've had less pressured time, we've done more, I think, interesting things, we've had a more relaxed atmosphere this year within the classroom, and we've had more time to actually spend than under School C, and I really believe that (HOD Humanities, Mid Decile Area, roll <500).

See, we've decided this year not to do research at Level 2, because they have it in Level 1 and they get it again in Level 3, so they have to have a big research component to their paper. We've just taken it out of Level 2 (English, Mid Decile Rural Co-ed, roll <500).

We dropped one and picked one up. We dropped a Technology achievement standard and picked up a Graphics achievement standard, mainly because it was more relevant, easier for the kids to get. We think they enjoyed it a bit more, and it had a bit more relevance to the direction we wanted to teach. And then some achievement standards we just haven't even bothered to look at. Well, we've looked at it, but decided not to teach it or assess it (Technology/Graphics, High Decile Urban Girls, roll 1200+).

I think my attitude towards assessment has changed from the first year. I think I over-assessed everybody in the first year, but now I don't assess as much. I try to build them into more compact areas. I don't think you achieve anything by assessing all the time, I really don't. And that's also putting in the unit standards as well as extras. So I have not assessed as much this year as I have in the first year. And so that's with Level 1 and I'm learning from that (HOD Commerce, Mid Decile Urban Co-ed, roll 501-750).

Others could not see how they could make reductions in their courses:

Yes, but for me, for example, Year 12 Economics has five major topics and I will have to teach all five because they are all related. So I have to teach all five, I can't just take off one and teach the four topics (Economics/Accountancy, Mid Decile Rural Co-ed, roll <500).

It's tricky though, well at least with Art History, because the course is designed to cover various specific skills which were previously taught as a whole throughout the year, and so if you drop a standard, then you have dropped something out of that skill set... (Art/Art History/Design, High Decile Urban Girls, roll 1200+).

However other teachers felt their schools ought to be looking at the issues more closely. Two teachers suggested that their schools were not being fair to students by requiring that all subjects cover all standards, and firmly discouraging students from making choices:

And that is different within our school, which in some ways may make it harder, that all subjects offer all standards within their subjects and all students doing those things do all standards. So of course you have students with the potential to get 120 credits at Level 1 if they achieve all of their [standards] (English/Media, High Decile Urban Boys, roll 1200+).

I think we have too many credits. You know, every course is 24 credits, the achievement standards are so many credits, so I don't think that we should be expecting the kids to do all 24 credits. Because I believe that in a general education, I think kids should be doing a range of subjects, but not necessarily 24 credits in that subject... Why don't they do like a maximum of 20 credits per subject? (English, Mid Decile Rural Co-ed, roll <500).

LOSS OF LEARNING TIME

Related to the issue of assessment driving the curriculum is the actual amount of time available for learning activities, as distinct from assessment activities. Few teachers mentioned, or remembered when probed, the *NCEA Updates* which discussed a more holistic approach to collection of evidence for assessment. Even when they had, they were bothered about what they saw as a conflict between this kind of evidence collection and requirements for authentication of student work and for equity between students, between classes and between schools (see Chapter 7). The impression gained through these focus groups was that in the main, teachers are still assessing in finite ways that are generally perceived as separate from learning, although the ability for students to learn from one assessment event and apply that learning later in a further assessment opportunity was appreciated (see Chapter 7). As a result, time which was previously perceived as being used for 'learning' is now being used for 'assessment', either first or further opportunities.

Some teachers talked generally about feeling that there was a lot more class time used for assessment:

I feel that there is now so much assessment that it is really eating into our teaching time. And several times this year I have presented kids with the assessment, when I wasn't really happy with the preparation that I had done for them, but it had to be done because of the nature of the NCEA... (French/English, Mid Decile Provincial Co-ed, roll 1001-1200).

We don't have the time as we've spent in the past, to cover aspects [of the curriculum] as well as we did in the past, because we've now got to do internal assessments as well within the class period as well (Geography/Social Studies, High Decile Urban Boys, roll 1200+).

Only one teacher offered the view that they had not lost time in assessing:

English work hasn't changed that much in terms of content between NCEA and School Certificate. We still had to do speeches in the classroom and write about it in the exam, we still have to do speeches, so we haven't really lost any learning time I don't think (English/Health, High Decile Urban Boys, roll 1200+).

One teacher said that they had found ways to successfully integrate their assessment into their teaching:

At times we have decided in a unit of work not to separate out into a formal assessment, but put the assessment as part of that unit, some of it even observation where it is a practical (Computing, Mid Decile Provincial Co-ed, roll 1001-1200).

For teachers in one school, the issue of organising catch-up assessments for students absent at the time of the initial assessment was a particular problem:

I find that you've got much less time teaching, because the kids are actually doing the assessments in class under supervision, like sometimes it can take up to two to three weeks to do the assessment, so that's two to three weeks out of the actual teaching time, because you've got dribs and drabs and interruptions, or kids away on Science field trips, or something like that, so you've got to hold off your teaching and you can't teach anything on those days (English, Mid Decile Rural Co-ed, roll <500).

The biggest group of concerns about loss of teaching time came from teachers who had to fit in practical assessments, some of which involved group work as well, especially but not exclusively in Science subjects:

Well in Food and Nutrition practical assessments and having to individual assess students and having to run a double programme, one lot one hour, another lot another hour... (Technology/Food and Nutrition, Mid Decile Urban Fringe Co-ed, roll 501-750).

The other issue I think with some of the practical work is the time involved in actually setting things up for the assessment. For both of mine in Science, it requires about a week's preparation before you actually do the assessment, and then you have the day of the assessment, and for validity it's done in class time and under test conditions, to ensure authenticity (HOD Science, Principal's Nominee, Mid Decile Area, roll <500).

We have our Science internal assessment that has to be done in class, that takes three periods, the investigation. Year 12 investigation, Year 12 Landscaping, have to be done in class. So, yes, there is class time taken up with the assessing whereas before it would've been 'Right, we've done this, now you'll finish this off for homework' (Science/Biology/Horticulture, High Decile Urban Boys, roll 1200+).

We find the hardest thing for us, not only do the kids have to get out and find a lot of information, they have to show a whole lot of other stuff, interactions and implications and things first, which really turns them off, then design the thing and build it. And that can take a long time. You can spend the first term just doing the pre-paperwork for it. And when you get to the senior levels, building the thing takes a long time as well, depending on the achievement standards that you do. We try and make our students make something of at least reasonable quality... (Technology/Graphics, High Decile Urban Girls, roll 1200+).

But with the Drama, so much of it is group work, where you give the students their activity and you're, well, you're not sitting back, but they've got to do it by themselves and so this can go on for weeks sometimes. And if there are four or five activities like that, which involve group work through the year, you've taken a lot of time out of your teaching time... If you're going to give them the time and if they've got to do it in their group, they've got to devise, or structure, whatever the 'in' word is

(they change it), a 15 minute or 12 minute performance, and they're in a group of three or four, and that fluctuates because often someone is away, so you've got that time of about three weeks when they're really just working on their own, which can drift into four weeks if some are away. So all that teaching time is being taken up during the year (HOD Languages, Drama, Mid Decile Provincial Co-ed, roll 1001-1200).

Two teachers talked about solutions they were working on for these problems:

I had a problem in the first year trying to do 'formative' and it was great fun you know, weeks of time! So the next year, last year, I just said 'No, we're going to do a Science practical, we're going to do a Physics practical, and they both count, you can get credits for both' and that motivated them a lot more to actually work for both of them, whereas when it was just a formative and summative, they didn't bother with the formative (HOD Science, Principal's Nominee, Low Decile Urban Co-ed, roll 501-750).

The other way round it, one of the people I know sets up several labs for a whole week and the students can rotate around it. But they lose some validity as well if some students can't sit the task till the next day, so there are issues that you have to... (HOD Maths, Physics, Mid Decile Area, roll <500).

Time to give feedback to students after assessment was also mentioned as a huge demand on class time:

And then of course we are supposed to discuss every assessment that we do with our students. Which is wonderful, I think it is an absolutely brilliant thing to do with students and they do need it, but we don't have the time. And that's once again eating out of your teaching time. You can't be conferencing an individual and teaching [the class] at the same time. You're giving very valuable teaching to that individual, but there are 29, 30, 31 other children sitting there (French/English, Mid Decile Provincial Co-ed, roll 1001-1200).

CREDIT ACCUMULATION

In all but one of the groups, teachers raised the vexed issue of whether students are motivated by the currency of credits or by the currency of Merit and Excellence, or even better by learning per se. Teachers see this as a dilemma, because it is clear that, especially for students who were not successful under the previous system, being able to notch up credits throughout the year and feel a sense of achievement is a very important motivator. On the other hand, teachers perceive that some students stop work as soon as they have reached the number of credits necessary for the relevant Certificate. Furthermore, teachers perceive that students who could have been achieving at the higher levels are content with an Achieved because that is the currency which qualifies them for the Certificate.

Many teachers said that students invariably want to know what a piece of work is 'worth':

They do, they ask the same questions, 'Is it worth anything?' and 'How many?' So those are the two key questions, and then based on if it's worth anything and the number of credits, they'll decide 'Oh yes, I've got to put some energy into it' or 'Stuff it, I'm not doing it' (HOD Commerce, Mid Decile Urban Co-ed, roll 501-750).

I think that is probably the major disadvantage that I have observed, is that the students are, or can become, very credit-orientated, and they're not interested really, they're choosing... It's the negative side of what was said earlier in that they can choose what they work towards, and they are choosing what they work toward. But if they choose not to bother with a standard, they're not going to learn that internal either. So that's a negative to the flexibility, that they are very credit orientated (HOD Maths, High Decile Urban Girls, roll 1200+).

How many credits they're worth does affect students, because I've had students say 'Oh well that's only worth 4 credits, so I won't do that, we'll just do this and that because we only need. I only need 18 credits to get my 80, so I only need this one from you anyway'. So they actually could've

achieved, but they didn't bother to do it. So the amount of credits that they get does affect what they do, drastically (HOD Art, Mid Decile Rural Co-ed, roll <500).

In some cases, teachers have changed the assessment programme because of a perception by students that a particular assessment is 'not worth it':

Well that's why we are taking out the research thing: 'It's only worth 2 credits, oh, I can't be bothered with that' so we said we're not going to offer that (HOD Science, Biology/Chemistry, Mid Decile Urban Co-ed, roll 501-750).

Concern was expressed that students were missing out on important curriculum goals by picking and choosing which credits they would aim to achieve:

What I'm concerned about is they actually end up avoiding what could be personal growth areas, like the guys who won't do the speech for example, and there's a lot of them at Level 2. They're okay at the Level 1, because it's only within a class context, but at Level 2 they've got to do it in front of an audience in the auditorium (English, Mid Decile Urban Fringe Co-ed, roll 501-750).

There are also issues with students choosing subjects which they see as delivering 'easy' credits rather than the ones which would challenge them more:

We're running into real problems at the moment between Geography and Tourism courses, Tourism being an ITO course and being quite vocational, but offering a lot of very achievable small credit activities. And the more academically capable students are still working in the currency of 'How can I pick the most credits as easily as possible' and they're opting for those [in Tourism], and I think they're going to end up spending too much time on that and not actually...they might find that at the end of year 13, they don't have enough of their academic credits for university. Or at least if they're getting into a competitive situation for getting into courses, you know. If they've got their 14 in each of three subjects, but if those courses are restrictive, I think they're going to find that they've penalised themselves... In Geography we're really struggling with falling numbers, and it makes sense. Why not go and do a Level 2 ITO Tourism paper if you're interested in NZ and people, and have 5 attempts and do that? And it's much more achievable. It won't give them, say, the depth of knowledge or academic ability perhaps, but for a 17 year old, or an 18 year old, why break your back over it, you know? (HOD Humanities, Low Decile Urban Co-ed, roll 501-750).

One of my students made a joke when the senior options booklet came out to help them choose what they were going to do next year for Level 3, and he looked at Hospitality and he looked at French and he said 'Look, I can get 3 credits here for doing a four minute speech in French on an unfamiliar situation...or I can do Hospitality here and I can get something like 2 credits for being able to open a bottle of wine and serve it'. And he was joking about it, but are there going to be students who are going to look at these courses and think 'This is easier, surely I can learn how to open a bottle of wine and serve it, and get two credits for it' (HOD Languages, Mid Decile Rural Co-ed, roll <500).

Also with our students, in this school particularly, you get students who are able students, who are able to achieve really good things in AS classes, but they choose to do the units standards classes... They see it as a holiday and so if those individuals are picked up they're scooped up and taken to the AS classes. But ultimately at the end of the day [colleague] says 'Oh no, they're all right in US classes, let them do US'. So then... (Art/Design, Low Decile Urban Co-ed, roll 501-750).

Whether students have reached their 'goal' of credits required for the Certificate will affect whether they do the work, including preparing themselves and fronting up to the external assessments:

The other thing that also is happening is that students are saying that 'Oh, I only have to get 80 credits to get my Level 2 certificate' and I'm saying 'Well yes, but if you want to do Level 2 Chemistry, you can't just have 80 credits in English and Maths and Dance and that - you've got to actually have some Science' (HOD Science, Biology/Chemistry, Mid Decile Urban Co-ed, roll 501-750).

The kids are so tuned in to all that, calculating it all up, there will be kids in the English classes that know that they don't need to get any credits in the exam because they've got the magic number of credits that they think, they believe, they need. So, they won't bother to make an effort in the exam or do internal work if it's not worth any credits (English/Health, High Decile Urban Boys, roll 1200+).

There seems to be, like, we used to be able to get a full year's work out of students, but now, and it happens in every class, I've got my credits, I've got my 8 for numeracy, I've got my 80, or my 60 for Level 2, I've got those - I'm not going to do any more work. So, yes, you can't get a full year's work out of them (Science/Biology/Horticulture, High Decile Urban Boys, roll 1200+).

This is concerning parents:

... they [parents] don't like selective learning. They see that their daughters or sons, whatever it is, they're looking through and they're saying 'I've got 80 credits coming into externals now and I don't want to do a hell of a lot of study' (because they've already got NCEA Level 1) 'and therefore, this is all that I want' and 'Why is everybody swotting away in the summer sun, when I've already achieved my standard?' And until they actually solve that one, parents are going to be anti, because they still want to see their kids swotting at this time of the year for some sort of exam, and they haven't got past this one yet, that's the big one... Well the parents really want to see their kids focussed on some end of year external. They're used to it, it's what they did at school, and it's what they expect, and their children aren't doing that (HOD Music, Mid Decile Urban Fringe Co-ed, roll 501-750).

This problem also rears its head around formative work for external assessments:

... in Science, we have very few internals, unless we go to unit standards, which requires an awful lot of writing of assessment tasks in addition, so assuming we stick with achievement standards, there are very few internally assessed credits, the majority of them are externally assessed credits. And we are finding that students are saying every time we are doing an assessment 'Is this worth credits? If it's not, then I'm not studying for it.' And therefore it is becoming very difficult to provide good feedback to students. And so, we actually have concerns about their learning and being able to improve their understanding and their ability (HOD Science, Biology/Chemistry, Mid Decile Urban Co-ed, roll 501-750).

Teachers agreed that not all students behaved in this way, with some not losing interest when they reached 80 credits, and aiming for the higher levels of Merit and Excellence in all standards:

There are one or two in the classes that I teach who stand out because they are after Excellence, but they're the sorts of people who want Excellence anyway (Maths, Mid Decile Urban Co-ed, roll 501-750).

I teach the more able students at Level 2, and it's the Excellence, aiming for Merit and Excellence. They don't necessarily always get it, but that's what really seems to be important to them as a motivator. Yes, that's the more able ones, they're definitely motivated by that (HOD Languages, Mid Decile Rural Co-ed, roll <500).

Yes, well it depends on the student. I mean for some students 80 credits is not enough, they want everything, and so I guess the credit-counting stuff reflects the personality of a student, and so for some students, their only goal is to achieve, and for some that's a reasonable goal, because they have to push themselves to get it. But for others, it's not... (HOD English, Mid Decile Area, roll <500).

Some teachers value the flexibility of the new system because it means that students can take control of their own assessment and make choices about their focus:

One of the things that we have found with our students is that they are more and more taking control of their own assessment and that they are making quite specific decisions as to whether they are going to do this or whether they are not going to do that, which of course they were never able to do before, because everything, you just had to do everything at all times. But there's definitely been a move towards students saying to themselves 'Right, do I need quality or do I need quantity?' and students will be deciding 'Right, okay, I want to get into a university course, I have to get a certain

number of credits, so I will go for as many as I can get, in order to ensure that I get the minimum', or others are saying' I want to get into a limited entry course and so I need those Merit and Excellence grades, so I'll flag some of the ones away to give myself time to concentrate on others'. And I just think that this is really good, because the students are being able to make good quality decisions about their future, and being able to actually influence the types of results they get, because of the flexibility of the system (HOD Physics, Quality Manager, High Decile Urban Girls, roll 1200+).

It's interesting though, because I just think that some kids are becoming more strategic. I had one kid and she was entered in five papers and she chose to do only three, because she was aiming for three Excellences ... so some of the kids are becoming very strategic (HOD Humanities, Geography, Mid Decile Area, roll <500).

And that's what's happening more and more now, the kids are, even with the internals now, they're picking and choosing which internals they are doing, because they're looking at the credits available, and they're organising their courses around how many credits they can possibly get for what they're good at. And so they're not going for 24 credits anymore, it's going down to 16-18 credits that they're doing to be assessed on (HOD Social Sciences, Mid Decile Rural Co-ed, roll <500).

On the other hand, not all the choices students make are wise:

I do think that there is more opportunity for less sensible students to make mistakes under this system than it was under the old system, where they had to try and get the whole of the English exam to get a certain mark (HOD English, High Decile Urban Girls, roll 1200+).

I have got Level 2 and Level 3 students who said 'I'm not going to do this, this and this, I've got this number of credits and I'm only going to get these two'. Two of them came out of the exam really upset, because they said 'I only studied this and it was really hard and I couldn't do the questions'. [I said] 'Why didn't you do this section, it had fantastic questions, just like I taught in class', but 'Oh, I'd already decided to drop that and focus on the other ones' (HOD English, Mid Decile Provincial Co-ed, roll 1001-1200).

It does become an issue if they are competing for getting into a course that has limited entry, which is what I'm trying to say to my Science students, you know, 'You need the Merits and Excellences, you need to be aiming for those if you can get them, don't settle for mediocrity'. That's the thing, you're talking about the US/AS things and I think that students who are mostly doing the AS, a lot of AS students are just aiming for Achieved and not worrying about Merit and Excellence, so it's a problem because they haven't understood that they might later be competing for a position and I'm trying to get that through to them (Deputy Principal Curriculum, Low Decile Urban Co-ed, roll 501-750).

In some cases, teachers had advised students about focusing on particular parts of the exam where they believed them to be more likely to be successful, and of course the new system of assessment lends itself to this much better than the previous one:

Oh, well I've actually taught my kids those strategies. I go 'You're wasting your time doing that paper, you cannot do it, you haven't been able to do it at Level 1 or Level 2, flag it and use your time on the other ones' (Principal's Nominee, Accountancy, Mid Decile Provincial Co-ed, roll 1001-1200).

I don't have a problem with that, because I directed some students to participate in Shakespeare and then not to attempt Shakespeare in the externals. But it was students who made other choices, without actually consulting me really... (HOD English, Mid Decile Provincial Co-ed, roll 1001-1200).

One teacher worried, however, that there wasn't a 'level playing field' in the exams, when some students were trying to complete all the external standards for the subject in the time allowed, and others were focusing on just some of them:

The only concern that I have with that is that it's not a level playing field in those exams if some students are just attempting one standard in three hours and others are trying to achieve more than that, so the results disguise that a little bit (HOD History, High Decile Urban Girls, roll 1200+).

A Principal's Nominee said that the increased sophistication of their school's systems in the third year of implementation had contributed to students being increasingly interested in credits. This teacher was trying to minimise this behaviour:

It's happening more this year than it has in the last two. In the first year we didn't really count credit totals, and it was a lot harder for kids to find out how many credits they actually had, mainly because our system wasn't up and running properly. Last year, just purely by the nature of the class, they had an internal competition within themselves to see who could get the most, we're talking Level 1. But this year, just again by the nature of the class and the individuals in it, they want to get to know when they've got to 80, so they can get to their 80 and they can stop. But the way I personally and as Principal's Nominee approach the kids to say 'Okay, you might have 79, but you're going on to Level 2 next year and you're allowed to take 20 over, so get 20 extra Level 1 credits this year, and you only have to look at 60 Level 2 credits next year, or 80 if you want to carry on again', so I've tried to actually encourage them to look ahead to the future, so many of them, in the exams they're sitting now, they have credits that they can put in the bank for next year (Principal's Nominee, HOD Science, Mid Decile Area, roll <500).

CONCLUSIONS

This chapter has raised some very big issues. It may be the case that some of these arise from the design of the qualifications system, and need to be reviewed by NZQA and the Ministry of Education, in consultation with the profession, with a view to considering whether modifications are needed to deal with any unintended negative consequences of aspects of that design. The most obvious example of this is the 80 credit requirement for the Certificate, and the possibility that it has some negative impacts on motivation for some students. This particular issue was foreshadowed by Professor Paul Black of King's College, London, in his report to the Qualifications Development Group of the Ministry of Education in 2000.

Opportunities need to be provided so that teachers, especially but not exclusively those in leadership positions, can discuss, both with colleagues within their schools and with colleagues in other schools, issues around how to ensure a proper balance between curriculum and assessment. Models of effective practice which schools and departments have found to address the issues raised here need to be disseminated among teachers.

(See Recommendations 1, 2, 3 and 4)

5. MODULARISATION OF ASSESSMENT

*The good thing about it is that it has been broken up,
but the bad thing now is the same, it's been broken up...*

A feature distinguishing this standards-based assessment system from the previous norm-referenced system is that assessment is modularised, and students are given credits for parts of a course, rather than a global mark for a subject. Teachers discussed the merits and the dangers of this approach.

MANAGEABLE CHUNKS

Some teachers talked about advantages for students, and for themselves, in breaking up the year-long course into manageable chunks for which students could gain credit as they went along:

You can actually deal with the three weeks, we're going to look at current geographic issues and we'll teach a range of them and then we'll assess on it, and then we put it away, that's it, we don't have to worry about it again...because the kids can concentrate on one thing, knowing that 'We're going to get this assessed at the end of the month, that's it, then we're finished with that' (Deputy Principal, Principal's Nominee, Mid Decile Urban Co-ed, roll 501-750).

And as a teacher too, I enjoy breaking my units of work down into wee segments and then assess them from that and then reward them for the work they've put in and it's some more credits to tuck under the belt (PE/Health, Mid Decile Urban Fringe Co-ed, roll 501-750).

And thinking about my alternative English students, some of them can perhaps focus for one week during the year or something, and they can gain credits for that time that they really are focussed, or if it's something, unit standards in particular, that they are really good at, then they can get credit for those things that they are good at without getting pulled down by all the things they can't do (English/ESOL, Mid Decile Urban Fringe Co-ed, roll 501-750).

I like the way that you have got so many of them [assessments] through the year. It actually pulls you through the year quite rapidly and in a very structured way, so that you're sort of keeping on working towards deadlines, and it's more effective than having one exam at the end of the year, you know. You can get bogged down a bit. If you're having to get units finished, and marks into a centralised mark book on a regular basis, it gives them good momentum, there's always work on the go (English, Mid Decile Provincial Co-ed, roll 1001-1200).

Other teachers saw a negative side to this, however, in terms of students not retaining knowledge and not transferring knowledge from one part of the course to another:

In the internals, we are teaching for that internal and they can pass at the time that they're doing it, and they understand what they're doing at the time. But if you reassess them eight months down the line without going back over it all again, they wouldn't have a chance. I mean, if you did the same on an external, there would be no way that they would pass it, absolutely no way (HOD Maths, Mid Decile Rural Co-ed, roll <500).

I also find that students' retention isn't necessarily optimum at times, and therefore maybe we need to look at how we're teaching those units, because you're pushing it all into them and they are coping with it all, but at that point. Whereas when you're doing it in 6 weeks, and 6 weeks, and 6 weeks and you're going to test it all at the end of the year, then maybe they would then retain... (English, Mid Decile Provincial Co-ed, roll 1001-1200).

Maths was moving in the direction of unifying it, getting rid of a lot of the jargon and focussing on problem solving and using Maths to a problem solving advantage. It has been nice in the fact that everything is chopped up into little pieces, but the kids have actually lost the connection between the two, and this really shows up big time when we get up to the top end, Scholarship, where we are

teaching courses that rely on perception and they are required to be able to apply in a holistic way. So, it is a problem. The philosophy of NCEA chopping the units down doesn't seem to be the right direction in Maths, it seems to be a very artificial thing, we've chopped up a whole lot of units, we've got lots of them, heaps of assessing the whole year through and at the end of it we have students with a whole lot of little bits of achieved and not-achieved, here, there and everywhere, whereas the approach we used to be looking for was what is actually useful in the real world (HOD Maths, Mid Decile Urban Co-ed, roll 501-750).

Yes, it's broken it up more, I mean in Science with Level 1, with the topics you know. It's not so bad for the teaching in class, but the assessment. I did like the old School Certificate papers where you had questions which had a little bit of Astronomy, a little bit of Physics, or whatever. And it separates subjects out so much, that students will lose contact of the fact that you can't talk about one thing without the other, that all of Science is interrelated, that Chemistry is part of Physics and Physics is part of Biology and so on and so forth, and that is getting a little bit lost (HOD Biology, Mid Decile Provincial Co-ed, roll 1001-1200).

I think it's a problem of the 'piecemeal' approach more than anything else so that students in History for example, do the standard where they interpret resources and they don't realise that they actually need to look at the resources in order to write the essay as well, which is another standard, so it separates up all the standards, and students don't make the connection between one standard and the other (HOD History, High Decile Urban Girls, roll 1200+).

UNDERSTANDING THE WHOLE SUBJECT

One teacher was concerned that the modularised assessment meant that students would be credited with a standard even if they had failed to demonstrate the foundational skills of the subject:

The good thing about it is that it has been broken up, but the bad thing now is the same, it's been broken up, so you're testing Statistics, okay, and they're working at probability and the kid doesn't know how to round, you think that's a very simple exercise, in the old days, that's wrong. That's not the case any more, you know, and some people think that's still incorrect, he's making the consistent mistake all the way through and then you have other teachers saying, 'Well hold on, has he met the standard for doing this?' And you have to, maybe he knows how to answer a statistical question but he doesn't know how to do the basic Maths involved, you still give it to him. And, I guess generally you do, because that's the standard that it's broken into, but I don't know... (Maths, High Decile Urban Boys, roll 1200+).

Similarly, some teachers talked about the cumulative nature of learning in their subject, which was not reflected in the modularised assessment:

But that doesn't take into account, and it's not just Music, there are disciplines where there is knowledge and skills and it's not something that you can just pick up in a module. And there are a number of subjects like that: Drama, even Art. I mean some of them have had three years of full-time Art and with all those opportunities to practise and to build up their knowledge and skills a student is going to do a lot better at art school, or do anything just because they've had the time. And there are some areas of education that the kids need time and they need that body of knowledge. There's lots of stuff, like you can't just check on the Internet to do that. I think it's really important that we need to acknowledge that it doesn't apply to everything. Even in P.E., I mean you would never pick your 1st XV rugby team out of the Year Nines. You can't say, 'Okay we're going to do a module of rugby and now you guys go and compete in the North Island championships and we expect you to win'. It is the same thing. In those subjects there is this tension, it is the dilemma. The old system concentrated too much on that, but perhaps there is a problem with the new system that it is going too far that way and the teachers are caught in the middle, trying to do the best for our kids. For me, that's a daily tension that I face (HOD Music, Low Decile Urban, roll 501-750).

I have detected over the last 2 or 3 years an increasing tendency for kids to come to the end of the unit, close the book and forget it, put it on the shelf and say 'I've done that, I don't need that anymore'. And in the past we could say 'Well hold on, you'll need that for the end of year exam' and so on. But increasingly now, I'm still having to say that if you're going to continue in the subject next year you're still going to need your notes on chemical reactions and your notes on electricity...or whatever, but I have noticed an increasing tendency for the kids to compartmentalise and when they

come to the end of the unit, that's it and the body of knowledge that was contained within it they have mastered, well, they have Achieved, perhaps got a Merit or an Excellence, but they kind of think they're done with it... The spiral curriculum was the buzzword in the 80s when I was doing my teacher training (Computing, Mid Decile Provincial Co-ed, roll 1001-1200).

Two teachers had seen their subjects as quite modularised anyway under the previous system, so they did not see modularisation of assessment as an issue:

I come from Geography and our curriculum fits it so easily, because the topics we do are literally stand-alone, so you have a skills one, you have one on natural landscapes at Level 2, you have one on natural hazards at Level 1 and Level 3 is the natural environment, so they're a solid thing, you just do it. The exam has only just been split up into the achievement standards, which for us, the exam was already split into. Literally no change, other than that we've gone from 66:34, to 50:50. So the kids go into the exam knowing that they've already got 12 credits. And so unlike [colleague's], the work is strung across them...as nice discrete packages, and if the kid misses one, well, that's fine (Deputy Principal, Principal's Nominee, Geography/Computing, Mid Decile Urban Co-ed, roll 501-750).

As far as Science is concerned, it always has been slightly modularised, because of the Physics component, the Chemistry component and the Biology component. What I have found is that it's easier now to look at classes and pull in work from the Biology curriculum and I can probably even pull work in from Agriculture and Horticulture to include in Science, so that my Science is not just Biology, Chemistry and Physics (Principal's Nominee, HOD Science, Mid Decile Area, roll <500).

Other teachers said that they were learning to teach holistically despite the modularised nature of the assessment:

I think we got tied up with each unit standard or achievement standard being a module. And I think that now we've been through all the levels, certainly our planning for next year is really quite different. We're looking at learning outcomes to start with and going from there...and assessment is going to be calculated in, but will happen much, much later. Whereas in the past we've sort of taught that bit, assessed it, taught that bit, assessed it. So we're looking at a far more...it's that overall...decide on what we want our kids to know, while still using that assessment but that's separate, and not driven by it. Which, they told us to do right from the start, but practically that wasn't going to happen (Technology/Food and Nutrition, Mid Decile Urban Fringe Co-ed, roll 501-750).

If you teach Classical Studies, you can teach mythology in vases as a topic, vases as a topic, and then when you come to the ethics, they've got the mythology information that you can apply to the ethic, and I don't see this compartmentalisation problem as a major, I see it as wonderful (HOD Classical Studies, English, High Decile Urban Boys, roll 1200+).

I don't really see it as much of an issue in English, I mean we've just been reviewing this year's program and I think there's still fine tuning, and we as a staff approaching a subject are still working out sort of what aspects we can do and what stages of the year for things to work together better and if we're going to focus on a particular standard, sort of the best time to do it so it works in with other things and we were thinking that with formal writing at Level 1 to sort of rethink what we're doing and that if we concentrate on this and look at this then we're looking for that to pay off in student's writing in other areas because we'll concentrate on certain aspects that will come through in what we do later on. So we don't see it so much as a 'It's over there and it's over there, and then the plains should meet, sort of thing', we see them all as working together. It does take I think some careful thought as to where things are done and I think we can probably still go further... (HOD English, Media Studies, High Decile Urban Boys, roll 1200+).

Well I think it's been a benefit in that Scholarship class because one of the standards was about doing some research into literature, a research report and the other standard was a presentation that came out of that report, so the two were intrinsically linked, and I found that fantastic, because under the old system, you told them to go away and do a speech and they didn't do the research and they sort of stood up there and gave an opinion which was nonsense. This made them do a report, write it down, and then you go away and think about how you're going to present that orally, so there was a whole new skill that came out, and I think that's a fantastic innovation (HOD Classical Studies, English, High Decile Urban Boys, roll 1200+).

FLEXIBILITY

However, many teachers saw big benefits for students in the flexibility that comes from a modularised assessment system:

One of the good things about the NCEA is that people can actually choose which unit standards they want to do, so we can get courses designed for specific students, to get to their strengths, and that's pretty good (HOD Social Sciences, Mid Decile Rural Co-ed, roll <500).

In Maths I think that the positive is that you can get a kid that would otherwise get nothing in their exam to pass, to get achieved in one or two internals, and particularly in Maths because, with some kids who are really hopeless at number and algebra which is really bad, but some kids can understand and do measurement quite well, or the geometry side of things, they can understand quite well but can never hope to do the algebra side of things. So you can sort of push them through those internals and then at least they get something... (Music/Maths, Mid Decile Rural Co-ed, roll <500).

The other positive in English...they choose from a large range once they get their students in front of them, your course is prescribed by who you get, not sticking your kids into a prescribed course, as used to be the case (English/Transition/Communications, Mid Decile Urban Co-ed, roll 501-750).

There's a lot more flexibility that you can sort of look at a class as you go through the year and alter your assessment plan as you go to meet the needs of that particular class, or you can just [adjust it] for individuals within the class and I think that quite a number of people do that (Principal's Nominee, HOD Science, Low Decile Urban Co-ed, roll 501-750).

The main positive in Food would be, and not that it wasn't there in the past, because there's always been a lot of versatility within the foods area, I mean traditionally in the Sixth Form, there was three different courses that you could teach...and there was even the Childcare one which is not specifically related to Food. We have a choice of three subject matrices that we can choose from. We can choose from Technology, Home Economics, or Health, so that we have a huge number of achievement standards that we can choose from - and then you add Hospitality to that, which has a further range of unit standards that you can choose from. And then plus we have the Home and Life Science unit standards that we can choose from and so we can pretty much make up any course that we like. So yes, the versatility is off the wall really. And what I teach up here is totally different to what schools in Auckland are teaching. I don't teach, I have not taught Health for the last two years. Down in Auckland they do. I only teach Home Economics achievement standard at Fifth Form and then I drop them, and then I don't teach any Technology achievement standards and it's basically because of the type of students that we have here, they are more practical based. They cannot do Home Economics at Level 2, but that's because it's no longer traditional Home Economics, it's Sociology. And kids down at city school, they do them and that's what they like, and then they want to go into university study in something remotely connected to Food; well, kids here don't (Food & Nutrition/Home Economics/Health/Hospitality, Mid Decile Rural Co-ed, roll <500).

I would agree with [colleague] there and in terms of my subject in that the versatility and flexibility brought by unit standards and achievement standards that you can use is very positive and I think for the kids that are a little bit slow, for the schools to get courses to really motivate them and suit them... Because again, I have seen the students here are very practically minded and so I've tried to provide the right achievement and unit standards and I think it's got a rather large positive to it (HOD PE, Mid Decile Rural Co-ed, roll <500).

Some teachers were thinking very creatively about future possibilities for using that flexibility:

I think that one of the major advantages of the whole system is that we don't have to deliver the whole course, and also students don't have to take the whole subject for the whole year, and we're looking now at ways in which we can give students additional choices which is going to give them, we believe, really, predetermined pathways to further education and further employment opportunities, which don't rely on students locking into a subject for a whole year. So, sort of a modularisation model which isn't going to impact on the whole school, we're looking at ways that we

can give students a range of opportunities in a band of subjects or of similar skills, in a variety of traditional subject areas, but they are actually able to select elements that they're interested in without having to take Geography for a whole year, or Economics for a whole year. You know, they can do a NZ Geography thing and a Business Studies... that are all going to be heading towards a knowledge of New Zealand or whatever you know, those sort of things and we're in the formal stages of that at the moment. And I think that's one of the huge things in terms of curriculum design that's really changed you know, and we're able to, and we had some curriculum drivers, you know, we had to lock into a particular curriculum for a prescribed period of time. And now as were moving forward into the NCEA that doesn't have to be the case any longer; we can actually start collecting subject content into bands of interest and I think that's been a major advantage for us... I also think as we move into this whole 'pathways and portals' type thinking, that's going to make quite...assortments of discrete pieces less obvious, because the source of those assessments or the source of that learning is not necessarily going to be so transparent as belonging to English, or ESOL, or Geography or History, it's going to be a course of study that is quite structured and does provide an opportunity for students to learn and be motivated, but it will actually be an integrated bunch of skills that the whole pathway, or the whole stream delivers, rather than just a whole bunch or smorgasbord selection of all those bits and I don't think that's what we're talking about, we're talking about quite structured pathways that are leading places that take their content from a range of traditional subjects rather than putting everything on the table and selecting whatever you like and let's go... (Deputy Principal (Curriculum), Low Decile Urban Co-ed, roll 501-750).

At Level 2 we actually squish Physics and Chemistry in order to encourage more students to take those two subjects. We've modularised and we have a short module of Chemistry and a short module of Physics which offer about 14 credits each... There's another side to it now, with the flexibility that we've got, for instance Arts students may well want to take some Science, it might perhaps be specifically related to their own area and so you could teach parts of the curriculum in a modular Science-type program that would take Photography and Art and whatever standards. Those students would not necessarily want the whole Science curriculum, so we could be offering them something that they might feel that they need and what it does is that it actually enables you to teach course that widen the knowledge base of students because traditionally Arts students haven't taken Science subjects, because it's just been Physics and Chemistry and Biology, but they might just want aspects of Chemistry and aspects of Physics in a course that would be of interest (Principal's Nominee, HOD Science, Low Decile Urban Co-ed, roll 501-750).

And someone else...I think it was you [colleague] that raised the issue with me the other day that maybe we could have more multi-leveilling, and across-subject generic type courses ... You see, we're both concerned that Biology and Physics are on at the same time and then we cut off that whole opportunity for students who may want to go into the Life or Health Sciences, and yet maybe we could offer some credits across all three Sciences, with pick and choose, say 'This module will be on in term 2, this one in term 3', so maybe there is a whole area that we need to explore, but we do have constraints... I guess there's a size issue, and the flexibility that we do have, I guess it was the...and I guess it's an area that we just need to maybe explore and we may find that we can do better, but there's going to be pros and cons aren't there, but a student may only have a teacher for 4 classes a week out of the six, but they gain their combination of subjects or levels, or something like that. I guess it could also mean that we have to be a bit more multifaceted in the subjects' areas, that we're prepared to up-skill ourselves (HOD Maths, Physics, Mid Decile Area, roll <500).

What we're looking at doing and it sort of ties in with what [colleague] said and admittedly we don't have as many credits, is like running it in two semesters. Semester one is like the development stage and then semester two, by then you will know what the students will be better at doing and we'd have to consider sometimes whether they should be doing Level 1 or Level 2 and that brings up other issues as well, but we're looking at doing it like that so you get a more holistic semester one and then semester two you pull the threads down for them to pass. We haven't tried this before, but this seems to be what we're going to try to do (ESOL English, Mid Decile Urban Co-ed, roll 501-750).

GOOD AND BAD

Other teachers could see both good and bad in the modularisation of assessment:

I'd just like to say something in terms of the languages, and Japanese in particular. With the achievement standards it's kind of a two-edged sword. It's good in that it identifies the goals, you know. 'This is what I've got to do', but, with language, you can't sort of learn a bit and then put it

aside and then move on to a new bit, you actually have to know all the language in order to get your achievement standards (HOD Japanese, High Decile Urban Boys, roll 1200+).

I think there is a tension between the flexibility that the new qualifications bring us, the fact that we can design programmes around particular interest areas, around students' strengths and so on, and the need to provide them with qualifications that are going to get them into polytechnic and universities and take them into particular workplaces. In fact, the Science [advisor?], she talked with me about the possibilities of some of the flexibilities we could introduce in Science and said that once you reach Year 11 there is no specific requirement that you teach the whole of the curriculum as specified in the curriculum document, which is in one reason why I dropped the Astronomy and Geology. But at the same time, when they get to Level 3, there is a need for them to have certain knowledge, certain skills that would enable them to go to university for instance. So I need to make sure that as HOD I have covered both possibilities: met the needs of students who are working perhaps at a lower level and working towards different outcomes, and met the needs of students who are going to university and need to have as much information as possible. I would be doing them a disservice if they didn't have the full background in Level 3 Physics for example. I know what it was like going to university as an adult student and not having the Chemistry, diabolical in trying to do Chemistry 1 (Principal's Nominee, HOD Science, Low Decile Urban Co-ed, roll 501-750).

I think it's important if we are aiming students at particular tertiary courses that will assume that they have a body or knowledge, but in any particular group in front of you, the percentage that will go on to that specific body of knowledge is quite small. So, are we preparing students for one academic pathway, or are we - and this is with the Social Sciences - or are we preparing them to be citizens of this country with a breadth of knowledge that they can then direct? One of the inspirational people in Geography is teaching Geography, is it for sustainable environments? She's at [school] and the course is a combination of some Geography papers, thinking, planning and decision-making, some environmental unit standards I think, and some Biology papers. And it's an interesting and very popular course with a lot of fieldwork and meeting people in the community and working in that area, but it doesn't present the Geography body of knowledge, it takes from it and combines to create a much more holistic course (HOD Humanities, Low Decile Urban Co-ed, roll 501-750).

CONCLUSIONS

As with the issues raised in the previous chapter, there are problems raised here which are within the schools' domain to solve, but there are also problems which may be unintended negative consequences of the design of the system, for example the perception that in some subjects students do not, despite their teachers' best efforts, transfer knowledge and skills from one unit of work to another. This may explain why in some subjects at Scholarship level in 2004, students performed less well than might have been expected on assessments which required them to integrate knowledge across whole subjects.

As with the issues raised in Chapter 4, there need to be opportunities provided for teachers to work together in a variety of groupings, both within schools and across schools, to develop solutions to problems that have arisen from the modularisation of assessment, and for examples of effective practice to be disseminated.

(See Recommendation 4)

6. STUDENT MOTIVATION

“It’s not so much a win or lose everything situation any more.”

Issues around motivating students are touched on in a range of other sections of this report, for example in Chapters 3-5 on The Future of the NCEA, Curriculum v. Assessment, and Modularisation of Assessment and in Chapter 13, Student Pathways Issues. This chapter covers material which is not covered in other chapters, and focuses specifically on questions such as whether or not the NCEA motivates students, which kind of students are more or less motivated by the system, and what aspects of the design of the NCEA motivate or fail to motivate students.

On balance, a majority of teachers in the groups believed that students were more motivated to succeed within the NCEA framework than in the previous qualifications system. The ability for students to accumulate credits as the year progresses and therefore to receive continuous positive reinforcement is seen by teachers as an important motivator, especially for those students who would otherwise be hard to motivate. Additionally, a number of teachers believe that good students were motivated to aim for Excellence. However, there were significant concerns expressed that the design of the NCEA has led to many students taking a minimalist approach to achievement, being satisfied with reaching the Achieved level in a standard and reaching the minimum number of credits for the Certificate. This issue is also discussed in Chapter 4, Curriculum v. Assessment under ‘Credit Accumulation’.

BANKING CREDITS AS A MOTIVATOR

Many teachers talked about the benefits to student motivation of being able to begin to gather credits from the start of the year, so that students felt that they were making progress and feeling a sense of achievement. They also believed the opportunity for students to have another try at a standard during the year was important. What follows is just a sample of the many positive comments about this:

Kids are accumulating and if you space those internals out, you’re actually rewarding them and it gives them the incentives to carry on... (Deputy Principal, Principal’s Nominee, Geography/Computing, Mid Decile Urban Co-ed, roll 501-750).

Students are getting success, if you like, credits for parts of courses during the year which gives them immense positive feedback. They don’t have to wait until they get their final results at the end of the year (Principal’s Nominee, Accountancy, Mid Decile Provincial Co-ed, roll 1001-1200).

I feel, for the good kids, well, for all kids, that they get a sense of achievement at the start of the year and you know, they are passing stuff and it’s a very good motivator. You know, kids have already got, they can see their progress sort of instantly and they don’t have to wait until the end of the year with a lot of other stuff that sort of gets in the way. And I’ve taught under both systems and I know that the kids do a better standard of work with NCEA, overall (English, Mid Decile Rural Co-ed, roll <500).

Another advantage that I can see is that kids are banking positive results early on in the piece. In Maths, and I presume it’s in other subjects too, by the end of term one, they’ve done a unit or achievement standard, and they’ve either got it or they haven’t. And in addition, with the internally assessed, they have a chance to do a resit, so it’s to their advantage from that point of view (Maths, Mid Decile Urban Co-ed, roll 501-750).

I think that's another interesting thing, that constant feedback. With exams it was all weighted on the end of the year, whereas this way, they're getting feedback as they go, so their confidence is... (PE/Health, Mid Decile Provincial Co-ed, roll 1001-1200).

I'm finding that students that may have failed an end of year School Certificate exam are able to achieve in their internals and so they're able to come away with some credits. And the other opportunity that they have with internals is that they get an opportunity for reassessment, so that they... It's not just a one-off examination situation where the whole year is based on a three-hour paper, so I think that it has helped the average to struggling students quite a bit (HOD Languages, Mid Decile Rural Co-ed, roll <500).

I like that they are collecting them obviously as they are progressing through the school, it is very clear to the students what they have, what they can get, where they are at, and the school does a very good job of reporting that back to them with records, and I think that can advantage a lot of the kids that they know where they're at and they don't have to go flooding into the end of the year exam and it's all weighing on that. It's now sort of bite, bite, bite, bite ... (PE/Health, Mid Decile Urban Fringe Co-ed, roll 501-750).

It's built a confidence in [students] because they have got those credits in the internals, and they realise that if they work consistently on the internals that they will usually get the credit and so it has been a good motivator for confidence and self-esteem, and they go into the external exam far more confident (Computing, Mid Decile Provincial Co-ed, roll 1001-1200).

The fact that assessment is modularised so that students can have their strengths recognised rather than be held back by their weaknesses was seen as motivating:

Compartmentalising them into the individual standards like that, it allows people to achieve in their areas of strength and not be dragged down by their overall...(Science, Low Decile Urban Co-ed, roll 501-750).

It's not so much a win or lose everything situation any more, because I know that with Music particularly with the old system of School C and UE, you had to get the lot, you had to be able to do all the theory, all the performance, all the aural before you could actually gain the qualification, and that was quite sort of... I mean traditionally for schools like this it absolutely penalised the kids because they would be very strong in one particular area and not in others. And so they wouldn't be given any credit for their success in that area, but under this new system we can actually isolate out the different components of Music and they might well get solo and group performance, which gives them some good credits, and not get the others and they are assessed again maybe in a year when they have a bit more musical knowledge and experience, so they don't waste the entire year (HOD Music, English, Low Decile Urban Co-ed, roll 501-750).

Yea, I'd just like to pick up that one, because in the past, you know for School Cert you had to be able to write an essay, and if you couldn't write an essay you were, you know, stuffed right from the start. But under the new system, they are falling over backwards to stop students writing essays and I find it really empowering for the kids, because they know for example that if in my subject they do a research project and their presentation, they've got 8 credits, and suddenly 24 doesn't seem so far away. And last year with my Level 2, most of them got all their internally assessed credits so they had 12 and most of them basically just concentrated on one paper in their final exams, and the majority in the class came out with 16, which is something...(HOD History, English, Low Decile Urban Co-ed, roll 501-750).

Often students will play to their strengths, or be motivated by their strengths ...so once again NCEA allows us to do that as a school, by encouraging students to follow a pathway in speech or something, Maori and something else and it could build into a very particular profile of the record they had at school (Science, Low Decile Urban Co-ed, roll 501-750).

In contrast to these perceptions were those of the teachers who believed that student motivation was not generally high, and it was difficult to get students to aim for more than Achieved:

We have struggled for years to develop the culture of excellence and we haven't succeeded. I think our kids are happy to accept the 'near enough is good enough' approach, that mediocrity is fine, and

part of that is a reflection of our size and the fact that they maybe gauge what is acceptable by what their next door neighbour does. I'm not really sure what the answer is, but we've for years had kids that have been happy with, you know, in the old system 50%, it's good enough. And the modern manifestation is 'Who needs Excellence? You don't get any more credits for it' (HOD English/Languages, Mid Decile Urban Fringe Co-ed, roll 501-750).

So many kids set their standards so low, they will only do enough to achieve. And you can say 'If you just do this, then you can get a Merit'. 'Don't want that, want Achieved.' If you do a bit of extra teaching to build around it, because you are teaching to the curriculum and you want to prepare them for the following year, and the kids say 'Is this worth credits?' If it's not, and you really are, you're preparing them for the next year, 'Tough, I don't want to know about it!' And that to me is actually quite a concern, that trying to get the students to aim for the Merits and Excellences and trying to get them to see that they need some teaching for the big picture and preparing for the future, even if it's not going to be assessed in this year now (HOD English, Mid Decile Provincial Co-ed, roll 1001-1200).

Many teachers believe that the Certificates and their credit requirements serve as a counter-motivator for a significant number of students, especially those in the middle ability range. For these students, reaching the minimum number of credits required for the Certificate, whether it be 80 at Level 1, or 60 at Level 2 if they have managed to achieve extras at Level 1 that they can carry over, becomes the end-point of their motivation. This includes students calculating how many credits they require per subject and stopping work at that point:

One of the things that I have found is that as the year has progressed and students have got credits and they've hit the mark that they have to get, you can see the motivation level drop. And I thought the idea of NCEA was actually to improve motivation and you know, by the time you get to the end of term three, kids say 'I'm not doing anymore, I've got enough' (Commerce/Computing, Mid Decile Urban Fringe Co-ed, roll 501-750).

On the other hand, the level of internal credits can be such that some students can rest on their laurels... (HOD Biology, Mid Decile Provincial Co-ed, roll 1001-1200).

But if they get their 12 credits internally, why would they turn up to the external exam? That would be the attitude of a lot of our students (English, Mid Decile Urban Fringe Co-ed, roll 501-750).

They've got more than 12 credits, 'Why should I bother with the external?' and I've just got this thought that a lot of the external results for drama may be pretty minimal, because why do they need to bother? (HOD Languages, Drama, Mid Decile Provincial Co-ed, roll 1001-1200).

Some teachers, however, do see the Certificates as motivators, at least for some students:

I think that as kids get higher up, it is important they can say that they have achieved a Level 1 or they have achieved a Level 2. They don't say 'How many credits have you got? You've only got 36 credits'. They don't talk in that language... [But] I don't know about the relevance of 80 [credits]. What is the relevance of 80? I mean, for the brighter students who can take the excess into Level 2, then the 80 is... I won't say irrelevant, because it does provide a benchmark, but I do wonder about the relevance and in the way that we plan our courses. And many students are actually sitting for 100 and something credits, and whether we have to think of the way that we present our courses so that they can just get an 80, or an 85, and what they get is relevant to the pathway that these kids are actually trying to follow... (ESOL, Mid Decile Urban Co-ed, roll 501-750).

It's a goal-setting thing, 'I want to get NCEA Level 1.' It's a goal, and if you achieve your goal, you're happy with it. Some kids have the goal that 'I want to achieve 150 credits', but see we don't offer those amounts of credits anyway. So, I think the goal for most of our students... is they've got their credits, and they're doing a bit of study, but they're not really taking it very seriously. I'll go back to it again, I mean if there was no NCEA Level 2, and they could just get an unlimited number of credits, I don't really know if that would be a good motivating thing for those students. A lot of students do see that as a sort of goal to focus on too, and that's part of the problem isn't it? (HOD Music, Co-HOD Arts, Mid Decile Urban Fringe Co-ed, roll 501-750).

One group of teachers talked about the increased retention of students in their school following the introduction of NCEA:

I think that we have given the students the confidence to return for a Year 13 year, which helps them sort of 'grow-up' in our space, whereas previously they might have departed. I've just seen the return of many students, who previously might have been condemned by the system as 2nd year 5th. They're not going to be a 3rd year 5th and they would leave school and go and do something else. Whereas now, they are, apart from the breadth of options that we seem to be able to offer, pathways to this and pathways to that, it's not a bad thing to have students coming back if they're undecided about where they are going in life, to have another year to grow up at our expense. I think that's a positive. [Researcher: And your retention data shows that, your roll data shows that you are retaining more?] Yes (HOD Maths, Mid Decile Provincial Co-ed, roll 1001-1200).

I think that some of these kids come back for good reasons and others come back because they've got nothing better to do and part way through the year they get absolutely bored with what they're doing and it can create problems. But I think you're absolutely right, about... (Principal's Nominee, Mid Decile Provincial Co-ed, roll 1001-1200).

I mean from a student's point of view, for those who were genuine about seeking out a course, or a direction in life, an opportunity to be with their peers and do something that might turn a light on (HOD Maths, Mid Decile Provincial Co-ed, roll 1001-1200).

CHALLENGING THE ABLE STUDENTS

Discussion often turned to whether the NCEA was challenging and extending the able students, and despite early predictions that it would not, teachers generally seem to believe that it is doing so:

It's certainly extending the bright students... (ESOL, Mid Decile Urban Co-ed, roll 501-750).

I haven't had any problems in terms of extending the top, in fact this year, I had eight of them that wanted to give Scholarship a go. It's just the way in which this subject is, it's not like [colleague's] one where they are asking very difficult stuff, it's skills based, and so they feel confident in their skills that they can tackle something like that, to see whether they can do it... (Deputy Principal, Principal's Nominee, Geography/Computing, Mid Decile Urban Co-ed, roll 501-750).

Having those different levels of achievement is really good, because you cater for those high achievers as well, they've got something to strive for (PE/Health/Social Studies, Mid Decile Urban Fringe Co-ed, roll 501-750).

I think that for our top students, that some are gradually getting the idea of Excellence as something to actually strive for, to go for. I'm not sure that it's totally across the board with a lot of students, who don't quite see the difference, but no, the top kids really are looking for that Excellence level of achievement (HOD English/Media Studies, High Decile Urban Boys, roll 1200+).

I think the kids that strive for the Excellences are the high achievers anyway... In particular some of my kids got all the credit they needed really early on, but they still wanted Excellence in everything they sat, they wanted more assessment to do, they wanted more achievement standards: 'Can we do this? Can I re-sit it? Can I try and get another Excellence?' (English, Mid Decile Urban Fringe Co-ed, roll 501-750).

When you [colleague] said that maybe the Excellence could be worth more and you said that they'd get eighty credits awfully quickly, you know, the kids that are striving for Excellence would keep going beyond that anyway I think, knowing that they were being rewarded for being better. They would keep going because they are the motivated type of students (English, Mid Decile Urban Fringe Co-ed, roll 501-750).

The top kids it doesn't matter, you know the Excellence questions are really hard, I think they're probably harder than Bursary even, it's really, really tough. And the top kids will always achieve with that, they won't be satisfied with Merit (Maths, High Decile Urban Boys, roll 1200+).

The requirements for Merit, Excellence are actually encouraging students to think beyond the average pass and the average one-word answers. [Colleague] was just saying that the Excellence questions in Stats and Calculus are really hard... How can they be any harder than any of the other questions? So, what they're actually doing is putting in those stages of the thinking process and I mean it's good to get a piece of work and go okay, we're working at this level, and then let's think 'Well what are the processes of being able to explain how this system works, whether it's a horticultural system or a biological system? And then, let's go back and justify this.' So it's those processes that I find them...I find that they're good. Again, you've got a limited number of students who want to get to Excellence, or even Merit. There are enough, but probably not enough yet. But the process of NCEA is designed to hopefully pull students up through the levels of thinking (Science/Biology/Horticulture, High Decile Urban Boys, roll 1200+).

I teach a Scholarship English class and certainly there has been an energy in that classroom that hasn't been there before. I think one of the reasons is the diversification in the activities. Before there has been a narrow focus with an exam, now they do some internal assessment which they get credits for, so now the boys are working with oral English, doing seminars, working with creative writing. These are excellent new activities that were not possible in the old Bursary system. I think for boys particularly I think, that's been fantastic. They see that there is a whole other side of the brain, the presentation side of their personalities, and it has enlivened the classroom magnificently, which wasn't simply available in the old Bursary system (HOD Classical Studies, English, High Decile Urban Boys, roll 1200+).

One school talked about offering its very able students university papers as well:

And then also in Maths and the senior Sciences, we've got the 100-level papers from Massey as well, for selected students, and students that have entered that have done very well (HOD Science, High Decile Urban Boys, roll 1200+).

And it's expanding. Boys are really keen to do extramural papers outside those that have been offered at no cost; there's a group of core papers to select boys at no cost, but some boys are actually keen to do papers that they will pay for (HOD ICT, Maths, High Decile Urban Boys, roll 1200+).

In contrast, a teacher believed that high ability students were being de-motivated by the external assessment in their particular subject, Maths:

It definitely kills their motivation skills, and I think with high ability as well in the Mathematics sense, in that the high ability students now, in the way in which the exams are set out, they only have one or two questions that are geared towards Excellence, and if they don't get that question right, they don't get Excellence. And I've got a number of students who are excellent students, but are not getting those Excellence grades on the externals, because they made an error in one question. And it just seems stupid that the whole subject comes down to one question on an exam. And they're getting to the point now of just going to Merit, because we know that we just slip off on the day that we can't... You know, the motivation, it's not there and they see the Achieved students getting Achieved so easily in things like unit standards that they think 'Well, why are we bothering so much time to try and get Excellence and we just...on the day we don't get it?' (HOD Maths, Mid Decile Rural Co-ed, roll <500).

MOTIVATING THE LESS ABLE STUDENTS

There seems to be absolutely no doubt in teachers' minds that the NCEA is a big improvement for less able students and has motivated them in a range of ways. Some of the factors are the ability to bank credits as they go through the year, the ability to focus intensively on those aspects of a subject where the students can succeed and to give recognition for the aspects that they can do even when there are large areas of a subject that they find hard to succeed in, and the range of new courses and new options within subjects that are available and which suit them better than what was on offer before the NCEA.

The ability to 'bank' credits as the year progresses was noted as particularly useful for less able students:

I like the idea, I like the concept, because I've always believed in testing things as you complete them, and it does allow for the plodder to get through more easily (English, Mid Decile Urban Fringe Co-ed, roll 501-750).

For students who are not, what we call the non-exam students, I think that it's a really big boost to them during the year, to their morale, that they achieve during the year. The credit that they gain throughout the year I think prepares them better for the externals, because they have got a lot more confidence and they know that they can achieve (TIC Curriculum/Assessment, History, High Decile Urban Girls, roll 1200+).

Some guys work very, very hard but they hardly achieved under the old system. Now they can achieve and get credits (Geography/Social Studies, High Decile Urban Boys, roll 1200+).

I had a class last year that were much slower workers and in the course of the year we decided not to enter so many of the externals and therefore they were to concentrate on the internal and they have done much better in doing that than in rushing through to finish the course. And that was a class decision that I would let them concentrate on those (HOD Humanities, Low Decile Urban Co-ed, roll 501-750).

The positive is that kids are able to pick and choose what they like to do, like I have one or two who are not so academic, so rather than do all 24, we can just concentrate on two or three papers and get them 18 credits, so they're passing and they're not failing, so that's good (Economics/Accountancy, Mid Decile Rural Co-ed, roll <500).

The fact that students can carry forward into the next year the credits they have achieved, even though they have not yet reached the number required for a Certificate, was described as motivating for these students:

Can I add that under the old system, if the kids got 30% at the end of the year, and they came back the next year they started with zero. Whereas now, if they have 4 or 5 credits from this year, then they can carry those credits forward to the next year, it's not gone and forgotten about, what they've achieved is recognised (Principal's Nominee, Accountancy, Mid Decile Provincial Co-ed, roll 1001-1200).

Another thing is with being able to achieve a qualification in pieces. We have so many students that arrive with a reading age two years or more below their chronological age, by the time they get to Level 1, they might be sitting with about, under School Cert, 40%, 45%, which would've brought them out the other side of School Cert with very little to show for a year's work. But with NCEA they're coming out with maybe 65 credits at the end of one year, and then by term two of the following year, they have started to hit their 80 credits, so the work that they've done is for something, rather than for nothing (HOD Humanities, Low Decile Urban Co-ed, roll 501-750).

Last year there were quite a number of students who got quite excited about that very thing, that point, and they would come and they'd tell us when they got their 80 credits, you know, they'd be so excited about it. I think there are some students who are not clear and there are quite a number of failures who are not aware that it carries over, but I think as we go through, more and more will be aware that you don't have to get it all in one year. I think it's very exciting from that point of view (Principal's Nominee, HOD Science, Low Decile Urban Co-ed, roll 501-750).

I also like the idea that they can build on that year after year, so if they're a limited ability student they can gain 4 credits this year and then so many next year and it all counts, so they feel like they're progressing (English, Mid Decile Provincial Co-ed, roll 1001-1200).

A number of subjects have developed a wider range of options to cater for the different ability levels of students, and all of these options now offer credits towards the NCEA. This has meant that students are more willing to continue study in subjects which previously they would have dropped as soon as possible:

In the Maths department, the thing that stands out for me is that I could name quite a large number of our students who previously were not at NCEA Level 1 ability, who now have an improved incentive to go for unit standards and so that the image of that Maths alternative class I think has

been improved considerably with the ability to gain credits in particular. And this year, we've offered the National Certificate of Maths, which suits those who have the bulk of Level 1 credit, but are not really capable of moving on to Level 2, but can get up to that level for the National Certificate of Maths, and they have a real incentive to stay in Mathematics and to, you know, aim for things which previously they didn't (HOD Maths, Mid Decile Urban Fringe Co-ed, roll 501-750).

New courses have also helped to provide pathways for students who would otherwise have had few opportunities to demonstrate their strengths in the past:

Being able to offer new courses... We offer a two-year Course, the National Diploma in Travel and Tourism. It gives kids a start for what they're looking for in their careers. And using unit standards there, kids find unit standards fairly easy and then of course at Level 2 and Level 3 and therefore, what we're finding is that the majority of the kids that do the work actually pass, so they feel good about themselves and they're also getting a qualification, so you can bring these other courses into the school curriculum (HOD Social Sciences, Mid Decile Rural Co-ed, roll <500).

I'm teaching the Hospitality within the academy, and it's sort of a work focussed type course, we go out into the commercial environment. And I find the students that commit themselves to the course, they just get so much out of it. I see their confidence grow and yes, they just have this absolute focus. And it's hard work, but it's really rewarding to see that develop with them. And I don't think the old School Cert system had that, not within my subject area. I think it built a base, and I think the Food and Nutrition side is still important, but this is just so good to be able to provide this (Food & Nutrition/Hospitality, High Decile Area, roll <500).

Further opportunities for assessment are important for the struggling students:

You can even get underachievers to achieve with a lot of one to one, because of the way that they can have one chance at it and then you can show them where to improve (English, Mid Decile Provincial Co-ed, roll 1001-1200).

STUDENTS IN THE MIDDLE

While teachers were agreed that high ability and low ability students were motivated by the NCEA, there was much less agreement that students in the middle range of ability were motivated. These were the students who were perceived to be most likely to take the minimalist approach described above, and settle for Achieved and for the minimum number of credits required for the relevant Certificate:

Yes, well I think that the top students in any school are motivated by that Excellence, so that it depends on where that middle bracket sit in a school, you know, and my feeling is that in a lot of state schools, generally speaking... it won't be Excellence, it will be achieving the standard (HOD Music, Mid Decile Urban Fringe Co-ed, roll 501-750).

Maybe it's the middle group that it's not so motivating for, because it motivates the ones who wouldn't usually achieve, and it certainly motivates my accelerants, like they all want to have all Es, that's their goal and they're happy to redo things as many times as they can to get Es. But those middle people, and maybe they were always unmotivated, even under the old system, I don't know... (English/Health, High Decile Urban Boys, roll 1200+).

Previously you could differentiate between a 70% student and a 60% student; you can't do that any more. Some of those brighter boys, good students, and I think it could be to do with the way the system, and it could be because of the way we're teaching as well, they have become less motivated. Not the really good ones, they always want the best marks, they want to go for Excellence. But the ones in the 70s, 80s in the old system that would push to be in 80s-90s, now they...generally speaking I think they're falling behind. I don't know what they can do about it, I don't think there is anything they can do. Especially when you see a B student and a C student getting Achieved, and after once or twice, the B student goes around and gets demoralised because, 'I'll get Achieved, so I'm happy with it' (Maths, High Decile Urban Boys, roll 1200+).

EXEMPLARS AS MOTIVATORS

One teacher commented that the availability of national exemplars at senior levels was a strong motivator in their school because it exposed students to what students in other schools were capable of achieving:

I agree with [colleague], I think one of the big advantages for us was finally the provision of exemplars that most people could agree on. Because with our curriculum document, the wording was so generic and so broad as to be totally meaningless and unless you looked at it in conjunction with exemplars, you might as well not bother; but the exemplars are here for Levels 1, 2 and now 3, and we can look at things and say 'Yes, this is the sort of thing that we understand to be at this level', and we know that, or hope that, everybody else in the country is doing the same thing. And that's a really critical thing for a school our size, because at each level we don't have a pool of more than say 100 kids. And sometimes they don't really comprehend that there is considerably more polished work produced sometimes by people elsewhere - so it's good for them to see exemplars too (HOD English/Languages, Mid Decile Urban Fringe Co-ed, roll 501-750).

SUGGESTED SOLUTIONS

A few teachers thought that a solution to the problem of students not aiming for the higher levels of achievement in achievement standards would be for Merit and Excellence to generate a higher number of credits:

Why don't you vary the credits for Achieved, Merit and Excellence, so say you have 3 for Achieved, 4 for a Merit and 5 for a Merit...? (Technology/Graphics, Mid Decile Urban Fringe Co-ed, roll 501-750).

It's important to encourage students to get to the Merit and Excellence, and I don't know how we can do that if we're simply rewarding the same credits. And if we go to any other system, then we're simply going back to a percentage...which has all gone (Science, High Decile Urban Boys, roll 1200+).

I basically think... give him 5 credits for it, because he's done far better than the 3 credits that guy got for Achieved, and Merit should be 4 credits. You know, put more value so the guys will strive to improve on their knowledge (Geography/Social Studies, High Decile Urban Boys, roll 1200+).

CONCLUSIONS

One of the main reasons put forward for a change from the previous qualifications system was that it had failed to motivate many students. It is clear that many teachers believe that the new system is much more motivating for many students. However, because there are doubts held about whether the revised system is motivating particular groups of students, this issue needs to be researched urgently to establish the extent, if any, of the problem, and whether there are any aspects of the system's design which are impacting negatively on student motivation.

The teachers who expressed concerns about student motivation tended to believe that the group who were most at risk of not being motivated was the students in the middle range of ability. In some cases they theorised that this was because of the 80 credit requirement for the Certificate, as discussed here and in Chapter 4. In other cases it was because of the wide range of achievement which is covered by the Achieved level. These aspects of the design are highlighted as meriting review in the light of the findings of the research we recommend be undertaken.

(See Recommendations 1 and 2)

7. MANAGING INTERNAL ASSESSMENT

“The difficulty is, though, knowing that you are being professional in those situations, in all those calls and judgements that you are making.”

A wide range of issues which can be grouped under this heading were raised by teachers. They all involve teachers and schools having to make professional judgements that balance a number of the goals and principles which inform the new qualifications system, for example student motivation, fairness, inclusiveness, clarity, equity, and manageability.

A lot of these issues were around assessment processes which schools were striving to refine, such as trying to assess flexibly and holistically, including seeking further oral or written evidence to avoid having to do a further full assessment; working with the criteria for grade levels; achieving clarity of assessment; the best timing of assessment; providing further opportunities for assessment; and ensuring authenticity and equity. They also worried about a perceived lack of parity between schools in the ways that they were managing internal assessment, which they believed posed a risk to fairness.

ASSESSING FLEXIBLY AND HOLISTICALLY

It has been suggested to schools (e.g. *NCEA Update 11*, May 2002) that in certain circumstances it may be appropriate to seek further evidence from a student orally or in some other way, rather than to have them repeat a whole assessment task or provide further written information. This has been presented as one of a number of ways of reducing the internal assessment workload of teachers and students. However teachers who raised this issue in the focus groups tended to be quite resistant to this kind of evidence collection, especially to using oral clarification. In one school, I was told, “I think officially we don’t permit verbal reassessments here”.

One teacher felt that in a small class, clarifying orally with a student was feasible, but in big classes it was not:

Personally, I think that's where professional judgement is very valuable. Just say you're marking a script and you see they've made a silly mistake and to have the opportunity to sit down and talk to them about it. This is where the difference between providers... If I was teaching at [small rural school] or somewhere and had two kids in my class, it would be easy as. But teaching here where you've got 22 or 32 [students] or whatever it is, it's a totally different ballgame, and you've got to be fair to every student and... it could be 10 of them [requiring clarification] (Maths, Mid Decile Urban Co-ed, roll 501-750).

Another teacher wrestled with whether this kind of assessment could be ‘spoon-feeding’. They provided the Languages ‘Writing with resources’ assessment as an example:

They know well before they go in what they need to get, it's quite clear and it's told to them numerous times and I'll actually write that up on the whiteboard 'Make sure you have included a level 6 grammatical structure' and that is the key point to achieving that standard or not, and you've written sufficient...like enough kana, you know, enough of the script... [Researcher: And if they hand it in, and they're a bit short of the quantity, can you give it back to them and say, 'If you sit down over there and write a bit more at this level, then I'll be able to give you the standard?'] I have a hard time on that, because I've had three lessons on it, it's there on the standard, it's there on the whiteboard, how much am I supporting them? When do I take the spoon out of their mouth? (HOD Languages, Mid Decile Urban Co-ed, roll 501-750).

On the other hand, a teacher talked about providing another assessment opportunity for the part of the assessment task which a student had not achieved, although they did not say whether seeking oral clarification was part of their processes:

So I guess for practical work, I know when students are likely to achieve a standard given how they work historically. My professional judgement would give me some lead into how they would go and how they would perform, but there are lots of components to it, it's not just the practical. There's processing, there's interpreting and so on and sometimes they don't quite get that even though I think that they're someone who would be able to, they don't quite get that bit, so there's this extra flexibility that we've got in that we can get them to resit part of the achievement standard which makes it much easier, that you don't have to use your professional judgements quite so much, you can actually collect the real data (Principal's Nominee, HOD Science, Low Decile Urban Co-ed, roll 501-750).

Another teacher saw the ability to orally clarify a student's understanding as a real benefit of the NCEA:

I also want to back up and support the idea of holistic marking and how important I think that is. I think the ability to be able to conference a student to the grade that you know they deserve, but because of a slight hiccup they would not get it, is a very worthwhile exercise, and the students are realising how worthwhile that is for them and I think that is just such a positive with NCEA. And it is rewarding as a teacher to be able to see that development happening right in front of you...although it's smaller. The difficulty is though, knowing that you are being professional in those situations, in all those calls and judgements that you're making (HOD History, High Decile Urban Girls, roll 1200+).

A number of teachers said that they were quite comfortable collecting evidence over a period of time, such as a whole unit of work:

A positive in PE is that it has brought in the opportunity for gathering evidence. You can use, you know, things over the whole unit, as opposed to just at assessment time. So if you've seen them perform to the standard under another context within the unit, then you can... (PE/Health, Mid Decile Provincial Co-ed, roll 1001-1200).

And they [students] can see that there is the flexibility of the system, whereby the teacher is able to actually award them with the grade that they should really get, because of this whole business of being able to look at a student's work holistically and what have you, as opposed to having to mark it absolutely strictly, and it allows that flexibility. And a number of students have said to me that they are finding it to be a little bit less, well I think initially they thought to start off with that it was an inferior system, but their attitudes do seem to be changing (Quality Manager, HOD Physics, High Decile Urban Girls, roll 1200+).

We use the term personal judgement, professional or personal judgement. And what we've done there, holistically, we've gone back and said 'Although they didn't get it here, we feel that they have adequate knowledge throughout the rest to show that they are capable of doing it, therefore they can be an Achieved'. We do that in Geography (Geography/Social Studies, High Decile Urban Boys, roll 1200+).

On the other hand, the judgements needing to be made were not easy:

I think you can [assess holistically], it depends on your definition of the term. I think we were kind of given the idea that holistic means, say, if they haven't written down 'a germinating seed', but then later on they've written down that 'Oh, you've got make sure you give it water', you say 'Oh well they know what they're talking about', so they get it right, even though they got it wrong in the first place. Because a couple of pages later they've remembered to water their seeds, you give them Achieved. So you're carrying on throughout the paper and providing new 'evidence' that they have reached the level of the achievement. I mean, it's difficult, because I was marking Year 13, and as part of the requirement, they had to give two market forces affecting supply and two market forces affecting demand. Now I go through, and go, 'You've only mentioned three market forces', but I go back, and they've mentioned supply and demand for this one market force, which is true because market forces affect both supply and demand. So, you're constantly kind of battling with your judgement statements, because of what they've written on this page and what they've written on that page after

and it's not as clear cut as before... Now you're just kind of making sure that they've covered these points at some stage. I mean, I'm not necessarily saying that it's bad, that's not to say that I shouldn't be doing it, but it does take a lot more time (Science/Biology/Horticulture, High Decile Urban Boys, roll 1200+).

Maths teachers in particular struggled with the concept of assessing holistically. While on the one hand they disliked having students fail because of a small 'slip' at some point in a calculation, on the other hand they found it hard to conceive of assessment being anything other than numerical:

Well we give them three examples and they have to get two right... so we do that. But this whole concern, especially in Maths with Calculus, that a student can do a whole big sum that takes pages and pages and then they may just make one minor error in the beginning which affects the whole thing... (HOD Maths, High Decile Urban Girls, roll 1200+).

A PE teacher was happy to take quite a flexible approach to how they assessed each student:

The units of work start with quite clear outcomes... and the students are made aware of that and it's good to follow that through for the students and then they can sort of choose how they want to be assessed. There's lots of different options for them, like when they do written, or when they do the practical, they can choose from different options available, and then the unit finishes. It's all quite structured (PE/Health, Mid Decile Area, roll <500).

One teacher thought it depended very much on the subject how flexibly you could collect evidence:

Obviously collecting evidence is going to fit the subject. One would be Art, when you've got a portfolio, it works perfectly, but how do you do it in more academic subjects? You can go through the whole period and get snippets (Geography/Social Studies, High Decile Urban Boys, roll 1200+).

Some teachers felt that their schools were not being flexible enough in their assessment rules, but described some very vexed issues. One teacher summed up a number of these issues:

Well I'd just like to come back actually to this whole notion of holistic, perhaps from a slightly different angle, I think that there are lots of contradictions involved and I don't know if they would ever be sorted out, for example, we have lots of students in this school who win writing competitions and it just seems ludicrous not to give these students Excellence in the writing, and yet, in the school assessment they may not have achieved an Excellence, it may have only been good enough to get marked as a Merit or an Achieved. But in fact they have produced a brilliant piece of writing for an external competition. But there are so many problems that are involved in this, because the school-based assessment has been carried out under strictly organised condition, whereby students haven't been able to take assessment out of the classroom and so forth. So, we have no measure, or no real idea of how much help students have had for stuff that has been entered under competition, and yet... And I can see the point of this, it has been suggested that it is in fact practice to award students a particular level of achievement, on the basis of the fact that they can achieve Excellence, if it is clear that they can achieve Excellence in another thing that they have done. And I think that there are...for example, here, students are being awarded Achieved standards on the basis of the work that they did in the school show. Now, if students were involved in production work in the classroom, then teachers would be given the same clear guidelines as to the help that they can give students - they could give it in general terms and they could answer questions, but they couldn't say 'You have to move here, when you say this' or 'You should use this gesture when you say that'. Whereas in a school show, of course the director is saying 'No, you don't do that, you do it like this' and yet these kids can, it is said, be given that achievement standard on the basis of their work in the show, whereas other students are working under very strictly monitored conditions. And I don't know how we solve that, but it seems to me to be a problem (HOD English, High Decile Urban Girls, roll 1200+).

One teacher had observed that moderators were not necessarily receptive to teachers assessing holistically:

I see all of the moderation reports that come in across the subjects, and I am concerned that there seems to be a difference between subjects, and whilst some subjects definitely are being moderated holistically and allowing teachers to mark holistically, others are being more pedantic and specific, and that is an area that I think needs to be addressed... These are the picky ones, these are the ones where I actually encouraged appeals, so we're looking at Media Studies, we're looking at Mathematics, we're looking at Graphics, Geography, and Music. My concern was with the practical subjects, where I felt that there was a lot of inconsistency in the messages that I was hearing from other schools about what moderators were saying in the moderator's report. My concern is that there is a need for clarification of the marking process, and the use of the term 'holistic'. My overall concern is that there is a need for clarification and consistency to be enforced nationally. In fact I think Maths is actually one of my main areas of concern. My concern is not so much with the teachers, I think the teachers do understand holistic marking. It was the contradictory messages that were coming through from the moderators that were throwing subjects away from being holistic, because of the discrepancies (TIC Curriculum/Assessment, History, High Decile Urban Girls, roll 1200+).

MAKING ASSESSMENT JUDGEMENTS

Making the judgements at the grade boundaries was a big challenge at times:

Ultimately, I visualise NCEA when I'm marking as being a series of hard lines, which are the Excellence, Merit, Achieved, Not Achieved lines, and then a series of softer, less hard lines just under these and I've got to find which students are... One of the main concerns that I have with the NCEA is when I'm trying to distinguish the different demands of the criteria from Achieved, Merit and Excellence. In History we have very generalised descriptors and terms used, for example, at Level 3, in one of our standards, the difference between Merit and Excellence is the difference between the words 'concise' and 'succinct'... And we've gone to all sorts of dictionaries to try and find the difference and we still haven't. And so these are like, so crucial, but yet so difficult (HOD History, High Decile Urban Girls, roll 1200+).

The grade boundaries within, if we're looking at year 13 research, it does mean that you have to be fairly confident and comfortable with your subject for starters to be able to recognise 'discussion' versus 'description' and 'explanation' and so forth. And I think that for experienced teachers that's not too difficult, and possibly it's something that contributes to younger teachers not sticking with the job so long, because really coming into a system which relies a lot on experience to be able to make judgements, they're coming in without experience and they're going into that system and I imagine it is probably a bit nerve racking for them sort of getting a bunch of say Level 1 essays and here's the descriptor... And they're coming in and they don't have that experience of those say 15, 10, 20 years that we've been teaching and doing it (English/Media Studies, High Decile Urban Boys, roll 1200+).

But, I guess I do have some angst around interpreting the standards, you know, constantly about interpreting the language that is used as accurately as possible, I mean, I just find that, you know, that thing that you do... If you look at a word over and over and over and over, it starts to mean nothing, you know what I mean? Right, and you look at the word 'explain' over and over, and what does it actually mean? Eventually you're starting to question language itself or something! [Researcher: Is it that 'describe, explain, discuss' thing?] Yes. 'Comprehensively evaluate' and that sort of thing, and you know, there are always certain examples that easily fit into each level and you can obviously see the skills. It's just those borderline ones that you could spend so long deliberating over, and that ends up taking a lot of your time... And I find that much more in a language based subject than with a visual subject, where the skills, well, still the borderline ones, but... (Art/Art History/Design, High Decile Urban Girls, roll 1200+).

Well I still find it difficult to interpret the Achieved, Merit, Excellence. When I first started out, I was the only teacher of Japanese in a small town and I had to interpret it myself. So I could ask somebody what it meant, but they couldn't tell me what it meant in my particular subject, because they didn't speak the same language. I actually find it easier, just because of the change of schools, but it is very difficult if you are in the situation, having to interpret the different standards (Japanese, High Decile Urban Girls, roll 1200+).

In NCEA in graphics, it's a little bit harder [than unit standards], because I'm still not 100% sure where the Achieved, Merits and Excellences should stand, it's still very hard for me to figure that out, to make the judgement, and that's where the moderation has always been handy and that's why if we can't get together as a group and talk about it... And of course I haven't got any Excellence examples, except what I've drawn and said to the kids, 'This is what an Excellence should look like' but there are circumstances where I can't, I don't know what an Excellence is, and there's no examples. And that's in Level 1 Graphics. And that's why I've gone to the ITOs in the workshop, because it's just much easier (HOD Technology/Graphics/Workshop, High Decile Area, roll <500).

CLARITY OF ASSESSMENT PROCESS

The focused nature of standards-based assessment is seen by teachers as improving clarity for students. They are given information that tells them exactly what understandings and/or skills are going to be assessed, and there is not the same element of 'Guess what the teacher/examiner will want me to know' that there was in the previous system:

Now we tell students exactly what we want and what it's for and they know exactly what the level is (HOD Food & Nutrition, Maths/Science, Mid Decile Area, roll <500).

And I think students have received much more information about what is expected of them in order to achieve (French/English, Mid Decile Provincial Co-ed, roll 1001-1200).

You can give them that ongoing feedback as they go, so that they can actually learn as they achieve (English, Mid Decile Provincial Co-ed, roll 1001-1200).

I think that it forces you as a teacher to break down tasks into manageable chunks because the kids want to know what they need to do to achieve, so you have to actually have guidelines and set points and things and I actually think that it's better as teachers in that it forces us to break down the big picture into little components, which I think is also easier for the kids to deal with than 'Please go and write an essay'. So I think it has broken it down and it gives you the main points that they will be assessed on and actually made it more manageable for students and perhaps actually changed the way that we teach (English, Mid Decile Provincial Co-ed, roll 1001-1200).

One teacher expressed a concern that students might even be receiving too much information:

I've noticed that I'm sure we're all giving out objectives, and information sheets and things we know our students respond to. They get all the starting tools to focus them on their work, but I do notice a lot of paper abandoned around the school, and I don't necessarily think that at this stage... And I don't know the yardstick to compare it with, but I just wonder what people... I certainly notice in my room that a lot of stuff gets left behind, because I've got lockers in there, and they abandon it (HOD Maths/Physics, Mid Decile Area, roll <500).

On the other hand, some teachers found they struggled to be clear with students about what was required because of the wording of standards and/or the lack of exemplars in their subjects:

Just in terms of what [colleague] was saying before in terms of the language, 'explain, describe...', we get words like 'some' and 'range' and I mean, what is the difference between some and a range? Where they are not quantitative numbers. And 'perceptive insights' and 'insights'. And you know, my 'some' might be different to your 'some'...And, you know, in graphic, the graphics achievement standards are actually working quite well, they are very clear about what they want and what you should be doing, but in technology, back to the language involved, it's wrong, I find the language difficult. And I actually have to turn around and go 'What are they actually looking for? How can I get the kids to show this?' [Researcher: What about the exemplars?] I wouldn't say they are that good, and they don't help. And I don't know how it works for other subjects, but I know for Art that they have those things that the NZQA sends out and they get nice big booklets, all glossy paper, and there's Achieved, Merit and Excellence, and they are explaining the work involved. And in Graphics and Technology, we're basically visual subjects as well, but there's nothing like that, and that would help a lot (Technology/Graphics, High Decile Urban Girls, roll 1200+).

TIMING OF ASSESSMENT

Teachers are wrestling with issues about when to schedule internal assessment. If it is too early in the year, it does not allow students to develop over the year so that they can perform at their best; if it is too late in the year, both teachers' and students' programmes are getting too full, and there is no time to provide further opportunities for assessment.

The arguments for slotting the internal assessment in early included the following:

In Maths, we have got our strands. So for example, we've tended to put the internal assessment at the beginning of the year, so we'll teach statistics and then that's an internal assessment; we'll do the probability work and get those assessments underway and look at the other, the geometry and the other externals later, because of the external exams coming at the end of the year (HOD Maths, Mid Decile Urban Fringe Co-ed, roll 501-750).

Other teachers preferred to schedule it later, or across the year:

I think it is important that it's later in the year, because kids develop so much in the later parts of the year, and it's really unfortunate that if you have an assessment early in the year that kids don't have an opportunity to do it later, the kids that missed. That is just really unfair to them, because kids at that age develop so much in that short space of time. So, I think assessment should be towards the end of the year, but it's hard to manage all that isn't it? (HOD English, Mid Decile Urban Fringe Co-ed, roll 501-750).

I think that is a concern, that if you overly-modularise that you are then missing out on that fundamental stuff. I think in English you make attempts to counter that by building in opportunities throughout the year for kids to show that they've developed in their written work or whatever (HOD English, Low Decile Urban Co-ed, roll 501-750).

With language, you can't sort of learn a bit and then put it aside and then move on to a new bit, you actually have to know all the language in order to get your achievement standards. So when you're trying to timetable assessments, if you do it too early, you end up focussing on that to the detriment of other things, say it's a writing exercise or an oral assessment, so that can actually trip you up a bit and you'll find yourself taking time out from your overall program. Because traditionally, you have aimed for the end of the year when everything has been done and they have everything in place. But in order to get Excellence, you need certain elements of the language, which you may not have acquired until the end of the year... But what happens is that here there is a rule that makes a statement that you can't have any internal assessment within ten days of exams, you know? So, ideally it's good to spread them out throughout the year and I think some subjects lend themselves to that very well, but languages don't (HOD Japanese, High Decile Urban Boys, roll 1200+).

I was disturbed at the last Visual Arts training day, where people were talking 'You've got to get 1.1 done in the first three weeks of the year', well, why? And that feeling from practitioners that those assessments became troubles of delivery and that was not the way that I view it, but that was certainly the feeling, that you get this out of the way because you hate doing it, and if you do three weeks on that one, get it out of the way and you can get onto the real stuff, you know (Deputy Principal (Curriculum), Visual Arts, Low Decile Urban Co-ed, roll 501-750).

Maths we... stagger assessment, because one topic might not necessarily have a bearing on the next topic, so we can assess, put one side together and carry on, to a lesser extent. So, that's what we do, stagger our assessments throughout the year (HOD ICT, Maths, High Decile Urban Boys, roll 1200+).

I don't like the idea of multiple assessments at the end of the year - I think that sort of goes against the whole...I like to look at things as being sort of opportunities for assessment throughout the year, where you can front up during the year, take the pressure and come up with your best result. Like in Music, we really are skill driven, and there is no doubt that the students are better at the end of the year, but...All they need to say is 'I've got the credits I want, I'm happy with that, I want to put my energy somewhere else'. It's student driven rather than prescriptive from me (HOD Music, Mid Decile Urban Fringe Co-ed, roll 501-750).

For others, the nature of their subjects dictated when the assessment needed to be scheduled:

For Phys Ed, that's an all internal assessment course, and so much of that relates to reviewing and evaluating what they're doing at the time that the assessment has to be done at the time. Because simply, the amount of written work that the students are producing is massive and we just couldn't do it all at once (Health/PE/Food & Nutrition/Outdoor Ed, Mid Decile Urban Fringe Co-ed, roll 501-750).

One teacher talked about the difficulties of being flexible in relation to each student's needs:

The child is meant to achieve when they're ready to achieve and therefore that's great. Maybe one of the kids is not quite ready for the achievement standard at the end of term one, but they will be at the end of term three. But then the negative of that is the stress on the teacher. When do you offer them? How do you mark them all year? And, you know, kids achieving at their own level when they're ready, you know, great idea, but then the practicalities. It's more added stress (HOD Social Sciences, Mid Decile Rural Co-ed, roll <500).

FURTHER OPPORTUNITIES FOR ASSESSMENT

The title of this section reflects the terminology currently favoured by NZQA, but in fact was not heard used in any of the focus groups. Teachers tend to use the terms 'reassess', 'resit' or 'resubmission' in this context.

The area of further opportunities for assessment continues to be quite vexed for teachers. Some are developing a degree of comfort around collecting additional evidence in less structured ways which do not have negative impacts on student or teacher workloads, but there was a wide range of understandings about what was acceptable and what was not, both in terms of school policies and in terms of perceived national policies. Others expressed considerable discomfort around issues of the time and workload involved, a perceived lack of national uniformity, and the lack of parity between internal and external assessment because one offers further opportunities and the other does not.

Many teachers saw further opportunities for assessment as making good sense to them and to students:

But that relates it to a lot of things that those kids experience in life, like for example the driver's licence, and that [failing the first time] doesn't rule you out, so they can see the connections and they can work away, so it's a definite advantage, for our group of students anyhow (HOD Social Sciences, Mid Decile Urban Fringe Co-ed, roll 501-750).

The idea of reassessment can pretty much be extremely useful, the idea that if you haven't done too well, that you can be reassessed, and I think that has proved very useful to some students. Whereas before, you just walked out the door and that was it (HOD Physics, Mid Decile Provincial Co-ed, roll 1001-1200).

It's a good learning curve that, because they can immediately get feedback as to where they have not come up to the standard, and you need to be able to correct that and they learn from their mistakes, whereas an exam under School C, yes they found out where their mistakes were, but that's too late (English, Mid Decile Rural Co-ed, roll <500).

However, some commented that students were not necessarily motivated to take up the opportunities offered:

We used to be quite rigid, in allowing a certain number of resubmissions, but we've kind of slowly opened the door, because a lot of kids just don't have motivation, no matter what you do, they are not interested, so then you don't get swamped with resubmissions, but the ones that are really keen

do feel like it's worth giving up the time and getting through, so I'm still not sure how to get through the motivation problem (HOD English/Languages, Mid Decile Urban Fringe Co-ed, roll 501-750).

Well I think that the students are less concerned about the reassessment opportunities than we are. I think we are hung up with giving them an opportunity and giving them another, it's this politically correct...giving them more chances, where some of them couldn't give a toss. You offer them a chance at lunchtime, you offer them a chance after school, you can put them down on the list, you can print out all the pages, you give it to a supervising teacher, and they don't turn up. We are more concerned about it than they are (HOD Languages, Drama, Mid Decile Provincial Co-ed, roll 1001-1200).

I know that for English we offer only one standard reassessment, one only. I either did it at the beginning of the year or they did it at the end, I gave them the choice. Some who passed just didn't bother, some who didn't had a go at it, that was it, only one... If you got Achieved, you were allowed to go again, everyone was allowed to re-sit... [But] no-one who got Achieved did it again (English, Low Decile Urban Co-ed, roll 501-750).

Also, one teacher said that the availability of further opportunities appeared to make students less motivated to perform well on the first assessment:

I have struggled a little bit with my own abilities to present a unit standard, and to encourage the students to pass it first time, and well, they're just not interested. And they think 'Oh, this is easy, I can pass it' and they don't put any work into doing it well. Because they know 'Oh well, I can have another re-sit, just give me another re-sit later in the year and I'll pass it then'. And they're lazy, they don't want to put the work in (Computing, Mid Decile Provincial Co-ed, roll 1001-1200).

Some teachers were finding manageable and effective ways to offer further opportunities for assessment:

Yes, in the arts I really like the NCEA thing because we can pay more attention to what we're actually doing, for example we can hold a concert, we can video it, kids can look at it and rather than saying 'This was your mark', we can reassess, show the areas on which to improve and have another go at it and find the improvement. Before, in the old system it was just do the exam and that was it, no chance of doing it again and improving on it, and that is really good in my Music class (HOD Music, Mid Decile Urban Fringe Co-ed, roll 501-750).

Yes I agree with [colleague] on that too. Initially I think we were horrified at the amount of resubmission that we might have to do, but I've two alternative classes this year and those kids just plodded away at it all year and re-submitted it as many times as I could manage, and then they got it right and I thought that was a really good learning process for them... I found it manageable, I didn't think it was going to be but it was. I got into a nice little routine of doing it and it worked fine, but they were small classes, twelve and fifteen [students] (HOD English, Mid Decile Urban Fringe Co-ed, roll 501-750).

I think that the fact that reassessment is now being, perhaps, de-emphasised, and the whole business of conferencing and resubmission, and you know, the students not actually having to do a completely new assessment, as you were talking about there with the Geography, is actually an advantage that is getting to be more and more of an advantage as we go on, because certainly the workload issues associated with proper reassessments are huge. But now that we are being encouraged to go more into the way of conferencing and resubmission... It's still perfectly valid, but the workload issues are far less of a problem. And also of course, there is far less workload involved from the students' point of view. Doing a completely new assessment is a huge load on them and it is nice to be able to have that opportunity and say 'Oh, if only, she's just so close' and being able to actually get them over the solid line through other means than reassessment (HOD Physics, Quality Manager, High Decile Urban Girls, roll 1200+).

There's other flexibilities that you've got as well for assessment, like for instance I had one student who didn't get one of the practicals in the Level 2 program, and I gave her back her raw material and got her to resit, which was actually something that I had to clarify with NZQA, because there is a problem when you have an outdoor practical, there is the problem that you have to make a trip to go and get this raw data. How can you get them to do another version of it, without making a big thing of it? If it's just one student then resits can become impossible. But now you can give them back

the raw data if it's their processing that's not okay. And then get them to actually go through the processing. So I guess for practical work, I know when students are likely to achieve a standard given how they work historically. My professional judgement would give me some lead into how they would go and how they would perform, but there are lots of components to it, it's not just the practical. There's processing, there's interpreting and so on and sometimes they don't quite get that even though I think that they're someone who would be able to. They don't quite get that bit, so there's this extra flexibility that we've got in that we can get them to resit part of the achievement standard and it makes it much easier that you don't have to use your professional judgements quite so much, you can actually collect the real data (Principal's Nominee, HOD Science, Low Decile Urban Co-ed, roll 501-750).

In one school, the Mid Decile Urban Co-ed, there was a debate about whether school policy prevented teachers from collecting further evidence from students for part of an achievement standard, while it did allow that same process in relation to a unit standard:

With unit standards, you're not forced to do the whole assessment again, you can reassess element by element, so if the kid misses an element, you can reassess that element and you don't have to do the whole task again, whereas with the achievement standards, it's the whole thing, you have to do the whole lot again if it's an internal one. So when you're doing research using a unit standard and the kid does most of it right, but leaves off the bibliography, they still can't get the unit standard, but you can get them to do the bibliography again...[Researcher: Well, could you not do that with an achievement standard?]You're not allowed to... (Deputy Principal, Principal's Nominee).

Well I'd just like to sort of clarify something, because that's not what I've done this year. Because, if a student had got from me an [assessment task] and they've done 80% of that [assessment task], that's fine, I don't make them do the 80% again, they only do the 20% part that they got wrong... (HOD Commerce).

Yes that's fine, but it's when they don't even get to that point, you've actually got to make them do the whole thing again (Deputy Principal, Principal's Nominee).

Oh, if it's done to the stage where you think 'Hey, this is not really anything near it', that's fine, but, you know, if they've got the majority of it right, I don't make them do the whole thing again, just the bit that they've missed out (HOD Commerce).

I identify the areas that need addressing and clarify with the student what they have to do in order to reach a particular standard and they'll go away and either adjust the work that they've handed in, or maybe redo one or two other pieces. I mean it depends really on which achievement standard that they're doing, but I would never ask them to...I could never ask them to redo the whole lot (HOD Visual Arts).

Many teachers felt the time involved in providing further opportunities for assessment was huge, in some cases making it impossible to do:

But see, in Science, for our practical one, they have to redo the whole lot, there is no way that they could not. But I mean, it's a three hour assessment, and to manage it we could only have 15 students at a time, where you really need to do it individually and so for one year level, it's a massive time input. And then we added a second year level and now we've got a third year level. Trying to manage the time is just enormous (HOD Science, Mid Decile Urban Co-ed, roll 501-750).

The other issue, I think, with some of practical work is the time involved in actually setting things up for the assessment. For both of mine in Science, it requires about a week's preparation before you actually do the assessment, so it's not the marking time so much as the time involved out of the programme to offer a reassessment. So by the time you've taken a week or so out to do the preparation, and then you have the day of the assessment, and for validity it's done in class time and under test conditions to ensure authenticity. For a student that has missed out because they were away that week, I can't even offer reassessments in those circumstances, because it would mean that student would miss out another week of ongoing work, so it's just a matter of practicality rather than fairness in offering reassessments (Principal's Nominee, HOD Science, Mid Decile Area, roll <500).

Within the Arts department, we've made a policy about not reassessing, because it was just too much work, but I teach my Art History class by myself, and I have made my own little policy to reassess in that class and allow them to reassess, but I think generally it is just seen as just too much work... I guess there's always a little bit of leeway [in Art] for students who have not achieved the standard. Generally, you know, there have been times over the years that we have let them if they have really tried the first way around, so there is a little bit of case-by-case that goes on (Art/Art History/Design, High Decile Urban Girls, roll 1200+).

It's hard for me to reassess, particularly at Level 1, but also at 2 and 3, because the project work is so large. We can't... we just couldn't do it, even into another assignment, or into another unit, sorry... (Technology/Graphics, High Decile Urban Girls, roll 1200+).

In many schools, further teaching and further opportunities for assessment were being provided in teacher and student 'spare' time, such as lunchtimes or after school or even at the weekend, and this was proving to be a major burden on teachers:

We don't have enough space for reassessment - we feel obliged to offer reassessment because you know, it happens in other subjects and we can't disadvantage our students so to speak. But, we offer our reassessment now outside of school hours, which of course upsets a lot of students. And we're also making use of what was formerly our senior exam slot for reassessment... (HOD Maths, Mid Decile Urban Co-ed, roll 501-750).

I have had plenty of students who have wanted another assessment opportunity. We have struggled to fit them in during class time because of the whole workload in terms of the time that we have to teach, deliver and assess, so obviously lunchtimes... I've had 7th formers queuing up in my non-contacts, who have been wanting reassessments, or just information on their work before they do their reassessments. So the workload has become a really big issue in lots of areas (HOD English, Mid Decile Provincial Co-ed, roll 1001-1200).

At one stage I know that we actually brought them back in during the holidays, some of the kids that hadn't passed a writing standard, and they needed to do their proof reading and we gave them another opportunity, those who actually turned up, and said they could actually pick up the errors that they had made. We weren't allowed to point them out, we just had to look at it every other way, and...But, with their proofreading skills and if they had shown that they could proofread, they could pick up the Merit. So they had an opportunity to look at it quietly, and they didn't all do it, but some did (HOD English, History, Mid Decile Rural Co-ed, roll <500).

Well, you know, teaching Geography as well, it is something to do with the school, because our Level 3 Geography numbers are enormous, they are huge, because they can use that into university as prerequisite for an arts based subject, and so we have huge numbers coming into Geography at Year 13, huge numbers. But a lot of the students are re-submitting and reassessing because they can't cope. And I guess that's a positive thing for the NCEA that they can reassess and resubmit, so that they can eventually get the credits, but we are forever assessing in Geography! We've changed our policy for next year, that we're not allowing complete reassessments, we are only offering them resubmissions if they have just marginally failed an assessment. It was just too much work to reassess almost half of the students in Year 13 and having to set a whole new requirement. And we've got 130 students you know, so that's 60-odd reassessing. Too much. And so that was a completely new assessment, so you had to sort of get your head around a completely new assessment to be able to mark it, and then a lot of our assessments are resource-based so then we have to do a lot of pre-teaching, a lot of different content that we then had to teach to our kids. And we're using our own time, after school or lunchtimes to do the reassessments (Geography/Social Studies/Travel, High Decile Urban Girls, roll 1200+).

That's a workload thing for you then, isn't it? I know some city schools are looking at Maths for example, so that reassessment is always offered on a Wednesday afternoon, after school, for kids who legitimately missed the original assessment and they just run off another task from the same standard. And that seems to work, and the reason they made it after school was so that they're not cutting across other classes and they find that only the students who are quite serious about doing it will actually turn up (HOD Maths, Physics, Low Decile Urban Co-ed, roll 501-750).

I think that schools have always done that though [offered catch-up opportunities for assessment], because when I worked in Auckland under the Sixth Form Certificate, when students were away ill or

on a course, we would do exactly the same thing, we would make time available to them either before they went on the course, or just afterwards, so I don't know if that's changed a great deal. What has changed a great deal I think is the number of opportunities that there are for reassessment. If I do 10 standards, then theoretically there are ten opportunities for resubmission and reassessment. Like [colleague], I have kids coming back in the lunch hour to either reassess or resubmit and I mean, I have to be in the classroom and then I have to remark work (Principal's Nominee, HOD Science, Mid Decile Area, roll <500).

Some teachers expressed a wish for national uniformity about further opportunities for assessment, including uniformity within their own schools in some cases:

It's okay here, but what do you do in large schools about reassessment of practicals and things like that? It would just be... They're saying that it is fair across New Zealand, but it's not. Because we're a small school we can much more readily, I'd say, offer reassessment HOD Food & Nutrition, Maths/Science, Mid Decile Area, roll <500).

It's professional judgement [whether to offer a further opportunity]. If you've invested the time in that unit, and after a student up and wants to do it again, then if they're coming to your classroom, but that's hard, because if this teacher here says 'Yes' and you say 'No', it's hard for you saying no (Art/Design, Low Decile Urban Co-ed, roll 501-750).

But then the kids see it as unfair, because different schools have different policy and then their friend down the road gets to resubmit, so that's a thing that I think is really difficult Drama/English, High Decile Urban Girls, roll 1200+).

How do you compare a school which offers the same achievement standard as us, but elects to reassess as many times as it takes to get the maximum number of passes? (HOD ICT, Maths, High Decile Urban Boys, roll 1200+).

There is so much inconsistency between schools, and between departments, and the number of students you've got. If you've got a small class, it's probably much easier to give them more time and another opportunity. But if you've got a big one... In English for example, it is really time consuming (HOD English, History, Mid Decile Rural Co-ed, roll <500).

That was what was happening at Cambridge, really, wasn't it? You kept doing it until you got it. But then, what school has the time to do that? How would you do it? (English, Mid Decile Rural Co-ed, roll <500).

Teachers also saw a lack of parity between external and internal assessment, because the latter provides further opportunities for assessment within the school year, whereas the former was a 'one-shot' type of assessment:

That's where it becomes unfair as well, in marking at the moment in Calculus [for external standard], if they make a slip like that at beginning, they've had it. But in an internally assessed piece of work, you can sit them down and say 'Just run me through the first line', and suddenly they've got it. There's no equality there I'm afraid, that's a big hole (Maths, Mid Decile Urban Co-ed, roll 501-750).

You have parents saying that maybe they should allow resubmission for the externals too (HOD Maths, Physics, Mid Decile Area, roll <500).

That's where I think the credibility of internal assessments falls down in the public, because they are becoming increasingly aware in the public that if they fail it, they can have another go at it. Whereas exams, if you fail it, you have to come all the way back until the end of next year and then you can have another go at it then. Which is absolutely not the philosophy of standards-based (Principal's Nominee, Accountancy, Mid Decile Provincial Co-ed, roll 1001-1200).

AUTHENTICITY

Teachers are exploring ways to resolve the tension between the need to ensure that the work students submit for internal assessment is their own, and the need to be able to

assess flexibly and not tie up inordinate amounts of class time in whole class assessment events that are not also learning opportunities.

One teacher said that not much had really changed in this area:

But we've always this problem, because there has always been that provision that the work has to be authenticated, under Bursary it was exactly the same, so there isn't actually a shift there... In Practical Art and Graphics, that was a requirement in the past (TIC Curriculum/Assessment, History, High Decile Urban Girls, roll 1200+).

Another teacher thought that subjects with a history of internal assessment may be finding things a bit easier:

My observation is that those subjects that have had an internal assessment component for 20+ years have found it a relatively easy process, but the subjects where it is a new part of their assessment, they are the ones that now have to get used to all of the practices that have been implemented as part of this. But, having said that, authenticity is an issue, because we know that our students are probably a few steps ahead of us in the use of IT (TIC Curriculum/Assessment, History, High Decile Urban Girls, roll 1200+).

Teachers were seeking ways to assess flexibly and creatively, without endangering authenticity:

There are issues there, I know, but I would hate to think that as a result of authenticity that I was forced to standardise my choices of assessment and therefore reduce the creativity possibilities and so on. History is very much about... the word independence is crucial, but they have to do it beyond the classroom I think. I can always be there while they're doing their History research and even in their creation of communicating the task, but I just can't create test conditions, and I don't want to and don't think it's necessary either. I think we already have a process in place whereby they do work in front of us for a fair amount of the time in class and we also have clear steps in place where they have to come and show us the work that they are doing, and a lot of it is hand-written anyway and you can see whether they're using their own language. There's a lot of checks and balances in place. So, I think it's again my concern that because we now have some of these problems, that they are going to narrow what we do and offer to the students and have these placed in the too hard basket; so, I see the issues and problems, but I don't want them to impede what I'm doing (HOD History, High Decile Urban Girls, roll 1200+).

I think that for a subject like English, which just has so many assessments during the year, I am finding that shortcuts are being called for, and those shortcuts are not necessarily right, as far as [ensuring authenticity] Yes, like for example research is no longer done in class, they can go out and do it themselves, or that you can sign a piece of creative writing and they can go home and type it up and bring a hard copy. And as long as there is not too many changes made, then that is okay, whereas my interpretation of it was that it should be done in class and so that once again that you can swear on a Bible or a Koran or whatever that it was specifically done by that child. And I am starting to feel as if I am losing some of that assurance, yet we are kind of being forced to do it, because we are having to find ways of saving time so that we can deliver everything that we need to deliver and that you can't do it in a 40-week year. You just can't do it and I think that shortcuts are being looked for, perhaps to the detriment of the system... (English, Mid Decile Provincial Co-ed, roll 1001-1200).

Strong school and department procedures were seen to be necessary:

Well, again, it does pose problems, but again, you have to have procedures in place that mean that you can't just do anything, you have got to follow set procedures. And all subjects are capable of looking at the particular problems that they have got and setting in place particular procedures that are relevant to their situation. And I think that is the main thing, that every subject is made to look at the problems that arise and actually sort of think about how to get over those problems and make sure that standards are set in terms of the types of procedures that are used in the situation (Quality Manager, HOD Physics, High Decile Urban Girls, roll 1200+).

However, one teacher thought that their department was making things overly difficult for themselves and for students:

I think that, well, I don't know for other subjects but I think that in English, we make it really hard for the girls and hard for ourselves, really hard for ourselves, definitely...We are very, very professional in the English department in terms of making sure that we're marking consistently and correctly and making sure that the kids can't buck the system in any way. Like, I know in some schools, that is creative writing for example, they are allowed to take that out and work on it and publish it, well, use computers for example, and be able to hand it in from that. But we've said that they aren't able to be doing something technically accurately if they are using a computer. So whilst some schools are saying 'Yes, but they let us use computers, so let's do it', we're saying that we 'No, we can't do that, so we won't' - so we're making it harder for them in order to be able to make it valid...(Drama/English, High Decile Urban Girls, roll 1200+).

In contrast, another school was giving students a further opportunity for the same kind of standard outside of the classroom:

Outside the classroom, they had to do it at home, I couldn't see the sense of repeating a whole unit, so I just gave them a quick refresher on creative writing and said 'Right, you guys who are interested, bring a draft to me in your own time, I'll look at it, then after that I'll give you a deadline and if you've handed me in a completed 1.1. creative writing essay, I'll see if you pass. [Researcher: How did you know it was their own work?] Same way I would always know if it was their own work. There's not many computers around here! [Researcher: What about 'aunty' that helped?] Well, I don't know, if aunty helped and they got an Achieved, then I can't do anything about that (English, Low Decile Urban Co-ed, roll 501-750).

Some teachers appeared to perceive there to be a difference in the authenticity requirements for achievement and unit standards:

I think that if we say that it is transactional and it's crafting and nothing is allowed to go home, if you've already made those rules, why not put the other couple of rules in, that you want, or don't want everybody to do? Whereas, with the unit standard, which is transactional, you can take it home and let somebody else help you, because it says you may be allowed an editing opportunity after crafting, and you're allowed to help other people, achievement standard you're not...From what was said at the training, we thought that you were not allowed to take a poetic or transactional home, because then there are authenticity problems, and I'm pretty sure that is across [region] too for those two achievement standards. I thought... (English, Mid Decile Urban Co-ed, roll 501-750).

I think that some of the reasons that some of these schools are heading away from NCEA Graphics and Design [towards Cambridge International] is because of authenticity issues in that a huge amount of the work that is done in Graphics is done in their own time. And maybe it's difficult to make the professional judgement that we also talked about, when the student has taken that work away and has maybe shown up on the day of handing the standard in, with work that you haven't seen them do in class, once, and they swear black and blue that it's their work, but I think it would be difficult as a teacher... We have had to make some of these calls, so we're speaking from experience (Quality Manager, Chemistry, High Decile Urban Girls, roll 1200+).

EQUITY

It is interesting that the school which raised equity issues about assessment was the High Decile Girls' school. It was in relation to ICT needed, and whether schools should be allowing students to use equipment or not:

We also have a particular issue related to calculators... It has been said that there are distinct advantages in certain standards if you use a graphics calculator. Well for example in Level 3 stats and modelling, simultaneous equations which I guess used to take a good 10 minutes to solve 2 simultaneous equations with three unknowns, if you put the numbers into the calculator now, it comes out in 2 minutes, so the students that have the graphics calculators are enormously advantaged and so we've had all these circulars saying which standards the students are advantaged with graphics calculators. So we know that there is not a level playing field even in the externals, because people have got access to different technology in those standards. And most of

the teachers in this school don't want to teach like that, they don't want to teach button pushing, they want to teach Mathematics and so we've had big discussions about whether to introduce graphics calculators into the school, because, as I say, most of us don't really want to because we want to teach the formal methods and the understanding behind what goes on. But, finally, we have decided to move to graphics calculators, simply because we started to get parents ringing up saying 'Why aren't you using the graphics calculators? Because it's much easier for the kids, and I want my child to do as well as she can, and she's more likely to do well if she's got a graphics calculator'. So that's a big issue for us...(HOD Maths, High Decile Urban Girls, roll 1200+).

Well, we've got a very similar problem in relation to the use of computing in writing assessments. We have fourteen Year 12 classes this year and so it is impossible for us to put them all on computers to do their writing so we make them all hand write. But, it is possible in the standard to use a word processor, which means the students can use the spell check and the grammar check. But the instruction that comes from NZQA is that for students who are handwriting their work, the teacher cannot work as a word processor and we find that impossible to understand, if they can have spelling problems and grammar problems picked up by a word processor. We are not allowed to underline the problems; we can say to a student in general terms that 'You have a lot of spelling mistakes in this' but we can't underline them in the same way that a word processor can. Where's the fairness and the consistency in that? And there have been endless letters backwards and forwards from the body representing [regional] English teachers on this issue, and they refused to budge, so it doesn't make sense (HOD English, High Decile Urban Girls, roll 1200+).

PARITY BETWEEN SCHOOLS

Teachers worry that differences between schools in the conditions that apply for assessment of students, the amount of help teachers give, the processes they have for ensuring authenticity and the number and manner of further opportunities offered means that there is a lack of parity of standards being applied, and that this is not picked up by the moderation system. This affects their feelings about the judgements they themselves make about these matters. A significant proportion of these concerns came from English teachers.

One teacher talked about a discussion he had been part of where teachers had concluded that it was a very 'high trust' system:

And you know, people were discussing this, the variation ... amongst schools, and the thing that came out of that basically was that you have no control over what any other school does, you only have control over your ethical sort of situation, your school's values and that's all you can do... [Colleague: And yet you could be disadvantaging your students in terms of gaining credits...] Yes, but are you disadvantaging your students by making them reach a standard? I don't think that's disadvantaging them at all, I think that's advantaging them (HOD Commerce, Mid Decile Urban Co-ed, roll 501-750).

Teachers recognised that their professionalism was key, but they were not convinced that everybody would behave professionally:

Professionalism of the teachers is really very, very important, and I don't know if that's consistent (HOD English, History, Mid Decile Rural Co-ed, roll <500).

The media publicity about Cambridge High School had not increased teachers' confidence in the system:

I worry about the 'across different schools' thing, especially around the excitement of Cambridge High and stuff, people saying standards from Boys High are going to be worth more than standards from across the road, because somehow we have a better reputation or something, and that seems highly unfair, because I guess School Certificate percentages were equal weren't they? (English/Health, High Decile Urban Boys, roll 1200+).

Certainly with the negative publicity with Cambridge and so forth that were playing a bit fast and loose with things, therefore the whole system sort of gets seen as that's what happens (HOD English/Media Studies, High Decile Urban Boys, roll 1200+).

Students from different schools compared notes with each other about standards being applied in their schools:

But then the kids see it as unfair, because different schools have different policy and then their friend down the road then gets to resubmit, so that's a thing that I think is really difficult. And I don't know if it's the same in other subjects. Like I was saying before, in English we say that they can't use the computer, other schools say you can, and that's a thing that makes it not very level (Drama/English, High Decile Urban Girls, roll 1200+).

There was also a perception that the system lent itself to schools marketing themselves as highly successful, when in fact they might be 'massaging' their results in some way:

It comes to political games, and a political game has been played already this week in this area, where one school made a statement 'Come here, because we had the highest NCEA Level 1s last year', but they don't tell you the true picture, and say that only 48% or 50% of their candidates actually entered, the others didn't. That's a political game and that's unfortunate (Geography/Social Studies, High Decile Urban Boys, roll 1200+).

Some teachers expressed a belief that other schools were guiding students more than was valid:

I know of one particular school in [city], and I won't name the school, whose Art department at Level 1 consistently gets results, you know, in the old School Cert days, marks in the 90s, and these days, you know, Excellences all the way through. And I know for a fact that the head of the department there directs the students' course in such an extreme manner that the students don't have any choice as to what they do, or the way that they actually prepare the work... The teacher gathers together all the subject matter, she photographs it all, she gives the students blown up colour photographs of the images that she wants them to reproduce, students trace them out and every single portfolio is the same and, you know... She directs absolutely, totally, the results that the students get (HOD Visual Arts, Mid Decile Urban Co-ed, roll 501-750).

With the transactional writing, the discussion between people of how you actually support students through to the crafted piece is huge, you know, do they put marks down the side, do they underline the mistakes, how long are they able to spend on it? There's a school in [city], three days, that's it, you craft it and you produce it. So it's those kind of things that people just ask each other... Whether you're allowed to keyboard something or not. At one school they disabled the spell checks of them, so the students couldn't do that, I mean that's huge, you know, for transactional writing... And someone else thinks that she can put it back and craft it as many times... I mean, how many times do you give it back to the student? (English, Mid Decile Urban Co-ed, roll 501-750).

The conditions for assessment of standards also varied from one school to another:

I have been to English cluster meetings where we have talked about how we go about doing those sort of things and so on, you know, and I am aware where there are several schools where students may take home their writing, and yet the general guideline from NZQA suggests that in fact the writing should be done under teacher supervision. I don't know what they say to visiting people, but I do know that there is a range of things that happen...(HOD English, High Decile Urban Girls, roll 1200+).

There are vast differences, and a lot of inequities I think, between how schools do it [Science practicals] because, I mean, we have to be able to verify that it's the students own work, and yet you have some schools who allow students to work together. They do a plan, write up a plan and then they put them together with 'like' plans and then they all work together to do the practical work. And then they sort of separate to write up their results. And, I mean, looking at how students work, when they work together, you can't verify who has actually made the changes, and you can't verify that in fact schools haven't actually put together bright students with less able students, so that the less able students get the benefit of the bright students. Whereas we actually make all our students work

individually, which is why it takes us a tremendous amount of time, but at least I can verify that it's the student's own work, not somebody else's work that they are all riding along on the back of (HOD Science, Mid Decile Urban Co-ed, roll 501-750).

This school is really tough, in English. Because I know, my son was doing it at another school and he was given twice as long and for things like the research assignment he got a lot of feedback and he'd show me... And his teacher had writing on it, when we're not allowed to write on anyone's work or give that type of feedback that he actually got. So, I think we're possibly one of the only schools that has higher pass rates in externals than in internals. It's weird, because I know that we have a really high marking standard in English (English/ESOL, Mid Decile Urban Fringe Co-ed, roll 501-750).

I've found with NCEA, just what I've heard on the street within Phys Ed, that often the teacher's interpretation of what the students need to be doing is different. For example, the worst achievement standard that I have in terms of students choosing to attempt is that coaching of a junior team, because that is just a huge workload, but I know that another teacher has interpreted that as just 'leading a group', so they teach internally within their own class, so perhaps two students will be in charge of taking the other Level 2 students for a physical activity and then they assess 2.5 in line with that, and they kind of all do that. See, my interpretation was that it had to be year 10's and less, so finding and being able to do that is hard. I could've got everyone through those achievement standards if I had done that within my class... I'd be keen to find out what the actual ruling is. I'm sure that it's Year 10 (PE/Health, Mid Decile Urban Fringe Co-ed, roll 501-750).

One teacher who worked with lower-achieving students believed that they were allowed to apply more lenient conditions to help the students succeed:

And the English department allows me to give far more time to my alternative students than the rest of you have for your NCEA classes, because you have to be doing exactly the same thing at exactly the same time, and I am lucky to be under a somewhat different system. I am allowed to do things at different times and different lengths of time and give re-sits and things like that, so that particularly able NCEA group is actually having far more pressure put on them than the kids who are in my alternative group (English, Mid Decile Urban Fringe Co-ed, roll 501-750).

Teachers pleaded for clearer guidelines about the conditions for assessing each standard, to ensure that internal standards had credibility. Interestingly, most of these were English teachers:

I think there need to be uniform templates or something like that set down by the Ministry for each subject, saying that, you know, this particular task has to be performed in a certain way and there are certain set criteria (English, Mid Decile Urban Fringe Co-ed, roll 501-750).

I think there is an underlying issue here that we need to be aware of. I think that internal assessment is important. I want it to be clear that the internally assessed standards are as important and as valuable as the externally assessed standards. And it does concern me that there are different conditions, not only in different subjects, but also in different schools. We for example made sure that our students did their writing in front of us, yet I know that in other schools, students have been allowed to take their writing home. I would like to see clear guidelines as to the conditions under which the students are expected to do the work, and I would like to see the odd spot check done to make sure that those kind of conditions are the conditions that in fact students in all schools are working under, whether it is having those regular checks and so on and so forth, but there needs to be... It needs to be quite clear, not only to us within the profession, but to the general public, that the standard are authentically gained by students, because I don't want employers or universities and so on to simply depend on the external, the results of the external standards, because of their being questions as to the validity of the internals. And I think that's a real issue that needs to be addressed (HOD English, High Decile Urban Girls, roll 1200+).

And I have to say, that having taught at two different schools under the system, I am damn sure that the assurance level is not the same and that the assessment level is not the same, because it is so wishy-washy in what we have to do, like how many errors does it take to be intrusive in English? Well my opinion might differ to your opinion and I can guarantee that it differs here from the last school that I was at, and I'm sure that it differs around the country. So if you're going to have standards-based assessment in a course like English, you have to have really set,

standardised...tick-boxes or something! And it is one of those subject areas that is not completely objective, there is always going to be an element of human judgment...(English, Mid Decile Provincial Co-ed, roll 1001-1200).

Teachers commented on the difficulty in getting authoritative subject-specific advice on difficult judgements about what was acceptable practice and what was not:

And also the material, you know, like for 12905, you have to read 9 texts. Well, we don't want to narrow it down so that it has to be a, b, c books, but that can be huge. At the moment I'm on a similar discussion group to [colleague] and people are asking if you can use *Choices* and *Applications* [Learning Media series] as books. People don't know if you're allowed to use those books and if they count at Level 1 or Level 2. There's still people out there asking those questions. And how do they find out? They ask other people. No-one wants to write anything down and be held accountable, that's how I'm starting to read it. It's all sort of 'You've got to keep coming up with the questions'. [Researcher: So the definition of an appropriate text is not clear?] Yes... And what is appropriate for one person, who could be dyslexic for example, and another person who may be reading at the age-level for their year. And they keep on bringing it back to you as a teacher, and your professional judgement... (English, Mid Decile Urban Co-ed, roll 501-750).

You [colleague] mentioned advisors, and that's one of the things that I think has been a problem, that there are inconsistencies also in areas with advisors. We had an advisor in our area about two years ago, not the present one, but the previous one, who said that you could actually underline... You weren't actually allowed to say what the problem was in that sentence, whether it was punctuation or spelling or whatever, but you could underline where the problem was or mark the sentence. And then, we found that with a change of advisor that this wasn't acceptable, and I don't now know whether it even was at the time that we were told, but now it's not acceptable. You can't actually mark in the margin or whatever, you know, and so the rules change and evolve and yet what is happening in areas...I mean, I don't know (HOD English, History, Mid Decile Rural Co-ed. roll <500).

Teachers believed that an effective moderation system was an essential safeguard against teachers' natural instinct to be generous to their students, and three of them believed that a system which moderated the internal assessment against the external would be more effective than the current system:

Because we are human beings, we judge things differently and if you're involved with the kid, you're probably going to be more sympathetic. I don't think I'd give an advantage to my kids, but I'd push people through possibly, not this year, but in you know, whatever, right throughout my teaching career. If you are actually involved with the class, it's very hard to actually be completely impartial. That's another reason why I like the idea of the moderation that I talked of before, the internal being moderated against the external (English, Mid Decile Urban Fringe Co-ed, roll 501-750).

Achievement standards in Science I'm very rigorous, and in fact at Level 1, I think interpreting the standard as I saw it was probably only 3 or 4 boys got Excellence out of 250. Whereas you look at the stats from other schools, they are stacked towards the Excellence. So, the system we had before, say if you take Physics for Bursary, it's 20% internal assessment and you could do that however you wanted really, as long as it was rigorous, and they scaled that against the external mark, and that removed that problem you see, and I'm very conscious of that. In fact this subjectivity that [colleague] was talking about is very subjective, as far as some of those internally assessed achievement standards are concerned, and that's a worry (HOD Science, High Decile Urban Boys, roll 1200+).

I would like our internals nationally moderated against other schools and against the externals, so that there is some consistency (HOD Social Sciences, Mid Decile Rural Co-ed, roll <500).

Teachers in the high decile boys' school were not convinced that the moderation system was enough to ensure consistent interpretation of the standards, and in some cases were in a dilemma about where to set the standards for their students:

One of the problems I see is the old idea of subjectivity in marking... How can you say that one school's grades are equivalent to another school's? That's a problem (HOD Classical Studies, English, High Decile Urban Boys, roll 1200+).

I was interested in your [colleague's] comment regarding the fact that different schools are assessing them so differently, because the first thing that struck me was with our Biology, Level 1, was that our internally assessed grades, which we had done so carefully in order to get it right, were very low, much below the national standard. And our external exams were well above the national standard. So, I guess we're just too hard on them here... It's like I've just got to stop and drop my standards really low, I guess, to meet the rest of the schools (HOD Biology, High Decile Urban Boys, roll 1200+).

That's exactly the same with Maths. Our national results in externals are above the norm, and our internal stuff way below. But that's because we want to maintain a decent blimming standard here, and when we hear of other schools doing ridiculous internal assessment, we are under pressure to offer something equally as ridiculous, to lower our standards. And many of us are resisting that, to our kids' detriment (HOD ICT/Maths, High Decile Urban Boys, roll 1200+).

There was a perception that other schools were making it too easy for students to attain the standard in a further assessment opportunity, or that differences in the situation of schools meant that some could more easily offer these opportunities than others:

And that's the whole fear about this system, that you don't know what's going on here. We try to set standards within our school, we sit here...and when we do reassessment, it's a formal reassessment, there's none of this 'Can you tell me where you went wrong there on that one?' And it's something that we've been told we could rightly have done, because it's common practice in other schools, so we have all this wide variety of standards within the standards that are internally assessed (HOD Maths, Mid Decile Urban Co-ed, roll 501-750).

I just don't think it's fair that some schools can in some subjects offer reassessments and others can't because of the time issue and the marking issue, which must be tremendous for a class of thirty. It takes me an hour to mark one in a class of five, so that's 5 hours. If you've got 30, where do you find 30 hours in a week? (HOD Food & Nutrition, Maths/Science, Mid Decile Area, roll <500).

But the expectation is that they are given as many opportunities to actually try and get them through, but we are limited by the amount of time that we can actually spend, and how much... Yes, but that's a negative I feel, that there is so much inconsistency between schools, and between departments, and the number of students you've got. If you've got a small class, it's probably much easier to give them more time and, you know, another opportunity. But if you've got a big one, in English for example, it is really time consuming (HOD English, History, Mid Decile Rural Co-ed, roll <500).

One teacher summed up the issues clearly:

I want it to be comparable, and want it to be able to be better compared, across units, across schools and across subjects, I want to feel that all of that is tighter and that we are operating at one level, consistently across... (English/Health, High Decile Urban Boys, roll 1200+).

CONCLUSIONS

This chapter illustrates the extent to which the new qualifications system relies on teachers making sound professional judgements about a range of matters. It also conveys an impression that teachers are struggling with these matters, and that many of them would value further support and guidance.

For example, there is clearly a need to provide further assistance to schools in the form of ideas about, and practical examples of, flexible and holistic assessment which does not leave teachers feeling that national standards of comparability are at risk. There also needs to be discussion both at school level and centrally about the really vexed issue of further opportunities for assessment. While some might argue that flexible and holistic assessment processes, if fully adopted by teachers, would obviate the need for

formalised further opportunities, such a position does not reflect most teachers' current thinking. At the moment, offering further opportunities for assessment, while seen as a significant benefit to students, is at a huge cost to teachers' time and energy levels. Models for this which are less demanding of teachers and students need to be found and disseminated.

Teachers are rightly concerned that at this point in development of the qualification, there are serious questions to be asked about comparability of internal assessment results from school to school because of the widely varying conditions for assessment being applied, in terms of time allowed, levels of guidance of students, processes to ensure authenticity of student work, and numbers of opportunities to achieve provided. The plea of the last teacher quoted, that they "want to feel that all of that is tighter" needs to be heeded.

For these reasons, the report recommends two days of Ministry of Education funded professional development every year for at least the next three years, beginning later in 2005, to enable teachers to share ideas with colleagues on good ways to manage the internal assessment which is such an important feature of this new system. There is also a need to address the time requirements of school-based assessment, and it is recommended that this be referred to the Teacher Workload working party currently working in this area. Until internal assessment becomes manageable for teachers, there should be no proposals put forward, as has been rumoured to be about to happen, to make a level of NCEA entirely internally assessed.

(See Recommendations 4, 5 and 7)

8. ACHIEVEMENT STANDARDS OR UNIT STANDARDS?

“I don’t like unit standards, I think they’re for the cabbage classes!”

There was extensive discussion in the focus groups about a number of issues related to the relationship between achievement standards and unit standards. Both types of standards deliver credits towards the NCEA, but there are significant differences between them: unit standards are entirely internally assessed, whereas achievement standards are either internally or externally assessed; unit standards are nearly all competency-based with just one level of achievement, achievement standards have three levels of achievement; many unit standards have been in existence for some years and have been through many revisions, whereas achievement standards are relatively new.

Teachers raised issues about the relative difficulty levels of unit and achievement standards and their respective credit values. They talked about the variety of ways in which they were using unit standards in their courses. They also talked about the question of ‘parity of esteem’ between unit and achievement standards, and how they were managing that in their schools. There are also issues about the lack of resourcing for unit standards in the form of sample assessment materials, but this is dealt with in Chapter 15, Resourcing.

DIFFICULTY LEVELS

There has been a perception (discussed further under ‘Parity of Esteem’ below) that unit standards are easier to achieve than achievement standards, however teachers were very divided about this. The differences of opinion reflect in some respects subject differences, but they also reflect aspects of the design of unit standards compared with achievement standards.

Some teachers argued that unit standards were harder to achieve because competency required consistent success across a range of very specific elements and performance criteria, whereas achievement standards were more holistic and general:

Some of the unit standards are actually more difficult than the equivalent bits in the achievement standards... So unit standards are not the easy option... I think it's the range of questions that they'd have to ask on a unit standards paper. I'm thinking something like the structure of the atom, they might get one question on the science for the achievement standard, but they'd have 5 or 6 or 8 questions on the unit standard about it. So it's not an easy option if you're looking for something to make sure the students get Level 1 Chemistry for example. Putting them through the unit standard is not always the easier option, because there's more content involved I think in unit standards (HOD Science, High Decile Area, roll <500).

In Year 11, the unit standards that we offer are much harder to get than achievement standards. I mean, we offer an algebra unit and a number unit standard, and if a student gets Achieved, and you can only get Achieved in unit standards, I think they are much more capable than students that will get achievement standards. I mean, unit standards you have to get 75%, there are 8 questions, you have to get 3 out of 4 for each, and if you don't, you fail (Maths, High Decile Urban Boys, roll 1200+).

I also like the high degree of accuracy that's required in unit standards, so you have to be able to achieve every part of the standards and I think that it's quite transparent that you have to achieve every bit of it. And so, when the kids can clearly see and understand the criteria, they will improve the bit they're not so good at because they can't compensate by being naturally good at something else (English/ESOL, Mid Decile Urban Fringe Co-ed, roll 501-750).

For some this specificity was a plus, but for others it was not, and they viewed the assessment as petty and not allowing for teachers to exercise professional judgement:

I'm finding in Science that if I give them a unit standard, even if it's just one of the 2 credit unit standards, they have to get pretty much everything right, and that makes it a lot less achievable than an achievement standard for which achieved doesn't require...it requires basic skills and basic information, which the unit standards seem to go beyond. I've always had that problem with unit standards in that they seem to be requiring 90% or above accuracy. There's a lot more flexibility with achievement standards to get Achieved... (Principal's Nominee, HOD Science, Low Decile Urban Co-ed, roll 501-750).

With the achievement standards you're able to teach them a unit of work and then give them a test at the end and then you mark the test with the criteria and they either get Achieved, Merit, Excellence sort of thing. With the unit standards, and it may just be subject related, they have all these performance criteria to meet, and we'll do a unit that runs for two terms and they're assessed during those two terms and it could be that they get 6 or the 7 performance criteria, but for one week their participation was different, or their performance wasn't high enough, and they can miss out on those credits, because they haven't met everything... There's opportunities to re sit and things, and so they can still salvage that, but ... it can be quite a burden on them (PE/Health, Mid Decile Urban Fringe Co-ed, roll 501-750).

The kids find, well, one I find repetitious, very repetitious and the kids get frustrated with it. 'I know I can do this, I've only got that one line wrong', but it's not 100%. Yes okay, we give them an opportunity to fix it, but some of them get so frustrated because they think, well, they've tried hard and then that one thing then becomes a huge thing. It might only be small, but because they've now got to go and look at again and often again, they... It becomes harder and harder work. I think if you can kind of grade them, it becomes so much easier (Commerce/Computing, Mid Decile Urban Fringe Co-ed, roll 501-750).

Other teachers believed that achievement standards were more demanding:

In P.E. they're quite different, achievement standards are much wordier and broader and require far more in depth evaluation and thinking, even at the Achieved level, so we have an alternative for them at Level 1 that uses unit standards. It offers less of them, we offer 16 unit standard credits at Level 1, and 20 for the achievement standard Level 1 (Health/PE/Food & Nutrition/Outdoor Ed, Mid Decile Urban Fringe Co-ed, roll 501-750).

We looked at Level 1 Geo, two years ago. I think the national pass rate for the population section of that was something like 25%, and it put me off doing it again, and so I now do the unit standards on population studies now, as do quite a few other schools. There's four credits as compared to three in the external and it's much easier to get those credits...[Researcher: Did you look at what actually happened last year with the population studies?] Well, it was still the worst of the four. It's ridiculous, they just have too much that you have to know for that particular one, so you have to know New Zealand population and monsoon Asian population - that's huge for 3 credits... Why not just do a unit standard on New Zealand population for 4 credits? And schools are latching on to this sort of thing, very much so (HOD Social Sciences, Mid Decile Rural Co-ed, roll <500).

Some teachers thought that it was not a matter of one type of assessment being more or less difficult, it was just different:

This is where I probably headed up to really concentrate on unit standards, because we had a lot of international students coming into the department, and it's an ideal opportunity that we can tailor the questions to the level or ability of the student. It's not watering it down, it's just actually putting the information in such a way that they can know what they are being asked to do... Well we're not reducing it, because you cannot reduce it, it's just basically putting into a user-friendly way if you like. So, it's not diluting anything at all, because it's the same ones I use for the non-ESOL people, but it gives me the opportunity to say that these kids are not going to be disadvantaged by words that they don't understand... (HOD Commerce, Mid Decile Urban Co-ed, roll 501-750).

I find that the unit standards are at the same level in Music. They're more practically orientated, that's why we use them, we teach unit standards in composition because in NCEA you have to write the piece of music as you compose it, you actually have to write it all out, which really doesn't suit

our students at all, whereas the unit standard allows you to compose it and then record it, so it's quite an industry...it's a whole different practical approach which really suits our kids, so we use that (HOD Music, Co-HOD Arts, Mid Decile Urban Fringe Co-ed, roll 501-750).

What actually happened there [in Technology] was, with the achievement standards they became more design focussed, so they have opted for the unit standards, so the boys can still have the 'hands on' with the woodwork and metalwork (HOD Science, High Decile Urban Boys, roll 1200+).

In P.E. I started off doing achievement standards and I found the NCEA ones involved a lot more writing, and in some aspects they weren't even getting any credits for their practical part of the unit as well, so I changed to unit standards and I found that worked much better in P.E. And the Level 1 actually flows onto Level 2, and I ... started to run a two-year course. I had 5th and 6th last year doing some Level 1 and some Level 2, but it was much easier than doing the achievement standards ones, because of the wordiness of them and they're just better put together I thought, the unit standards than the achievement ones, and they're easier to mark as well (PE, High Decile Area, roll <500).

I've got a specific example, in Level 2 Trig, the achievement standard is a practical and it's quite difficult to organise, I can imagine it would be absolutely shambolic in a large school. I can manage it in a small school, but marking wise and everything, the unit standard is far easier to work with. [Researcher: And in terms of the level of knowledge or skill...?] It's the same, the only thing is that the unit standard is not practical (HOD Maths, High Decile Area, roll <500).

Music teachers in two different schools were disappointed that some unit standards which they felt had met their students' needs better than the achievement standards had been dropped:

Although they [unit standards] measure the same kind of skills [as achievement standards], they measure them in a different way... They were both internal, one was you listen to a tape and you write down all the notes of what you hear, which was not great for our kids, the unit standard was one where you listen to a whole CD and you actually re-play it on the keyboard or on the guitar. Same skill, and our kids can do that without even thinking about it, but what they cannot do is hear something and write it down. But now, that one that assesses it with them using a keyboard or a guitar, they dropped it, so they can only do the external exam that they won't achieve (HOD Music, English, Low Decile Urban Co-ed, roll 501-750).

Teachers talked about the huge range of difficulty levels in unit standards, especially at Level 1, where the policy has been that Level 1 was 'flexible downwards', in other words standards which reflect achievement well below Year 11 performance are able to be registered at Level 1. This causes some difficulties for schools, especially if they have not set pre-requisites of particular standards for entry to Level 2 courses:

We have an alternative Maths program where they achieve 16 to 20 Maths credits in unit standards, and they believe they have passed Level 1 Maths. Put them into a course using Level 2 achievement standards and they can't cope, because they are not equal standards, they are Level 1, but they are at a far lower level (HOD Maths, High Decile Area, roll <500).

There was also a concern that the allocation of standards to levels was not always appropriate:

From my perspective, it's the writers of the unit standards and the decisions they make about what level they are at. They don't have a global understanding of the criteria that have been produced and so in the Outdoor Ed, there are big discrepancies... I'll give you a very specific example. There's a unit standard to do with work around avalanches and it's pitched at Level 2. Can you imagine any Year 12 student really being engaged with avalanche work, other than perhaps having some introduction to the way snow falls and so on, you know? I could reel off 6 or 7 or 8 examples off the top of my head right now of similar...(HOD Social Sciences, Outdoor Ed, Mid Decile Urban Fringe Co-ed, roll 501-750).

My husband teaches a Level 4 standard in Agriculture, which is a measurement standard, exactly the same as a Level 1 standard that I teach. Level 4, but because its in context it's classified as

Level 4. Teaching the same types of measurement, area, volume, but in an agricultural setting, that my students take as a Level 1 ... There is a question about the integrity of Level 1 I see, and I can understand why the lower level standards are there, because the numeracy requirement is there, but it creates a lot of confusion (HOD Maths, High Decile Area, roll <500).

In some subjects, there were calls for more standards that would allow the less able students to continue to progress:

We have that problem of students going on to Level 2, who have got the required number of credits of Level 1, and our alternative Level 2, our MAP 2 course is still at Level 1 credits, and so we've sort of thought about the easier ones for the Level 1 students to do, and the Year 12s, still doing a Level 1 course though, can keep getting credits. That National Certificate in Maths has been great, because it now gives them an incentive to come back and do Maths in Year 12 and get to that 30 credits, but after that, there's nowhere for them to go. The Level 2 unit standards are too hard for them, and there are very few. I'm trying to find some Level 2 unit standards that some of those students can achieve, but there isn't a course there (HOD Maths, Mid Decile Urban Fringe Co-ed, roll 501-750).

We are struggling to provide courses for students who are not able to reach the standards at Level 2 English. With hard work, focus, you can get most students through Level 1 English. Most students, I mean there are still those who need the 102 classes, but they can achieve a reasonable number. Above that, we are in real difficulty in terms of providing courses for your 202 students, which is our alternative programme. If we come up with unit standards, they're writing ones. They are creative writing and there is formal writing, and the standard requires exactly the same as if they were doing achievement standards. And what we are finding throughout the country is that there is total inconsistency, and I can totally understand what happened at Cambridge. If you're trying to get kids through, and you want to give them some English ones, you're going to use the unit standards ones, and in the end... And I know of a number of other schools that are lowering the standards and saying 'Oh well, they're unit standards, surely this should...', but the level is the same... So they have not come up with qualifications at Level 2 at a level that the students can actually achieve... We have got to have more Communication English unit standards at Level 2, that students can move onto once they have got through NCEA Level 1 English in writing. Because if they have slogged their guts to get it at Level 1, and they really can't go any further, what can you give them for writing? There is really nothing else (HOD English, Mid Decile Provincial Co-ed, roll 1001-1200).

CREDIT VALUES

Teachers said that there needed to be work done to reconcile the relative credit values between unit and achievement standards. They described cases where roughly similar standards, with roughly similar amounts of work required, generated quite different numbers of credits.

In most cases mentioned, the unit standards delivered more credits for the amount of time and/or level of work required:

There are unit standards in Geography too that we can use instead of the achievement standards if we want to, they cover the same ground... But, some of them have got a higher credit value than the similar achievement standard, so...[Researcher: Do they warrant that higher credit value?] The one that is significantly different is the research one. The unit standard is worth 6 credits, whereas the achievement standard is only worth 3. [Researcher: And are there differences in what's required?] A little, but you still cover everything that is required in the unit standard during the course of the year anyway, so you can actually end up giving the kids three extra credits, for doing really nothing extra... (Deputy Principal, Principal's Nominee, Geography/Computing, Mid Decile Urban Co-ed, roll 501-750).

I've decided that next year I'm not doing the internal research [achievement standard], because of the amount of work involved and the very low credit value attached to it. It's just not worth the effort. So instead, I'll be looking at replacing that with a unit standard, rather than that. Because the setting up or getting people to go out to businesses and arrange that and phoning and going in, it was just absolute rubbish for three credits and it just wasn't worth it (HOD Commerce, Mid Decile Urban Co-ed, roll 501-750).

I do find that a big difference is that unit standards, even though the same level, have less work in them. Some of the NCEA achievement standards, for the number of credits, one of them is actually two terms' work for 6 credits and kids look at that, and they go 'Wow, I could pick up 2, 3, 4 credits just in a session over here, and you're making me do this for 6!' Kids understand this, and they don't react well to it, it's very difficult to push that through (HOD Music, Mid Decile Urban Fringe Co-ed, roll 501-750).

But, there's a wider range of unit standards for English, you know, for example you can do something, well, Cambridge High School used it didn't they, the litter one, well we used that here. 'Perform a routine task', and you get two credits. I had kids complain to me about how come it was so hard to get three credits for English, where they could get, oh I don't know, I didn't believe them, but it was something like 12 credits for riding a motorbike, so there's huge discrepancies and I don't understand that at all (HOD English, Mid Decile Urban Fringe Co-ed, roll 501-750).

But I feel for kids who struggle all year doing a full course, and might get 8 or 9 or 10 credits, and then they look across at someone else who got 15 credits, because they were doing unit standards. Does that mean that they're better than them because they got more credits? And I don't know if employers can tell the difference between a unit standard and achievement standard can they? Do they know that all achievement standards, which perhaps have more rigour, start with 90? (Principal's Nominee, Accountancy, Mid Decile Provincial Co-ed, roll 1001-1200).

In some ways, the whole Cambridge High situation is made possible by the looseness in the whole system and that you can go and pick up lots of little 'nonsense' credits, and call yourself 80 credit NCEA Level 1. But there are lots out there which are all...it's possible to pick up these things that have credit value, but...(HOD Humanities, Low Decile Urban Co-ed, roll 501-750).

To one teacher, the problem was between unit standards in different subjects:

I think there's another issue, unit standards between different subjects. Where some might take 10 hours to get a credit, where in some areas a student may accumulate 60 credits in a subject throughout the year. There is clearly some discrepancy there in the amount of hours of work required for a credit (Geography/Outdoor Ed, High Decile Area, roll <500).

One teacher felt that the achievement standards delivered more credits:

But taking time out in a crowded curriculum to do unit standards, where a practical assessment might take one week of my lessons, that is quite a big chunk of teaching time to get the majority of them through one unit, whereas the achievement standard investigation, it does take a week, but you do get 5 credits out of it, whereas a lot of the unit standards there are only 1 or 2 credits involved (HOD Science, High Decile Area, roll <500).

There was a call for a thorough review to take place:

I think if we just got one really long table and laid all the standards out and said 'Oh, this one takes about 6 weeks of work to get through, so what's a sort of equivalent 6 week standard, oh, you get 5 credits for that and you get 3 there, oh that's not fair' or we get all the research standards out and say 'Right, what are the key skills here, and what's the point of repeating all this?' Somehow we have to have a sort of global look at it all and I feel that's missing. And yes, how do unit standards compare to achievement standards? And why do my boys who are doing a speaking unit standard have to do two speeches for a US when it's one for an AS? (English/Health, High Decile Urban Boys, roll 1200+).

HOW TEACHERS ARE USING UNIT STANDARDS

A number of teachers taught courses which were exclusively unit standard assessed, however there were others, discussed here, who were using a mixture. It was interesting to see how and why they were doing this. In some cases they were offering unit standards to boost the amount of internal assessment available in the course, because they believed students performed better in that kind of assessment:

I find that if I write a unit standard, I write it in the language that I use for the students in the classroom, and so they know exactly what they're being asked, whereas the NZQA-speak, in some of the exams, the questions are very, very vague and the students don't know what the question is asking. So that's why in lots of ways I prefer the unit standards (HOD Commerce, Mid Decile Urban Co-ed, roll 501-750).

We have tended to offer unit standards in some of our courses because they are internally assessed and we offer them in place of the externally assessed unit, so that when it comes to the end of the year there is less pressure on students when they go into the exam. They still have a 3-hour exam, but instead of sitting six papers, they'll maybe only be sitting four, because we've done two unit standards (HOD Maths, Mid Decile Urban Co-ed, roll 501-750).

For example in History at Level 1 at the moment you can only get 8 internally assessed credits. The Ministry tried to change this last year but people voted against and so you basically have the problem when planning your course, you either give them their research project and then follow it up with the presentation side of it, which gives you the 8 credits, or try and give them one at the beginning of the year and one at the end of the year to try and keep their interests up in that interim period. But I don't know whether other schools are like this, but our kids like instant gratification, they like to basically do the work and get the credits, rather than have to get the first 8 and then sit around for the rest of the year trying to get the other 16. And this is the benefit, that not only will they get the 8 from the achievement standards, if we pop in a couple of unit standards as well, they'll be sitting there with their 16 credits... (HOD History, Low Decile Urban Co-ed, roll 501-750).

I do it [offer unit standards] because they're not doing it under an exam situation. They can do it in the room and they can have another go at an equivalent paper if they don't get it, or they could... If it's in five parts, they can redo part one on another set of questions (HOD Science, High Decile Area, roll <500).

In other cases, teachers were offering unit standards because they believed they allowed for more flexible assessment:

One of the things with the whole process of unit and achievement standards is that it allows you tailor a course better, you can have a mixture. With unit standards, you're not forced to do the whole assessment again, you can reassess element by element, so if the kid misses an element, you can reassess that element and you don't have to do the whole task again, whereas with the achievement standards, it's the whole thing, you have to do the whole lot again if it's an internal one. So when you're doing research using a unit standard and the kid does most of it right, but leaves off the bibliography, they still can't get the unit standard, but you can get them to do the bibliography again... (Deputy Principal, Principal's Nominee, Geography/Computing, Mid Decile Urban Co-ed, roll 501-750).

I think what I meant about the flexibility, was that there is flexibility in the way in which aspects of the curriculum are assessed, for example, in my subjects, students that are not perhaps suited towards external exams can be put in the appropriate internal unit standards to cover that area of the curriculum. I mean there may be one or two where perhaps you would place less emphasis on certain aspects of the curriculum, but it is at least covered (Principal's Nominee, HOD Science, Mid Decile Area, roll <500).

In some cases, unit standards were being used to assess skills or understandings which were not covered in the achievement standards available:

In English, the achievement standards and the unit standards tend to be complementary rather than you know, using them instead. So, if you're doing a speech for example, which is an achievement standard, you can then use the unit standard on listening as part of the programme, and that's really useful. And in the Level 2, there is one unit standard which takes the work that we've actually done in three achievement standards, takes it on one step... [Researcher: What's that one about?] It's three pieces of publishable work. So they do three pieces of transactional prose throughout the year for other reasons, then they reach the standards and take it on one step further and use it for marks in a unit standard and I think that's very good (English, High Decile Area, roll <500).

There are aspects, I know personally from my point of view, that there are aspects of the curriculum that weren't included in the achievement standards, so I left them out. If the kids weren't going to be

asked questions on them, I left them out. Next year, I'm going to be doing more unit standards work to give better [curriculum] coverage, so more unit standards and less external, so I'll get coverage better (Principal's Nominee, HOD Science, Mid Decile Area, roll <500).

In some cases it appeared that unit standards were being used as an insurance policy against students failing achievement standards:

In our NCEA classes it's predominantly achievement standards, but we give them the option at Level 1, if they need their 8 numeracy credits, then they are offered additional unit standards. They have an opportunity to get their 8 numeracy credits out of the road with unit standards, but then there is another such achievement standard that they can take that from. In Level 2, the assessment is predominantly achievement standard, but we do offer a couple of calculus unit standards, and if the students don't pick up those two, then there is the opportunity to sit the external achievement standard at the end of the year. They are mutually exclusive, they don't cover exactly the same, they could get both, they could do the unit standard and get their 4 credits from those, and they are mutually exclusive from the achievement standards that they sit at the end of the year, and we encourage those that want to do Calculus the next year to do the achievement standard as well (HOD Maths, Mid Decile Urban Fringe Co-ed, roll 501-750).

Well, we offer them [unit standards] in Level 2 and Level 3 as well, it's because unit standards are internal assessment, so if they sat the internal assessment for the unit standards and they passed, and then they fail the achievement standard for whatever reason, then they have a fallback position. If they pass the achievement standard, we don't give them the unit standard, so we keep it and won't submit it to NZQA... Whether they need it or not, it's just a fallback position for them (Maths, High Decile Urban Boys, roll 1200+).

Because I do a lot of unit standards, there's a lot of pressure on in Maths for the students to get 14 Level 1 credits for that numeracy requirement now for University Entrance. So I feel that I am having to put most students to do the unit standards as well, just to back up in case they fail the externals, then with the internal unit standards, they've got that 14 to pass them through (HOD Maths, Mid Decile Rural Co-ed, roll <500).

I am busy kind of fighting [negative perceptions around unit standards]... so that I can find achievement standards to have in the forefront and unit standards sort of sitting in behind them as back-up (English, Mid Decile Provincial Co-ed, roll 1001-1200).

One HOD was using unit standards in Year 10 as part of trying to shift students to Excellence in the achievement standards in Year 11:

Trying to change that mentality is one reason I use unit standards. In year 10, I offer unit standards in probability and trigonometry, which are equivalent to the achievement standards, and the reason I do that is, they pass that one and I say 'Okay, next year, you are aiming for excellence in achievement standards, and that is what you're working towards' and that has worked this year. It hasn't worked previously. It failed the first time I tried it, but I hadn't had the students who were actually capable of Excellence actually working then (HOD Maths, High Decile Area, roll <500).

THE 'PARITY OF ESTEEM' QUESTION

Schools and individual teachers varied somewhat as to whether they perceived that unit standards reflected lower levels of achievement and were therefore in some ways lower status than achievement standards, but in no school did unit standards appear to be universally seen as on a par with achievement standards. Some factors influencing perceptions appear to be teachers' subject areas, their experience with using unit standards, and the decile level of the school they teach in. In two schools there were at least some teachers who were clearly trying to adopt a language which focused on standards and credits, rather than differentiating between the two types of standards. A downside of this, extensively discussed at the Low Decile Urban Co-ed school, was that this put most of the focus on the number of credits students could achieve, rather than on striving for Merit or Excellence where it was available in achievement standards. This

seems to be a fundamental dilemma, which is discussed in Chapter 4, Curriculum v. Assessment under 'Credit Accumulation'.

There was no school in the sample where unit and achievement standards appeared to have attained equal status among teachers and students. In one school, two teachers perceived that students 'just want credits' and that status distinctions were not greatly in evidence:

The kids just want credits (HOD Maths, Mid Decile Urban Fringe Co-ed, roll 501-750).

Just one other thing that underpins that I think, about the finding the right attitude or approach in relation to this parity thing, is that a number of years ago, we tackled the issue of allocation of time to subjects, and we went for parity, talking senior school here at the moment. And so that may have helped ease this issue...well I'm absolutely certain it has to be honest, but, the issue was that some subjects were perceived as far more important than others. You know, if you got 2 hours a week, then it's natural that that is how you were perceived... (HOD Social Sciences, Outdoor Ed, Mid Decile Urban Fringe Co-ed, roll 501-750).

However, not all teachers in that school agreed that they were perceived as of equal status:

I think that as an employer, they would be looking at achievement standards with a clear understanding of what went on to get those standards. Because I see as a parent, or people should see, that achievement standards are of a higher quality than unit standards (Commerce/Computing, Mid Decile Urban Fringe Co-ed, roll 501-750).

In the Low Decile Urban Co-ed school, there was a wide divergence of opinion. The Deputy Principal (Curriculum) described the policy intention of the school:

I'll tell you one of the major things we tried to do was to 'fudge' the differentiation between unit standards and achievement standards with the students, so we talked up credit rating, we talked up that it didn't matter whether it was a unit standard course or an achievement standard or a mixture of both, they both deliver credit, so we actually put credits out there with the kids. Perhaps to the exclusion of the qualitative statements that are attached to [achievement standards] so we get students coming along and 'If I do this course, how many credits is it worth? I'm going to get 16 from that and I'll get 12 from that... a 21 or a 23, or is this only...' They ask the questions, so we've actually made the currency of the school the credit rating of the courses, so that we removed the stigma. There is none, in this school any more. If kids go to English, in the English courses, unit standards, achievement standards, or a mixture, they go to English and they get credits. So I suppose that's one of the things that we've over-promoted credits in the school and maybe kids aren't perhaps thinking as carefully as they could, about their performance within the individual standards. You know, our results would show that the attention to credits has paid off in terms of students making choices that make achievable learning for them (Deputy Principal (Curriculum), Visual Arts, Low Decile Urban Co-ed, roll 501-750).

However a significant number of teachers there disagreed that this policy was working, at least so far:

I think probably too there is this perception that unit standards are a lesser way to go. And I think, in ways we have fostered that in this school by saying that your teachers will choose who goes into the achievement standards class and who will do the unit standards. And there is this idea that they are 'cabbage', which is basically why I've had to think long and hard about whether I'm going to do it in History or not. And in fact one of my colleagues, I suggested it to him the other day that I was thinking of introducing unit standards and he was almost like 'God, why! Who are you going to make do them?' and that sort of defeats the purpose really. But you go to any school and you start talking about unit standards and the kids will go, 'Oh, that's the cabbage course' (HOD History, English, Low Decile Urban Co-ed, roll 501-750).

I need to agree with [colleague], in terms of English I think there is to some extent... Kids do see a distinction between unit standard and achievement standard...but then it's changing, I don't think

kids necessarily see it as cabbage as they used to. There was an absolutely clear demarcation between the two, you were either doing proper English or you were doing cabbage English. And that's changing, but I do think there is an amount of sort of discrimination that kids place on those courses (HOD English, Low Decile Urban Co-ed, roll 501-750).

I think that somehow or other we're discounting the value of unit standards against achievement standards and I constantly get kids telling me that they've 'Only done unit standards' and that's what they're saying to me, they're apologising to me, they say 'I'm sorry miss, I've only done unit standards' and I keep on telling them that if they've done a unit standard at Level 1, that has the same value on the Framework as an achievement standard at Level 1 and it goes right through. But there is this impression that they've got some sort of lesser value and in this school in particular, because we've got such a broad senior curriculum, we can't meet that with achievement standards, we've got to provide unit standards and, you see what I mean... And I feel that it's not just a college issue, it's a national issue, that somewhere in terms of the introduction of achievement standards, there's some sort of priority attached to them and they are actually degrading the unit standards (HOD Health, Careers/Life Skills, Gateway, Low Decile Urban Co-ed, roll 501-750).

In the case of all the other schools where the issue was discussed, there was clear evidence of a status distinction being made:

But I also think that the achievement standards and the way that they've had more time spent on them is demeaning the unit standard qualification. [Researcher: So unit standards are being looked down on, is that right?] Both by some of the staff that don't teach them, some of the staff who do teach them, but not by the students, because they can't really determine at this point, but they're getting the attitude from...and I hear staff say 'Oh, you'll need to do this English course, because it's higher' you know, 'If you're in that course, you can move down to this course'. And it takes all my patience not to rip somebody's head off, but you hear that and that's what parents are still getting confused about because you've got staff who still think English is academic English and you've got other staff who think English is communication (English/Transition, Mid Decile Urban Co-ed, roll 501-750).

My comment wouldn't be so much external versus internal, as opposed to achievement standards versus unit standards, and I don't know if it's just me being a little bit fearful of what I think are weak, cheap credits, as in unit standards... In the Maths department, the unit standards are kept for our 103 class, our third tier of 'Let's get them their Numeracy' (HOD Maths, Mid Decile Provincial Co-ed, roll 1001-1200).

But they think unit standards are not such, you know, prestigious grades as getting an achievement standard. I had a year 12 student say ' Oh, but I've only got unit standards' (Maths, High Decile Urban Boys, roll 1200+).

The kids who are the academic kids in the [class offering a mixture], they will ask 'Is this is an achievement standard or is this a unit standard?' If it is a unit standard, then they don't want to know about it, they have already worked out that the achievement standards have a higher value when you want to move onto other things, like university. In English...I'm not saying that for other subjects, but that's how they perceive them to be... You see them talking over the option booklet and they say 'Oh, that's only unit standards', so they move on. That's just the attitude of the academic kids... (English, Mid Decile Rural Co-ed, roll <500).

I think that students sort of think that they are lower ranked courses, our unit standards. A lot of the students think that with the unit standards 'Oh well, they're a unit standard, not an achievement standard' and they just don't bother doing the assessment if they don't need to. And I'd say that half my class of 13 could basically just not come to class all year, because they just have this perception that they don't need them, the credits (Geography/Social Studies/Travel, High Decile Urban Girls, roll 1200+).

The 'bad press' for unit standards was blamed by some for the low esteem in which they were held:

I think we need to look at the academic as opposed to vocational courses and credit. Bad publicity that NCEA has got is because people can go and get unit standards in shearing, you know, people got all these credits for a day's shearing, whereas in English it takes so long to get something. And I

mean, a lot of unit standards were designed for industry and that's good, but if you can do it, you get certified that you can do it. But also at some times, people say why is it so easy to get credits in these practical things and then it's so hard to get them in the academic things? But then even in English we have unit standards and achievement standards in the same subject, and it's absolutely not true that there is less work for the unit standards...(English/ESOL, Mid Decile Urban Fringe Co-ed, roll 501-750).

I'd like to comment on what [colleague] said about the unit standards 'cheapening'. I've got a real issue with this, and it might be just me, being a little old-fashioned like [colleague] perhaps. The Cambridge High School furore, for want of a better word, where they were offering unit standard without so-called learning required. And I don't think that is a fault of Cambridge High School, I believe that is a fault of the unit standards being able to be used. And the famous is the picking up the rubbish one, because that wasn't what the standard was, the standard was 'Working as part of a group, toward a common goal'. We offer that standard here, and kids pass it, [but] we don't get them to pick up rubbish, they go home and create a barbeque, everyone has got to pitch in and organise and have a feed, you know. The issue is with the standards and I think that there are some unit standards which are easier to pass and if we wanted, we could get a 100% pass rate in NCEA. We'd give all of our kids the 103 maths course, we'd get all our kids to do it, they'd all pass (Principal's Nominee, Accountancy, Mid Decile Provincial Co-ed, roll 1001-1200).

In some subjects where unit standards were either the only option or the teacher's experience indicated that they were a better option, unit standards were highly valued:

I think there's another side to that too, and that's when you compare for example the take up and the motivation of students in the school that used to do the old Technology achievement standards and those who are now doing the Building Tech unit standards. I mean there's just a huge change in the whole character of the course, the motivation of the students. Kids are absolutely on fire with doing real things, and making things that are really targeted on the future, in contrast with trying to do achievement standards in Technology which nobody understood. It puts the whole thing in balance, and I don't think that anyone who is doing our Building Tech course would say that they were doing cabbage. They can see that it's absolutely relevant to where they're going, they're getting tons of opportunities to learn real skills, employers are coming and asking kids that are on the course to come and do work experience, I mean what could be better than that? (HOD Humanities, Low Decile Urban Co-ed, roll 501-750).

Some teachers argued that introduction of a Merit level into unit standards more widely than has already happened in a very limited way would help to motivate students more and to make the more difficult unit standards more achievable:

This year I'm only teaching unit standards, but in the past I've taught the achievement...and the better kids want something, they like to think that if they've put the work into it then they want more than that kid that's just managed to scrape through, so I think you need that grading, I think that works (Commerce/Computing, Mid Decile Urban Fringe Co-ed, roll 501-750).

Somewhere along the line, I have heard the idea that there might be a Merit level introduced for unit standards and I think that would be a very good thing, because what it might mean is it would shift the Achieved level for a unit standard down slightly from the 90% correct thing, and then have a Merit level as well so that there's a little bit more flexibility (Principal's Nominee, HOD Science, Low Decile Urban Co-ed, roll 501-750).

Another teacher, however, did not want to see levels introduced into unit standards:

I like unit standards for particularly the alternative English class because they don't have that qualitative... apart from you've met the standards, but you're not comparing with others in the class in the Achieved, the Merit, an Excellence. As long as you can do it, you can do it (English/ESOL, Mid Decile Urban Fringe Co-ed, roll 501-750).

CONCLUSIONS

It is not a simple matter to deliver parity of esteem to the range of options available within a school, especially when there are two different assessment systems operating, one of which in a number of ways appears to be more highly valued, and where the lower status system is associated mainly with subjects that have been labelled 'vocational' or with easier options within subjects. The fact that both kinds of standard deliver credits towards the same qualification is not sufficient to change the perceptions. It may be, in fact, as Howard and Greg Lee have argued, that the goal of parity of esteem is not achievable because the relative status of subjects is something which has a long tradition that is not easily overthrown. The story of the low-decile school where the senior manager believes that all kinds of standards have similar status, but where staff clearly contradicted that view, is salutary. If it cannot be achieved in a school like that, where can it be achieved? Furthermore, if the route to parity of esteem is to emphasise credit values rather than working for deeper learning and higher levels of achievement, then that is a route which many schools will rightly choose not to take.

There are some issues raised in this chapter, however, which can be addressed by NZQA and the Ministry of Education, in consultation with the profession. There is a need to look again at whether introducing at least a Merit level into unit standards would be warranted. There is also a need to have a thorough look at the relative credit values of all standards, and to ensure that the credit values are equitable. There is also a need to resource unit standard assessment equitably with achievement standard assessment, an issue discussed more extensively in Chapter 15, Resourcing Issues.

(See Recommendations 1 and 3)

9. INTERNAL MODERATION OF INTERNAL ASSESSMENT

“I found it was a joyful process.”

The absolute need to do internal moderation of assessment in many respects appeared to be seen as a positive feature of the new qualifications system, although it was noted to be a significant addition to teacher workload (see also Chapter 14, Generators of Workload).

The greatest number of references to internal moderation came from teachers in small schools or small departments, who lacked anyone in their own school with whom they could do internal moderation:

I'm the only really full-time Maths teacher in our school and I'm having to go and approach other schools to moderate mine, you know (HOD Maths, Mid Decile Rural Co-ed, roll <500).

And I guess that's a problem with a small school too, that you don't have colleagues in your same area or subject, so it's sort of hard to discuss your particular assessments that you're doing (PE/Health, Mid Decile Area, roll <500).

But I think in School C and Bursary we had moderation clusters for [Music], and we don't have that any more... We'd actually take the top and the middle and the bottom kids and actually take them to a performance cluster and we would haggle afterwards, and we don't have that now, so... It's such a subjective thing assessing performance as well, especially when you know the kids and especially in a small school like this where you don't have the range of comparison... (Music/Maths, Mid Decile Rural Co-ed, roll <500).

Many of these teachers were very positive about their experiences of working with colleagues from other schools:

I was involved with the Level 3 Biology this year and I found it was a joyful process because I met with one of the teachers in another school and we did... The two teachers in this school did the moderation ourselves and then we took our student work to another school that we're working with, and I felt that sort of enhanced the whole process, because we all knew then that we would have three voices in concordance and we looked at each other's work so that we knew that we had a consistent standard across two schools and I thought that was extremely... It did require an hour's travelling on my part and about an hour and a half or so on the other person's part, plus the meeting time... [Researcher: So you met somewhere in the middle?] In the pub! But you know I think that is a feature that I guess has always been available and people do talk professionally, but I think now there is maybe a greater amount of it (HOD Maths/Physics, Mid Decile Area, roll <500).

I'm actually very fortunate because I'm so new to the system [immigrant teacher], I do have a colleague down at [area school] who willingly shares what she has done for her unit standard, and I'll provide what I can...but she provides more this way than what I can provide for her...but we do work together for those. It's difficult when you're in a small school with the one person, and you're doing moderation...and you really do have to have someone when you come into this system, to do your marking with for the unit standards (HOD Science, High Decile Area, roll <500).

I do that down in [city], I drop it off to them [a colleague] when I go down for the weekend and he's been very supportive, and he's always available, he'll come up and help try to sort out exemplars and that sort of thing (PE, High Decile Area, roll <500).

I can get my work internally moderated because in order to bring in the Hospitality I had to gain an assessment-based unit standard and [other teacher] did it as well, so she's able to moderate my work and then I go to moderation meetings where everyone involved... That involves going to [city about an hour away]. I'm actually going to a moderation meeting next week and it's during school-time. I chose not to go last year's because it was easier to be here than to actually go. It's very good

for me to go though, because I can actually talk to other teachers and see what they're experiencing, what's happening and talk to the representative and yes... just get their perspective with what's happening with the programme and everything (Food & Nutrition/Hospitality, High Decile Area, roll <500).

But we also do a lot...for Visual Arts...with the Art departments in the different schools around the [city] area, which is quite helpful, because they bring in quite a lot of samples and that's what they're doing and that's how they're moderating it. So actually, it's very nice in the Visual Arts curriculum area, we get lots of good information and lots of stuff available on the website you know...And just to get different samples, and what everyone else is doing around the place. It's good at [school] that we are able to do that in our department, but all your HODs would be able to arrange something (Art/Design, Low Decile Urban Co-ed, roll 501-750).

I'm just thinking about how lucky we are in English really... We have [teacher] in [city], he actually did all the training, so I got in that training as well, and you've always got that support, you can phone him and he'll come down... He arranges exemplars. I don't know how he actually works as well, but he does, he's brilliant (English, High Decile Area, roll <500).

One teacher in an area school had tried to solve the problem of isolation by using only pre-moderated assessment tasks:

I don't use un-moderated assessments, that's why I get my assessments from NZAMT. I don't write my own assessments because I don't have any possibility of having them moderated by anybody else within the school (HOD Technology/Graphics, High Decile Area, roll <500).

Schools and larger departments appeared to have good systems of internal moderation operating, although one sounded as if it could become pretty onerous in a larger school:

One thing that we've started and we've been advised by the School Relationship Manager at NZQA that we should extend, is that we have an internal school moderation system, which checks the work of...well, initially it was designed to check the work of new teachers in the school to make sure that their work met our standards, which are generally quite high. But according to [SRM] we really need to be doing an internal moderation of everybody's internal assessments regardless of who they are, before they're given. And if you took that to the nth degree, that would mean the workload was horrendous...the implications would be, but the outcome I think would be really good. So we have a little moderation committee, and this year we just looked at some work that had been done and we found that in one case in particular, the teacher needed considerable assistance to get the work up to the national standard... Well we have a representative from most subject areas there, so for instance, we had a competency issue with a staff member and so we were able to take somebody else from the school who had similar skills but not involved in that and they looked at the work. And then, I've been involved in helping a lot of staff in different subject areas develop their material so...I mean a lot of unit standard work, comparing the standard to the assessment, to the assessment schedule, it's general, it doesn't have to be subject-specific, so we weren't necessarily looking at subject-specific stuff, it was just taking the standard, does the assessment meet the standard criteria? Does the assessment schedule reflect not only the task, but does it also reflect the standard? So, that's exactly the same things as the external moderators would do, all our job was to make sure that our work as a school was at the national standard in all subjects (Principal's Nominee, HOD Science, Mid Decile Area, roll <500).

One HOD said that a preparatory meeting before assessment began helped a lot:

We find it's actually more efficient to have a meeting beforehand to, you know, explain where the... to avoid problems later, otherwise it's hugely difficult to get everybody in the same frame (Quality Manager, HOD Physics, High Decile Urban Girls, roll 1200+).

A comment from one teacher was interesting in what it reflected about students' views of internal moderation systems:

... and I made it clear as well [to students] that I took a big sample of the ones that I'd marked and handed it round other teachers in the department. And I got 'Don't give it to this one or give it to that one, because they like me better' and I said 'Well it doesn't matter... It's to keep us professional and

to know that you're getting a fair mark and that we are marking fairly too' (English, Mid Decile Urban Fringe Co-ed, roll 501-750).

It was clear that teachers took the task of supporting their colleagues to make assessment judgements very seriously, but that the time involved was a major burden for HODs and classroom teachers:

That is a generator of workload. It's the hours that we spend, and I've only got a department of five, and the hours that we spend trying to establish those... and it just goes on and on and on and on... (HOD History, High Decile Urban Girls, roll 1200+).

And if you skimp on those hours, it exacerbates the problem of between-school consistency, because if you're not doing that internal moderation, you know, your processes start to unravel a little bit (Chemistry/Science, High Decile Urban Girls, roll 1200+).

It's become like a debate between the other teachers, you know, Maths you had always assumed to be fairly straightforward, you have a right answer, you tick it and move on. Internals I've marked in the last two years, yes, it's become...in marking the whole thing we'll have a discussion, like a meeting about it. And I'll certainly have it sent back to me, and 'Well, what about this guy, has he met the standard?' (Maths, High Decile Urban Boys, roll 1200+).

I mean the grade boundaries if we're looking at Year 13 research, it does mean that you have to be fairly confident and comfortable with your subject for starters to be able to recognise 'discussion' versus 'description' and 'explanation' and so forth. And I think that for experienced teachers that's not too difficult, and possibly it's something that contributes to younger teachers not sticking with the job so long, because really coming into a system which really relies a lot on experience to be able to make judgements. They're coming in without experience and they're going into that system and I imagine it is probably a bit nerve wracking for them sort of getting bunch of say Level 1 essays and here's the descriptor, which is for experienced teachers, you know... And they're coming in and they don't have that experience of those say 15, 10, 20 years that we've been teaching and doing it. And you can give them so much help, but really it comes back to this aspect of really, they've really got to make those decisions and even if you could, there's a time aspect that again, it's difficult when you've got your own marking as well, to sit down with someone else and go through their 36 with them. In an ideal situation, that's what would happen, you could sit down beside them and say 'Right, let's do these', but hours in the day, and pressures from without, which is also pressures I think from administration too of NCEA, I think there is an extra bit that is happening, in general in schools there are more things to do, and it's something else that adds to this overall thing which is more paperwork than what you had before, depending on your position (HOD English/Media, High Decile Urban Boys, roll 1200+).

I've got to basically moderate the other teachers that are doing Level 1 in my subject because they're out in different departments, so they didn't really train in my area, they're in different subject areas, they didn't really go to the courses on NCEA Level 3, and they aren't from my subject, so I'm having to do all that as well. It's just too much (HOD Maths, Mid Decile Rural Co-ed, roll <500).

CONCLUSIONS

Teachers highly value the professional conversations they engage in during internal moderation exercises, because they get to make shared judgements about real examples of student work, and to share ideas about teaching and learning strategies that will help students to achieve better. However, there is not enough time available in schools for this work to be as professionally productive as it could be. The teachers for whom internal moderation requirements are the biggest challenge are probably those in small isolated schools or single-teacher departments in larger schools, but it is also clear that internal moderation exercises in large departments place a big burden on their department heads. Getting the members of a large department together for a sustained period of time and not after school when they are all tired is a huge challenge, but so is it a challenge for a small rural school to release staff to meet with colleagues in other schools which may be quite a long distance away. The Ministry of Education needs to consider how these difficulties could be alleviated, because of the huge benefits in

enhanced teacher knowledge and capability that would result, hence the recommendation that this be considered by the Teacher Workload working party established under the Secondary Teachers' Collective Agreement. The proposed ongoing professional development would also enable teachers to share ideas about internal moderation processes which work for them in their particular contexts. Until it is found that internal moderation processes can be manageable for all teachers, there should be no consideration of making any level of the NCEA entirely internally assessed.

(See Recommendations 4, 5 and 7)

10. EXTERNAL MODERATION OF INTERNAL ASSESSMENT

“The moderation is the thing that has the potential to give this credibility or not, and I want the country to believe in the system.”

The external moderation system, which is the quality assurance process for the internally assessed components of the qualification, lacks credibility with the vast majority of teachers. The researcher heard many examples of inconsistencies in moderator judgements, of pettiness by moderators, and of inadequate and mistrusted processes for appeal of moderator judgements.

The moderation system is an essential mechanism to reassure the teaching profession, students, families, tertiary institutions, employers and the wider public that the NCEA can deliver national consistency of judgements against the achievement and unit standards. Lack of confidence in the moderation system leads to lack of confidence in the whole qualification. As some of the teachers expressed it:

I think the moderation is the thing that has the potential to give this credibility or not and I want the country to believe in the system, and as long as there are examples that crop up where things have slipped, then this is not going to happen (English teacher, Mid Decile Area school, roll <500).

I want it to be comparable, and I want it to be able to be better compared: across units, across schools and across subjects. I want to feel that all of that is tighter and that we are operating at one level, consistently across (English and Health, High Decile Urban Boys, roll 1200+).

Teachers in every group raised issues about the moderation system, and while the occasional comment was positive, most were not. It is essential that the issues raised in this section of the report are addressed with urgency.

A STRESSFUL EXPERIENCE

The process of sending work away for moderation is stressful for teachers. Two teachers described this vividly:

The other thing with moderation is...well, everyone shits themselves here when stuff has to be sent off, it's the only way to put it. A lot of people walk around here quite nervously for a month, six weeks waiting for that stuff to come back. And then when it does come back you're either sitting there saying 'Oh it's okay', but some people I know have told me 'I thought I was doing it right, and they've told me I'm doing it wrong'... (Technology/Graphics, High Decile Urban Girls, roll 1200+).

And then you don't necessarily have the support to know whether you're going to be moderated as right, and I feel really, you know, I don't feel like I've got that... It's stressful. I don't feel like I am empowered to enable me to be totally confident in my marking... (Drama/English, High Decile Urban Girls, roll 1200+).

STRINGENCY OF SYSTEM

But despite this acknowledgement of the stress involved, teachers overwhelmingly wanted a more stringent moderation system, and were concerned that it was not. One issue was the low number of standards moderated each year:

I don't think it does the job that it sets out to do... It's too small a sample, there are no real comebacks...everybody seems to be looking over their shoulder - we're doing the right thing, but what about the school up the road? And when you get publicity surrounding a school like Cambridge

High School with their 100% rates, you know, everyone ends up shaking their heads (HOD English, Mid Decile Urban Fringe Co-ed, roll 501-750).

If there was a good support system in place, I would feel a lot happier... Because as I said, my work hasn't been moderated on the whole, I'm not 100% sure [about assessment judgements made] (HOD Languages, Mid Decile Urban Co-ed, roll 501-750).

I think there needs to be more resourcing, because I've only had one achievement standard in Level 1 this year moderated and I don't think that's really enough in order to ensure that across the country, schools are getting it right. And I don't think that 8 samples out of some big schools is enough...I think that's ridiculous. For us, that's a big percentage of our students, but ... (HOD English, Mid Decile Area school, roll <500).

This year at Level 2 we had a huge investigation, which was 4 credits and it concerned me that they didn't externally moderate it. And I passed through...you know, we moderated it in the department, but it concerned me a bit. They selected to use a Level 3 one that was very similar, well actually identical to the Level 2 ones that we've got. So I would've thought that with a big change like that, to make it...you know, to give it the rigour, that it should have been externally moderated. If we're going to make these things all people will value (HOD Maths, Mid Decile Provincial Co-ed, roll 1001-1200).

This view was supported by another teacher in the same group:

That would go for Biology too. You miss not getting the feedback on those big ones that you are doing internally. It feels like you're sort of in a void (HOD Biology, Mid Decile Provincial Co-ed, roll 1001-1200).

This same sense of insecurity was expressed by a third-year teacher in a much bigger school who was the sole teacher of her subject at Year 11:

I'm a one person at Year 11 for Drama, and the thing that I think is a real worry for NCEA is that...like, last year I had written the programme and was assessing it, and nobody else in the school was assessing at the same level and I didn't have anybody asking to see what I was marking, and so I was assessing with another teacher outside of the school and I got my feedback from when I sent stuff down for moderation, so that was okay. This year though, I knew I was never going to be moderated externally, I still had nobody else assessing at the same level within the school, so for every assessment I knew that it was up to me to try and find somebody to mark it again and that nobody would be checking on what I was marking. And because I knew that there was going to be no external moderation, it's like, I had to be professional and all in how I marked them, but I just thought 'This is shocking - there's going to be schools that...' It's just relying on teachers making judgements, when we know that there is... And if you're the only person at that level, there's nobody else that you've got anything to compare against. I don't necessarily trust myself. I feel that I should be checked. You know, I'm doing the best job that I can but unless I get feedback from people that know what they're saying ... how else do I know? I'm sure we're all doing the best that we can, but that doesn't mean that we're doing it right... (Drama/English, High Decile Urban Girls, roll 1200+).

While teachers like this one who are the sole teacher of their subject or level in their school acknowledge the need to go outside the school for 'internal' moderation, this does not necessarily build their confidence when the external moderation system lacks stringency:

Just on that topic of marking your things and having no one check you, I've found that it's really up to you to go and find somebody to moderate your work and I have marked something and thought 'That would be an Achieved, or even Not Achieved' and then I've felt that I've wanted a second opinion and have then gone to find someone and then I've found out that no, they thought it would be a Merit. So there's also a difference of opinion, so it does make you wonder what could happen if there are people who are not getting moderated (Japanese, High Decile Urban Girls, roll 1200+).

Different schools impose different pressures, with teachers in this high decile school feeling that they were under very close scrutiny by parents, and it was also noticeable that the less experienced teachers felt that pressure more:

Particularly in a school like this, where the parents are very interested in what their children are getting...and will, you know, come to you and ask about this grade...there is a lot of stress that comes in around our decision making and there's also a lot more onus on us to make those decisions... (Second year Art/Art History/Design, High Decile Urban Girls, roll 1200+).

This comment was supported by a colleague:

And also to take the culpability of the decisions that we make... (Third year Drama/English, High Decile Urban Girls, roll 1200+).

One teacher described a vision of a whole lot of buildings filled with people who would support the qualifications system, including one for moderation, and saw it as a professionalising opportunity:

I think we should get rid of exams completely, and I think that this building that we are talking of should also be filled with another group of people, who could be the moderation police, and they could go all around the country and pick on a school and make sure they are all moderating properly. So, I don't see why we are trusted with assessing their speech and their research, but we are not trusted with marking their literary essay for goodness sake. That's the thing we do easiest and best! Universities, UCOLs, polytechs or whatever, they don't have external exams. I think there is a tremendous opportunity here to professionalise teaching, and employ some moderators to fly around and look at samples of work, that would be far better (HOD Classical Studies, English, High Decile Urban Boys' School, roll 1200+).

The change in the system signalled for 2005, whereby for standards moderated before student work was available schools would send in samples from the previous year, received varying degrees of support. One teacher appeared to be uncertain that it would improve matters, because of a perception that even less work would be moderated:

And the moderation system is changing yet again for next year. I haven't got the exact details in my head, but there's been a new centrefold information sheet out about it. Yes, there's... I think the impression that I got was there is actually going to be less called for, and only in areas that have shown quite sort of significant problems will be moderated. And we no longer have to, and I may be wrong, because I've only had a cursory read of this, but my understanding is that we no longer have to send in our assessment plan early, and we will be asked for material to be moderated, you know they will choose. And that's actually a problem I thought, because I actually alter from one year to another what I offer, and what if they ask for something that I don't intend to do? (Principal's Nominee, HOD Science, Mid Decile Area school, roll <500).

One group of teachers, just told about the change the morning of the focus group, was feeling anxious:

... we've already given it all back to the kids and we've got nothing (Geography/Social Studies, High Decile Urban Girls, roll 1200+).

On the other hand, the problem of having moderation too early to have any work to be sent in was clearly one which teachers wanted to see fixed:

We had one moderated earlier in the year, our moderation was quite early this year, for a unit standard that wasn't being assessed until later in the year, so we had no students' work to be sent away... (HOD Maths, Mid Decile Urban Fringe Co-ed, roll 501-750).

My assessments are never done in time for moderation... Well there's answers done, but there's no student examples to be sent away with it (HOD Languages, Mid Decile Urban Co-ed, roll 501-750).

The process whereby teachers are asked by NZQA to select eight pieces of work for moderation, and to try to demonstrate a range of achievement and select pieces which are on the grade margins, was generally supported by participants, although there was a degree of distrust expressed about whether all teachers followed the process and a feeling that it could be made more robust:

I find it really important, because of our isolation, to have that opportunity to have it checked with the moderators. I mean I don't think it's a bad thing to get something wrong in the moderator's eyes, so I think it's important to actually get their help really (HOD Humanities, Mid Decile Area, roll <500).

We deliberately sent them on the margins, and the one time that we were actually given candidate numbers, when the selection was completely random, it turned out that it was for a standard that hadn't been assessed and we were going to have to video them anyway and so I went back to NZQA and they said okay, just choose your own. So moderation has a place to play in this too doesn't it? I mean, the moderation process is perhaps a little bit...fickle I suppose is a good term to use, but...and it also discourages schools from sending work that you have conferenced with a student and you are concerned that it is close to one of these 'dotted lines' - that is the work that you should send...you should not be afraid to send it. What is the point in sending work that is clearly above the very solid line? And the moderation process doesn't perhaps encourage schools to do that (Science, High Decile Urban Girls, roll 1200+).

The ideal thing is that people put in the ones that perhaps they're not sure about. Again, of course there may be others who think 'Well, I know this is an Achieved, so I'll send it in and then mine will come back and the eight I sent in, you know they're all right, so it's all good'. I mean you choose the ones you send in, so that aspect of moderation can work certainly within English. 'Give me one which you're not sure about and we'll put it in' and that helps to standardise marking. But when you give the choice to people, it is open for people just to... (English/Media, High Decile Urban Boys, roll 1200+).

In English, we know the achievement standards that will be moderated and the ones that won't. So it's like, what's to stop teachers going and...and I know it's relying on our professionalism and everything, but I think there also needs to be some sort of...they need to not tell us which...I would like to see NCEA moderators just coming randomly and saying 'Show us your unit, and we will pick the kids', instead of 'Pick eight kids, and we'll tell you in advance what the unit is'. Because I just think there is so much ability to...like, I could have just completely rigged it if I wanted to and nobody would ever have known (Drama/English, High Decile Urban Girls, roll 1200+).

QUALITY OF MODERATORS' WORK

There were many concerns expressed regarding a lack of consistency in moderator judgements, and also some examples given where it appeared that the moderator was lacking in subject knowledge. This is a matter of serious concern to teachers, because it reflects on the credibility of the whole system.

Examples of variability of moderators' judgements were given in nine of the sixteen groups:

You send a standard to one moderator and you'll get back a report, and if you put in the same one to another one, you'll get a completely different outcome... I took an assessment from another school. I changed the headings, that's all. Their one was sent away and passed and got okay. My one came back with a vague comment on it that didn't seem to apply, and I ran it past other moderators and they couldn't actually explain it to me... (HOD Maths, Mid Decile Urban Co-ed, roll 501-750).

We've done unit standards at Level 2 and we've done achievement standards at Level 2 for practical work. I've sent tasks away to be moderated and they've come back... I actually run them past people that I know are moderators and I've had six moderators do the same piece of work and they've all come up with totally different, totally unrelated things that need to be changed, totally unrelated. Our Level 2 Biology this year, and I don't know if we had the same moderator as last year, but it was the same task, and I had put in all of the changes that had been requested, and I now have a raft of other things that are not even anywhere related (HOD Science, Mid Decile Urban Co-ed, roll 501-750).

We've been involved in cluster groups where the group has developed work and the same achievement standard has been sent away from this school as has been sent from that one and been accepted, and not accepted here (Technology/Food and Nutrition, Mid Decile Urban Fringe Co-ed, roll 501-750).

I sent one away, and for some reason or another I got it done twice, it must have been a mistake, and I got two reports back. One of them was all fine, and the other one was 'You've got to make some changes'. They let themselves down badly there (HOD Music, Mid Decile Urban Fringe Co-ed, roll 501-750).

I've had that as well. One said there was nothing to change and the other one said there were quite a lot of things to change ... on the same set of work (HOD Maths, Mid Decile Urban Fringe Co-ed, roll 501-750).

I sent one away for moderation three years ago...passed with flying colours. They asked for it a year later, failed. I changed nothing, and the unit standard had not changed at all, nothing had changed. I sent it away again this year and it passed again with flying colours. Now how can that be? It's the same unit standard, the same tasks, the same schedule, the same students' work, you know. I did it as a bit of a laugh to see, and it passed, failed, passed. I'm really concerned about that.... I'm really annoyed that NZQA is hiring moderators who don't in my opinion understand either the unit standards or achievement standards, writing comments that make no sense to those of us who get them returned (English, Mid Decile Urban Co-ed, roll 501-750).

We teach two international languages here - Japanese and Spanish - and we work really hard within our department to make sure that our achievement standards are consistent and that they follow the format that is laid out by NCEA, which does seem to change quite periodically - but that's another issue. So both the Spanish teacher and I have sent off our achievement standards - same standard, just one is Japanese based and one is Spanish based and suited accordingly. She has been pulled up on some things that I haven't been, and vice versa, so it would seem that there is no consistency between the moderators (HOD Languages, Mid Decile Urban Co-ed, roll 501-750).

A Principal's Nominee, who saw moderators' reports across a range of subjects, had some interesting observations:

Because I'm the Principal's Nominee I gather all the assessment information and send it away for moderation, and when it comes back, I analyse all moderation and all moderation reports. And I actually found that there were some discrepancies in what the moderators said in different subjects. They may have said the same thing, but their recommendations were actually different between one subject and another ... In our Level 1 Physical Education, the moderator had ticked the box 'Meets the standard', yet there were significant changes required inside. And so, the moderator should've ticked the box 'Adjustments required'... I think it was in [other teacher's] case the moderator had ticked 'Does not meet the national standard' and then you looked inside and there were very minor things like it didn't have the version number on top and...[teacher] had used the version of the exemplar, not the version of the standard and everything else was fine, but it was just these really little tiny errors, yet they had ticked that it didn't meet the national standard. So, to me, it's almost as if the subject moderators for different subjects haven't actually got together and decided that 'If someone had only got this and this and this missing, then you tick this box' you know (Principal's Nominee, HOD Science, Mid Decile Area, roll <500).

In their other role as HOD Science, this same teacher had an equally unsettling experience:

When it came to Level 3 Biology, we worked with three different schools to do the internals. And one of the schools sent the material away for moderation prior to actually doing the work, and it came back all the boxes ticked. Our school and the school down the road did the work and sent it away to be moderated and it came back 'Requires work' and commented on the assessment schedule and so on, because they had student work to look at, whereas the school that sent it away initially had no student work for the moderator to look at, so they obviously assumed it was fine. So we were working with what we believed to be an acceptable moderated piece of work and it actually went back, what they had assessed had been agreed with, but the actual tool itself was questioned again, which I found was interesting to say the least. Different moderator, it would have been a different moderator because the three schools working together were 700 kilometres apart, so they've usually got different areas, so it would've been a different moderator I think (Principal's Nominee, HOD Science, Mid Decile Area, roll <500).

Excessive pettiness was also criticised by teachers:

And they're often little nit-picky things as well: 'You haven't got the right version number' (Deputy Principal, Principal's Nominee, Geography/Computing, Mid Decile Urban Co-ed, roll 501-750).

And some moderators give minute detailed feedback... like, you might have left a comma out or something (English/ESOL, Mid Decile Urban Co-ed, roll 501-750).

Some moderators might give you a little bit of feedback, but they might pick on the fact you don't have a comma in your work (Technology/Graphics, Mid Decile Urban Co-ed, roll 501-750).

Failure of the moderator to read the submitted material carefully appears to be behind this teacher's experience:

Yes, there's moderation, I send it away for moderation, you know, I send away so many items, and I had some questions over one of the pages of their assessment, so basically I collected some more evidence I suppose, and I stapled the extra evidence with each of the assessments, so the page that didn't have all of the evidence on it was on the top of the page that did have the evidence on it, and the moderator didn't see the evidence behind it, so what I was supposed to do was put a line through the evidence that they were not supposed to see and show that they had in fact gained more evidence by not including it in the evidence that they should've, with the line through, but... But, you know, and the thing comes back and it's just so ridiculous... So, where is the page? Show me the clause that says 'Lines are to be put through bits that are not intended as evidence for the purpose of moderation'. I mean, they cannot...this is a kind of juggling act isn't it? Nonsense. Anyway, I find, they didn't look at the evidence that I collected to base my assessment on, but anyway...it just... (Science, Low Decile Urban Co-ed, roll 501-750).

There were concerns expressed that some moderators were lacking in the necessary range of subject knowledge, in both cases in the Arts area:

Well particularly for my department, for my area...a lot of the things we use are relevant to our students, Pacifica and Maori students, so we use Maori and Pacific subject matter. It goes to the moderator. Students have complete understanding about using all the correct...but when it goes to the moderators, there are no Maori and Pacific moderators, so I don't believe that they have complete understanding of the subject matter, so they can't make a clear judgement based on the information that is in front of them. The only judgement that they're making is technique and really the only thing they can make on, but a lot of the content with a lot of the students that I have, a lot of the content is personal identity, culture, religion based... so I think we are persecuted by moderators on that... I don't think the moderators can make sound judgement calls, based on where they're at, because they have no idea (Art/Design, Low Decile Urban Co-ed, roll 501-750).

They stated that there wasn't adequate evidence of an artist role model, and you know, the artist role model... the student had worked consistently with the artist role model and the only thing that I can think of was that the verifiers [moderator] who were used on that panel were not aware... They're not meant to [name the role model], there is supposed to be evidence in the student's work, and I mean, this student, the work couldn't have been more obvious, the role model couldn't have been more obvious (HOD Visual Arts, Mid Decile Urban Co-ed, roll 501-750).

In one case, material had been sent for moderation and was returned without having been moderated:

I'm used to waiting half the year and then the papers come back with no report attached... We got the papers back but no moderation report (HOD Maths, Mid Decile Urban Fringe Co-ed, roll 501-750).

One teacher suggested that there needed to be a checklist for moderators which was made available to teachers too so that they knew what the expectations were:

It would seem to me that a basic checklist would be good for the moderators to go through and that we could have access to, so that we knew what we had to put in for the moderators to see, but there doesn't seem to be any consistency. And it's quite degrading as a teacher when you spend a number of hours trying to get something absolutely perfect and then it comes back unfairly assessed, it would seem (HOD Languages, Mid Decile Urban Co-ed, roll 501-750).

APPEAL PROCESS

The researcher asked teachers whether they would consider appealing moderator judgements about which they were dissatisfied, but it appears that there is little awareness of any appeal process, and little faith that it would be worth making use of it. Furthermore, the lack of faith about appealing can mean teachers will 'play safe' next time:

I went through the process here at the school after I calmed down a little. And I'm sorry, but it's not worth making the effort. We've done one and it's basically not worth the paper work. We went to go through the appeal and my co-ordinator said, 'Look, it will be tagged again next year, it's the wrong time of the year to send it off again, let's just flag it' (English/Transition, Mid Decile Urban Co-ed, roll 501-750).

When the moderators' report comes back, most staff, they feel aggrieved and they feel like they want to put in an appeal. But it's a very difficult process to go through and you have to be well and truly supported. And so I would think that there are a lot of reports that are just put aside into the too-hard basket, 'Rather than appeal we'll just do nothing' and then that particular teacher is, from my perspective, no longer feeling as positive about NCEA as they did before they got the report and obviously next time they're moderated, they will make jolly sure they send down samples that are especially [clear] (TIC Curriculum/Assessment, History, High Decile Urban Girls, roll 1200+).

One teacher indicated that they were not aware of how they might appeal:

Worst of all, when you want to go back to the one that gave you the thumbs-down, you can't actually go back to anybody and get the information as to why, there is no-one to go to, you can't access anybody. And to me, that is a fundamental flaw, it should be open and transparent, you know, what's going on (HOD Maths, Mid Decile Urban Co-ed, roll 501-750).

One HOD had tried to appeal a Moderator's decision, and been most dissatisfied at the result:

Well, I've had an instance that really worries me. In the first year of NCEA, within my Level 1 external folios - and the student's work concerned - the student was one of my top students, and there were three students who gained Excellence and when I sent them away for verification, the one student came back and they'd knocked it back to a Merit. And the reason given why, why she'd been knocked to a Merit, well as I saw it, it came down to placement of work on the panel to show the development of ideas. And a problem had arisen because the student had lost a piece of work that had been put in an exhibition and had gone astray. So I wrote to [National Moderator] and I ... sent a photograph of the lost piece of work, I explained the situation and explained that because the student had lost a piece of work, it threw out the sequence of the work, which comes down to...in the criteria for Excellence it says that the student has to make purposeful decision-making. Because of this one piece of work, she was knocked down to a Merit. As I said, I wrote to [National Moderator], I sent a photograph to her of the work, and I didn't even get a response, there was not even an acknowledgement that I had sent the letter off. So I had to front up to the student and explain to her the next year the process. I told her that they hadn't even deemed it important enough to...and this kid had worked her guts out, and I was really gutted over the whole thing. She was sort of philosophical about it and I thought she handled it very well...I think I handled it less well (HOD Visual Arts, Mid Decile Urban Co-ed, roll 501-750).

MODERATION AS SUPPORT

From before implementation of the NCEA, PPTA was arguing that the moderation process should be a form of professional development, and that this would necessitate teachers being able to communicate with the moderator. It has always been acknowledged that this would be a more expensive system, probably requiring full-time moderators. A number of teachers in the groups brought up this idea, however, and it clearly needs to be re-visited if the system is to be perceived by teachers as supportive:

But then the reports that come back, instead of being a positive process, it is tending at this stage to be more of a negative process. And instead of supporting and affirming teachers, it is actually making them feel negative and somewhat disillusioned. And this to me is a major problem that needs to be addressed if we want to move forward and we want to take all of New Zealand's teachers and schools with us. We need to really address that issue of moderation and how it's being done (TIC Curriculum/Assessment, History, High Decile Urban Girls, roll 1200+).

The report that you get back is just not supportive, and it's not helpful. It is limited in the information it gives you and the feedback that you get (HOD English, High Decile Urban Girls, roll 1200+).

The invisibility of the moderators and the inability to go back to them for assistance bothers many teachers:

I need to know what is wrong, if I am going to write something appropriate next year, you know, 'What's wrong?' No one could tell me... What my main concern is, is that there seems to be a bit of a void out there. You send it into this sort of little black box, it's spewed out by the black box and it's got a few comments on it, and you can't talk to the black box, the black box won't talk back. And that system does need to change, it's not good. And if this system is going to move on, and if it's going to have some credibility, that needs to change (HOD Maths, Mid Decile Urban Co-ed, roll 501-750).

And I basically think that if the moderator's got any credibility, they've actually got to come to the school, say 'This is how I see it' or 'How did you see it?', you know, that's my feeling, there's no sort of feedback, that doesn't happen (Geography/Social Studies, High Decile Urban Boys, roll 1200+).

The moderation, the faceless moderation, [colleague] alluded to it earlier on, that you don't exactly know where a moderator is coming from. You receive something back from moderation and it comes back good, and it comes back bad, you know, what are their criteria? They do spell it out, but how do you argue with that? How do you put your point of view across? (Science, High Decile Urban Boys, roll 1200+).

There's a need for feed-forward. Well, we do it with our students. We, as teachers and assessors, we need feed-forward (TIC Curriculum/Assessment, History, High Decile Urban Girls, roll 1200+).

I would see it as a support system if you had some sort of interaction, but it's not, it just comes back on a piece of paper ... (Art/Design, Low Decile Urban Co-ed, roll 501-750).

Teachers in the groups who were or had been moderators themselves also expressed some negative views about the system:

I'm a bit upset about what has happened with the Maths moderation, which possibly typifies across the board. Two or three years ago, if I did a moderation that was negative, then the people I was moderating sent it back to me and we had a discussion. Now, if I give something a negative, I never ever hear about it again, and I think that's a major weakness of the system (Maths, Mid Decile Urban Co-ed, roll 501-750).

Well I was actually a moderator, right from the start of the unit standards days, and the very first year of moderation, I was involved in that very first year, and when we had a task to moderate, we would actually talk about what was wrong so that the school knew exactly what was wrong with the work. And of course, it was a sort of professional development issue every time. But of course, it was also incredibly time-consuming. And it was only in that first year that we were encouraged to do that, and after that it was knocked on the head – no contact with 'the client' (Quality Manager, HOD Physics, High Decile Urban Girls, roll 1200+).

I was actually... an advisor and moderator and I did all of the [rural area] schools. And that was a most rewarding process, both for myself and for the school that I went to. They were very remote and found it very difficult. They needed that one on one, and that was the model that was seen as the ideal. I mean it was admitted that would have been an ideal, for them to be chosen on a yearly basis, whatever the needs would be, and particularly in the first five years. And it's a shame that process wasn't able to be implemented, from my perspective, looking back and I just remember how good that was, and how good it could have been and how much more supportive. Because my

main concern was the small remote schools, and they are the ones that suffer the most in this process (TIC Curriculum/Assessment, History, High Decile Urban Girls, roll 1200+).

One moderator actually confessed to having moved outside their moderator role to provide help to a struggling school:

Actually, I had a small area school that approached me, being the moderator, and said 'Look, we don't understand what you've written', so I said 'Well, I can't reply as the moderator, but as a fellow colleague, this is what you should do'. So some might, even though they're not meant to (HOD Science, High Decile Urban Boys, roll 1200+).

Teachers recognised that a system other than using practising teachers would require a higher level of resourcing:

I don't think practically, because the thing to remember is that they are just ordinary teachers on the whole, that really if they're moderating things, then it has to be confessed that they wouldn't be able to handle it. Because you could think about the number of people that maybe would contact them, multiplied by the number of things that they're actually moderating. Even if it's one question, if everybody asked one question... So there needs to be some system in the end, whether there are Ministry-employed moderators, okay, here we are, this is the salary (HOD English/Media, High Decile Urban Boys, roll 1200+).

I attended many conferences and meetings down in Wellington around moderation, and every time we all said the same thing, but the reply was 'If you implement a moderation process which is also a professional development and supportive process, it's going to cost too much'. And so, therefore, this model that we have now in place is not because it seems the best from an educational point of view, but it's because it's best in terms of monetary... Every time that I went to a meeting, what was put forward was that it needed to be visits to the school, whereby the moderator is giving advice, on site (TIC Curriculum/Assessment, History, High Decile Urban Girls, roll 1200+).

There were complaints about the conditions operating for moderators, both from moderators themselves and from their colleagues:

There's another point that really comes up to me if I wear my moderator's hat. I think it's really important that moderators be funded to meet at least once a year so that we do try and keep to some... The original thing was that we were gradually bringing the boundaries in, but as you're saying, they are starting to go out again you know. And the only way that we can come in is if we actually meet and talk and look at things as a group and actually come to a conclusion. It's only from this year, supposedly we're not going to meet again, supposedly we've had our last meeting and then we're going to just fly solo, which is just ridiculous (Maths, Mid Decile Urban Co-ed, roll 501-750).

The worrying thing is, and I know talking to other people who do moderation, it is a tremendous extra effort for an ordinary teacher as well, it just keeps coming through the year, and bits keep coming and you're doing your other job and you've got this moderation to do, and it's sort of almost like it's relying on staff where a number are already overworked and doing other things, to do this extra job and possibly they're not doing it that well. They might be, but you would like a nice system where, you know, there's a little group somewhere, there's a new beast which grows up in the Ministry which is the moderation beast or something and they have their own little tower block and the moderation is done and it's fine and then that takes it away and I suppose you have it sort of I guess audited in some way... (HOD English/Media, High Decile Urban Boys, roll 1200+).

CONCLUSIONS

There is urgent work to be done in regard to the moderation system. If it doesn't have credibility with teachers, it will certainly not have credibility with students or with the general public. The current model of practising teachers doing moderation work in their 'spare' time, and being under strict instructions to not communicate with colleagues whose work they are moderating to help them remedy defects found in their assessment, is simply not working.

The idea of building a moderation service that is properly staffed and which combines the functions of moderation and support needs to be revisited by the government in consultation with the profession, hence the recommendation that such a proposal be referred to the Career Pathways working party established under the Secondary Teachers' Collective Agreement, to work in consultation with NZQA. It is likely that if moderation became a highly regarded task, done either full-time or part-time and properly resourced and with a professional support element to the work, it would be competed for by the best subject specialists in the profession, and the quality issues raised here by teachers would disappear. Until the external moderation system is believed in by teachers, students and the general public, there must be no proposals to make a level of the NCEA entirely internally assessed.

(See Recommendation 5 and 7)

11. EXTERNAL ASSESSMENT

“It’s now impossible to provide a fair system between different years, because the students are at the mercy of the person who writes the exam.”

While no-one in any focus group expressed a wish for the NCEA to become an entirely internally assessed system, there are huge concerns about the quality and reliability of the external assessment currently. These are such that the credibility of the externally assessed part of the qualification is under serious threat. Concerns are around the quality and predictability of the external assessments experienced so far and the comparability of results from year to year, from standard to standard, and from subject to subject.

QUALITY AND PREDICTABILITY OF EXTERNAL ASSESSMENTS

Issues about how the exams were going to identify the different levels of achievement were raised:

Well I've just come from as I said, a Science teachers meeting, looking at the exams and all that, and we had these sort of magic words you know 'describe, explain, discuss'. But we actually went through all the Level 1, the Level 2 and the Level 3 and in all of those papers we found that examiners had actually used those words - presumably to signal an Achieved, Merit, or Excellence question, but there's about a five-word answer [required], that's the only answer you can give there, you can't discuss it! There's nothing to discuss...[Researcher: So you feel that there's not enough opportunity to demonstrate Excellence?] Well, I mean technically, they're going to have to make it an Excellence answer, but goodness knows how... In some cases it was a Merit question and they'd tried to turn it into Excellence, in some cases it should've been an Achieved question that they tried to turn into an Excellence (HOD Science, Mid Decile Urban Co-ed, roll 501-750).

Some teachers expressed concerns about changes in exams which had not been signalled. Two Languages teachers complained that previous patterns about the length of passages had not been followed, and one also gave a specific example of an exam that had strayed into vocabulary which students had not been expected to know:

The listening this year for example, I think at Level 2, there were words included that aren't curriculum words at that level. Now they were glossed, but in a couple of the situations, there was another word that they could have used instead of the word that had been glossed and that would have been a word that the students were supposed to have learnt. And just little things like that, I think it's poorly written. And one of the reading questions this year was a very long passage. Last year there were two passages, and they were of similar length, but this year it seems that they have gone for a short passage and then a long passage at Level 1 and Level 2, which the students found daunting and I hadn't set them up to read a long passage because I hadn't seen a long passage before, but, and that's another point, within this quite lengthy passage, they had glossed seven words. Now I think that's poor writing skills on behalf of the examiner. I think there is a huge amount of vocab that they have to learn at that level, surely the assessor can write something that fits that vocab, and if they don't have that vocab, then choose another topic to write about. That's my point of view, I mean, why do we have to have all these glossed words? It's not assessing what they should've learnt that year (HOD Languages, Mid Decile Urban Co-ed, roll 501-750).

[Teachers should have been told] that the transcript will be, instead of 250 words like it was last year, but it's going to be 600 words, you know, we should've been told that, that the transcript was going to be a lot longer so that we could at least have aimed higher with our kids (HOD Languages, Mid Decile Rural Co-ed, roll <500).

A teacher who was currently marking externals was concerned that a marking schedule they had been given differed from the assessment specifications:

Just on that same note, I'm currently marking externals, and our marking schedule is different to the assessment specifications given to teachers. Someone sitting there said 'This isn't what is on the assessment specifications, or on the achievement standard specifications', and they said 'Oh no, you go by the marking schedule'. I won't say any more than that, but I can say that is actually happening right now with me and that's the sort of thing that's happening. What do I go by? Do I go by the marking schedule or the assessment specification? 'You must go by the marking schedule'. A chief marker just recently before the exam wrote that marking schedule. Teachers have no idea what's on it, and I find that obviously quite...(HOD Technology/Graphics, Mid Decile Rural Co-ed, roll <500).

A Geography teacher was concerned that material had appeared in an external exam that was in their curriculum but not in the achievement standards:

Our urban topic in Year 12, we taught the learning outcomes that came out with the achievement standards, not so much what was in the curriculum document, thinking that they were going to be assessed on what was in the actual achievement standard, you know, we were quite confident about that. And the exam came out last week and had questions on stuff that we had left out, because it was in the curriculum document, so we had had an issue with whether to follow and focus on the questions in the old curriculum document, or the learning outcomes actually in the new achievement standards? So we are now very unsure about what to do next year, whether to teach all of the old curriculum questions, as well as the learning outcomes and make our job even longer, or to just do what we did this year and focus on the achievement standards, because we don't even know what we are going to be examined on, it seems now that we can be examined on either (Geography/Social Studies/Travel, High Decile Urban Girls, roll 1200+).

The absence of a curriculum raised problems too:

With Art History at Level 2, there's not a huge number of schools offering it. There's a problem with the curriculum not being clearly enough defined in a way, you know, there's been stuff turn up in the exams that I just hadn't covered (Art/Art History/Design, High Decile Urban Girls, roll 1200+).

A Chemistry teacher said that material had been in exams which they had not been forewarned about:

In the Level 1 Chemistry this year, the questions are just way out of left field. Some of them, just like the samples, didn't fit the achievement standard. And after the Level 1 and Level 2 papers, we had queues of kids banging on our doors going 'You didn't teach us this!' and no we didn't: 'We know we didn't teach you that' (Chemistry/Science, High Decile Urban Girls, roll 1200+).

Many teachers were concerned that exams had been pitched at too high a level or had presented unnecessary difficulties for students:

In the last year's Drama exam, the first question, they had to apply a theatre genre to a picture, which was very obtuse. It had a couple of pillars in it, and it was just a bare stage. Now, that was the first question and so, if they wrote about the features of a particular genre of theatre, like Shakespearean theatre, but didn't quite apply it to that picture and how it could've been put into the picture, they couldn't achieve that particular section of the paper. There were three other sections in the paper... Now, they could have got Excellences and Merits for the other questions, like most of them did in my mock exams, but they couldn't achieve. No, sorry, they were allowed to have the second question, but they couldn't get higher than an Achieved if they hadn't got that first bit right. So it didn't matter whether they got Merits and Excellences for the rest of the paper, they were only allowed to get an Achieved for the paper, because they'd missed that one thing (HOD Languages, Drama, Mid Decile Provincial Co-ed, roll 1001-1200).

The formula sheet that they get given at Level 2 is not even as much as they get given at Level 3. They get more material given to them in the formula sheet at Level 3 than they do at Level 2 (HOD Maths, Mid Decile Rural Co-ed, roll <500).

They've had Maths today, and I can see their faces like 'this', those kids out there have had a really bad deal at Level 2 this year...(HOD Maths, Mid Decile Rural Co-ed, roll <500).

I had a student go in for Stats, an excellent students in Stats, should've got Excellences across the board in Stats, came out really confident in the Stats, went into Scholarship and just didn't have a clue what to expect, but, a complete surprise to all, totally off the scale. Like second-year university material you know... There was no prescription, nothing, and it was nothing like the examples that had been on the web... There's got to be something in place to account for these externals that are just way off the scale, these random tests that are not at the same level that they should be (HOD Maths, Mid Decile Rural Co-ed, roll <500).

I have the high achievers and they have, after this exam, taken a huge beating to their self esteem and I'm quite concerned about how it's going to affect them for Level 3. We went into the Level 2 externals with a great degree of confidence. I went into it with a great amount of confidence for them and they felt, I think, reasonably confident about it too. And they have lost that confidence after sitting that exam, and it worries me as to how that's going to affect them in terms of sitting Level 3 next year. But every time I talk to kids out there now, they're saying that about every exam just about now... And this is a great concern for getting numbers for classes for next year, and this was a comment that came up from the Head of Languages at one of the private girls' schools in Auckland, she made the comment that after that French exam that she is going to lose students, that they are just going to decide that it's too hard and to do other courses (HOD Languages, Mid Decile Rural Co-ed, roll <500).

Levels 2 and 3 are significantly harder than what we thought would be our exams, like all the practice exams that we got from the Ministry, and there just seems to be...miles higher than last year ... Kids can't see the trend, they're only going on, well for Level 2, it's the first year for us with Level 2, we just downloaded the Level 2 papers from last year and that's all they had, and it was totally different this year, absolutely! (English, Mid Decile Rural Co-ed, roll <500).

At Level 3, we have nothing to base it on, so at the moment there's all these little horrible surprises. English teachers nationally at the moment are complaining bitterly about Level 3 English, the Othello and the unfamiliar texts and things, and I mean it's just... Teachers look bad and they feel stupid if they get it wrong and they haven't taught the right thing or whatever but then it's a toll on the kids. It's good that they're fixing things, but you'd like to think that if you taught Level 1 last year, and you spent all the time learning it, that it's going to be the same next year, but instead all three... Hopefully maybe Level 1 is right now, I don't know that it is, but they'll still be changing Level 3 next year and it's just a massive amount at once (English/ESOL Mid Decile Urban Fringe Co-ed, roll 501-750).

We found that there was a huge jump between Level 1 and Level 2 in the questions that they ask, and the Level 2 questions, the teacher who teaches Schol said that they were harder than the Schol questions, heaps harder than the Level 3 questions. And they were a lot different to the exemplars and the exams that we were given in the middle of the year (Drama/English, High Decile Urban Girls, roll 1200+).

With careful teaching and coaching and dedication, you can actually coach the student to quite good levels of achievement with the internals, you can coach them along, you know and help and assist, and that means that they feel good about that, and they get an Excellence and then along come their externals and my goodness, I've just looked at them this year, and they are hard! And so, these kids might get E, N, N, and N. And how does that look? Does that reflect back on me in terms of me and what I've done? It shouldn't...[Researcher: What level are you talking about when you're talking about the exams being so hard?] Two and three, well, I've just had a look at the Level 3 Chemistry, and it's a hard paper (Science, Mid Decile Rural Co-ed, roll <500).

Standards being applied in marking gave some teachers concern:

The other concern that I have about the externals is, just going on the Maths externals, they seem to have been 'dumbed-down' from one point of view, and also made extremely hard at the other end of the scale. Using the old manner of judgement, if the student was going to get 25-30%, up to about 60%, then they would be getting Achieved in Mathematics. [Researcher: Is that in all levels? Level 3 as well?] Yes I believe so, Level 3, so of those, if they were doing Calculus Level 3 and getting 30%, they would certainly get achieved. To get Merit, they would need to be somewhere between 65 and 85, or even 90, because the Excellence questions are a huge challenge. And in marking, I haven't come across an Excellence this year yet in marking. I've had two students that have been close. Most of them, even those who got all the Merit questions correct, in fact the ones who got all the Merit questions correct haven't gone on, because they've realised it's too bloody hard... I taught

my kids to make sure that they got Achieved, and then have a go at Merit, but I actually said to them 'Do not spend all your time on the Excellence questions' because I could tell from the exemplars already, and that was what actually happened, that you could spend your whole life doing some of those questions, so that's a disadvantage of this system in that you would end up not even attempting some of the relatively easy stuff in the other standards. And that is a problem I think, a double problem, it's too easy, and it's too hard (Maths, Mid Decile Urban Co-ed, roll 501-750).

It definitely kills their motivation... in that the high-ability students now, in the way in which the exams are set out, they only have one or two questions that are geared towards Excellence, and if they don't get that question right, they don't get Excellence. And I've got a number of students who are excellent students, but are not getting those Excellence grades on the externals, because they made an error in one question. And it just seems stupid that the whole subject comes down to one question on an exam. And they're getting to the point now of just going to Merit, because we know that we just slip off on the day that we can't... You, know, the motivation, it's not there and they see the Achieved students getting Achieved so easily in things like unit standards that they think 'Well, why are we bothering so much to try and get Excellence and we just...on the day we don't get it?' (HOD Maths, Mid Decile Rural Co-ed, roll <500).

The English department has little to no confidence in the external, Level 2 particularly, and we know that it was the first year for it last year. We had a student who could not actually formulate a sentence pass transactional writing and when we saw the script, we could not understand how they could pass it. And of course this year it's an internal now, they have changed it from an external for, in our view, money saving, to an internal one. I had a Level 1 student pass who couldn't actually... The sentences quite often didn't have verbs in them, she passed as well in transactional Level 1, external. And to my knowledge, I haven't taught Level 1 this year, we've had students get their scripts back and sometimes we feel that the person marking it has made comments without actually relating the comments to the Achieved, Not Achieved, Merit or Excellence. So they've written comments on the script, and the child sends it back, for example one of our teachers taught a student with bad hand-writing to write on every second line, so, he got his work back with a cross through it, saying, 'You should not be writing on every second line, Not Achieved'. So of course, we sent that back to be told that is actually not what failed it, but that's what the child got back and presumed was the reason...(English, Mid Decile Urban Co-ed, roll 501-750).

Another teacher was concerned that nothing had been written on exams to indicate whether questions had even been marked:

One thing that really bugs me, they don't write... For the writing of passages in Languages, there's actually no... You could look at the writing passage that the student's got and think 'Did they actually mark that?' because there is absolutely no marking on it. And I've done School C marking in the past and we used to have a little coding system for different things, you know. So as a teacher of that subject, when I'm trying to look at this writing to see why it maybe failed, or got a Merit, or an Excellence, there's no feedback to guide me, to guide the students (HOD Languages, Mid Decile Urban Co-ed, roll 501-750).

One teacher was concerned that text language was becoming acceptable in exams, in her case in Information Management:

One of the things that is upsetting me too is the acceptance of txt language in answers in exams...like 'u' for 'you', '4' - 'I'm going 4 a walk', or 'b4' - that's being used in exams and it's being accepted. So this whole txt thing is coming in. And for me, that is not a proper expression of English...maybe because I don't understand half of it anyway! But this is it, it's the whole thing - it's coming in and it's acceptable and one person was talking about it the other day that she was marking and she took it to the moderator and the moderator said 'That's fine'...It's in Information Management, which is very much a language rich subject...(HOD Commerce, Mid Decile Urban Co-ed, roll 501-750).

Two Science teachers were concerned about scientific inaccuracies reflected in their exams or judgement statements:

There are the judgment statements, there are major scientific errors in the judgement statements, and how do you fix those? Major in the sense that 'If you don't get this achieved, you didn't get the

standard', but the criteria for judging is wrong, there are scientific errors in that. When you find that out, how do you...? (Science/Biology/Horticulture, High Decile Urban Boys, roll 1200+).

And some of the questions [in Level 1 and 2 Chemistry] were trying to be tricky, but were just wrong. And if you were a good chemist you would go 'It's rubbish, it's wrong, that's not true!' And so we've sent off a rather stern letter... (Chemistry/Science, High Decile Urban Girls, roll 1200+).

One teacher found the marking schedules for their subject not sufficiently clear about what was required of students to achieve the different levels:

One thing that concerns me is that once you get one paper, an external paper, to teach or to talk to your next year's level, you have to again look at the examiner's marking schedule. And I have, and I have sort of distributed it around the school, because the way the marking schedule was, it was said that 'This schedule is provided so that you can explain to your students as to why they got...' But I don't understand it. I gave it to about five others to look at and they said 'Well I don't know what the hell that means either!' I actually had to put together a template and you had to go through and to get an Achieved you have to get this one and this one, and then to get a Merit, you have to get those same ones, but then you have to get this one, this one, this one and that one. And you try explaining that to anybody! I couldn't explain it to myself until I sat down with somebody else and we said 'I think that's what that means...' (HOD Commerce, Mid Decile Urban Co-ed, roll 501-750).

In contrast, other teachers found their marking schedules easier to follow:

I can counter that with the Level 2 marking guide for this year, which is two and a half pages long, and it goes question one, Achieved, those criteria, Achieved, Merit, Excellence, and I've got about seven things circled on it, and that's all I've got to do when I mark (Deputy Principal, Principal's Nominee, Geography/Computing, Mid Decile Urban Co-ed, roll 501-750).

Well I must admit that the Science marking schedules that have come through from exams are very easy to follow (HOD Science, Mid Decile Urban Co-ed, roll 501-750).

One teacher expressed concern that there was not 'a level playing field' in external exams when some students were working towards all the possible external standards, but others were using the full time for just one or two standards:

The students who want to get those Excellences are making decisions to do two out of the three in the end of year exam in order to make sure that they have got the time to achieve those Excellences, so they have got that flexibility. The only concern that I have with that is that it's not a level playing field in those exams if some students are just attempting one standard in three hours and others are trying to achieve more than that - so the results disguise that a little bit (HOD History, High Decile Urban Girls, roll 1200+).

At the same time, teachers said that there was not enough time allocated for students to perform well across all the standards being examined. A large proportion of these comments came from the High Decile Girls' school:

It's being able to do all [the external standards] in a 3-hour examination. At the moment, Chemistry has that problem, five standards in a two-hour examination is just too much. And so that is something that probably needs to be addressed (Quality Manager, HOD Physics, High Decile Urban Girls, roll 1200+).

You know, the five standards that we have in three hours, not only is that too much in three hours, but in fact there isn't enough in each standard to get a decent appreciation of how much the student knows, especially if you're trying to assess Achieved, Merit and Excellence. To give a student enough Excellence opportunities where a standard is supposed to be 35-45 minutes each, it's just impossible to do that, so perhaps some of the assessments need to drop out... Well, I don't know what the best way to solve it is, but something needs to be done about it (Quality Manager, Chemistry/Science, High Decile Urban Girls, roll 1200+).

But, they give you a time allocation, say about 40 minutes for each of the essays, there's three essays, and then an hour for unfamiliar texts, where they have various things thrown at them that

they haven't seen before. And what has happened in the past, and it's the same at Level 1, is to get Excellence, you have to write quantity as well as quality, both are important. And to answer a question that was quite tricky, with different components in it, you couldn't really do that well, at Excellence level, in 40 minutes: plan it, think it and write it. And our better kids, there are several of them who got Excellence grades in externals last year in Level 1 so that we know that they are capable kids and not just in our opinion, those kids went well over the time and when they arrived at the unfamiliar texts at the end that was meant to take an hour, they only had half an hour, or in some cases even less to try and do that. So what is actually going to happen eventually I can see, if it keeps going the way it is, is that those kids are going to not do the last section and they're going to take their time to do their three essays and get them all to Excellence level. And that's not really right, because it's sort of cutting out a whole range of things. And those kids were really bright kids, and they should be able to get their Excellence right through, but the time that is given is unrealistic for what they expect really. And what is expected for Excellence is far more than would've been expected in School Certificate for your top kids I think, in that timeframe (HOD English, Mid Decile Rural Co-ed, roll <500).

In one case, students had made choices about which standards they would restrict themselves to in the exam, but the choices turned out to be unfortunate because of the level at which the questions were pitched:

Another problem is that they have their 18 credits [in Level 3 Chemistry]. Of the five booklets, three are worth 3 credits each, one is worth 4 and the other worth 5, and they knew they were going to be tight for time, so some of them made what they thought was the 'informed' decision and concentrated their efforts on the standard that was worth 5 credits, because at least if you knew you were tight for time, you'd get the most credits. Unfortunately, it was really, really, really hard, so some of them had abandoned the simple questions. In the lesser valued standards for one that was worth almost twice as much but it was too hard and they couldn't do it, and some of them hadn't fully prepared for the other ones, so some of them had shot themselves in both feet...which was particularly unfortunate (Chemistry/Science, High Decile Urban Girls, roll 1200+).

COMPARABILITY

The lack of comparability of external assessments between a subject's standards within the year and from year to year, and between different subjects, was commented on in 5 of the 9 schools.

Teachers expressed the view that within a subject, the proportion of students achieving at each levels ought to be reasonably consistent between the various external assessments, and that this was not happening:

In the first year of Geography, 1.2 or something, we had 67% of candidates in NZ fail it. There is something dramatically wrong with that if you get the same candidate writing 1.3, where only 30% fail, but in one of them 67% fails, so there was something We need to be able to sit down and go through things like that and be able to work together and with whoever is in charge of the judgement criteria, because obviously the judgement criteria were out of line (Geography/Social Studies, High Decile Urban Boys, roll 1200+).

Also too, when you get your examiner's reports back, whole sections of New Zealand didn't pass in some areas of the exam, like, I think it was in Level 2, there was only a sort of 38% pass rate in short texts. Well, there's something wrong if 38% pass, when it's meant to be 70% or something of people that sit should pass. And of course kids see that and think 'Well...let's not do short stories', but then next year, it could be easy (English, Mid Decile Rural Co-ed, roll <500).

Year to year comparability within a subject was also an expectation that was not always being met and this was of great concern:

Obviously Level 1 is the only one that we can really...because that's the only one that we've had more than one year of so far. In the listening section in Japanese at Level 1 in 2002, there was something like 60% nationwide failed this achievement standard, and this was at the stage that they were looking at a 70-30 type of pass rate. So 60-odd percent failed nationwide. Last year, we had no feedback, though as teachers we were asking why that achievement standard was particularly hard,

no feedback whatsoever from NZQA regarding it, so it was very hard last year to then kind of teach the kids what they needed to do. And then last year it was reversed, something like 80% nationwide passed. But without any feedback from us, you kind of wonder where the shift was, to go from one extreme to the other (HOD Languages, Mid Decile Urban Co-ed, roll 501-750).

The French teacher was saying that this year's French [external assessment] was incredibly hard because last year's was really easy, and you know, next year they might get it right, somewhere in the middle... And then they'll change something quite a lot and it happened in English between the first and second year, a lot, because they didn't get it right the first time, but then what have we got to base what we do on with what happened in the first year? At Level 3, we have nothing to base it on (English/ESOL, Mid Decile Urban Fringe Co-ed, roll 501-750).

Within English in the external exam at Level 1 last year compared to the year before, in 1.2, the formal writing and the literatures there was a variation I think by 10-20% of... And I mean that is an aspect of saying 'Was the standard they [students] were at in the first year too low or whatever...?' It's hard to say, you could probably have numerous factors that could come into it, particularly year groups sociologically and all sorts of things, but you wouldn't think there would be such a wide variation (HOD English/Media Studies, High Decile Urban Boys, roll 1200+).

A wish for some degree of comparability between subjects, at least the 'conventional' subjects, was expressed by one teacher:

That's another thing that was really difficult with NCEA that English teachers talked about a lot, is the different amounts of kids who get Excellences in different subjects, and kids making choices based on how easy the subject is, like, simply overall, it's much harder to get Achieved in Drama than it is in English in some ways, and Art has a much higher percentage of Excellences, but English consistently we get about 6 or 7... but in Art you can get quite a decent chunk at the top (Drama/English, High Decile Urban Girls, roll 1200+).

Other teachers felt that there were differences in the approach in different subjects which affected their difficulty level for students:

Actually it's just struck me what the differences are between the Sciences and Maths achievement standards and the English achievement standards, since I've got a familiarity with both, is that in the Sciences and the Maths they seem to be getting stuck on the pedantics, like for example they may be chasing a particular word to get Merit, or that can change you from getting Achieved to Not Achieved, one word can do that. And I think that's the difference between the two, that's why English is so much better, because these other subjects are getting caught up in pedantics... (HOD Science, High Decile Urban Boys, roll 1200+).

People who were PE experts wrote PE standards and I want an English teacher to have a look at them and make sure that they are rigorous and the way they're written is clear and all that sort of... I think, yes, a kind of conversation with each other (English/Health, High Decile Urban Boys, roll 1200+).

Three teachers in the same school articulated the problem as being that in a standards-based assessment system there was no opportunity for scaling when an exam turned out to be more difficult than intended:

The thing is to me that under the old system, you were never quite sure how hard the exam would be set, but there would be scaling to make up for it either way, whether it be too hard or too easy. Under NCEA, we, as a system, are still not quite sure how to set an exam at the right level, how to pitch an exam to the standard. You know what the standard is, but how do you pitch questions that are likely to get a reasonable number of people, who have done the work, passing? (English, Mid Decile Rural Co-ed, roll <500)

It's now impossible to provide a fair system between different years, because the students are at the mercy of the person who writes the exam. You might one year in Maths get a 70% pass rate, and then in the following year get a 70% fail rate. There is now no way of fixing that, of adjusting it, there is no system. So that is very, very unfair on students who sit an exam in a year when it was particularly tough, which could be a case like in the English, which was very hard this year, and very

easy and similar, or easier last year... (HOD Technology/Graphics, Mid Decile Rural Co-ed, roll <500).

We've got to do something in NCEA to account for those years when the papers are not right, it's just not fair on the kids who have to sit that year... [HOD English: Especially when the entry to other courses depends on their performance in say Level 3.] A lot of prerequisites are Merit in this, Merit in that, and if you don't get it then you don't get in. Well that's not going to happen if the paper's too hard and they're going to have to bring down the borderline, but then that's going to let a flood through that shouldn't be there. Something has got to be in place (HOD Maths, Mid Decile Rural Co-ed, roll <500).

CONCLUSIONS

As the recent controversy over the Scholarship results and criticism about comparability of results at other levels have demonstrated, the public and the profession wish this qualifications system to be able to provide high quality and appropriate external assessments which deliver an acceptable level of comparability of results from year to year, standard to standard and subject to subject. At this point in time, the NCEA is not delivering that. The fact that the previous norm-referenced system did not deliver year to year comparability either is irrelevant, because there was the back-up mechanism of scaling available to ensure results were perceived to be fair, at least at the very high-stakes level of Bursary.

A search for the mechanisms that will restore faith in the external assessment of the NCEA must be pursued with urgency. It would be wrong to suggest that finding these mechanisms will be easy, however. There is a need to access expertise from outside NZQA, perhaps from within New Zealand or perhaps from another country, given that so far NZQA appears not to have found adequate solutions to what are very complex problems to solve within a standards-based model of assessment.

(See Recommendation 1)

12. GENERAL ASSESSMENT ISSUES

“It has the potential to be a much fairer system.”

A number of issues at the level of the design of the qualification system were raised in the focus groups. These included the relative merits of standards-based and norm-referenced assessment systems, of internal versus external assessment and the role of the teacher as assessor. In addition, they raised issues about the number of grade levels used in the NCEA, the relative credit values of achievement standards, and the literacy requirements of some subjects. There was also discussion about the flow-on impact of the qualification system on teaching, learning and assessment in the junior school.

STANDARDS-BASED VERSUS NORM-REFERENCED ASSESSMENT SYSTEMS

A number of the issues under this heading are implicit in teachers' comments elsewhere in this report, in terms of the benefits and negatives of the current system over the previous one. However, some comments by teachers more directly addressed the issue, and are discussed below.

Some teachers argued that a standards-based system was simply fairer to students than the previous one:

I think NCEA has the potential to be a much fairer qualifications system than the previous one. We went through internally assessed School Certificate, and external, and the systems were shocking, they were absolutely shocking, you know, right to their very roots, they were unfair to kids, and unfair to this school. And what we have here still has flaws, but it has the potential to be a much fairer system (HOD English, Languages, Mid Decile Urban Fringe Co-ed, roll 501-750).

Sixth Form Certificate, in particular, was seen as a very unfair assessment system:

One of the biggest positives is that we have got rid of Sixth Form Certificate and I don't think that any of us would want to go back to a system that did not recognise any form of progress that was made, because it was just limited by the grades that they got in School Certificate, and just getting rid of that was just wonderful. And now here you have this Level 2 system which is giving them recognition for the true progress and learning that's taking place (TIC Curriculum/Assessment, History, High Decile Urban Girls, roll 1200+).

There's been a huge improvement on the Sixth Form Certificate in the sense that now people, I think, are being set against a standard that is there in concrete really, as against that whole marking against what students got as their School C marks. That used to have a really big impact; a bigger impact on our school, as a smaller school, because it really didn't seem to allow for improvement. I suppose that when you have smaller sample group, your results are skewed as such. So yes, that's been great (HOD English, Mid Decile Area, roll <500).

One of the things that I like to compare NCEA with and Sixth Form Certificate is that if a student's achieved something, if they pass an internal assessment, they have passed it, and they get the credits. Whereas with the Sixth Form Certificate if you passed this one and failed this one, and passed this test and failed this test, you just also failed and it just stripped you down and you didn't really gain anything from your accomplishing something. So, that's one thing that I definitely do like about NCEA, is that you've got what you've got, those credits are not going to get taken away from you, or that achievement, or that passing is not going to be eroded away (Chemistry/Junior Science, High Decile Urban Girls, roll 1200+).

The system of moderation used for some School Certificate internally assessed subjects had also posed difficulties:

They sat a moderation test in the middle of the year, and any results that they got were always moderated against that national moderation test and when I first came here, we had internally assessed Maths and the teacher that took it at that time was very experienced and he knew what the moderation tests were going to be like, so he made sure that the kids were all prepared, and then modelled his testing before and after the moderation test appropriately, and the kids did well. As soon as you plugged somebody new into that system, it failed, because it didn't matter how well the kids had done after the moderation test, their final percentage was compared to that national moderation test - which was basically Year 9 and 10 work (HOD Science, Principal's Nominee, Mid Decile Area, roll <500).

The fact that there is now just the one qualifications assessment system, rather than three different qualifications, was also seen as a plus:

It's all NCEA, the kids only have to get their heads around one way of assessing and once they grasp that in the first year they move on and they don't have to get their heads round a second one, which is great (HOD History, High Decile Urban Girls, roll 1200+).

Another positive is the sort of building block side to it, and how they can be doing Level 1 when they're Year 12 and working to their own ability, and how it all fits in because it's all the same qualification (Technology/Graphics, High Decile Urban Girls, roll 1200+).

The fact that the areas where students were weak did not stop them gaining credit for their strengths was seen as important:

In terms of languages, there's four skills that are assessed, reading, writing, speaking, listening. Under School Cert and Bursary, we would do the speaking internally, mark it and then send it off and then those speaking marks at the end of the year were then moderated against the external marks. Now, obviously you're talking about a completely different skill and that was very unfair I always thought, for somebody who is maybe a great orator, but maybe can't read or write. So they've got an exceptional mark in their speaking, but then they've looked at their reading and writing and go 'Oh no, this student obviously doesn't understand the language' and then take that mark right down. Whereas now, each of the four skills is marked separately, not being moderated against each other (HOD Languages, Mid Decile Urban Co-ed, roll 501-750).

Under the old School Cert system, the first year I came here, I had a Maths class that was very kinaesthetic, and I had to teach them School Cert Maths, and most of them came out with about 30% in Year 11, whereas what we are looking at with the achievement standards or unit standards, those kids may be really good at two things, they may be really good at geometry and measurement, but they would have failed with 30%. But at least now I can change it and we can give those two standards that they can do and that might be what their employers want. They might want measurement and basic number, they might not give an iota about algebra and for those kids it's better to say to an employer that they can do these things than to say they get 30% in Maths, so they can't be very good at anything (HOD Food & Nutrition, Maths/Science, Mid Decile Area, roll <500).

As an English teacher I really love the opportunity to work to the strengths of kids, so for example at Level 1 Year 11, a lot of our kids are pretty confident speakers and under the last system they might have left the school with no qualifications at all because the only opportunity they had to assess against that was to write about their speech in School Certificate (HOD English/Languages, Mid Decile Urban Fringe Co-ed, roll 501-750).

At the same time, one teacher commented that students did not necessarily focus on their areas of strength in this way, but still had a subject-based pass/fail mentality:

Our students still have a pass/fail mentality in terms of a subject: 'How many credits do I have to get to pass Accounting?' and I say to them 'Which aspect of Accounting are you talking about?' and they just go 'What?' Well I can tell them what they have to do to pass concepts, I can tell them what they have to do to pass partnerships, but they want to know how much they have to pass to pass the subject. Well you don't pass subjects any more, but that's me playing with them and trying to get them thinking, but we haven't helped ourselves by saying 'To get to the next level, you must get 12 credits'. So a kid who comes in to repeat Level 1 Maths has 9 credits from last year. As soon as

they get 3 that they didn't get from the last year, 'I've passed, I don't want to do this any more'. Big issues (Principal's Nominee, Accountancy, Mid Decile Provincial Co-ed, roll 1001-1200).

Standards-based assessment is seen as delivering more useful information about a student's strengths:

I'm a big fan of NCEA and the main reason is that it tells the kids and anybody else who is interested enough to read their Record of Learning, what they can do. Particularly the students who would've ended up with sort of 25-60% in School Cert or Bursary. They know stuff, but who knows what they know, if all they've got is a 30% result? Whereas now, they can say to someone, 'This is what I know, I know how to do number, I know how to do creative writing, this is what I've got'. Instead of saying 'Well, I've got 42%, but I actually don't know which bits I got right and which bits I got wrong' (Principal's Nominee, Accountancy, Mid Decile Provincial Co-ed, roll 1001-1200).

It washes with me, in terms of English, because you're doing such a wide range of skills, from visual, oral, written language. It make sense if I'm employing someone at the TAB, I'm not that bothered that they can make a nice static image of a theme of a poem, but I am bothered that they can give a speech, maybe I want them to have that speaking standard, so yes, it washes with me that those skills are sort of broken down in a more specific way (English/Health, High Decile Urban Boys, roll 1200+).

In our subject, we have a little bit of everything and I was thinking that as a positive, we have numeracy skills, and we have a bit of literacy and comprehension and that sort of thing and we have drawing, a bit of artwork. So, as [colleague] has said, I think that is a real positive about our subject and the way it's been going, they can manage skills, they can do spreadsheets, they can do all those little things, whereas in the past, they just set out a piece of work and got a mark for it, but it didn't really say whether they could put a sentence together, or a column, or whatever, or... It was just what it looked like really. That's one really good thing about NCEA for our subject area (HOD IT, Mid Decile Provincial Co-ed, roll 1001-1200).

Standards-based assessment is also seen as providing more clarity about what was required and about the increasing levels of challenge in a subject:

Especially for the students that would like to do more than achieve, I think it's clearer for them what they need to do. They pick up their mistakes, and I found that kids were getting far better results in terms of what they put on paper, far easier for them to do their essay lately than it ever was in the past, and especially in Level 2 where we came to do the exam for the first time. We hadn't done it before, and I think a lot of them are actually quite well prepared, even though we haven't done it... (Geography/Social Studies, High Decile Urban Boys, roll 1200+).

Because there is Level 1, 2 and 3, you can see a progression of the levels. So, for example at Level 1 for the French, they would be doing a speech and they would be required to do that speech again at Level 2...but then they can see that they are doing it at a higher level, and then Level 3. Whereas when we had the old system, we had School Cert, everybody did their own Sixth Form Certificate [course] so you weren't quite sure how it all toned in, and I think that, I am being a bit cynical about this, but I think that was one of the reasons that last year's externals at Level 2 were a lot easier than they have proven to be this year, because they didn't know where to put them. Because they had to make allowances for whatever was being taught in Sixth Form Certificate. And then you've got Level 3, so you can actually see a progression in the kids. I don't know whether they can see it... (HOD Languages, Drama, Mid Decile Provincial Co-ed, roll 1001-1200).

One teacher said that standards-based assessment reduced the subjectivity that was present in marking under the previous system:

Having worked on external marking panels, there were the subjectivities that were on that panel... I remember working on marking panels, where the range of marks in, say, a 12 mark essay, I've heard people give 5 out of 12 and other people give 11 out of 12, and you could never cure that on a panel. Subjectivity is a huge problem. I think in fact the problem has been ameliorated because where on those panels you were working with marks out of 12 or out of 20, now you're working with only four grades and you're actually arguing around boundaries now and the walls aren't as viscous and people with reason can describe what their position is and get people to move a bit, more easily round NA, A, M and E than 'Is this 5 out of 12 or 11 out of 12?' I think the subjectivity problem will

never be cured but I think there has been an amelioration (HOD Classical Studies, English, High Decile Urban Boys, roll 1200+).

The fact that internal assessment is not moderated against performance on external assessment in the new system was seen as fairer:

The good thing though is, that with all the internal assessments under the old system, it was always scaled against external exam results. Now with the internals, even though they may be the same, if they achieve, they achieve, there's no mucking about with the marks at the end of the year (Principal's Nominee, Accountancy, Mid Decile Provincial Co-ed, roll 1001-1200).

I'd just like to comment on the external thing, because I have only taught under the School Cert system for one year, and I had rather practical subjects and girls that were really good at practicals, but when the exam came, because it wasn't stand alone, they got their exam mark and it got scaled down, which was crazy (HOD Food & Nutrition, Maths/Science, Mid Decile Area, roll <500).

Lower achieving students were seen to benefit from a standards-based system which recognised the areas in which they had some skills/knowledge:

At least in Science, where the kids used to have just an exam and they either passed it or they failed it, so they could go out with nothing, at least now they can go out with some credit and some acknowledgement, even if it's just a small area. It may just be that they can't cope with the exams, but they can get something internally. So even students who are finding it difficult can get some credits (HOD Science, Mid Decile Urban Co-ed, roll 501-750).

I've come from a special needs background, and I mean, my first few years of teaching were School Certificate and I used to worry myself sick over those kids, because I knew that over half the class weren't going to get their... And it is good now to be able, for the lesser kid to achieve some credits, to have some successes, it's great (HOD Biology, Mid Decile Provincial Co-ed, roll 1001-1200).

Students who worked slowly were less disadvantaged in external assessment, because they could limit which standards they attempted and allow themselves more time for the ones they were stronger in:

Or, in an exam, I can tell a student who writes slowly, or works slowly, to just do the first two, leave the last one, and they can then get the credits for those two, whereas if they try all three, they're going to fail the lot. And that was the problem at Sixth Form Certificate or Bursary or whatever - they never had the time. It still takes them three hours, but you can say to them 'Look, just do these ones, you'll get 9 out of the 12, forget the last one.' So, that's a new advantage (Deputy Principal, Principal's Nominee, Geography/Computing, Mid Decile Urban Co-ed, roll 501-750).

The fact that students were being assessed against a standard rather than against each other was seen as fairer:

If they can do it, they get rewarded for that, not in comparison to anyone else, and I do like that kind of assessment. Can this student do it? Not that they're the 8th best at doing it, they can do it, and they get the credits for their ability... In the past in my subject area in Sixth Form, how the system worked and with bell-shaped curved and things, the very capable kids were getting 5s and 6s, and they were better than that. Now, it caters for the abilities of the student, so the student gets what they deserve (PE/Health, Mid Decile Urban Fringe Co-ed, roll 501-750).

What we're looking at is 'Can a student do this thing, and how well can they do it?' Isn't that what we're looking at? 'What can they do, and how well can they do it?' (Assistant Principal, English, Mid Decile Provincial Co-ed, roll 1001-1200).

Assessment under the present system was seen to have more validity:

The exam situation for English teachers put them in a ridiculous position. We had a new curriculum which said we had to do speaking, you know, and you had to do research, you know, what did we do, we gave them an exam on their speech, where they had to write down what their speech was about for God's sake! How absurd was this? Here were kids learning what some other kid had done

for their speech and learning this and writing this out for their assessment. The exam system really was counter productive if we were going to have the new curriculum. We would've had to stay with the old system of 'reading a book and writing about it' in order to stay with the exam system (HOD Classical Studies, English, High Decile Urban Boys, roll 1200+).

There is an internal writing, and that seems more in line with what you would do every day in a language, you are writing using dictionaries (Japanese, High Decile Urban Girls, roll 1200+).

Teachers were conscious that the scaling under Bursary had sometimes given students a false sense of what they had achieved, and that the loss of this might cause some disappointment at Level 3:

I'll tell you, in the old Bursary system, I think a lot of our kids are going to get a shock in English, because you could get a mark in the 40s and get scaled to 50 and look like you've passed, but in fact all those questions will now have discrete achievement standards, they may get Not Achieved in all of them, whereas before they may have got 8 or 9 out of 20 and been scaled to 50 and thought they had passed (HOD Classical Studies, English, High Decile Urban Boys, roll 1200+).

On the other hand, some teachers saw negatives in the design of the new system. One teacher felt that students who did not achieve credits in the new system had nothing to show, whereas under the previous system at least they had some kind of a mark, however low:

One of the things that I find, at the other end of the scale, the Not Achieved, in the old days they may have got 15%, or 20% or whatever, at least that was something. Now, somebody can go through a test, not do a damn thing and get an N and somebody else can go through and just miss on that little bit and not quite do that bit and end up with N. And I don't find any way around that, but I find it rather frustrating for the less able students, because sometimes they try quite hard and they wouldn't have got 0 in the old days, they would've got something. But now they are all in the same category with nothing, N, and I find that...(HOD Physics, Mid Decile Provincial Co-ed, roll 1001-1200).

This was countered by a colleague who said that having a low mark was not really seen as having anything:

In the old days, if you got 13% we could say 'Oh, well, you can feel good that you knew 13%' but it didn't really help students did it? Nobody really thought that was any good. But if you think about it now, it has become clear who the students are who are achieving Excellence across, they are still standing out and I think the students think of it as 'This is just one of the many little things I'm doing, so it's not the end of the world if I got N for that' because they're also doing a lot of other things as well (Assistant Principal, English, Mid Decile Provincial Co-ed, roll 1001-1200).

Another teacher felt that able students wanted to know their place in rankings:

Your better kids prefer to have marks, they want to know where they fit in the scheme of things, they don't want to just know they got an E – a 95% E, a 90% E, an 82% E? Or did they get an Achieved at 43%, or did they get an Achieved at 65%? They want to know where they fit in the big scheme of things, and they know too that their work is probably better than his work or her work, but they both ended up with a Merit and they think 'Well how come? 'How come I got lower than him in that section? How come he got Merit and I got Achieved, but I got more questions right?' (English, Mid Decile Rural Co-ed, roll <500).

One teacher was concerned that there was no longer any attendance requirement. Such a requirement would of course be antithetical to the principles of a standards-based system but there may well be an issue for schools which formerly used such requirements to encourage high attendance by students:

The thing that I find strange is that there does not appear to be an attendance requirement. Now I have got students that have never been here for much of the year; probably one student who I would say had been here about 5% of the time he was supposed to be, and has put in for a compassionate

consideration. Now there's a lot of students who miss time. Why is there not an attendance requirement? (HOD Commerce, Mid Decile Urban Co-ed, roll 501-750).

Some teachers felt that they had lost some flexibility under the new system:

[Under the previous system] you had certain tasks to complete by certain dates. What I liked about the Fifth Form area was that I could teach anything that I wanted to within the first half of the year, as long as I completed the curriculum areas that were being tested in the mid year exam. So [another English teacher] might be doing poetry and I might be doing creative writing and the next time something else, you know. You didn't have to be doing things at the same time (English, Mid Decile Urban Fringe Co-ed, roll 501-750).

I'm afraid I can't think of anything in the Science, Horticulture, Biology area that is working better under the NCEA system than it was in the old system. The examinations are still there, there's less internal assessment in Year 12, there's less opportunities to give students a range of assessments that they could have had in Year 12 to achieve Sixth Form Certificate, it's more restrictive, there's no scope, as I say in the internal assessment area for utilising students' backgrounds and things like that. Year 11 has, how do I say, well, students achieve an NCEA certificate, Level 1, Level 2, without any academic rigour. They think they can go on to Level 3 and they haven't got a hope. I think that it's putting false ideas into the student's mind. I've got Year 12 students who would never make Year 13, two months or so ago saying that 'I've got my Level 2' (Science/Biology/Horticulture, High Decile Urban Boys, roll 1200+).

INTERNAL VERSUS EXTERNAL ASSESSMENT

The presence in every subject of internal assessment delivering credits without reference to external assessment results is a key feature of the change to the NCEA. This is valued by teachers, however they see the external assessment as still having an important place.

Many teachers said that internal assessment suited some students better, and allowed them to achieve success:

Students who find that they can perform well, or the internals suit them best, then they can do that. Well they'll get their credits, as many as they can, and why present at the externals if you don't have to? And other students want to cap off their internals by performing in the externals, so they go for it (HOD Social Sciences, Mid Decile Urban Fringe Co-ed, roll 501-750).

The Maori students, I find, do prefer to be assessed with the practical side of it rather than the traditional side. They find it a lot easier to achieve, I guess (HOD Maori, Mid Decile Provincial Co-ed, roll 1001-1200).

The internals allow those students that aren't necessarily good at doing exams to gain a bit of a step towards the overall process. It also follows if they are going to go on to university, it follows the same process. Course work contributing to the overall achievement at the end of the term... (Science, Low Decile Urban Co-ed, roll 501-750).

I think that the externals suit a very small minority of kids. I think the internals meet the needs of a bigger group (PE/Health, Mid Decile Provincial Co-ed, roll 1001-1200).

I'm finding that students that may have failed an end of year School Certificate exam are able to achieve in their internals, so that they're able to come away with some credits. And the other opportunity that they have with internals is that they get an opportunity for reassessment, so that they... It's not just a one-off examination situation where the whole year is based on a three-hour paper, so I think that it has helped the average to struggling students quite a bit (HOD Languages, Mid Decile Rural Co-ed, roll <500).

English is such a huge subject, it is so big that it is just impossible to assess in a three-hour exam at the end of the year, so I do like the way you've got the internals and the externals and it spreads the load for the kids and the kids can really work on getting Excellences in a range of things, because

they've got the time to do it...because it is spread across the year, you know (English, Mid Decile Rural Co-ed, roll <500).

I teach a Scholarship English class and certainly there has been an energy in that classroom that hasn't been there before. I think one of the reasons is the 'diversification' in the activities. Before there has been a narrow focus with an exam, now they do some internal assessment which they get credits for, so now the boys are working with oral English, doing seminars, working with creative writing. These are excellent new activities that were not possible in the old Bursary system. I think for boys particularly, that's been fantastic. They see that there is a whole other side of the brain, the presentation side of their personalities, and it has enlivened the classroom magnificently, which simply wasn't available in the old Bursary system (HOD Classical Studies, English, High Decile Urban Boys, roll 1200+).

I'm aware that there are students who do have significant exam anxiety, and they have traditionally scored very poorly like on the old School Cert. So I think that the students who have that issue are able to achieve more consistently, not just relying on that paper at the end, which I think results in an ongoing, very positive attitude (HOD Health, Guidance, Mid Decile Rural Co-ed, roll <500).

One teacher also commented that internal assessment rewarded persistence and hard work over a period of time, something that should be valued:

The other thing that I like about it is that it concurs with the values that we are trying to instil in our kids, in that persistence and hard work really do pay off and it rewards battlers, NCEA, if they stick at it and don't give up, and they'll end up getting something useful (HOD English/Languages, Mid Decile Urban Fringe Co-ed, roll 501-750).

The issue of gender differences, which has been raised by some principals of boys' schools, simply barely surfaced in the focus groups. Not surprisingly, the only school where it did was the one boys' school in the sample, however even there opinions differed, and it was not an issue that was picked up and run with by the members of the group. One HOD opened up the topic by saying that, contrary to the predictions of some, they had seen boys responding really well to internal assessment:

But I will say one thing on this, I know that internal assessment is often seen as a female thing isn't it? Something they call the 'feminisation of assessment'. But I disagree. I think our boys have responded fantastically to the opportunity to get a summative assessment throughout the year. Whereas it used to be 'the game on Saturday', which was the end of the year, one game, everything was on one exam, and now, they get chances right through to show their skills and prowess (HOD Classical Studies, High Decile Urban Boys, roll 1200+).

This was countered by another HOD:

Well, then explain the problems we've had with boys simply are not doing the work, boys simply not doing the assessment (HOD Biology, High Decile Urban Boys, roll 1200+).

But the discussion then moved to more general issues about motivating students to work, chasing up students who failed to complete, and so on, and the gender issue was not raised again. In co-educational schools, and the one girls' school, the issue was never raised.

Some teachers talked about the stress of exams for students, and ways that they had been able to ameliorate that under the new system:

Instead of the Science department doing entirely science standards in their course, they have selected some Science and some Bio. So the kids, whilst they have two exams, they have three hours to complete each and they're under no pressure to complete all the things within one three-hour slot. They've got two slots to come into, so it takes some of those exam nerves and stresses off the kids as well (Principal's Nominee, Accountancy, Mid Decile Provincial Co-ed, roll 1001-1200).

They also talked about the disadvantages of exams, such as that a student can be having a bad day, that students tend to cram rather than retain the knowledge, and the unpredictability of what might be in the exam:

How can you judge what a kid knows in three hours in an end of year exam, depending on what happened to them that morning, and on that day and everything else? I think that's a real negative... (English, Mid Decile Provincial Co-ed, roll 1001-1200).

I think if our aim in education was that they were to retain a good percentage of the things that they learnt, then maybe that external exam at the end of the year would be something that would be worthwhile. Because we are saying 'You don't just learn it and forget it, you retain it.' But on the other hand, we know that it can be artificial, because kids do cram at the end of the year, the knowledge is going into their short term memory and by January, February, it's gone again! (French/English, Mid Decile Provincial Co-ed, roll 1001-1200)

Well externals in the old system were unpredictable anyway, you didn't know what was going to turn up, but just in terms of credibility is that, you know what is going to be in the internals, and you can coach, and you can teach and help and assist, and make sure that the skills are there for that 40 minute or 1 hour assessment that they need for that. But you don't know what emphasis the external examiner is going to put, or what questions or what aspects they're going to ask. You know what areas they're going to ask, but you don't know specifically where they're going to go with... I don't think it actually works, because you've got this complete unpredictability for so many credits and this complete predictability for the other half a dozen of them (Science, Mid Decile Rural Co-ed, roll <500).

There is a fear, however, that the government intends to make Level 1 internally assessed, and teachers do not see this as a positive development:

There has been a lot of buzz going around about the intention of making Year 11 internally assessed right the way through, now, has there been any feedback on that? (HOD Commerce, Mid Decile Urban Co-ed, roll 501-750).

The rumours are that Level 1 would become entirely internally assessed, but I think you would have mass resignation and schools would straight up not offer Level 1 (HOD Maths, Mid Decile Provincial Co-ed, roll 1001-1200).

Moderation just takes such a long time, and I have this great fear, from what I've heard, Level 1 might all be going internal. We've heard it in Geography meetings and if that all goes internal, the workload would just be so much (HOD Social Sciences, Mid Decile Rural Co-ed, roll <500).

Some teachers believe that the external assessment results are more highly valued in the community than the internal results:

I think that people think, the community and employers, that externals have got a greater sense of rigour. And people that I have spoken to who employ people have said that they will be looking at externals, because you know that you're getting a consistent standard across the country, or they all think that there will be... (HOD English, Mid Decile Provincial Co-ed, roll 1001-1200).

That's a comment that came up recently from another teacher about the difference between doing internals and the externals and sort of talking about that if the students don't do so well, then don't do externals and just let them do internals. In the future, future employers, and perhaps universities, how seriously are they going to take the internal credits, are they going to look and say 'Sure, they can do that and they could get all these credits on an internal task. What's happening when they're doing externals?' Externals are going to be more important, because they're a general standard across the country, so maybe it's going to get to the point where future employers and universities are just going to ignore internals (HOD Languages, Mid Decile Rural Co-ed, roll <500).

And also you get a lot of hearsay about people's opinions and you hear things, and one thing that I've heard is that the tertiary providers don't look at the internal grades anymore. You don't know if that's hearsay or not, you know. We hear that they discount those grades as not being worthy of recognition (Science, Mid Decile Rural Co-ed, roll <500).

I've had senior kids come up to me and say that the employers don't even look at your internals. And I think that's very unfair if that's what the weighting is going on (English, Mid Decile Rural Co-ed, roll <500).

A few teachers argued that the system needed to be structured in such a way that exams continued to have an important place, and that there was a danger of this being eroded by students focusing on reaching a certain number of credits:

But you've got to have external exams, they've got to be real and you've got to be working towards them. You don't want half of the students saying 'Oh, that's it, I'm finished.' Or 'I might just have a quick look through my books, it's not that meaningful for me, but I'm going to this exam, I'll have a go at it, but it doesn't matter, I'm in Level 2 next year'. A lot of kids focus on that next year, they're in. Until they come to some sort of solution saying 'To get NCEA Level 1, you must pass at least some of the external credits', or they come up with some other little variation to put some value on these external credits, some kids are going to say 'I've finished' (HOD English/Languages, Mid Decile Urban Fringe Co-ed, roll 501-750).

I don't think they [exams] are necessarily more rigorous, I think it's just they're different and that is why I think it's sad if kids are getting enough credits and then opting out of them, because it is that balance, and that healthy balance (Assistant Principal, English, Mid Decile Provincial Co-ed, roll 1001-1200).

THE TEACHER AS ASSESSOR

A negative side of internal assessment, for some teachers, is that it changes their relationship with students from teacher to final assessor, and some are uncomfortable about this. Formative assessment is something they are happy to do, but summative assessment, where they feel they have students' futures in their hands, is less appealing.

One teacher said that they were happy with the role of assessor, but they did not want it to dominate, and that the amount of teaching time being used for assessment risked that being the result:

But I also think that many, many teachers would be very, very loath to have their assessment time becoming so large that it actually prevents them from doing the amount of teaching that they want to, so it's an issue. Okay, we all have accepted the fact that we are assessors as well and I think that most of us want to be, because it's nice to be able to have some sort of power in determining what results your students are going to get. But I don't think any of us would actually want that to become our only job (HOD Physics, Quality Manager, High Decile Urban Girls, roll 1200+).

Another teacher felt that the moderation system did not provide adequate feedback to enable teachers to feel confident about their judgements, and talked about the weight of the decisions they were making:

The other thing is that I feel I'm actually giving them the credits, I'm not just contributing to a mark, so it's quite a major decision that I'm making on their behalf, whether they achieve or not achieve. It's a major decision, it's not like I'm contributing to something, this is 'Yes, I'm giving you three credits'... If there was a good support system in place, I would feel a lot happier about making it (HOD Languages, Mid Decile Urban Co-ed, roll 501-750).

One teacher found that the precision of unit standards made it easier to show students that it was the standard that was guiding the assessment, not the teacher's opinion, but that achievement standards did not provide the same precision:

When the kids can clearly see and understand the criteria [in a unit standard], they will improve the bit they're not so good at because they can't compensate by being naturally good at something else, and I think it makes it easier for me marking it. I also used achievement standards with the same class and using the unit standard and having those criteria takes me out of it, because I can say 'The standard says this, it's not me saying that it's not good enough', whereas with the achievement standard, there is a lot more qualitative... when you talk about crafting and things like that, is this

crafted as much as the other one? But with the unit standards we're not looking at that at all... Because, particularly the alternative students I teach, have had a lot of perhaps negative history with English teachers in the past and they feel that assessments are a personal criticism (English/ESOL, Mid Decile Urban Fringe Co-ed, roll 501-750).

Nevertheless, this teacher was still not comfortable with the role of assessor:

But it's not better for me, because I don't like assessing. In some ways I'd be much happier if they all went home at the end of the year and someone else marked it. It takes a lot of class time, you spend a lot of time assessing rather than teaching and then, you have to separate yourself as a teacher and an assessor and it's just not something I like doing, I don't have any desire to be a marker or anything, I desire to teach and be encouraging and supporting, not fail people (English/ESOL, Mid Decile Urban Fringe Co-ed, roll 501-750).

Neither was a colleague in the same group:

I don't mind formative assessment, because I think that's productive and it's a learning process, but I'd rather be removed from the summative one unless I'm on a marking panel, that's different. But if you're responsible for the summative exercises in the classroom that you teach, it's a bit too close for comfort for me (English, Mid Decile Urban Fringe Co-ed, roll 501-750).

This was mentioned in other groups too:

At times, I really don't like being the assessor as well as the teacher, particularly in terms of students working incredibly hard in terms of accuracy and they've worked really hard and you still have to say that 'Sorry, you still cannot write accurately', so that is probably the part that I hate the most (HOD English, Mid Decile Provincial Co-ed, roll 1001-1200).

Previously, we were teachers in a classroom, and the students would judiciously do their notes, study for the exam and that was certainly a student-teacher relationship. What it seems now is that we are not just teachers, we are assessors, so we take a different form to the students. 'I want an Achieved, I want a Merit, I want an Excellence'. We don't have the same student-teacher relationship that we used to have. And it depends on how many internals there are within a subject. And I suspect that where there are more internals, there is probably more pressure on us as assessors. And purely as a classroom teacher, I don't think that's a goal or a responsibility that a classroom teacher should have, because it takes the relationship away (Science/Biology/Horticulture, High Decile Urban Boys, roll 1200+).

With the Languages, say for example you set the class a speech topic and you say that this will be recorded in a week or so, and they then start coming up to you and saying 'How do you say this?', and you say 'Well, I can't actually do the test for you'. What I'm finding is a kind of crisis for me as a teacher. Everything in me as teacher says 'I want to tell them how to say this', but once I've set the topic it has to be hands off (HOD Japanese, High Decile Urban Boys, roll 1200+).

CRITERIA FOR GRADE LEVELS

Some teachers were concerned that each level of achievement, especially Achieved, covered a very broad spectrum of student achievement, and therefore did not provide adequate information to students about their progress:

Having said that, an Achieved is a very, very broad category in my subject area. I'm not sure, but I'm guessing that it will be much the same in other subjects. [Researcher: In all levels, or just at Level 1?] At Level 1, and also at Level 2 - particularly at Level 1 though of course. And somebody who just scraped through at Level 1, would have, in my estimate, about 30% in School Cert. Now, I understand that they're ideally trying to pass more people, but they could've done that with School Cert, just change the pass rate, and that's effectively what we're doing (HOD Maths, Mid Decile Urban Co-ed, roll 501-750).

I find it difficult as well, giving someone an Achieved that has just scraped in, and then someone who has just missed a Merit and the discrepancies between those two pieces of work is just huge. And I feel quite bad that I can't give them an 'Achieved Plus' or something like that, you know what I mean,

so they've got something that they can see... Well, I would like them, it's hard to get them to do any work that's trying to improve their grade, and if they knew that 'Oh, I was so close to Merit last time, I could get a bit more, I could get there'. Now, they are going 'Oh, I got Achieved, oh yes'. Sometimes in my mark book I'll actually write Merit Plus or something like that, so that I know, they were officially only a Merit, but they were really close to an Excellence, just as a note for my own information, because it helps me and I'm sure it would help them (English, Mid Decile Urban Fringe Co-ed, roll 501-750).

The thing I really don't like about the whole system is just the grading - the Achieved, Merit, Excellence - it's just too broad and it doesn't really push the students to show what they can achieve. Like, if you had been a 65 in the old days, or a 50, you both get an Achieved...I mean, what does one mean against the other these days? (HOD Art, Mid Decile Rural Co-ed, roll <500)

The fact that large numbers of students are reaching Achieved at Level 1 raises concerns that unrealistically low expectations about what is required at Level 2 are being engendered as a result:

I'm concerned about Level 2 Maths, I just think they've watered down Level 1 so much that at Level 2 they can't cope, there is so much to do in that Level 2 year [HOD Technology/Graphics: That jump from Level 1 to 2 is just huge.] Just theorising with some of the Level 2 stuff in terms of Geography, looking at the results from last year, for three of the papers, the externals, I think roughly 50% of people got through in New Zealand. And this kind of begs the question, well why is that? And I guess I don't know the answer. I think that if we look at the achievement level that we allow the students, is there quite a significant gap between an achievement at Level 1 and Level 2? I'm not sure that I know the answer, but just looking at Geography, it just concerned me that last year as a country, we didn't do terribly well. And I guess with NCE Level 1, certainly, we're catering for 70% of the country to pass, to meet the standard. But then we look at that 70% and we have students that are certainly are struggling according to those statistics, at Level 2. Are we giving them realistic expectations of what's to come? It's just an issue...(HOD Humanities, Mid Decile Area, roll <500).

One teacher found that Excellence covered a large range too:

And also, the idea of the Excellence, I find, particularly in Drama performances, Excellence is a huge range. For example, we had a combined performance with [neighbouring school], and one of the girls at [neighbouring school] is outstanding. She performed...she was 20 out of 20 in the old days. But, also one of our students was excellent, and I would have given her 18 out of 20 in the old days - but because she still came within the Excellence range, she could get Excellence. But there was nothing to show for [student] that she was 'More Excellent', and I think that the Excellence range is very wide...(HOD Languages, Drama, Mid Decile Provincial Co-ed, roll 1001-1200).

However, a colleague disagreed:

But no-one has taken her Excellence from her, I have no problem with the fact that, you know, two people have got Excellence and one is a high Excellence and one is a lower Excellence, because we're not in a ranking system anymore, we're in a standards-based system. And I'm still really comfortable about that... (Assistant Principal, English, Mid Decile Provincial Co-ed, roll 1001-1200).

Some teachers thought marking would be easier and students more motivated if there were a greater number of grades to allocate:

It's amazing, like [colleague] said before, students get frustrated because they are just under a Merit, when somebody is just over into the Achieved. Maybe instead of having four grades, you could have... I mean, I don't know how it would work, you'd get used to it... [Researcher: What would be the impact on your marking load, if you had more levels of achievement to judge between?] As long as the criteria were set out clearly, it should actually make it easier I would have thought... (Commerce/Computing, Mid Decile Urban Fringe Co-ed, roll 501-750).

Well I'd quite like to see some sort of system where they had E+, E-, M+ like that so that kids sort of know where they are better, and also when it's A, A- or N+, a 'Not Achieved Plus' which means you were close to achieving (English, Mid Decile Rural Co-ed, roll <500).

I don't like the brutality of the grades Achieved and Not Achieved, I think that we need a 'close to achievement' and a 'well below achievement' grade (HOD Maths/Physics, Mid Decile Area, roll <500).

It can take a long time to give kids accurate feedback, with the Achieved, Merit and Excellence, because their buddy that they're sitting beside has got a Merit as well, or they've got one Merit here and an Achieved here, and they compare their papers and they can't see the difference, because the Achieved was such a high Achieved, and it takes a long time to sit down with the students and show them what they need to do and where they need to go in order to get to the next level. And why they didn't quite make it to that Merit level, or that Excellence level (HOD Biology, Science, Mid Decile Provincial Co-ed, roll 1001-1200).

I used to work, when I taught overseas, with a nine-mark number system, which translated into grades. So I think 8 and 9 failed... 1 and 2 were Excellence, you know what I'm talking about? So you did get the numbers with the grades as well, and that was really good because there was a difference between 5 and 6. 3 and 4 I think were Merits or whatever, and 5, 6, 7 were passes, and that was good because it... to have both systems working in together. I know that sounds strange [that marking was easier] because you've got more grades, but you don't actually have to sort of sit there and think 'Is this Achieved or not, no it's not' (English/ESOL, Mid Decile Urban Fringe Co-ed, roll 501-750).

Some teachers said that they already thought, and in some cases talked, in terms of more than four levels of achievement:

And it's very weird that we are talking about it... I mean, everybody talks about it when they go to every meeting: 'Oh yes, that's a high Achieved, or that's a low Achieved, or that's a low Merit and that's a high Merit'. It makes me wonder that there must be something wrong if we are still talking high Merits and low Merits... (HOD Languages, Drama, Mid Decile Provincial Co-ed, roll 1001-1200).

And if you're working with a student who is an Achieved, but a low Achieved and you keep working with them and they keep going up and you can go 'Oh cool, now you're a solid Achieved... you're now a high Achieved' and they're like 'Oh, is it still an Achieved?' and you can say 'Yes, but it's a high Achieved!' you know. Because there is a lot of movement, they can develop heaps but they can't really see the benefit. And some kids are like 'Me, I'm way off a Merit, so what's the point of me trying any harder?', you do get that (Drama/English, High Decile Urban Girls, roll 1200+).

When I mark work, I tend to go M+, Merit plus, so that the kid knows 'You're nearly at an E' and I might qualify what he needed to do to get that E, so the kids think that 'Oh, I haven't just scraped in from an Achieved' (English, Mid Decile Rural Co-ed, roll <500).

I've always had a little niggle about them [levels of achievement] being such broad groups, I mean whenever I mark my Art or Art History, but mostly Art, you know, I do the whole Merit plus, Merit minus sort of thing, so spread out the group. Essentially I think we rank them in groups. And I do have an issue that a low Achieved is nowhere near the same as a high Achieved, as far as the high Achieved often having so much more work than a lower Achieved... You know, I just naturally want there to be at least two divisions within each of those, so there's at least an A, A+, or M, M+... (Art/Art History/Design, High Decile Urban Girls, roll 1200+).

One school planned to introduce extra levels of achievement in their junior school in 2005:

We've actually brought into our system for our juniors next year, rather than having E, M, A, we've got a CA which is close to achieving and then an N, so the kids know their CA was good because it gives them and their parent an indicator that they're not just a Not Achieved kid (English, Mid Decile Rural Co-ed, roll <500).

Maths teachers in particular were uncomfortable with only four levels of achievement:

I just think in Maths that the whole Achieved, Merit, Excellence thing is just very waffly and inaccurate in terms of kids' ability, and I really think that the only real way in Maths... There's a big difference between 98 and 81 in Maths, and I much prefer the marks and the ability to give a percentage (Music/Maths, Mid Decile Rural Co-ed, roll <500).

Being a mathematician obviously I like numbers, and I really like the old-fashioned percentages and I also like to do it more on a cumulative basis, not like if they fail that if they fail this skill, they're going to fail that assessment. I want to be able to see that overall they got that percent on a test, and so that's a pass, you know. I really think we're being really particular in some areas and some skills. It's just so pedantic now that I don't think it's fair (HOD Maths, Mid Decile Rural Co-ed, roll <500).

On the other hand, other teachers were becoming reconciled to the current grade levels, and believed that more levels of achievement would make marking harder:

Yes, I don't like A, M, E and I think that they are very broad. But, I'm just marking the first Level 3 Chemistry achievement standard, and it's amazing. You go to a paper and it comes out M and you can see it's an M as you go through, it's coming through a lot clearer than it has in all the internally assessed stuff done in schools. I hadn't marked NCEA before, I've previously marked Bursary, so, yes, I'm coming round to it (HOD Maths, Mid Decile Provincial Co-ed, roll 1001-1200).

I personally would not want to have any more than 3 levels. If you started to go to 5, it would become a nightmare marking internal assessments (Principal's Nominee, Accountancy, Mid Decile Provincial Co-ed, roll 1001-1200).

It does make it easier marking, because there are only three groups, so it does take away some of the stress in making decisions, but... (Art/Art History/Design, High Decile Urban Girls, roll 1200+).

The fact that Art teachers are being asked to provide judgements beyond the normal four levels is seen as an inconsistency:

Can I just say one thing there? I had to send away portfolios this year and give an estimate of what I thought was an Excellence and Achieved and a Merit and also within that I had to say whether they were low, middle, or high within that group. This is at Level 1... So I actually had to chop it into 9, and to do that I had to go back to the numerical system, in order to explain what I thought was a low Achieved, a middle Achieved, and a high Achieved... When they gave me back the results, they never gave me a high or low for it, so I had to go to all that extra work... I know why, it's because they would've put all the high Excellences in one corner and then the very low Achieved somewhere else - it's for the markers, I think. If you're doing that, then all of a sudden that Achieved, Merit, Excellence is being downgraded isn't it? Three levels within, so I had to do it into nine (HOD Art, Design, Mid Decile Rural Co-ed, roll <500).

When he [HOD Art] sends his submissions off to NZQA for marking, he's got to send a sample of eight, and he has to state whether he thinks each is high, middle or low within each of the categories... I believe that's to try and give the markers down in Wellington, when they spread all the folios out on the floor... It's an interesting one, because when we got the results back, some of the kids that he had marked middle in the Not Achieved range had been shifted up to Achieved, so then he had all the kids who he thought were high Not Achieved, he shifts them all up, that's fine... (Principal's Nominee, Accountancy, Mid Decile Provincial Co-ed, roll 1001-1200).

RELATIVE CREDIT VALUES

Teachers are concerned at inconsistency in the allocation of credit values to standards, both between unit standards and achievement standards and between achievement standards in different subjects, and called for a nationally consistent approach to be taken on this. (While the issue is also mentioned in Chapter 8 Achievement Standards or Unit Standards? under 'Credit Values', this section focuses on relativity between achievement standards only.)

Teachers worry that students are opting for subjects which are perceived to deliver them credits for less effort:

I don't actually think it's just between NCEA and unit standards, I don't think there's equity between subject areas or between one achievement standard even in one area against another. Well, I've taken Year 12 Accounting this year, who've taken achievement standards. I ended up with six

students left at the end of year, I lost about ten students who said 'I'm not doing this, I can get credits easier in another subject, so I'm going to do that'. I mean, that's all well and good, that's their choice, but one of my top students, she said that we did one internal and it's worth four credits, and she said 'I have worked on this for hours and hours and hours and my one paper in English took me an hour and I got the same credits for it, it just doesn't seem right'. And in their own minds it doesn't seem right (Commerce/Computing, Mid Decile Urban Fringe Co-ed, roll 501-750).

In my subject at Level 2 with the achievement standards, one of the first things kids will ask is 'How long is this going to take, or how much work do I have to put in to get the credits? I've already got the 18 for the year or whatever, and do I need to be doing the work?' For example, there are a lot of credits on offer for doing some sports coaching, but in order to gain those credits, you've got to do the work within the subject, then you've got to give up your own time and do at least eight hours of coaching, and then there's the eight hours of the game time, and being observed by the outside people. And for some of the kids at Level 2 that's just too daunting for them... And on top of that, they've got to do 45 minutes of writing for each hour they do, because they've got this huge bit of collecting evidence in writing, they have to write down their whole lesson plan and the communication techniques they're going to use, and when you go to hand it out to them, already you can see them thinking 'How much...?' You know, there's just a lot of work there and obviously I could come in and do the test on modes of learning and get my 3 credits, or I could go and do my coaching for sixteen hours and do eight hours of writing to get my 3 credits, and a few of them just won't volunteer for doing that coaching, because they see it as too much work for what they're doing to get out of it at the end (PE/Health, Mid Decile Urban Fringe Co-ed, roll 501-750).

A group of HODs in the Low Decile Urban Co-ed compared notes about the number of credits allocated to research projects at Level 3 in their various subjects, and were astonished at the disparities:

A research assignment in Year 13 Geography, most schools handed it out in term 2, and students worked independently, because it's research and we can only support them. If they come and ask us a question, we can't give them any other kind of...So, they had to work independently through term 2, into term 3, and present their work to the class in a seminar format, and evaluate their work and make a justified recommendation about it. It takes a lot of time, and it's worth 4 credits, with presentation included (HOD Humanities).

I think that's ridiculous, because the kids in History have to do one as well, and that's worth 5 credits and they get a second part to that where they can get another 4, so in real terms they're able to get 9 credits for the same level of work if they follow it all through (HOD History).

At Level 3 English, there's a research topic that they present based on their language or their literature study [worth 3 credits]. I haven't taught it, so I can't sort of comment specifically. But I know that involves a great deal of work and a lot of schools don't actually offer it because it's such a big and extensive topic (HOD English).

I must say that I talked to one of our better senior students during the year, and she said 'Oh god miss, I hate doing research!' And I mean she was doing English, History and Geography, so she would have had to do three of them, for varying number of credits! (HOD History)

It's something that we need to look at doing, because Year 13 Music has a research topic as well [worth 8 credits]. We need to find a way to incorporate the subject areas, because so much of Music involves History anyway. If you're researching a historical music topic, you're doing History research, and the same skills as what's required in English. I mean there's no reason why a student can't do a research project, which meets the criteria for English and for Music (HOD Music).

Actually I don't think you would be able to find one. You might fluke it, but they're very specific things that they're looking for, the History one is actually very hard. Whereas at lower levels, probably yes (HOD History).

LITERACY REQUIREMENTS OF STANDARDS

Teachers across a range of subjects perceive that the way the standards have been established or that the exams have been written in some subjects places high demands for literacy on students, and that this is not always relevant to the skills being assessed:

[I want to comment on] the type of language that is being used in the exam, because I think a lot of students know the answers, but they don't know the question. So, I'm asking that maybe that is looked at, I mean, what are we trying to assess? Are we trying to assess their English ability, or are we trying to assess the subject that they are being examined on? (HOD Commerce, Mid Decile Urban Co-ed, roll 501-750)

I think a biggie in the Maths department has been the students' ability to understand the written work. There's a proliferation of words in Mathematics now, as opposed to simple mathematical solve: $2x + 1 = 7$... Oh well, I think it should make Maths more authentic - it is a question about an everyday situation, which is what we want Maths to reflect, but they are stifled by their ability to be literate (HOD Maths, Mid Decile Provincial Co-ed, roll 1001-1200).

The same is happening in Drama. They are expected to write and be aware of, they've got to write their understanding of what they're doing at everything. So therefore kids who perform extremely well, but may not be able... But then they'll turn around and say that they can do it orally, but you still need to know the jargon. It is very much English, coming from an English background, there is very little that has been practically looked through I think, and demanding a high standard of written knowledge for a lot of the assessment I think... Somehow they've got to demonstrate their understanding and as far as moderators are concerned, the performance is not enough to demonstrate that they know how to be a clown, they've got to have the written work to back it up (HOD Languages, Drama, Mid Decile Provincial Co-ed, roll 1001-1200).

The Science at Level 1 has always been more contextual though, at that Level 1, it always has been and that was the whole thrust of the curriculum, to get that contextual aspect to it (HOD Science, Mid Decile Provincial Co-ed, roll 1001-1200).

Our major problem is the language, from Level 1 to Level 3, all of this technological jargon, which unfortunately half of the kids at Level 2 last year didn't know what they meant and then they've come into Level 3 this year and they just haven't got their heads around it (HOD IT, Mid Decile Provincial Co-ed, roll 1001-1200).

I had to hurriedly re-write my programme, and it did require a lot a re-writing to make the [assessment tasks] fit... I've sent them in for moderation and they've come back with long lists of things that have to be added or changed and I think, well, when I give out a brief now, it's four or five pages long, and the kids are going, 'What?' They want the kids to have all the information and it's fine, but the kids don't need all the information because their brains are full after one page and everything else just falls out the side. They just want to know what they have to do. And if they need to know something along the way, the teacher will tell them, but we have to dump them with a whole lot of information (HOD Technology/Graphics, High Decile Area, roll <500).

In Graphics, it's the other way around, my students found it very easy to pass the externals, and very difficult to pass the internals, because there was a lot more writing expected on the internals, and they just wouldn't do it. And on the externals, it was much simpler, in my subject... Level 1 especially (HOD Technology/Graphics, Mid Decile Rural Co-ed, roll <500).

USING ASSESSMENT RESULTS

Teachers in six schools discussed issues around the use of assessment results for monitoring achievement and for 'league tables'.

One teacher felt that pressure to produce high success rates could lead to teachers guiding students to less challenging courses and standards:

There are some standards which are easier to pass and if we wanted, we could get a 100% pass rate in NCEA. We'd give all of our kids the 103 Maths course, we'd get all our kids to do it, they'd all

pass. [Colleague: It wouldn't be doing them a service at all.] But it would look good, wouldn't it? (Principal's Nominee, Accountancy, Mid Decile Provincial Co-ed, roll 1001-1200)

Another teacher felt that pressure to produce high success rates prevented them from broadening the curriculum in the ways they would like to:

And I said to her [an adviser who had suggested the curriculum should be broader], 'We can't do that though, we've got to get credit in order to pass, our school looks good, and the kids get what they want, they want the credits, and we just don't have time to do that if we...', you know, it's a time management thing. It was an interesting idea about teaching, but I don't have time to do that, or I'm too scared to pursue that course, in fear of losing the time (English, Low Decile Urban Co-ed, roll 501-750).

A group of teachers in the Mid Decile Urban Fringe Co-ed had a lengthy discussion about the impact of 'league tables', which they saw as largely meaningless, on the popularity of their school, and about the new system under which Not Achieved results were not reported by NZQA on school profiles or students' Interim Results Notices or Records of Learning:

Basically those league tables mean nothing when you present it now... Because you get 100%, because there is no way of telling between a student that didn't achieve and a student that chose not to sit that particular achievement standard (Health/PE/Food & Nutrition/Outdoor Ed).

Except the modern variation of the league tables that the press use now, is that they measure the number of students in a year against the number of passes...(HOD English/Languages).

But, if you've got student choice, and they're choosing not to, or not achieving, there's a difference there... (Health/PE/Food & Nutrition/Outdoor Ed). And the paper doesn't see it... (HOD English/Languages).

That's right, and I think it reflects badly (Health/PE/Food & Nutrition/Outdoor Ed).

We can withdraw students from that internal kind of thing, which is what you're saying there now, but we can't as staff... We have no input into whether a student applies to do external credit. It's their choice when they enrol, what standards they enrol for. And some would say 'Well that's their right', and it is, I agree, but some of it is very unrealistic (Technology/Food & Nutrition).

Plus it is possible for a certain staff member to influence a student in terms of that, making an entry, and therefore if that is happening, then that is not happening across the board is it? The other issue about reporting results in league tables is that students are achieving lots of other things that aren't recorded, including national certificates. We had students who have achieved the National Certificate of Sport in Level 2...(HOD Social Sciences).

But small communities like this read this sort of thing, and we have kids that bus past our gate, we have kids picked up from outside our gate and bussed elsewhere... (Technology/Food & Nutrition).

But we have the opposite as well. We have kids that come right past the other schools... (HOD Social Sciences).

Yes, league tables encourage a simplistic view and that's the big problem...(HOD English/Languages).

It was suggested that the complexity of the results under the new system made teachers less accountable in a way, because it was harder to see a pattern:

Talking about percentages and all that, I know it's shifted the accountabilities to a certain extent as well, because with the other exams you had to aim to get a reasonable sort of mean, and now it's hidden in the mix of grades, so no-one really knows. And it's the same with the results at the end of the year. With Bursary and School Certificate, if you hadn't reached a certain mean, you had questions to answer, but it's hidden in the mix now. [Researcher: Does nobody ask you now as an HOD, why your range of grades in Science are so at variance with the national ones on different

standards? I mean, are you not expected to report on that to...?] Yes we are, but it's not as hard and fast as it used to be, that's the difference. When you have a one-figure percentage, well it was easy to compare it, but you might be up in this one and down in that one, so it's not so clear cut now (HOD Science, High Decile Urban Boys, roll 1200+).

One school was using Level 1 results to show 'value-added', and discussed this in relation to whether they would want to stop assessing at Level 1 in the future:

With our Level 1, that gives us a good indication of value added... After three years at the end of their Year 11, we can see the value-added there, and it just shows us are we on course, are we doing the right thing, what do we need to change? And I think that if you did it [first level of assessment] a year later, it's one year too late for actually making the modifications after three years of secondary school (HOD Social Sciences, Mid Decile Rural Co-ed, roll <500).

FLOW-ON TO THE JUNIOR SCHOOL

Teachers see both positive and negative impacts on teaching, learning and assessment in the junior school, as a result of qualifications changes at senior level. Some teachers feel that the junior curriculum is being narrowed as they try to focus on skills which students will need to succeed in the NCEA:

Our whole focus [at junior level] is changing and in fact we are moving from some of the enjoyable aspects of English, because we are having to focus so much more on process and crafting (HOD English, Mid Decile Provincial Co-ed, roll 1001-1200).

Others see this increased focus as a positive in terms of ensuring that students succeed:

We quite often talk about Year 11, Year 12, and Year 13 in isolation, and I think that in this school it's in some ways been a real positive and given a stronger focus and perhaps enhanced your programme at Year 9 and 10, because what it means is that if you're serious about trying to give your students the opportunity to achieve, I think most of us have changed the programmes at Year 9 and 10 significantly, just so the students are certainly well-rehearsed when it comes to sitting the external exams and internals at Year 11. And so I think, we have all sat down and looked at our programme at Year 9 and 10 and probably put a hell of a lot of work into adapting, changing and making those programmes mimic what the kids are going to get later so they're going to be well-served for those years. And so you can't just look at Year 11, 12 and 13 in isolation and I think it's often forgotten that if you're serious about trying to enable student learning, then you've got to do it at Year 9 and 10, and that quite often gets forgotten and I know we've done a lot of work on that within the school (HOD Humanities, Mid Decile Area, roll <500).

I think it's quite a bit a bit to train as well, and we train it back to Year 7. I think that with the schedules and the mark sheets and some of them will just go down the Achieved, but I think as teachers, we need to teach to the Excellence column. It has improved the work in the junior school, because they know exactly what they have to go for and yes, I think some of them will just want Achieved, but then some of the other students go straight to the Excellence column and work their way down that and I think that has improved our achievement through it (HOD Food & Nutrition, Maths/Science, Mid Decile Area, roll <500).

We're finding that in PE that we are starting to use that language and bringing it down, so that they are going to be ready for the assessment types that they are going to have at Year 11 (PE/Health, Mid Decile Provincial Co-ed, roll 1001-1200).

The same would apply to Languages, the kinds of assessment that we have, for example for writing with resources, if we want our students to have the best show at that then we certainly have to give them some practice there at the junior levels (French/English, Mid Decile Provincial Co-ed, roll 1001-1200).

The kids are pretty geared up to it before they get there, in Year 9 and 10 they're working on similar strands, you know, at a lower level, but there's a similar style of learning (English, Mid Decile Rural Co-ed, roll <500).

CONCLUSIONS

Most teachers believe that the NCEA has the potential to be a much fairer assessment system than the previous mix of norm-referenced qualifications. This is not only because standards-based assessment focuses on what a student knows and can do, rather than comparing them with their peers, sometimes quite arbitrarily in the case of scaling, but also because what is required to succeed is clearer to everybody in a standards-based system. The substantial proportion of internal assessment under the NCEA also gets a tick from teachers because it more validly assesses the skills and understandings chosen for internal assessment, because the assessor has fuller knowledge of the student's level of achievement, and because it rewards important generic skills like persistence and hard work.

However, although teachers increasingly appear to be seeking internally assessed alternatives to some of the externally assessed standards, any proposal to shift to an entirely internally assessed system at one or more levels would have a very negative reaction from teachers, at least at this point in the development of the qualification. Besides the huge manageability issues that this would raise, there are still concerns about the robustness of the external moderation system (see Chapter 10) and that needs to be resolved before schools even begin to consider increasing the amount of internal assessment. In addition, not all teachers are comfortable with the extent to which they have become assessors for a national qualification, rather than teachers.

Some teachers are not totally reconciled to the current number of levels of achievement, and would like consideration to be given to perhaps adding more levels between Achieved and Merit. This seems to be an issue mostly at Level 1, where the Achieved level was set to allow about 70 percent of students to at least gain a Level 1 Certificate and to experience enough success to motivate them to continue. This has left a very broad range of achievement within the Achieved level. While this group may be a minority of teachers, it is a question which would merit further investigation, hence the recommendation that this matter be reviewed by the Ministry of Education and NZQA, in consultation with the profession.

Clearly more needs to be done to achieve greater consistency across subjects in the number of credits generated by similar amounts of work, if the qualification is to be seen by teachers and students to be fair.

There are also matters raised in this chapter, such as the use of what are much more complex assessment results to monitor student achievement, which could usefully be discussed in the recommended ongoing professional development programme.

(See Recommendations 1, 4 and 7)

13. STUDENT PATHWAYS ISSUES

“Where will it all end?”

The focus groups discussed at length the new pathways opening up for students since the arrival of the NCEA, and an overall impression of this is that the NCEA has brought a whole new level of complexity to the work of secondary schools. New programmes are being introduced. Some subjects are introducing a wider range of options within the subject, to cater for different student needs. They are also modifying their existing courses to target them more effectively towards the needs of their particular students. A range of National Certificates is being offered, including many which are offered by Industry Training Organisations. The status of some subjects is being raised, as they begin to deliver credits towards the same qualification. Universities have in recent years begun to offer enrolment in certain papers to school students. Schools also appear to be making available more opportunities for multi-level study.

All of this presents major challenges to schools. They must try to make their staffing, always a limited resource, stretch to match this greatly increased complexity. Because of the wider range of choices available, subject areas need to make decisions about pre-requisites for entry to the next level, otherwise students will enrol in courses where they cannot hope to succeed. But setting pre-requisites in a standards-based and modularised assessment system raises new issues. Schools need more comprehensive systems for guiding students through this maze of possibilities. There are traps waiting to snare schools in relation to the literacy requirements for the Level 1 Certificate and for university entrance if they do not monitor students' progress carefully, and there are other tertiary entrance issues as well.

On the other hand, these expanding pathways can be very valuable to motivate students.

NEW PROGRAMMES

In some of the schools, whole new programmes were being developed, combining courses into packages:

We do have a brand new course coming in next year at Years 11 and 12, and that's a Gateway course, and we'll send our average kids into that course. We've also got an employment course at Year 11, for kids that do employment skills and do working experience (HOD Social Sciences, Mid Decile Rural Co-ed, roll <500).

NEW OPTIONS WITHIN SUBJECTS

A more common kind of new pathway is change within the current subject areas. This issue is extensively covered in NZCER's three-year Learning Curves study, which has highlighted the extent to which some subjects are developing new options, sometimes as many as three within a subject at a level. This was borne out by this study as well:

And I suppose in a sense, if I really want to be honest, the ability to target specific units to particular students, so we can, like I'm doing right now, sit down and design courses for specific types of students within our school system... [Colleague: And so, you're channelling the kids according to their ability, but you're still allowing them to do Maths up at Level 2?] There are Level 2 courses now, including one that I'm writing at the moment, that have a predominance of Level 1 units in them (HOD Maths, Mid Decile Urban Co-ed, roll 501-750).

We have full Health courses at Level 1, and then we have a skills sort of a course at Levels 2 and 3, which is like parts from the old transition type of course, and they can do achievement standards for

that course as well (Health/PE/Food & Nutrition/Outdoor Ed, Mid Decile Urban Fringe Co-ed, roll 501-750).

The main positive in Food would be, and not that it wasn't there in the past, because there's always been a lot of versatility within the Foods area, I mean traditionally in the Sixth Form, there was three different courses that you could teach, and there was even the childcare one which is not specifically related to Food. We have a choice of three subject matrices that we can choose from. We can choose from Technology, Home Economics, or Health, so that we have a huge number of achievement standards that we can choose from, and then you add Hospitality to that, which has a further range of unit standards that you can choose from. And then plus we have the Home and Life Science unit standards that we can choose from and so we can pretty much make up any course that we like. So yes, the versatility is off the wall really (Food & Nutrition/Home Economics/Health/Hospitality, Mid Decile Rural Co-ed, roll <500).

Under the English, we now have got... three courses running. We've got 'external' which has the achievement standards, we have the unit standards, which is obviously more internal, with a couple of achievement standards thrown in and then we have a lot of Communications Skills English, so we can actually cater for three types of learning, which you couldn't do under School Certificate, you either got one particular class or another one, and they all sat an external exam (English/Transition, Mid Decile Urban Co-ed, roll 501-750).

Next year, we're thinking about running two classes at Year 11, but offering a mixture of unit standards and achievement standards. We might have a base level of unit standards that they can sit and then if we've got people who can get through those standards and are looking for more, some of the brighter kids and the switched on folks, they can carry on using achievement standards as well. That might sort of keep everyone happy (Technology/Graphics, Mid Decile Urban Fringe Co-ed, roll 501-750).

So it [a Level 1 unit standards Science course] has been a good motivation, but at the same time nobody is actually kidding themselves that these kids are in any way capable to go on to a regular Biology, Chemistry, or Physics course. And this is something that I have been getting our school to address, that we need to have now a Science 202 course for something that very much used to be filled up by the Human Biology that is no longer offered (Biology/Science, Mid Decile Provincial Co-ed, roll 1001-1200).

Teachers talked about changing existing courses in order to better meet students' needs by selecting standards from different subjects, or mixing unit and achievement standards to cover aspects that will interest students:

Another positive is that we can tailor courses to best suit what we want to teach. So instead of the Science department doing entirely Science standards in their course, they have selected some Science and some Bio (Principal's Nominee, Accountancy, Mid Decile Provincial Co-ed, roll 1001-1200).

One teacher commented that the leadership of the school was very influential on the extent to which departments were encouraged to develop new options:

I'll say something quite controversial. It depends on whom we have in the driver's seat as to how many pathways are being offered. It depends essentially on who the principal is. I've worked here under four different principals and there is a difference from one type to another. For example we had one principal a couple of years ago who was very keen to see alternative courses at Year 11 and worked hard to provide them, dare I say, to the detriment of the numbers being taught by classroom teachers at Years 12 and 13. And we have had in the past, quite a number of Alternative Maths, Alternative Science, mainly those, Alternative English on one occasion. And the alternative way of running it is putting everyone through the same set of hoops and I don't think there is any right or wrong way to do it, it's just turned out that way... (Mid Decile Area, roll <500).

At the other end of the scale, teachers at the High Decile Urban Boys school talked about the fact that some of their very able students were doing university papers while at school:

In Maths and the senior Sciences, we've got the 100-level papers from Massey as well, for selected students, and students that have entered that have done very well (HOD Science).

And it's expanding. Boys are really keen to do extramural papers outside those that have been offered at no cost. There's a group of core papers to select boys at no cost, but some boys are actually keen to do papers that they will pay for (HOD ICT, Maths).

It's working very well, in fact they want to expand it. This year we just did Physics, next year it's Chemistry is being offered as well, and Statistics (HOD Science).

NATIONAL CERTIFICATES

Subject departments are also beginning to offer a very diverse range of Certificates or parts of Certificates other than the NCEA, many of which are linked to Industry Training Organisations:

And this year, we've offered the National Certificate of Maths, which suits those who have the bulk of Level 1 credit, but are not really capable of moving on to Level 2, but can get up to that level or the National Certificate of Maths, and they have a real incentive to stay in Mathematics and to aim for things which previously they didn't (HOD Maths, Mid Decile Urban Fringe Co-ed, roll 501-750).

I believe that we still have some classes working towards a Certificate in Employment Skills, and next year we're moving into a Certificate in Elementary Construction Skills...(Principal's Nominee, Accountancy, Mid Decile Provincial Co-ed, roll 1001-1200).

There's the National Certificate in Performing Arts, which includes the Drama (HOD Music, High Decile Urban Girls, roll 1200+).

The other thing that we have implemented to hopefully cover that issue, at Year 12 anyway, is that we have introduced the Youth Award scheme, which is almost outside the NCEA. Students can earn credit equivalents, they don't earn credit specifically. That's offered against Maths at Year 12, so students have the one opportunity, but it means that if they do that, they cut themselves off from Level 2 Maths and anything further on... We offer the National Certificate in Computing, and that's it. [Researcher: Not the National Certificate of Maths?] Well, our Maths department really hasn't thought that through, but I'm sure we can look at that, the National Certificate in Maths. I am looking at the National Certificate in Science and we have had a go at the National Certificate in Supported Learning when we have had special needs children here. Again, it depends on the students, it depends on the staffing, it depends on lots of things (Principal's Nominee, HOD Science, Mid Decile Area, roll <500).

In the Electronics, with the Industry Training Award, they actually get a double one there. They get the achievement and unit standards in Electronics, plus the EITO National Industry Training Award at the same time (HOD Science, High Decile Urban Boys, roll 1200+).

Yes well for pathways, that was something that we were really concerned about. We were offering all these unit standards, and there was no direction that they were taking, and that's why we decided to introduce this National Certificate in Computing, because the unit standards have some relevance now, and they have a focus in the direction that if the students want to go to university and do a more intensive Computing paper, that they have at least done the compulsory papers before they go in that direction. And I'm feeling more comfortable now, teaching it for next year, because I know that I'm giving the students a direction and some quality. And I think it's going to work much better...and the students go 'Hey, we've got some focus, we've got a direction', and they're feeling happier too (Computing, Mid Decile Provincial Co-ed, roll 1001-1200).

Being able to offer new courses, like at Level 2 and 3, we offer a two-year Course, the National Diploma in Travel and Tourism. It gives kids a start for what they're looking for in their careers. And using unit standards there, kids find unit standards fairly easy ... and therefore, what we're finding is that the majority of the kids that do the work actually pass, so they feel good about themselves and they're also getting a qualification so you can bring these other courses into the school curriculum (HOD Social Sciences, Mid Decile Rural Co-ed, roll <500).

We've brought it out [Hospitality Standards Institute certificates] and we hope to bring out more regular certificates. I did the National Cookware this year, which is all HSI units and we hope to have another one out next year, a two-year course so that they can come into a Year 12 and 13. And that's been a really good initiative by the HSI to meet the needs of NCEA hospitality, because previously, the National Certificate took two full time years, it was an awful lot anyway (HOD Food & Nutrition, Maths/Science, Mid Decile Area, roll <500).

We have also the scope and accreditations to offer the National Certificate in Equine Studies. We haven't actually studied it for two years because the teacher we had is on maternity leave at the moment. We have also extended accreditation in the Technology area to allow our Technology teacher to do standards in furniture and building and they are being done... There is no specific certificate as such, but the students that have those already have credit towards any that they might do if they go on into business and become an apprentice... They already have some of that work. We also operate with Telford, the rural polytechnic, and while there is no specific standard there, kids actually work towards their Level 1 Certificate in Agriculture, so we actually start the process, but we don't actually always complete the process, because of, as [colleague] said, the constraints, but that's the base we have ... The beauty of that is any that are related to the ITOs, or any that are related to the Certificate in Computing, they can be used twice. They can be used for the NCEA, and for use anywhere else, so that's the beauty about those (Principal's Nominee, HOD Science, Mid Decile Area, roll <500).

For Technology I went to unit standards, I was not happy with the Technology based school ones, so I went to ITOs which is Carpentry, they have been excellent. The kids have thoroughly enjoyed them, they've been easy to use and easy to implement. The Building and Carpentry ITO organisation bent over backward to help me get them set up and it was so easy to set up because they just supplied everything. The furniture trade ones that I'm trying to set up now are a little harder to set up. The furniture trade people obviously don't need people as desperately as the building people do, so they haven't bent over backwards, so I have to go through the paper trail to finally get that set up. I hate paperwork that I find unnecessary, and of course there is always unnecessary paperwork, well that I find unnecessary being from a building trade, you do things out of necessity, you don't fluff around. But, the ITOs are excellent, they suit my teaching methods, they suit the clientele, the students we have here. They suit them in two ways: (a) they can achieve them easily and (b) it prepares them for the outside world. They're country kids mostly and they're hands on. They can't be bothered fluffing around with paperwork, they like to do and make (HOD Technology/Graphics, High Decile Area, roll <500).

We've got a couple that are doing rural skills, and they're also interested in motor mechanics. So the motor mechanics is done as a STAR that we sit them in at the end of the term and that is actually, that time is written into their individual timetable (HOD Science, High Decile Area, roll <500).

RAISING THE STATUS OF SUBJECTS

Subjects which were not assessed as part of the School Certificate or University Bursaries canon were traditionally perceived as of lower status in secondary schools. One of the goals of the NCEA was to give 'parity of esteem' to a wide range of types of learning, rather than to privilege 'academic' learning. The 'parity of esteem' issue is largely covered in Chapter 8, Achievement Standards v. Unit Standards, but some more general comments are also included here where they are relevant to the broadening of pathways for students.

Subjects often mentioned as having an enhanced status under the NCEA included Physical Education, Outdoor Education, Health, Drama, Dance, Media Studies, Graphics, and Technology. One evidence of this change in status is the increasing numbers of more able students taking these subjects:

A large number of subjects that are not traditional are now getting recognition, like Phys Ed at Year 11 used to be an add-on, because there was no School Cert Phys Ed. Now, it's a stand-alone subject. Drama, Dance are all coming into their own now as separate stand-alone subjects. Media Studies, all of these, which were sort of outside the pail if you like...(Deputy Principal, Principal's Nominee, Mid Decile Urban Co-ed, roll 501-750).

I think the NCEA has validated a lot of the non-academic subjects and we have now seen an increased understanding in some areas now... Well Drama is one, where you can now do Level 3 and offer standards assessment for that. I hate to use the words 'non-academic' for Music, because we have some quite academic components, but also some very practical components, so it's sort of a hodgepodge across the board. But I think it has validated students who did traditionally not achieve (Quality Manager, Chemistry/Science, High Decile Urban Girls, roll 1200+).

Now Media Studies has got I suppose some credit in the fact that it is a Level 3 and Scholarship subject. Previously you had it as a stand-alone subject and it tended to be students who were... There may have been the odd student who was really keen and did it, but other times it was students who were leaving. Now certainly looking at the timetable for next year, we're going from one class of Media Studies, at Level 2 we've got two plus a big class at Level 3 of 19, I think it is. And I will credit that to the fact that it now has status within students' eyes (HOD English/Media Studies, High Decile Urban Boys, roll 1200+).

For P.E. and Health and Outdoor Ed, it's given the subjects some equity and credibility that they didn't used to have under School Cert. The kids are now seeing NCEA achievement standards and seeing them with same credibility as say Maths and English credits might be... It's provided our Faculty with equity with other subjects, as in that the credits are counting towards the same thing as everyone else (Health/PE/Food & Nutrition/Outdoor Ed, Mid Decile Urban Fringe Co-ed, roll 501-750).

Under the Transition, which is the core generics that I teach in the other area, the unit standards are totally valuable, we wouldn't have a course running if we didn't have unit standards there, so that's a huge positive. Like, produce a CV, manage your stress, all of those things that employers want you to do, time management, all of those things actually get recognition in a way that can go towards a qualification, the same as somebody who goes on to university and does Maths etc (English/Transition/Communications, Mid Decile Urban Co-ed, roll 501-750).

ESOL is now recognised as part of the Framework and credits in ESOL are recognised... We're also getting all these lovely credits in Outdoor Recreation and Sport and things like that, so there's a much more friendly, individualised programme than the academic group... (English/ESOL, Mid Decile Urban Fringe Co-ed, roll 501-750).

With my Tourism class, it's now bigger than my Geography Department and I sort of hummed and haahed about that, but then the kids that are doing it this year, guess what? They're all aiming for the tourism industry, that's where they're heading for, so that's why they're doing it (HOD Social Sciences, Mid Decile Rural Co-ed, roll <500).

For Technology, going to Level 3 NCEA it's giving us a... Before we never had anything at Level 3, you could never get Scholarships or Bursaries, so it's given that for the subjects, making it a significant subject, rather than a fill-in maybe for some kids (Technology/Graphics, High Decile Urban Girls, roll 1200+).

Our Graphics numbers are large, we have a lot of kids coming into Graphics (Technology/Graphics, High Decile Urban Girls, roll 1200+).

Teachers in two rural schools were very enthusiastic about the opportunities offered to extend the range of subjects available for students and to give them status:

I think that the way we look at those [unit and achievement standards] and the way that we tend to look at the professions and trades that are associated with, maybe we've been looking at those inappropriately. The old adage that academic is worth more, that those people are more intelligent, is an argument, but it is based on some truths that are supposedly proven and accepted because those sorts of people tend to be the ones that control money and power, and so those are the ones that are dictating that achievement standards have more value. I think that, I'm coming from 'Hey, when are we going to challenge that idea?' Who says that a kid who becomes a horticulturalist or a cabinetmaker is not more intelligent than a chemist? Who says that gift is not as special? That does require intelligence, but it's a different type of intelligence that is not typically regarded as intelligence... [Colleague 1: I'm just thinking, it's the boat builders and the designers that are getting paid more than we are. Colleague 2: And same with the plumbers and drainlayers.] Yes well yesterday at a Hospitality moderation meeting, we got shown a list of the salary and wages rates within different groups of hospitality and it was a bit of a bombshell, because some of them are

getting paid really well. [Colleague: Yes that academia is a status thing and I think, as the world turns a little bit at the moment, we're certainly trying to encourage kids to go into more technical, well give the same status to technical opportunities] (Food & Nutrition/Home Economics/Health/Hospitality, Mid Decile Rural Co-ed, roll <500).

I think it's quite amazing that students can leave school with a Certificate having done a programme like Outdoor Ed, or Rural Skills, or Hospitality, not the traditional academic subjects, which in many other countries are all you can do. So, a student can have a schooling certificate composed of a range of subjects that we might just take for granted in the rural system, but it's quite amazing... Well education is not just about academics, it's sort of a broader...tramping in the mountains and building that confidence, or working in the hospitality industry or, you know, it's all part of education really (Geography/Outdoor Ed, High Decile Area, roll <500).

Education is a whole life thing, and I think that if we can set up our students to see that it's a whole life thing and not just a school thing, that they're always going to be moving ahead or changing direction, because you know, careers aren't static any more, you're going to have at least seven major changes in your career, so if we can teach them or get them to understand that everything is ongoing, it's forever, it doesn't matter what it is, as [colleague] was saying, it can be anything, the broader the base sometimes I feel the better, depending on the students of course (HOD Technology/Graphics, High Decile Area, roll <500).

MULTI-LEVEL STUDY

Multi-level study, in the form of an individual student being enrolled in subjects at a variety of different levels for a variety of different qualifications, has been increasing in secondary schools ever since single-subject passes were introduced for School Certificate and later for University Bursaries. This trend would appear to be accelerating with the NCEA, and there are also some schools where Year 10 students are beginning to accumulate credits towards the NCEA.

One teacher commented, however, that students who began Level 1 NCEA in Year 10 were not being entered that year but their credits were being held over until Year 11, and that this was de-motivating for students:

Year 10 students are choosing Level 1 credits. Here, if we get students to do that, they don't actually get their credits credited until the following year. I don't really like that, I think that's a little bit of a disincentive. I think that if a student has actually achieved something in that year, they should get something in that year. And so, I don't know what the problem is, why they can't do that, I don't know why students can't get that...[Researcher: Well you have to pay to enter...]Yes, I guess it's probably not worth entering if they only pick up sort of 6 or 8 credits, I haven't actually... Occasionally I'll have a performance student that will come through Year 10 that's up to Level 1, so we'll just put them straight into the Level 1 concert, and then they can pick up those credits, and one student got Excellence, but he won't get anything until 2005 at the end of the year, and he achieved that six months ago. It's a long time I think (HOD Music, Co-HOD Arts, Mid Decile Urban Fringe Co-ed, roll 501-750).

Under the NCEA, however, there appears to have been an increase in the expectation that teachers will assess students within a given class against standards at more than one level. Some subjects, such as Languages, have often had to be offered as 'composite' classes consisting of students at two or even three levels of the language, simply because of small numbers in the senior school. It is likely that under the NCEA, with the pressure for ever-increasing diversification of subject offerings, this has increased. Furthermore, in some subjects it is possible, because of the nature of the progression of the achievement standards, to teach the same set of understandings and skills but assess students at different levels.

Teachers talked about the pressures of offering 'composite' classes:

Multi-levelling. Because of our small school, we have to do that, we can't have a class for kids who have just got a few standards or whatever it is, we have to have some multi-levelling. We've been told that we should be doing more than that, but it's tiring just thinking about it... "Differentiated learning" - that's the catchword. The pressures on a small school, the staff in small schools are huge, and I don't think the government ever really has a clue actually what it's like in practice in a small school, trying to do everything the right way for our kids. And the other thing is that we've only got 320-odd kids, but we've got a huge range, we've got from the lowest kids to the ones that would be up in the top anywhere, haven't we? And we've had to do the best by all of them, and there are only.. Just, some of us, trying to do everything, and it's really hard (HOD English, History, Mid Decile Rural Co-ed, roll <500).

On the other hand, some subjects are able to assess at a range of standards relatively easily:

The other big advantage is the multi-levelled approach, so you could take a couple of Year 12's into your Level 3 course, and they could be tested against the Level 3 standards, but if they weren't up to the standard, then because of the nature of the Geography unit standard, i.e. it doesn't matter at what level if I've studied a Geographic issue, then they could achieve Level 2 if they were still up to that. So within a Level 3 course, they could pick up their credits for Level 2. Also, it works the same in History...so it's given us more flexibility to cater to students' needs (HOD Social Sciences, Mid Decile Urban Fringe Co-ed, roll 501-750).

There is an advantage too, that when you are teaching and assessing your class, that if a student doesn't reach the standard.. I went back to their records, for example in research at Level 3, and they had not got Level 2 research either, so I reassessed them at that and I've actually done it at other levels and said 'Look at what you have got', at what they come in with, and if they can't reach the Level 2 level, let's go back and look at Level 1... (HOD English, Mid Decile Provincial Co-ed, roll 1001-1200).

I gave everybody at the beginning of the year, a printout of the previous year's results and said to them at the beginning that 'You need to have a look to see where their gaps are.' It's something that I had in the back of my mind that we should actually look to start putting in place, and it is one of my things for next year, so that we are making a conscious effort to make sure that if a student can't reach that level, that we can go back and cut the gaps back (HOD Maths, Mid Decile Provincial Co-ed, roll 1001-1200).

Although, even with Maths, I find that it's flexible, because we may have kids that come through that may have picked up some standards in Level 1, who because of their timetabling may not be able to repeat Level 1, so we can swap them into a Level 2 class and programme them for some Level 1 and some Level 2 things. I was looking at teaching a Year 12 and 13 class next year doing the same thing. Because of the constraints of staffing within the school, that wasn't my choice, but it was the fact that it can be done... The workload is an issue, but within that I could have 12, 13 and a combination of the two, so that's where the flexibility is. With School C and Bursary you had no flexibility whatsoever, total repeats. And for our kids, the reality is that they're not, a number of them are not academic, and so therefore, you know, their confidence was not good, repeating subjects (HOD Maths, High Decile Area, roll <500).

We had a class this year, a Level 3 class, where many of the students hadn't passed many if any of the Level 2 Chemistry standards, so they were taught the Level 3 course, and then enrolled in the Level 2 externals as well. So, some girls from that class sat the Level 3 exam in the morning, and the Level 2 exam in the afternoon, so that they could get those Level 2 credits that, you know, for them it was really important because it gave them the chance to be able to do... And Chemistry is very fortunate in that sense, in that Level 3 is essentially the same content as Level 2, it's just a lot harder, so you would not have to be in the Level 2 class again, but because it is just the same course again at a higher level, you could go and sit the exam (Chemistry/Science, High Decile Urban Girls, roll 1200+).

In some cases, the problems have been solved by offering Year 12 students the Year 13 course even though they have not done the Level 2 standards:

I have the Year 12 and Year 13 at the same time. I could in effect use the achievement standards to do a multilevel course, but that would disadvantage in my view the people who wanted to go on to

university, because there is a specific course that they should have... (HOD Commerce, Mid Decile Urban Co-ed, roll 501-750).

It [the ability to create a mixed Level 2 and 3 course] would depend on the subject. It is very difficult to mix and match to create a course when you have got a cumulative subject. Like, one year we couldn't get a student into Level 2 Geography, so we put her into Level 3 Geography because it fitted, and it didn't matter, because the courses are quite separate, the only thing you lose is the skills, so she was fine... For next year, we've got only three or four who want to do Level 2 Classics, but about ten who want to do Level 3, so they're all going to do Level 3. You don't have to have done Level 2 to be able to do Level 3 (Deputy Principal, Principal's Nominee, Geography/Computing, Mid Decile Urban Co-ed, roll 501-750).

Teachers suggested that the perceived stigma for students of doing a subject at a lower level than one's year level was being reduced because of the number of students now studying at a range of levels:

As far as flexibility goes, it's interesting too to have a look at the students' choices as far as cross-leveilling goes. There is an unavoidable stigma that under the old system if you went into a Fifth Form English class, that meant that you didn't have School C English, whereas now that stigma's been toned down a little bit in that you may be in that class because you don't have 2 out of the 7 standards, or...you know, you may have an ulterior motive to be in that lower level class, and I think it's beginning to make it a little bit easier for the students to sort of drop down a level and fill in the gaps in their qualifications. Especially if the students have made poor choices, they tend to feel a lot more comfortable now in taking small chunks at a lower level (Quality Manager, Chemistry/Science, High Decile Urban Girls, roll 1200+).

There were also students studying at a higher level than their year level:

We also adapt it [NCEA] to the needs of our more able students, for instance we have Year 10 students who are gifted at Maths doing Level 1 standards, but maybe we aren't doing as much as we could do to encourage those more able students to forge ahead (French/English, Mid Decile Provincial Co-ed, roll 1001-1200).

The Year 9 Te Reo Maori students can be accelerated to study at senior level. From Year 9, they go right up to Level 3. They follow the same programme as at Level 3, they go straight to that programme. Last year there was one girl here in Year 9 that topped the whole Bursary class. [Researcher: What happens to them in Year 10 then in terms of Te Reo?] This is where it's sort of come to a dead end, you know. They can't go back down and do Year 10, they are so... We were hoping to get something from some of the universities, a paper from Massey or something for them to do, but then again, they've got their 101 or 121 or 10-something papers, and that's just too easy for our lot (Maori, Low Decile Urban Co-ed, roll 501-750).

STAFFING CHALLENGES

Teachers talked about the staffing challenges posed by the proliferation of courses under the NCEA. Allocating secondary school staffing fairly has always been a huge headache, but the expectations of choice created by the NCEA appear to have made decision-making in this area tougher still. Sometimes there just wasn't a viable-sized class in a subject at a level, and yet schools were still trying to find ways to cater for students' needs:

It's this proliferation in a school of 800, which this school is, and how do you cope and how do you cater for them, and what happens when [colleague] only has seven that want to do Level 2 Accounting? Is it a class? There are some subjects, you have to, because like [colleague] said, they're cumulative, and once a kid has done Level 1, you can't suddenly say a year later 'Sorry, you wasted that year because we can't offer it at Level 2', you have to offer it otherwise you're going to lose those students (Deputy Principal, Principal's Nominee, Geography/Computing, Mid Decile Urban Co-ed, roll 501-750).

In my subject, which doesn't have great numbers, small numbers are a problem, I think there needs to be some allowance for that, because if you can't get the separate classes, you have to go on to

Correspondence, or as they've done this year sit in with mine, because I do all the three levels together, and Levels 12 and 13 do Correspondence while I'm teaching at the front of the classroom and it's a very difficult situation (HOD Japanese, High Decile Urban Boys, roll 1200+).

SETTING PRE-REQUISITES

Another challenge is resolving the issue of what, if any, pre-requisites to set so that students move up the year levels into courses in which they are able to achieve success. This is not easy and there are issues about predicting numbers and scheduling of classes, when students may have achieved a wide range of standards at the previous level:

There are students who come into the Level 2 here who have no writing credits and actually can't do any of the English other than the speaking at Level 2. They haven't achieved anything, because they can't write and I think that is an appalling way... I would much rather see them in 202 doing other things and so I would like to have that criteria. Not all the writing, but at least one, to show that they can write. The other thing that we are playing around with, with 202, is that we are going to run a combined course, so there are requirements in credits for a student going from an alternative programme at Level 1 to Level 2. What we will look at the beginning of the year is what credits they have got, and so their programme will consist of flowing on from what they did in the previous year, so it's not a matter of pass and fail, it's a matter of adding-to... It does take a lot of tighter individual planning for each student, and the numbers in class also has an impact. So you've got to weigh up: what are we putting first? Our students' needs? Class size numbers? School restrictions? You know, because of sheer numbers that we've got to deal with... (Assistant Principal, English, Mid Decile Provincial Co-ed, roll 1001-1200).

One teacher believed that it was contrary to the philosophy of standards-based assessment to set pre-requisites, but appeared to be having doubts about whether, in their subject at least, it was practical not to:

The whole idea of the NCEA which we were told three or four years ago or whenever it was, was the fact, and we were given darts and if you managed to get the dart over the line, under NCEA you weren't allowed to have prerequisites, because that's the whole idea of it, you could achieve. So, you could come in at Level 2 or whatever, and if you could achieve the standard, then... So you couldn't put in prerequisites, it was sort of a real no no, and I think that is what we've had at the back of our minds. I mean, that was the theory behind NCEA, when it came to assessment, anyone can get the dart over the line, and it doesn't matter whether you've learnt French for two months, but if you can achieve the standard at the level that you are doing it, you could achieve it (HOD Languages, Drama, Mid Decile Provincial Co-ed, roll 1001-1200).

Some schools had simply set a raw number of credits from the previous level for entry into the next level:

[Researcher: What would you require for a student to move on to Level 2?] 14 credits I think we require. [Researcher: But could they be any of the Maths unit standards, or do they have to be particular ones?] Any of the Maths unit standards that are provided at [school] which does limit it already, because we are not offering the really low unit standards (Maths, Mid Decile Urban Co-ed, roll 501-750).

Another teacher saw problems with setting particular standards as pre-requisites:

Well, we've thrashed this around over the last few years and the problem that you come up with is that a kid might get 21 out of 24, but that's the one standard that they've missed. You're telling them that they can't go to the next level and they've got all bar 3 credits (Principal's Nominee, Accountancy, Mid Decile Provincial Co-ed, roll 1001-1200).

One school had chosen not to formally set pre-requisites, but there were filtering mechanisms in place nevertheless:

Some subjects do, but we discourage it. The school's philosophy is basically open-entry, which is the philosophy of NCEA (Quality Manager, HOD Physics, High Decile Urban Girls, roll 1200+).

But around that, there is a certain degree of guidance given, in that if you haven't got any of the Level 2 Chemistry credits for instance, why are you looking at enrolling in Level 3 Chemistry this year? There are the guidelines around that, but no prerequisites (Chemistry/Science, High Decile Urban Girls, roll 1200+).

We have also this year received a list of the students who have put their names down for your subject at the level for next year and we're able to check through that list to see if there are any students who we feel are misplaced, so that's another check and balance and then feedback and we all looked at the lists and then gave that back to the academic deans...(HOD History, High Decile Urban Girls, roll 1200+).

GUIDANCE OF STUDENTS

A system as complex as the NCEA offers a huge range of choices to students, but it also opens up great possibilities for students to make poor choices and places increased responsibilities on all teachers to contribute to the guidance of students:

Well I think the old-fashioned idea of what we have known, I'm thinking back to my school days, the old fashioned idea of careers advisor has changed drastically. That's one change from the original system, in that perhaps we have all become careers advisors and heaven forbid I think it's actually quite easy for us to be that, because the majority of our students go to tertiary institutions and we have some idea of what they need, we can summarise it in an options book. But in a school where there is a much broader range of places where students are thinking of going, it would be an absolute minefield you know. 'What do you need for this apprenticeship, versus this tech, versus this university, versus...' you know? (Quality Manager, Chemistry/Science, High Decile Urban Girls, roll 1200+).

Year 10 is interviewed at this time of year. [Colleague] talks to them all, because she does the... and our acting guidance counsellor, they talk and she talks careers and pathways and things with them and it's explained to them exactly what they are going to do. We ask them what subjects they would like to do and we give them an option booklet. In the booklet it says that there are both unit and achievement standards available, each of us as a subject teacher is able to have an input into that. This year's Year 10 we have 27 of them, and we had 13 the year before, so it's not a huge crowd of people to organise, and all of us are usually available to talk to these kids. 'Are you going to do this next year, are you going to do Rural Skills, are you going to do Geography?', just generally talking to them, and you do it in form time too, if they want to come and talk to you about any of the subjects they will...I would say it's sort of informal... (HOD Science, High Decile Area, roll <500).

I actually think all sorts of people do the guidance. I don't think we should underestimate the role of the classroom teacher, because usually you're the first port of call for students. HODs are also really important, and deans. And as a dean, I will point students in the direction of their subject teacher, or the head of department of the subject they are studying. And they can provide very important information about what the subject has to offer them for that particular year. And also our course booklet is just one book. We used to have them at different levels, but now all the information is contained in one booklet, so kids and parents can look ahead and see where the courses can go, what the prerequisites are in Year 13, for subjects that they might want to be doing there, so that from Year 11, they can look ahead right through (Mid Decile Provincial Co-ed, roll 1001-1200).

Some teachers worried that students might be making the wrong choices:

We have a real change in what students are doing now. They are no longer sticking with the traditional core subjects, even right up to Year 13 level, so there are now a great variety of subjects for students to take. Whether that's a positive or a negative I'm not sure. It's positive from the kids' point of view, but whether when they reach the end... Are we going to produce too many students that have Drama and Dance and Phys Ed qualifications? And what are we going to do with them? (Deputy Principal, Principal's Nominee, Geography/Computing, Mid Decile Urban Co-ed, roll 501-750).

With the diversity of subjects that we are talking about, are there some clear career pathways there? Because I think there are a lot of courses leading off on a tangent that doesn't actually lead them anywhere. I mean if you look at the number of boys doing PE studies, how useful is that at the end of their schooling for their career pathway? They've seen it as a soft option many of them (HOD Science, High Decile Urban Boys, roll 1200+).

The students that I'm concerned about are the ones who have no idea where they're going, particularly kids who are going to polytechs. Everyone is fairly clear of what they need to get into university, but polytechs are a completely different kettle of fish, because every department sets their own criteria. And it might say you need 8 English credits for this, another one will say you only need 6, and then they're getting even more specific, so they might not recognise the wide reading one for example, certain Hospitality courses and things, but our kids don't know this, and it's really frustrating, and trying to talk to teenagers 'Think of the future', it's really...(English/ESOL, Mid Decile Urban Fringe Co-ed, roll 501-750).

We have a real problem too in Maths, where some of my students have told me that they can get their credits much easier in other areas and use a couple of those, and I've had to point out that 'These are valuable credits'. And so what we're going to find is that in the more traditional areas and the ones where academic effort is required and in the Arts and that too, is competition from other areas where it is perceived there are easier paths to the credits. I think that could have long-term implications for the New Zealand population – well even in the next two to three years (HOD Maths, Mid Decile Urban Co-ed, roll 501-750).

Students who are prepared to ask for help and assistance are probably getting much better guidance than the ones who don't. I think that a lot of our students are making good sensible choices, but I think there are a number who aren't, in regard for instance to the externals... Because achievement standards break down the subject, there are more opportunities to make choices, and they do sometimes make really silly choices in English, that they're not in fact going to do that, because they see it as too difficult and yet... In an exam for example they make really silly choices about the amount of time that they are going to put in. And I think that there is this feeling that 'Oh, this is optional, so I don't have to do it...I'm finding it too difficult...'. They're not thinking it through properly as to which pieces they should concentrate on and so on. So I do think that there is more opportunity for less sensible students to make mistakes under this system than under the whole system, where they had to try and get the whole of the English exam to get a certain mark (HOD English, High Decile Urban Girls, roll 1200+).

Schools and teachers have set up a variety of systems to guide students:

We've started a system here at this school this year, a mentoring system, where all of the [Year 13] students have a mentor in a staff member, which I think has been a really good idea. And that staff member keeps a really close eye on three or four students to make sure those pillars are being met and that their aims and their courses are actually welded together, so it's like a personalised guidance for those students, because it is a minefield really (HOD Music, Co-HOD Arts, Mid Decile Urban Fringe Co-ed, roll 501-750).

It takes a lot more time now with NCEA, because of the greater choice that NCEA offers, to give decent advice and guidance to students and we, well the qualifications managers, share a lot of the tasks with the deans, and the amount of time they put in with us has increased this year, and the government for this year needs to recognise that I feel... The iterations that HODs and Deans have to go through in order to ensure that students are well placed are much greater now, because of the increased information and range of choices open to the students (Quality Manager, Chemistry/Science, High Decile Urban Girls, roll 1200+).

At the beginning of the year the students come in and we look at the Year 12s and 13s in particular, we look at what they achieved last year, except the NZQA website failed that day and they couldn't get their results... But we look at what the students have already achieved and what they can move on to and the idea is to try and make sure that they were looking at things that will take them towards the kind of career that they want. So, where they're not sure about things, I will talk, and the other people will talk about where are their interests, where are their strengths and that sort of... Making sure that they have their literacy and their numeracy, of course if they're going to university, you've got to make sure that they've got their Level 2 in that as well, and I've got all sorts of tracking sheets that I give out to the students at the beginning of the year where they can keep a track of what they're doing at the beginning of the year and it specifies how many credits they need for each level

and how many they need for literacy and numeracy and so on (Principal's Nominee, HOD Science, Low Decile Urban Co-ed, roll 501-750).

We've got a senior dean who works very closely with the principal, and what happens there is that twice a year the progress of all the senior students is tracked and they have an interview with the senior dean and they establish what their goals are, where they're going, are they achieving, what are the courses that they need. And that is guiding and we've had a guidance counsellor for careers for four hours every morning and that will continue next year (HOD Social Sciences, Mid Decile Rural Co-ed, roll <500).

This year at Level 3, after the term 3 exams, I actually sat down with my Year 13s, thinking about what their aim was for the end of year externals, because most of them did not try at least one of the standards in the externals. So I created a 'thought-provoking questionnaire for Year 13 students about their approach to NCEA Level 3 History' and sort of got them to start thinking about 'Well, how many credits do I need to have for this external? Where am I placed now at this stage of the year in terms of all my credits across all my subjects? What should I be thinking? I'm not going to do that...' and you know, just making sure that they are cementing their choices or thinking about their choices really, but they're consciously thinking about them, not just haphazardly doing it. It was something that I hadn't done in the past, but felt that it was really important to do (HOD History, High Decile Urban Girls, roll 1200+).

LITERACY REQUIREMENTS

Only one teacher commented on the literacy and numeracy requirements for Level 1, and the comment was very supportive:

The other thing I like, is that's important for us at Level 1, the insistence on the numeracy and literacy, minimum of 8 credits. I teach neither Maths nor English, but it seems to me that for many students, those 8 credits may be all they get in Maths, and if they can get something like their basic numeracy by doing measurement and numbers, they can add, subtract, multiply and divide, and they can measure things and there's their 8 credits, then that tells the employer that they have at least that basic stuff, so if in a shop, they can give change, or if they're on a building site that they can read a tape measure properly. And the same with literacy, they can give a speech, they can interpret in English or whatever, so I think it allows us to focus, to give the kids an opportunity to get those minimum credits, without having to sit exams (Mid Decile Area, roll <500).

On the other hand, there was some negative comment in one school where two ESOL teachers participated, about problems with the literacy requirements in relation to university entrance. They both felt that the requirements were impacting negatively on international students in particular:

What they're being assessed on is, they must have 4 credits in reading and 4 credits in writing. Most students can cope with the reading without any problems. Because they have to produce writing at publication standard, that is what's causing the problem, and there is no allowance in there for any grammatical error basically, and no recognition, from my perspective, that these students are actually literate to a fairly high degree in their first tongue, or their mother tongue, and we're asking them to become literate at a high level in a second language. So we're actually ignoring their prior learning, which goes against all teaching and learning practice in my opinion (ESOL, Mid Decile Urban Co-ed, roll 501-750).

I don't see that transactional writing to publication standard is really the best thing that I should spend with my Level 2 kids, crafting away for ages and ages. I don't feel that is really taking them towards where they need to go towards university. I'd be better giving them a wide genre of information and material... I don't think that crafting one piece of writing to that level is actually the answer, because if I have errors, there's spell check, there's a grammar check and we are right down to the accuracy. I agree there needs to be a writing standard, I definitely think there should be, but whether I'm going to spend that long time on that piece of writing. Would I be better to get them to write a report, write a creative comment on a newspaper article, write something on a research side?(ESOL/English, Mid Decile Urban Co-ed, roll 501-750)

One of these teachers also felt that there was a double standard applying, whereby students who entered university from foundation courses had a lesser standard of literacy applied to them than students entering from schools:

The implication there is that there doesn't seem to be a level playing for providers. There doesn't seem to be a level playing field for students going into university. Just for example, many of our international students are saying that to get the literacy requirement at Level 2 is actually too difficult, it's easier to go to a foundation study at university and get an IELTS and get into university that way than to... And also I understand that some private providers... have made their own agreement with the vice-chancellors' committee. Now, what international students are doing is that they are opting out of high school, and we talked about pathways before, and there is no clear pathway for them, they are opting out of high school, because they perceive that the Level 2 literacy requirements out of high school are more difficult than gaining an IELTS out of a foundation study (ESOL, Mid Decile Urban Co-ed, roll 501-750).

The same teacher commented that not only did this impact on international students, but also on Pasifika students who do not have the option of going to foundation or private courses:

Now, I haven't talked about the Pasifika kids, who obviously don't have the option of going to a foundation course and there seems to be a feeling that you, and I might be wrong here, but my understanding is that you can enter university with Te Reo as a Level 2 literacy requirement. So there is a feeling that there is a difference in standards being accepted by the vice-chancellors' committee as to what is being accepted for those literacy requirements... (ESOL, Mid Decile Urban Co-ed, roll 501-750).

OTHER TERTIARY ENTRANCE ISSUES

There was a feeling expressed by some teachers that the universities were continuing to place limitations on how schools designed courses, through their entrance requirements:

But the escape route is the domain, the use of the domain, so I mean, your students can achieve so many credits in the one domain, which gets them one of their, what we call around here, their pillars. We've set up a system of pillars as a requirement for university entrance. [Colleague: But that domain issue can take flexibility out of your delivery, and I mean if you ask students, the course that is best suited to them.] (HOD Social Sciences, Mid Decile Urban Fringe Co-ed, roll 501-750).

Ensuring students understand what they may need to do to gain tertiary entrance was a challenge for teachers, especially if as a general rule the school had tried to put the focus on credits from standards, to give 'parity of esteem' to unit standards:

We've got students doing Level 3 Computing which is unit standards and Computing is one of the fields that is a university entrance course. Photography is another one I think because it comes under the Visual Arts and that is assessed mostly by unit standards, so yes, it does become an issue if they are competing for getting into a course that has limited entry, which is what I'm trying to say to my Science students, you know, you need the Merits and Excellences, you need to be aiming for those if you can get them, don't settle for mediocrity. I think that students who are mostly doing the achievement standards, a lot of achievement standard students are just aiming for Achieved and not worrying about Merit and Excellence, so it's a problem because they haven't understood that they might later be competing for a position and I'm trying to get that through to them (Deputy Principal (Curriculum), Visual Arts, Low Decile Urban Co-ed, roll 501-750).

Some teachers worried that the tertiary sector was not yet familiar enough with the NCEA to be able to sort students for entry to courses:

One thing that I have been prompted to think about was the university requirements, for course entry and things, and how they... They don't seem to know what to do with the Achieved, Merits and Excellences and how they're going to look at those kids... Are they basically just looking at number of credits studied, and numbers achieved? (HOD Maths, Mid Decile Provincial Co-ed, roll 1001-1200).

The problem is I think too much variety isn't it? I mean we've had a [university] meeting, and they were saying what their criteria were for taking classes for next year, and even those guys didn't have a clue...I mean they were sitting there saying 'Only 14 Maths credits at Level 2 to take Linear Algebra or first year Calc or whatever'. I mean, it's not going to happen, because a student getting 14 credits is not going to take those courses if they get to university, so it's probably not a problem. But I can guarantee that there are a lot of students in this school with 14 credits at Level 2 or Level 3 even, who if they go to [university] and take Maths, no way in the world will they pass. You can get achievement standards, and then you can get unit standards and then you get something else here you know, and where do you draw the line as to what they know previously? If you got an A Bursary in Maths or Calculus or Stats, I mean you can be fairly confident that they have a certain level of competence. You look at Cambridge things as well, everyone is getting a lot of credits in this and that, but what does it really mean? You have unit standards... And I'm thinking that if a university organisation cannot figure out, they are now having to come to teachers and asking what should our criteria be for specific courses next year (Maths, High Decile Urban Boys, roll 1200+).

I would say no [the NCEA is not working for tertiary providers] given all the problems that tertiary providers are having in setting prerequisites for their 1st year courses. They're changing their tune all the time. Not all the universities are... maybe because they probably can't agree with what's going on at the secondary level, they can't make consistent prerequisites for their papers? (HOD ICT/Maths, High Decile Urban Boys, roll 1200+)

Others were confident the tertiary sector would cope:

Well within our school, we know who are top academic students are don't we? We had our dux, and nobody disputed that. I think that the universities will actually find that it will be made to work easily, I don't think that it is a major problem... (Assistant Principal, English, Mid Decile Provincial Co-ed, roll 1001-1200).

Well universities have used points for years. When I went to university, to get a degree I had to get 108 points. Points = credits. We were marked differently, but they still used the points and the credits thing. So I don't think they'll find it an issue (Principal's Nominee, Accountancy, Mid Decile Provincial Co-ed, roll 1001-1200).

CONCLUSIONS

Schools are expending an enormous amount of time and energy to ensure that they provide the maximum amount of choice to students so that learning programmes are available which as closely as possible meet their individual learning needs. This is likely to be contributing very positively to student motivation, hence the reference to Recommendation 2 about research into student motivation.

On the other hand, providing all this choice is extremely demanding on staff, particularly heads of departments who have already been very stretched by other aspects of the implementation process. There has been no recognition of this in terms of extra time for curriculum leaders in middle or senior management. It is not surprising that these positions in schools have become increasingly hard to fill in recent years.

The vastly increased complexity of choices and curriculum breadth which the NCEA has produced has also not been recognised by government in the increases in staffing which have been provided in recent years. Extra staffing has been fully committed to meeting the guaranteed minimum contact time negotiated under the Secondary Teachers' Collective Agreements in 2002 and 2004, and has not been available to provide extra flexibility in staffing the curriculum. This report makes a clear case for improved staffing to enable schools to make full use of the flexibilities available under the NCEA, and for this reason it is recommended that the Teacher Workload working party established under the Secondary Teachers' Collective Agreement give consideration to the issues. There are also costs to schools in broadening the choices for students, in terms of

providing specialised equipment, hiring support staff and so on, hence the recommendation for a review of Operations Grant funding.

In addition, little support has been provided to schools to assist them to develop policies and processes about things like course pre-requisites or systems for guidance of students. Models of a range of systems which schools have found to work need to be disseminated so that every school does not have to re-invent the wheel, and this could be part of the ongoing professional development recommended by this report.

(See Recommendations 2, 4, 5 and 6)

14. GENERATORS OF WORKLOAD

“It is way too hard and stressful.”

The vast majority of people in the teaching profession and in the government agencies responsible for implementing the qualifications changes would agree that there have been consequent increases in teacher workload. Whether these are permanent or short-term, the exact extent of the increases, and what the specific generators of that extra workload are, is less clear. Teachers in the focus groups frequently talked about their increased workload, and this helps to create a clearer picture of the multiple factors contributing to it.

There are references to the workload generators of particular aspects of the system in a range of chapters of this report, and comments about workload were made in every focus group. This particular chapter draws on comments that were specifically about workload issues and that are not quoted elsewhere.

A MULTIPLICITY OF FACTORS

Teachers talked about the huge range of tasks required of them as they implemented the new qualifications system. These included developing new or revised courses, building resources, developing assessment tasks and checking them with others, redeveloping them when the standards are changed, teaching new teachers how to assess against the standards, organising material for moderation, entering results, checking results lists for accuracy, and much much more. One Head of Department summed it all up vividly:

Time has a lot of aspects and this one's on the teacher, in terms of developing courses, developing resources, developing particular assessments. Now I know that a lot of different subjects have different ways of coping with this, and they share a bit, but there is still a tremendous time factor involved in hunting down the appropriate way, finding one that fits, finding one that is actually of the appropriate standard, and you don't know, of course, until you've actually gone through and checked that standard against what you think is right, then of course you send it away to see what other people think is right, and there's yet more time to verify it, but then it's still not appropriate so you're going to have to re-start it again... [then] we get through and we finish one little bit, and we think 'Wow, we've got through this level! Right, that's all right', but then there's the standards changes. 'Here's the printout for this year's changes in standards', so we're going back to writing again. So that's what I'm saying, when will it end? I had thought that we had sort of got through Level 1 and got that behind us, but now we've got a new round of changes there, and Level 2 changes already I'm sure, and then of course Level 3 (HOD Maths, Mid Decile Urban Co-ed, roll 501-750).

Heads of Department were particularly vocal about the impact on their workloads:

As far as workload goes, I think there's a huge amount more with NCEA, because everything has to be documented. There's so much paperwork, everything you have to tell them why, you know, so everything has to be documented the whole way through, what courses you have done, how you assessed it. You've got to check with the kids, you have to give it to the students, they have to check it and sign it and then you have to file one and then save yourself one and there's just so much paperwork now (HOD Art, Mid Decile Rural Co-ed, roll <500).

The paperwork you know with the NCEA, not only is there the paper work you have to do, but also the moderating. You've got to internally moderate, you've got to document that, and to me it's just got absolutely... You know, I've been teaching nearly 30 years, and I'm working harder now than I've ever worked, because of this extra paperwork that NCEA has created for me. And I'm of the opinion that we have become clerks, HODs have become filing clerks, there's so much paper to file etc. Whereas the way that I see around it is an increase in ancillary hours for schools, for HODs to use ancillary people to do this filing. I mean sometimes I would be the highest paid filer or photocopier in New Zealand - it's crazy (HOD English, History, Mid Decile Rural Co-ed, roll <500).

I'd like to throw in the other major increase in workload, a huge increase in workload - administration. My job quadrupled, and that is why at [school] we have qualification managers because the total work with the administration of the new system is huge and the workloads for everybody increased dramatically. I'll give the example that is having to take place right now, the verification of the internal grades. In the past it was just those subjects that had an internal assessment component, so it was Maths with Stats at University Bursary level... Geography, Economics...a few subjects had; it was about 10 subjects. Now, every single subject, every single standard, at every different level and it is just huge at Levels 1, 2 and 3, they all have to be verified within a matter of two weeks. Because they go on the site at the 5th of November, and then NZQA does their bit, then they tell us by mid-November. They all have to be checked and verified by the 7th of December. And that's just one little example. There's a hell of a lot more, and it's happening all the time. So it's not just those of us who are doing the administration at management level, it affects everybody, the administration and paperwork is huge (TIC Curriculum/Assessment, History, High Decile Urban Girls, roll 1200+).

I've written new programmes for Years 11, 12, 13, multilevel programmes, and the juniors as well, it's been a huge, huge workload, absolutely huge and it's ongoing. It's not that I've now got it set in place and we'll work with that, because each lot of kids that come into my class are different. Next year's kids will be different and I'll have to be working towards.... And that's the huge issue for me, the amount of work (HOD Music, Low Decile Urban Co-ed, roll 501-750).

Level 3 has made the huge difference. Level 1 and Level 2 were okay, because by the time Level 2 came along, Level 1 was working all right, but Level 3... (HOD History, English, Low Decile Urban Co-ed, roll 501-750).

I find for English, particularly as an HOD, that assurance moderation is a big thing. Because ours is very subjective, in terms of creative and formal writing, our speeches too, actually everything is very subjective, nothing is tick these boxes, this is the answer sort of thing, but rather it is so subjective that it does take a long time to ensure that you get consistency across the class. If they pass at Level 1, you've got 6-7 at Level 2 and 3 at Level 3, and in order to be consistent, you can't just say that you pass, you've got to get another staff member to check. So, if I'm doing 6th form, then I'm marking another whole set of exam papers, it's doing another whole class set of work, by the time I get 4, or 5, or 6 from every other teacher. The new Assistant HOD does Level 1, I also do Level 3 and need people like [colleague] to share it, the workload is phenomenal. So, it's not just the assurance, it is that. And I find too that teachers coming in from teachers' college, we are getting more younger teachers coming in, they've got the knowledge of the curriculum, they are coming to grips with the NCEA, but they need a lot of support in terms of the... We have spent hours with them, talking about the content, how you deliver, how you assure, how you check the standard of the work and so on (HOD English, Mid Decile Provincial Co-ed, roll 1001-1200).

I haven't quite worked out if anyone here beats me, but I would imagine that I would be one of the longest serving teachers here! And I've been through it all, but I have never had to work so hard as I have had to since the NCEA has come in, and it's not that I'm teaching even one more thing, but the paperwork, the crossing of the t's, the dotting of the i's, the amount of photocopying that I have to get done, the amount of handouts that I have got to give to the kids. The number of times that I have given them out and they will leave them at home, or 'Oh, did you give me that?' And then the moderation, the collation and the editing of the tapes, the stacks of stuff that you send in to be moderated and then it comes back and says 'Why don't you go on the website and update such and such', and I mean, we have to do that all the time, you know, because they keep changing things. But you know, I have never had to work so much on paperwork as I have had to on NCEA (HOD Languages, Drama, Mid Decile Provincial Co-ed, roll 1001-1200).

Classroom teachers had also seen big increases, particularly in marking, moderation and administration, and some of them commented on the negative impact of this on the pastoral care and extra-curricular work of the school, and on professional and social interaction between staff:

Another thing that takes up a lot of time is assurance. You will often get handed essays from fifteen other English teachers to work through and say that 'Yes, you're on the right track' or 'No, that shouldn't be a Merit' and where are we meant to really find that time? (English, Mid Decile Provincial Co-ed, roll 1001-1200).

I just feel that NCEA has increased our workload significantly, because we are doing the assessment that normally was done at the end of the year. And there's a lot more, because of all the assurance processes and the moderation and the conferencing, so that goes hand in hand with the changes in expectations of teacher performance, which I think is good, we have much more rigorous appraisals now than we did 20 years ago, and that makes us a more credible body of professionals. But, it all takes time and I think that we have been absolutely ground into the earth by the workload and...[we're getting] increased non-contact time, but I think I'm catching up with where we were before NCEA came in, I don't think overall that we have made huge gains (French/English, Mid Decile Provincial Co-ed, roll 1001-1200).

Sure we've all got our four hours this years, but that four hours nowhere near compensates for the increased marking and admin that NCEA has brought, no way (Biology/Science, Mid Decile Provincial Co-ed, roll 1001-1200).

I think we've got to keep pushing the envelope for non-contact time, because I can remember the time when things used to slow down at the end of the year, but here now I've been how many weeks now without senior classes and I've still got something to fill up every one of my days. I thought this afternoon 'Why did I volunteer for this discussion?' But I am pleased that I came along. I think that the amount of administrative work that we have to do is really underestimated. And I've heard of colleagues going into other jobs and being told to slow down: 'Okay, you don't have to work right through...' (French/English, Mid Decile Provincial Co-ed, roll 1001-1200).

In actual fact it's the way of life now. You look to your lunch break as a space where you can get some more work done. You've got a sandwich in one hand and your pen in the other, and it's just one of those things with teaching (English, Mid Decile Provincial Co-ed, roll 1001-1200).

And also, there has been a change that I have noticed since I've been here, and I've been here for three years. When I first came here, there was a very vital staff lunch time. I now see that there is a mass exodus from the staff room - I see very few HODs or teachers. They are usually, and we've got a good hour block at lunchtime, they are in their offices having their lunches as they're working through assessments, or catch-up assessments. The other thing that I've noticed too is that other things are taking a lower profile, like pastoral support systems, because in actual fact teachers have not got the luxury to be able to put into those sorts of social interactions with the students. I would say that there is definitely a skew towards the more academic and less social that is happening, and that is not only for the students, but also for the staff too (HOD Health, Guidance, Mid Decile Rural Co-ed, roll <500).

Marking is huge, assurance is huge, and I only assure the assessor, so heaven knows what the assessor is going through! And course development and planning your year and trying to work around bridging your courses and checking that you're doing the right things at the right time and that they can fit in with other people, or don't fit in with other people as the case may be, it's huge. So looking at the 202 course for next year and trying to work out how to get achievement standards and unit standards sort of all together and then realising that I was going to be running around chasing my own tail with multi-level teaching and multi-tasking and all that sort of thing and trying to get my head around the actual thing that you've got to do it all at the right time with the different levels and that I couldn't actually be in two places at once. And I showed a colleague what I planning and they took one look at it and said 'I'd quit teaching!' So there is no way... And he said 'What are you trying to achieve by...' and I said 'Well I'm trying to meet the kids' needs' and he said 'Yes, and you'll kill yourself in the process', so it was back to the drawing board on that one! And just chasing your own tail as far as... I seem to be drowning in paper... But I can spend a whole free period you know, talking to [colleague] about whether or not this essay is this level or this essay is that level you know, and it's really time... It takes time just to get the actual level into your head so that when you go in and mark the next 30 that you're actually... (Year 3 teacher, English, Mid Decile Provincial Co-ed, roll 1001-1200).

I wish I'd actually timed how long it took to set up a 2 credit achievement standard, a practical in the Science department, and it's a big department within the school, with three teachers, yet we've got no Science technician and so what happens is that every single bottle, every single chemical has to be made by me, and so not only do I have to go on the internet, download the task and then alter it and then have it moderated and then maybe do some of the paperwork that QA is asking for to have it moderated and I send it to them and then send it back and they say 'Change this' and so you change that and do it again and then you've got your paperwork and then, you know, I have a small class, but I still have to start everything from scratch myself, which is taking away from my

preparation time, from my teaching time for the junior classes. And this is for a 2 credit achievement standard and you know, I didn't actually time it, but I reckon it took me over 20 hours of solid preparation, including making the acid, diluting the acid, putting it in the bottle, making a label, putting it on the thing, the kids doing it for 40 minutes/an hour and then undoing it all. It was a huge amount of time that was being put into it, especially in a small school where there is no back up staff, no-one to help you do that. I think that I must be the most expensively paid bottle filler in the country. You know, I'm being paid 55-grand to put stuff in bottles and make sticky labels and put stuff out, and to do photocopying and to do all those kinds of things... (Science, Mid Decile Rural Co-ed, roll <500).

NZQA is not making our job any easier by demanding all of this paperwork, as well as your school moderated work, as well as the curriculum stuff that got to... So you've all this criteria from NZQA which is checklist you must have blah, blah, a, b, c, d, but wait that's not all, you've got to have stuff from your curriculum advisors from the school, but wait that's not all, you know, you've got to have your principal's signature on this and then you've got to have the red bag to send it, but if it's not going in a red bag then you've got to send it in a green bag, but wait, we don't even have the green bag. And then by the end of the day you just want to throw it at the courier driver, you're just over it, eh! And I don't know if that's just teething problems that you are getting as a result of NCEA, and that hopefully two years down the line when they've had it running for two years or so, that it's going to streamline a little bit more, so you don't have to have two bags, just one green bag and that will be made available to you automatically, without you having to ring up and leave a message with lah, lah, lah, lah, to send it out. So hopefully, they're going to look at it and go 'Take that out, we don't need that', you know, 'We've given the capacity to make professional decisions to do this, but we need to make sure that all the resources are there' and not that you've got to download them off the net, you know, in your only period of the day that you've got free, you've got to download information that is relevant to your unit of work for NZQA, on yellow pieces of paper. Or are we pink this week? You know, and it's quite frustrating, because that's down time from what you're employed to do, which is to teach, motivate and inspire (Art/Design, Low Decile Urban Co-ed, roll 501-750).

And I was talking to another teacher today and they have said that they are pulling out of all extra curricular next year. They teach English, their marking load is huge and they can't do it all, plus they have a family and a life outside, so something had to give. And so the sacrifice that person is making is to pull out of extra-curricular, which they don't want to do, because they like the contact with the kids and the outdoors; but something's got to give (English, Mid Decile Provincial Co-ed, roll 1001-1200).

A lack of resourcing in small schools adds to the burden:

The staff here, the hours that get put in, and the dedication is just phenomenal, and that doesn't get recognised by the government. We just do everything, as we've mentioned, here. You type your own reports, you do your own photocopying, you do your own filing, you just basically do everything, whereas at a bigger school... At [large urban school] I just used to push my papers in and they were photocopied, I had someone to do all the filing, I had somebody to do all the typing and it was just so easy. You get on with what you're paid for and produce really good teaching resources and teach really well. Here you're trying to do all of that at the same time, and it does take its toll (HOD Social Sciences, Mid Decile Rural Co-ed, roll <500).

The time involved in setting up the practical situations. Because my classes run back to back I don't get any breathing space in between to clear up from one practical session and set up for the next one, so my day's pretty much... I don't really catch up with myself. I don't get to have breaks or sit down much at all, and that catches up on me to be honest. I can't keep that up without it starting to pull me down a bit. I find that there's a lot of work to set up the Hospitality programmes. To get them up and running I need to be in regular contact with the outside organisations that I rely on to be able to help implement the programme. They provide support and provide the commercial environment and I need to be doing that in my own time, because I don't get time to get through any of that during the day. I guess it's the nature of a practical subject and I know that if I were in a big school, I would have support in the way of technicians and perhaps even be fulltime and have non-contacts and that sort of thing (Food & Nutrition/Hospitality, High Decile Area, roll <500).

Trying to keep up with the changes is quite hard, and there's only one of us as we keep saying, we can't delegate. I have worked in larger schools on a part time basis, and there were five of us in the Technology department and we'd all be sent off with jobs to do and they had a full time technician (HOD Technology/Graphics, High Decile Area, roll <500).

Photocopying exams for 20 students... We don't have any administrative help at all, and then the photocopier will break down half way through too. We live to see another day, but you know... (HOD Maths, High Decile Area, roll <500).

Teachers long for some kind of stability:

Well, it depends how often they're going to change standards and I know that they had the first round of Level 1, and then after two years they sort of changed it, fine-tuning, and that's okay, and they've done it for Level 2 and presumably they're going to do it for Level 3, but I don't want to find that I'm trying to have to fix Level 3 and then at the same time trying to fix Level 1 again. I'm not saying that you don't ever change anything, but it's just, you don't ever feel that you've got anything that you can work with for more than... Well I think that you have to have some point of stability. I'm not saying that you don't ever change, but it's just, you can never sit back, partly because of the timing of when they put all the changes through. You just feel as though you're running the whole time sort of to just try and keep up, you can't... Just sometimes, you know, it would be nice to be able to come up for breath! I acknowledge that the changes we have had seem to have been needed, it's just the thought of, we seem to be changing all the time, is there going to be a stop at some point? (HOD Science, Mid Decile Urban Co-ed, roll 501-750).

It's good that they're fixing things, but you'd like to think that if you taught Level 1 last year, and you spent all the time learning it, that it's going to be the same next year, but instead all three... Hopefully maybe Level 1 is right now, I don't know that it is, but they'll still be changing Level 3 next year and it's just a massive amount at once (English/ESOL, Mid Decile Urban Fringe Co-ed, roll 501-750).

Teachers differed as to whether things were getting any easier. One teacher felt that their course was the point of stability, and changes to assessment were relatively minor:

I'm far more comfortable now with Level 1 because we've done it for a number of years, still acknowledging the fact that there are changes being made. But I teach a course, I don't teach assessments, so basically my course is still the same, it's how I assess that course that changes. So basically I haven't got any major changes that I do, because I don't change [the course] when NZQA changes an assessment. What it does mean is that I have to sort of re-jig the assessments and say to the students 'Well, this one was in 1.8, it's not in 1.4, so that's coming in here', so I've got to make changes on the assessment, so that's where a little bit of time comes in (HOD Commerce, Mid Decile Urban Co-ed, roll 501-750).

In contrast, another teacher said that they had to change their course because of assessment changes:

We've actually had course changes as opposed to.. New syllabus, new assessments altogether. They are significant changes that require quite a bit of work, and you can cope if you know that it's going to finish at a point. But if it's going to be essentially ongoing, it seems like somebody hasn't quite worked it out in advance before we introduced it as a national qualification (HOD Maths, Mid Decile Urban Co-ed, roll 501-750).

Another teacher wondered whether things might get easier:

And you know within 20 years, you'd like to think that things would gradually get easier, but I probably will find that I'm working more, whether that's a good thing or not, but you like to kind of think 'Oh yes okay I'm on top of things, it's good', but I'll probably find that now you, the level of work, you're working harder. However I think in English, actually marking has become easier... Other things have probably added, I mean, just the putting in of the new system that has been quite an evolution for people to get their heads around. I mean you change any system and it's said you have to do these things differently or whatever you do, it's going take a little bit of effort and things to do it and I think that within education, changing the assessment system has been quite a steep learning curve for people to change their head around to things (HOD English/Media Studies, High Decile Urban Boys, roll 1200+).

One teacher wondered why New Zealand was assessing for qualifications at all three levels of the senior school, and thought this was a major contributor to excessive workload:

I think the main problem is that we are the only country in the world that is assessing three years in a row and that's the biggest trap (TIC Curriculum/Assessment, History, High Decile Urban Girls, roll 1200+).

One teacher worried that the time demands of the current system were getting in the way of teachers doing further study:

Another thing that worries me is that I think teachers used to have time to make time for further study. People were often studying towards one course or another, and I just wonder how many people are able to do that these days? (French/English, Mid Decile Provincial Co-ed, roll 1001-1200)

Both younger and older teachers struggle with the new system:

And it's the same with those in the twilight of the career, you [colleague] talk about the young ones finding it a bit overwhelming, it is the same with the 'woollies' and all that carry on, who legitimately struggle with it. You know, after 30 years of black and white, suddenly all this mass of grey. You know, you can't tell me that the stats on older teachers leaving... Just look in the Gazette and look at the numbers of HODs positions that have been advertised. Why's that? People in the twilight of their careers are going 'I've had enough of this' and they're out of here (HOD ICT, Maths, High Decile Urban Boys, roll 1200+).

I just think that the workload is just so, so high and I think that especially as young teachers that, I, I just need more time. I honestly am passionate about teaching and love working with kids and love so many aspects of it, but if it continued like this, I could not be a teacher, I would have to leave the profession because it is way too hard and stressful (Years 3 Drama/English, High Decile Urban Girls, roll 1200+).

CONCLUSIONS

There are no simple solutions to address the extra workload generated by this much more complex qualifications system, but it is clear that solutions must be found. One of the recommendations in this report calls on the Teacher Workload working party established under the Secondary Teachers' Collective Agreement to provide solutions to address the time requirements of school-based assessment under the NCEA. The special resourcing requirements of small schools need to be given urgent consideration, if situations are to be avoided where teachers in small schools have no ancillary support for their work in relation to the qualification system, hence the recommendation that Operations Grant funding be reviewed. There are aspects of teacher workload which might be alleviated as a result of professionals sharing ideas for the management of assessment, providing a further reason for the ongoing provision of professional development.

(See Recommendations 4, 5, 6 and 7)

15. RESOURCING ISSUES

“What has happened is that we were conned.”

PPTA has continually called for increased resourcing for NCEA implementation over a number of years, but what has been provided has never been enough. It is clear from this research that concerns about resourcing still remain, and the areas in which they are evident are consistent with the areas PPTA has been highlighting. These are: sample assessment activities and exemplars for both the internal and external achievement standards and for unit standards; ongoing professional development for teachers; and compensation for the increased school costs in a number of areas.

SAMPLE ASSESSMENT ACTIVITIES AND EXEMPLARS – EXTERNAL ACHIEVEMENT STANDARDS

At the end of the third year of implementation, teachers feel they have a reasonably clear idea about what to expect in the Level 1 exams, and some idea about what to expect in the Level 2 exams. But while they recognise that over the years successive exams will begin to establish a pattern, at this stage unpleasant surprises are still possible:

You see that because we've only had the NCEA for 3 years, you haven't got a big pool of exam papers like we used to when we taught School C and UE and so the kids can't see the trend, they're only going on, well for Level 2, it's the first year for us with Level 2, we just downloaded the Level 2 papers from last year and that's all they had, and it [the 2004 exam] was totally different this year, absolutely! (English, Mid Decile Rural Co-ed, roll <500).

In terms of the transition, you've got this exemplar on the Net, with no qualification and nothing to compare it with, and no marking schedule or nothing that explains the depth of answer that is required and so it's all of a sudden, here it comes, you know (Science/Chemistry, Mid Decile Rural Co-ed, roll <500).

Teachers expressed particular concerns that they had seen no exemplars of questions or work that would meet the Excellence level at Level 3, or would meet the Scholarship level. They said they were told by NZQA to consult past Bursary exams for an indication of levels, but in some subjects, teachers wondered whether there had ever been any questions at Excellence level. It is quite possible that there have not been, since high marks under the old system could be achieved simply by performing consistently well over a range of lower level questions:

We don't have any indication of what's going to be an Excellence question, we don't know that until we get the marking schedule post-exam. I think that the Languages might be kind of different, just talking to other teachers, in that the questions are not tagged as Excellence or Merit and that type of thing. I think it's how well they answer that question as to whether they maybe get an Achieved, a Merit or an Excellence out of it...(HOD Languages, Mid Decile Urban Co-ed, roll 501-750).

Our questions are not tagged either [as Achieved, Merit or Excellence level] until you see the marking schedule, but generally the last questions are the Excellence ones (Maths, Mid Decile Urban Co-ed, roll 501-750).

But in Level 3, there were sample exam papers on the Net, but there was no marking schedule or no assessment schedule, we had no idea what the standard was, and plus you heard bits of information like, for example, someone said 'Last year's Bursary paper had no Excellence questions in it' (Science/Chemistry, Mid Decile Rural Co-ed, roll <500).

I'd just like to say something while we mention exemplars: I'm really actually disappointed in the way NZQA has handled Level 3, as well as the introduction of Scholarship. There's a Scholarship exam on the Web, just the sample exam that's all there is. There's no assessment schedule, there's no

specific guidance as to what they're looking for in order to...whether they actually do achieve it, or if they achieve it with Outstanding Scholarship. And also, Level 3, there was no English, even though at Level 1 and 2 we were given some exemplars as to 'This is a Merit, this is an Excellence', you know, so that people had that sort of guidance. They've given us absolutely nothing for externals. So we were all really hoping that they are marking the way we think they're marking it! And who knows, because Level 2 was such a huge step up, I'm just wondering if they are going to actually mark it at Bursary standard, because I think Bursary standard is more like your Level 2, well not much higher. And what we're expecting is probably like at least 'Bursary-plus' and they've given us really no idea as to what they're going to use as their, well we've got their standard criteria from the standard, but how they interpret it... (HOD English, History, Mid Decile Rural Co-ed, roll <500).

I have seen that in Science and Maths, the lack of direction in Scholarship has been, you could only guess really what was going to be in the paper, we only had the sample assessments on the Web, not really any direction there. I had a student go in for Stats, an excellent students in Stats, should've got Excellences across the board in Stats, came out really confident in the Stats, went into Scholarship and just didn't have a clue what to expect, but, a complete surprise to all - totally off the scale. Like second-year university material you know, we had, there was no prescription, nothing, and it was nothing like the examples that had been on the Web (HOD Maths, Mid Decile Rural Co-ed, roll <500).

Art seemed to be the one shining light in terms of exemplification of the standards, but even then the rating was 'could have done better':

In the first year of any level definitely, they have sort of gathered together pieces of work as to what an NCEA folio should look like. But no, they are much, it's much easier with a visual image to compare... They don't [annotate the exemplars] probably quite enough. In Art History Level 1 there were excellent examples, then not so much in Level 2 and then in Level 3 there has been a severe lack of any exam practice for the externals, and I think for the internals as well - so it really felt like stab in the dark (Art/Art History/Design, High Decile Urban Girls, roll 1200+).

A Technology and Graphics teacher at the same school had in fact shown Art exemplars at cluster meetings in the hope that this would stimulate production of materials of equal quality in their subjects:

I've taken exemplars from Art to cluster meetings for people to sort of try and push that barrow, and I think, there's some there for Graphics, but I asked at the last cluster meeting, when they have the Technology work down there, when all the markers go down and do their training, why can't that work then be photographed, scanned? It's easy enough to get permission from the kids. And then produce something like they do for Art and, especially in Level 1, there's only 7 achievement standards that they've got to do it for, and that's internal and external as well, there should be some for the internals as well (Technology/Graphics, High Decile Urban Girls, roll 1200+).

SAMPLE ASSESSMENT ACTIVITIES AND EXEMPLARS – INTERNAL ACHIEVEMENT STANDARDS

Not surprisingly, there was more discussion about the quality of the sample assessment resources for the internal achievement standards, as teachers must summatively assess these standards themselves. The resources available on the NCEA website have clearly not been adequate to meet teachers' needs. This is more obvious in some subjects than others, but even in English - which has been held out as a model of excellence - there was criticism of both the quality and quantity of resources.

Most teachers believe that high quality assessment resources need to be available for them to simply use as they are if they choose to do so:

I think they need to look at resourcing us so that these extra demands that have been placed on us, for example, like internal assessments, there are commercial places that will produce these assessments for us, they cost money of course. It's just basically things like that: no extra work, no extra demands, that's it (HOD Maths, Mid Decile Urban Co-ed, roll 501-750).

I'd like another little tower block somewhere with the production of exemplars or assessment material or so forth that we could go to, and you know 'This has been developed, here they are' as opposed to going 'Here's another job for you guys to do', and I think some people have seen that as being a bit of short change by the Ministry, going 'Where do we go to now?' (HOD Biology, High Decile Urban Boys, roll 1200+).

I see a number of my colleagues going through a lot of hassle, a lot of stress, a lot of time, getting offside with their colleagues, which never used to happen, over some assessment that someone has written that's not rigorous and kids are complaining about marks, 'How come I got an Achieved when it should have been a Merit', starting off all these arguments about how it was assessed, how it was marked. And then we submit it for moderation and it comes back and we've failed it, it just adds salt to the wound. I mean, why should we be put under pressure to write something that's going to cause all this hassle and ultimately not be a rigorous test of the kids' ability? We need to pay someone good, big money to do the job (HOD ICT, Maths, High Decile Urban Boys, roll 1200+).

And the time to actually change them, I mean, I'm still using some of the ones off the Net, which are absolute rubbish, but I haven't got time to sit down and write one, with all the paperwork involved (HOD Social Sciences, Mid Decile Rural Co-ed, roll <500).

In some cases, they had bought resources from subject associations, school support services, or colleagues because the quality of the resources on the NCEA website was inadequate:

For workload issues, and maybe for professional reasons too, there is a tendency to use 'bought-in' [assessment activities], particularly in Physics... [For example from] the New Zealand Institute of Physics, and you know, that's my professional body... We pay for them. And similarly in Mathematics, through the New Zealand Association of Maths Teachers, we can access, if we pay the membership fee, we can access their resources... And in fact, without them, I would have been in a very awkward position this year having taken over the class (HOD Maths, Physics, Mid Decile Area, roll <500).

I get my Maths ones from Team Solutions and I pay for them, but still there are often a lot of mistakes on the ones I bought this year... The NZAMT website is excellent for Years 9 and 10, but there's not really the things there for achievement standards. There are very good unit standard [assessment tasks] for Levels 2 and 3 (HOD Maths, Mid Decile Rural Co-ed, roll <500).

Two teachers in the same school did advance the view that sample assessments on the internet should serve only as examples from which teachers should develop their own assessments to fit their courses. In the first case, the samples were there, in the second they were not:

It's a starting point for you to establish your own programme from what you want to do within the school, relevant to the area that you teach in (Art/Design, Low Decile Urban Co-ed, roll 501-750).

And that's another issue too that I wanted to raise, the almost complete lack of resources, particularly in the area of Music. You look at the Music stuff and there is next to nothing there and as far as I know from the chats I've had with the other HODs around the place, everyone is making up their own stuff, which is fine because it means that in some ways that yes I can cater to our kids, and if they really show an interest in something I can design something around that and that's really good. But what I don't have is kind of exemplars to work from - there are some, but again they don't meet the moderators' standards, so you've got to wonder (HOD Music, Low Decile Urban Co-ed, roll 501-750).

No other teachers volunteered this view, however. Instead, there is an overwhelming view that there should be a sufficient number of high quality sample assessment activities available on the internet for teachers to be able to select what is most appropriate for them and use them 'off the shelf', and that this requirement has not so far been met in most subject areas.

There is also a belief that the government agencies should continue to produce new resources. One Maths teacher was optimistic that there would be more resources available over time:

I think it's a time thing. Year 11 last year, we didn't have a lot of resources, but we've got heaps this year, Year 11 is all sorted, it's all good. But then Year 12 and Year 13, there's not a lot of stuff once again, but I guess the longer NCEA goes for, the more examples will be available on the Net, as long as people provide, as long as people submit them, so that will be sorted out. But certainly at Year 12 level and Year 13, for the stats and probability we just did, it wasn't very good at all. We downloaded off the Net, but we had lots of problems with it, and it's just heaps of work (Maths, High Decile Urban Boys, roll 1200+).

However others, based on their current experiences, did not appear to share his optimism:

I would still like to have more access to resources, and new resources coming along. And there's nothing really new coming through on those NCEA sites when I go on to see what there is, there's nothing (Computing, Mid Decile Provincial Co-ed, roll 1001-1200).

Some teachers also perceive that the quantity and quality of resources has declined with each new level:

I think that what has happened is that we were conned, and that might be a strong word, that there were going to be a lot of resources for Level 1, and then there were less for Level 2, and we have been left to flounder for Level 3 (HOD Languages, Drama, Mid Decile Provincial Co-ed, roll 1001-1200).

We got a lot of help for Level 1, not so much Level 2, and Level 3 ... At Level 1 I think that we have actually got on top of it. Our department is not so big, so it's actually easier (HOD ICT, Mid Decile Provincial Co-ed, roll 1001-1200).

English teachers were about equally divided about the quality of their resources. An HOD and a classroom teacher in the same school thought the English resources were good:

In English, it is just very clear and it's just there (HOD English, Mid Decile Provincial Co-ed, roll 1001-1200).

We're quite lucky in English that we have what I consider to be quite good materials, so we haven't had to spend our time I think doing that [preparing assessments] (English, Mid Decile Provincial Co-ed, roll 1001-1200).

Other English teachers were not as satisfied:

I also think some of the exemplars are pretty unrealistic. I marked School Certificate for years, and some of the Excellence exemplars, kids are looking at it and saying 'Well I can't do that' (English, Mid Decile Urban Fringe Co-ed, roll 501-750).

Kids should be able to download those [exemplars] too, they should be able to do something and go, 'I want to know what an Excellence looks like in a particular task', they should be able to get on the Web and look at one. And there's no... We haven't got enough resources as teachers for the kids, and at the moment, everybody is in a sort of... My Excellence could be quite different to somebody else's Excellence, and I'm hoping not but... (English, Mid Decile Rural Co-ed, roll <500).

One English teacher asked for exemplars provided to be closer to the grade boundaries so that the more subtle distinctions could be demonstrated:

And also, just to add to that, some of the Not Achieved exemplars are so obviously Not Achieved it's not funny, you know, my four year-old niece could have done that, but on the other hand I think you need something of a realistic exemplar, not something that's so obvious that they could've... So it's

obvious, so that the kids can see 'Oh yes, I see what they did wrong there', but not something that's so obviously so far off that... Just so the kids can look at it for example and see that they were nearly there... (English, Mid Decile Urban Fringe Co-ed, roll 501-750).

Maths teachers talked often about the Maths Association website resources, although it appeared that these were filling a gap in resourcing for unit standards (see next section) rather than for achievement standards. On the NCEA website resources, two Maths teachers were satisfied:

In Maths, I think we are well served for the internal (Maths, Mid Decile Urban Co-ed, roll 501-750).

The exemplars on the Maths side are very well resourced. We have the NZAMT site and the NCEA site, so we've got a very good resource base of exemplars (HOD Maths, Mid Decile Provincial Co-ed, roll 1001-1200).

But two Maths teachers in the same school expressed a wish for secure resources that students could not access:

I think the whole idea of internal assessment tasks needs to be looked at, I mean that task that you got off the Internet, no doubt kids have access to that as well, so to me, that is really not a valid assessment. We try and use the exemplars off the Ministry website, but I mean they're either hopeless, or it's probably faster to ask a kid to print a copy of the answers off for us than it is to look for them myself. I mean there's no rigour in that assessment. And then if we change it in any way, we'll probably fail moderation. I want to be given a lot of money, a significant amount of money, put in a room and charged with the task of writing internal assessments that will then be distributed to schools via a secure website that no one has access to except staff, and that's the assessment. You can, say, have a choice of three or four tasks that you can use for this internal achievement standard and that's it, no scope for changing them. That's what will work for Maths (HOD ICT, Maths, High Decile Urban Boys, roll 1200+).

They're smart, we tell them where the website is... That's another reason why you can't just download and use [an assessment activity] off the Web, because some of the students have seen it already (Maths, High Decile Urban Boys, roll 1200+).

Social Sciences teachers were not happy with the quality of resources either:

A lot of what is there [on the NCEA website] is inappropriate for a school like this, and I don't honestly think they thought it through in a lot of cases. I'll give you an example. Last year they put an internal assessment on the Net, and they had one called 'Bringing him back to life' and you had to research the name of a soldier, and this was one that was picked up nationwide and one of my students rang the Ministry of Defence who told her that she couldn't have the information which I thought was a bit strange, so I rang the Ministry of Defence and they said 'Oh yes, you can have it, can you write on behalf of your student?' because they'd had to take on extra staff members to cope with the workload, with the archives! (HOD History, Low Decile Urban Co-ed, roll 501-750)

The Geography one is somewhat similar, where they are researching a current planning issue, decision-making, but they have to get information in the first person, so our lot all turn up at the counter of the city council and ask to see the plans and talk to the planner about some major subdivision or... So now the city council are making double copies of everything and filing them at the local library, but that makes it secondary data and not primary so that makes it a bit harder (HOD Humanities, Low Decile Urban Co-ed, roll 501-750).

For quite a number of the exemplars, we have had to make changes in order to fit exactly what our requirements would be ... [and] they've got to make use of more examples. Two examples is not good enough. Ten examples is probably getting better to the range, but to put two examples up there...Because a lot of schools...I pity the small departments. We're large enough, most of us are in large departments and we have a lot of staff that can help you out, and that you can get some ideas rolling. But the one teacher department...who have got to run a department by themselves, or just...where do you get all your material from? You have got to get it from the Web (Geography/Social Studies, High Decile Urban Boys, roll 1200+).

I also have a major problem with the internals, I mean, time to produce them, therefore why aren't they being supplied? We were told that there would be absolutely truly wonderful resources available on the website that we could just download and that we could use, and most of what's on there is just absolute garbage... (HOD Social Sciences, Mid Decile Rural Co-ed, roll <500).

Science teachers were mixed in their views:

There's also short internal assessments that are practically assessed and they're great, very clear in the guidance. The support that has been produced has been excellent in Chemistry, all the sample materials and exemplars and things. The level of support is quite amazing, compared with the UK, where you'd be writing all your own resources, whilst over here there's all this support and it's clear (HOD Maths, Chemistry, Mid Decile Provincial Co-ed, roll 1001-1200).

I have to say that in Science, the examples that were available in the beginning year were ludicrous. I hate to be critical, but they were laughable, they were so unusable. And the Science in them was so bad, that you could not use them as a proper assessment item, they were full of errors. And I know that as a group, the [area] group got a name, I think, for being particularly bolshie when Level 1 Science was being introduced, because we were so appalled at what we were supposed to be working with. And huge improvements were made fairly rapidly, but not rapidly enough and we were, I think, pretty undermined, we had no confidence in the process. Speaking now as the teacher in Biology, we feel that the introduction of Level 2 went a lot more smoothly and professionally, but still, the exemplars and samples that were available for us to use, say last year and perhaps the practices the year before, they were not able to be taken and then used, you had to modify them quite a lot, and I think we're getting better at it, but it still does take the time (Biology/Science, Mid Decile Provincial Co-ed, roll 1001-1200).

Teachers in subjects newer to qualifications assessment, such as PE, Health, Technology, Drama and Media Studies, and subjects with relatively small numbers of teachers and students, such as Languages and Music, were the most likely to complain about the quantity and/or quality of the resources available to them:

I think that one of the problems is that the newer subjects, or for those schools that haven't had Drama, and I think that also Media Studies is a new subject, think a lot of those subjects haven't had, or haven't been given, the resources. And they have nothing to fall back on... But I think they're really floundering in some of the newer subjects, because basically they haven't had the programmes to teach to start with, and now they're trying to teach something that hasn't been established over the years as a subject. And I think that's where we have had a lot of problems (HOD Languages, Drama, Mid Decile Provincial Co-ed, roll 1001-1200).

Media Studies is floundering, and there is not that ongoing support at Level 2 and Level 3 that we need (HOD English, Mid Decile Provincial Co-ed, roll 1001-1200).

There's not that many for Drama and they seem to, you know, when they were moderated last year, there were things that were wrong with them, even those that were... And so there's that whole issue, and there's not very many there, but they're a good starting point (Drama/English, High Decile Urban Girls, roll 1200+).

The resourcing of the people who have developed the exemplars obviously wasn't adequate, because the changes that have been required in order to make them useful have just been huge and we have no model answers for the things we're talking about in Phys Ed... We have tiny little examples within the marking schedules, which might address one point within that exemplar, but no 'This is an Achieved, this is a Merit, this is an Excellence' (Health/PE/Food & Nutrition/Outdoor Ed, Mid Decile Urban Fringe Co-ed, roll 501-750).

Last year I was head of Computing, and we went to a number of achievement standards involved with Technology, and it was one of these...bizarre...and the words 'word processing', 'databases', weren't in any of the achievement standards. And you had to always sort of interpret and it was always interpretations of like, what does 'requirements' mean? Does that mean 2, or 10? (HOD Physics, Mid Decile Provincial Co-ed, roll 1001-1200)

In Graphics, the Graphics achievement standards are actually working quite well, they are very clear about what they want and what you should be doing, but in Technology, back to the language

involved, it's wrong, I find the language difficult. And I actually have to turn around and go 'What are they actually looking for? How can I get the kids to show this?'... I wouldn't say they [the exemplars] are that good, and they don't help. And I don't know how it works for other subjects, but I know for Art that they have those things that the NZQA sends out and they get nice big booklets, all glossy paper, and there's Achieved, Merit and Excellence, and they are explaining the work involved. And in Graphics and Technology, we're basically visual subjects as well, but there's nothing like that, and that would help a lot (Technology/Graphics, High Decile Urban Girls, roll 1200+).

... we're meant to supply them with examples of Excellence so they know what to work towards, and the exemplars for Graphics Level 1 are actually rubbish. There's no training supplied to actually show you examples of Excellence or show you how to achieve Excellence. Like the one on sketching and rendering, you have to be an artist to achieve. You know these kids are doing technical drawing, and yet they have to do sketching and rendering. I'm not a very good sketcher, I'm not an artist you know, and to achieve Excellence... it's almost an artistic sort of work. I wouldn't say the exemplars are useful, that's for the NCEA ones (HOD Technology, Graphics, High Decile Area, roll <500).

I'd also like to say that for achievement standards in Languages, typically there has only been one exemplar for each achievement standard per language, so you're not getting.... For example, someone in my situation, I'm basically the sole teacher in the subject, so I teach in some degree of isolation really. I have a good network and all the rest of it, but it's very hard to get a sense sometimes of what is actually wanted or required, because I have one exemplar to go from... At Level 1, there was actually quite a variety, but a lot of them were impossible, they were generic language exemplars, so they may have been appropriate for say German, but they certainly weren't appropriate for Japanese, because the level that students get to in the European languages tends to be a lot higher than with the Asian based languages, because of the script and that type of thing. For example, for a Level 1 writing one, it might say design a book cover, and write the author and all that. Well, in Japanese they just don't have that vocabulary or that knowledge. So, while there were a number of exemplars at Level 1, a lot of them were just totally inappropriate (HOD Languages, Mid Decile Urban Co-ed, roll 501-750).

An Accountancy teacher was very grateful for the support of a colleague, who had filled a gap left by inadequate resourcing on the website:

Yes, well, in the Accounting area, we have been [well-resourced] but it hasn't come from any advisory group. There's a woman from New Plymouth who has been a facilitator and has written curriculum and she has been tremendous. She has been contracted by Massey College of Education. So if you took her out of the system, I would suggest that there's nothing (Principal's Nominee, Accountancy, Mid Decile Provincial Co-ed, roll 1001-1200).

As with the externals, Art shines out as a subject provoking only positive comments:

I think that the Visual Arts area is going really well, I have absolutely no problems and no questions about the availability of resources on the NCEA website, I think it's really good, and plus our networking with the other schools in the [city] Visual Arts area, subject associations that we have (Art/Design, Low Decile Urban Co-ed, roll 501-750).

The experience of teachers of using an assessment activity off the website only to find that it does not pass moderation is an intense irritant:

But the other thing is still the quality of the information that is on the Internet. Teachers are taking it down in good faith, reviewing it sitting in a classroom by themselves at five o'clock at night, using it with their students and then getting it slammed by the moderators. Well, the moderators must be getting multiple copies of the same task, but when the moderators identify the weaknesses, they are never corrected on the Internet. If you go back the next year, they are still in the same form (HOD Humanities, Low Decile Urban Co-ed, roll 501-750).

With the achievement standards, there are multiple versions sitting on there... so there are multiple versions of assessment tasks and you've got versions of versions of assessment task as well. And that's a situation I found when I downloaded what I thought was a valid assessment task, and presented it to my students then sent it off to moderation, and I was told that it wasn't the current one

therefore it was invalid. But it's the principle that with the achievement standards there doesn't seem to be a system in place on the NZQA system that deletes all previous assessment tasks, or invalid versions. If it's invalid it shouldn't be there, it should be gone. And you know we've got a, b, c versions and we've got abc.2 versions, and I find it very confusing (HOD Health, Low Decile Urban Co-ed, roll 501-750).

It's a struggle for Music, I download stuff straight off the Net like we're supposed to do things, rejected by the moderator (HOD Music, Low Decile Urban Co-ed, roll 501-750).

I know that I've talked to people that have had things back, that they've got from the Web, from the Ministry and the moderators have said that this isn't meeting the standard, and they're going 'Hold on, this is the one that I got from...' and again that type of thing undermines a structure as 'Well what do they want? I've got what they've said is up there, I give it to a moderator and I get a thing back saying 'No this doesn't meet the criteria'.' (HOD Biology, High Decile Urban Boys, roll 1200+)

And you send them away for moderation and then they criticise the heck out of their own exemplars. But when's the time to fix them? (HOD Social Sciences, Mid Decile Rural Co-ed, roll <500)

I took one directly off the NCEA website, sent it off for moderation exactly as it was written, and I had it sent back saying that it wasn't suitable, the first year (HOD Science, High Decile Area, roll <500).

SAMPLE ASSESSMENT ACTIVITIES AND EXEMPLARS – UNIT STANDARDS

Unit standards, both in 'conventional' and 'non-conventional' subjects, are being used quite extensively in schools, more than was probably expected when the NCEA was being developed. Some teachers commented on the disparity between the resourcing for achievement and unit standards. Resources that were produced for the trials of unit standards in 'conventional' subjects in the 1990's are now somewhat out of date, because the standards have been revised.

Teachers praised the NZ Association of Maths Teachers for the work it has done to fill the gap which has appeared:

The Association of Maths Teachers, they have a secure assessment site and we also have a group that emails to keep in contact with each other, and the exemplars for unit standards are coming from them basically, from the Association of Maths Teachers (HOD Maths, High Decile Area, roll <500).

Other subject groupings have also done work in this area:

There's very little material for teachers to use. They sent that book out a few years ago and that's all we've got to work with. And in actual fact I complained about it this year and our local English Association actually ran a workshop where we devised some exemplars, because there were no exemplars for unit standards (HOD English, Mid Decile Urban Fringe Co-ed, roll 501-750).

However, a number of English teachers said that there was a real need for sample resources for English and Communications unit standards:

What I'm finding is that the unit standards, which were around longer, for example 1307 which is a Level 3 unit standard about giving a speech, when they couldn't find exemplars for Level 2 [achievement standard], they nicked the idea from that for one of the topics under Level 2, deliver a presentation. So what they're doing is they're taking all the ideas from the unit standards and putting them in the achievement standards, giving the achievement standards the development of exemplars, but still, no exemplars for unit standards. So they're creating a two-tier structure again, which quite frankly is that 'English teachers are big snobs' and the achievement standards are considered the way to go, you don't go to unit standards unless you are typically going to be in the 'alternative class' (English/Transition, Mid Decile Urban Co-ed, roll 501-750).

There haven't been exemplars [for Communication English and English unit standards], and so you're finding out anecdotally what's acceptable and what's not acceptable, and so the range is huge, between schools and between all the country...I think that within English we've noticed a big

difference between achievement standards and unit standards as to what's available, so when I do achievement standards with my English class, it's really easy because the assessment resources are all there, and there's masses of it and people have written units of work for everything and its all there on English On-Line, and it's really easy. But the unit standards stuff that's there was written when unit standards were first introduced, and the manuals we got then date back about 12, 15 years or whenever it was when unit standards were a big thing, but the unit standards have changed since then, a lot of things are outdated (English/ESOL, Mid Decile Urban Fringe Co-ed, roll 501-750).

The ESOL area is also under pressure because adequate supporting material has not been provided for their unit standards:

As an ESOL teacher, our biggest complaint, it's this brand new subject ... No one has ever written any assessment tasks or assessment schedules, and looking on-line at the unit standards that people offered in ESOL last year, there's actually quite a narrow range... [There's] a massive number of unit standards, some of them no-one in New Zealand actually used, not a single school even offered them because no one could work out actually how you would write an assessment task for a particular listening standard. So, what's happened in ESOL is that no one in the first year or so did listening unit standards, because it was too hard to work out how you would assess it. And people are now gradually doing it, and we have the advisors writing us some and a little bit has come on ESOL On-Line, but you know, it was an incredible thing having no resources and so the workload was incredible (English/ESOL, Mid Decile Urban Fringe Co-ed, roll 501-750).

Teachers of Commerce and Computing, History, and Science would also like resources in their areas for unit standard assessment:

I know the government said that they would have exemplars and all that kind of stuff for NCEA, but it would actually be quite nice, seeing as all the unit standards have all changed, if they could do that as well, it would fill a big gap and it would be nice... Because we spend hours creating assessments and then we kind of like, I kind of double check myself 'Have I got this right? Have I covered everything?' and you know, you think of something and most times you do get it right, but it would be just nice to have something there as an example and 'Have you covered this, this and this', you know, even if it was a general template like what they've got for the achievement standards (Commerce/Computing, Mid Decile Urban Fringe Co-ed, roll 501-750).

I don't think we are getting the amount of support from the Ministry that we need. For example the stuff on the Net is for achievement standards, but there is nothing for unit standards, so basically if you want to offer unit standards, you have to write them yourself, and that's a workload issue, time (HOD History, English, Low Decile Urban Co-ed, roll 501-750).

I'd like to go back to this thing about unit standards not having assessment tasks on the website. A while back, unit standard [assessment tasks] came out in this great big folder. Remember the big folders? They've got all the Biology ones and all the Physics ones and all the Chemistry ones and so on and they had a whole lot of information about the kind of assessment and the standards that were available, and then they had examples in there of elements of standards at each of the levels, and that was superb. Because although they may not be the same task that you wanted to do, they gave you an idea because here was the example that was really, really worthwhile. A lot of those standards are now out of date, they've been withdrawn, so I don't know where...I know where the Science ones are...I don't know as Curriculum Co-ordinator where either the CD-Roms or the folders are in the school (Principal's Nominee, HOD Science, Low Decile Urban Co-ed, roll 501-750).

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Teachers are convinced that there is an ongoing need for professional development to assist them with the implementation of the NCEA. School Support Services appear to be meeting some of the needs, as are formal and informal subject networks, but there is still a perception that something akin to the 'jumbo days' of the implementation years is still necessary.

Teachers say that they need continued opportunities to talk with colleagues in other schools:

It's important for us, somewhere along the line I think there's room, not just for next year but also for a number of years, for us to sit and have conversations, work it out. We need to talk to other people (English/Health, High Decile Urban Boys, roll 1200+).

You've got more than enough time to talk to the guys in your own school, but you need to get outside. The teacher in Geography in [small school] is all by himself, he needs to be able to contact others. You've got to be able to set the standards with others, and ask for help if it's necessary (English/Health, High Decile Urban Boys, roll 1200+).

I think we need more professional development... (Geography/Outdoor Education, High Decile Area, roll <500).

School Support Service's delivery of ongoing professional development appears to be only partly meeting the needs:

I've found in terms of English that the support, say from the [city] College of Education, over the past five years has been fantastic in terms of that they deliberately look for facilitators in this area and so we receive a lot of extra training in terms of English. They set up very good cluster meetings, which are still supported by [city] College of Education English advisers, so I think that there is a far greater sharing of resources and awareness of what's out there and the directions in which the subject and the curriculum is moving. I think that has been a great benefit to us all. We're having ongoing HOD training in [city] this year, we have had a follow-up cluster meeting this term, so yes, it is constant and it is ongoing... (HOD English, Mid Decile Provincial Co-ed, roll 1001-1200).

I'm not saying that the Drama adviser from [city] Support Services hasn't been supporting, but we haven't had the support that we should have had at Level 3 (HOD Languages, Drama, Mid Decile Provincial Co-ed, roll 1001-1200).

I haven't had any adviser come in terms of Maori yet... but there are a lot of resources coming from the Ministry of Education (Maori, Mid Decile Provincial Co-ed, roll 1001-1200).

Subject association meetings help to meet needs, but this teacher regretted the disappearance of the wider discussions previously had at such meetings:

The local Geography Teachers' Association has met regularly for multiple years and we've always tried to work on supporting teachers to make Geography more exciting, so we used to go out and we'd do a field trip and we'd do the best field trip that we could and then teachers would take that away and use that in their classes and share that. But over the last three years, all we've talked about is NCEA and this year's professional development day, the only way that we can access what everyone is getting back from the moderators is that everyone is bringing in their moderated work and we're going to sit down there like boring old farts and we're going to get through all the pedantic stuff of what the moderator has said and change this word from 'You may do this' to 'You must do this'. And that's what subject associations have come down to, so rather than being inspirational I can understand why people say 'I don't really want to do that on the 22nd of November, I'm not going to go'...(HOD Humanities, Low Decile Urban Co-ed, roll 501-750).

Teachers have established their own informal networks with colleagues, which also provide support:

And it's also good to contact other teachers in other schools: 'What do you use to do this with them and how do you do it?' And then swap notes, sort of thing, just the little pieces of work that you can discuss quite readily (English, Mid Decile Provincial Co-ed, roll 1001-1200).

Reinstatement of the annual 'jumbo days' in some form would please many teachers:

I think that it is a positive in having the enforced PD, and I don't mean it in a negative way, but we have had to, as teachers, look at our programmes and have had to communicate both externally and within our school, and that has been a really positive thing for me personally and I know for other staff (Chemistry, High Decile Urban Girls, roll 1200+).

I agree with what they've said. Obviously, experts and money and time are just so important. But at the same time one thing that is still going to be important I think is teacher only days, as we've had in last two years, is still very important to us. We've got to have contact with other people. For someone to say that 'We are not going to have in 2005 these days' is not fair, because we still need to go back. We've only had one Year 13 behind, we need to go back and understand where do we go to. In the first year of Geography, 1.2 or something, we had 67% of candidates in NZ fail it. There is something dramatically wrong with that if you get the same candidate writing 1.3, where only 30% fail, one of them 67% fails, so there was something ... We need to be able sit down and go through things like that and be able to work together and with whoever is in charge of the judgement criteria, because obviously the judgement criteria were out of line (Geography/Social Studies, High Decile Urban Boys, roll 1200+).

I think one of the positive spin-offs of this system has been that teachers have been brought together with others in their subject area on a regular basis, and I don't know if that is so valuable for the younger teachers, but for those of us who have been in the career for a while, it's really good to be revitalised and to gain an understanding of the wider realities, which is important. And I would love to see that continued in some way, because it's a really lonely profession by and large, so it's really good to have those conferencing abilities (French/English, Mid Decile Provincial Co-ed, roll 1001-1200).

Because it [Drama] is my secondary subject and English is my first subject, all of my NCEA training days I went to English, so I've got no NCEA training specifically in Drama, so I think that's a real worry (Drama/English, High Decile Urban Girls, roll 1200+).

I think if they brought those [jumbo days] back, that would be a great help. This year I taught Geography and it was great, it worked fine, but I think if we got together with other teachers and thrashed out the programme for the year, it would be a great help (Geography/Outdoor Education, High Decile Area, roll <500).

But teachers said that not everything was perfect at the 'jumbo days':

You get 20 people [in a jumbo day] and give them an exemplar, you're not going to get a consensus, are you? They're thinking about it and the thinking bits are good, and as long as you don't get the negative ones there, which we have quite a few of in Science, for whom nothing was right, and they didn't want to implement the system to start with and everything was done to hijack it, which made life very difficult (HOD Science, High Decile Area, roll <500).

I found in Maths when we had our Level 3 training and we were meant to be producing resources, that what actually happened was the biggest schools in town just took their departments away into the school and left the others like me there. I don't know if that would happen again if we had that sort of thing. I don't know. That certainly wasn't helpful (HOD Maths, High Decile Area, roll <500).

When we were sitting in NCEA training, you had an opportunity to sit down with a group of people and work out to some extent what this meant, but a lot of that conversation was stifled because it was far too ... political, yes, that's a good word (HOD Humanities, Geography, Low Decile Urban Co-ed, roll 501-750).

Two teachers mentioned the huge professional development they had gained from taking on roles as moderators or as markers:

It's employment [as moderator] but it's also PD for me, so it's actually quite useful, not just from a selfish, monetary point of view. It's PD, which in turn can benefit the department, so it's not all me (English/Transition/Communications, Mid Decile Urban Co-ed, roll 501-750).

One of the bonuses in English, when you're marking it, you get a feel for what other people around the country are teaching, what works, what things kids respond to, you know, I note it down... So it actually becomes quite a good professional development thing, and also developing your marking skills (English/Media Studies, High Decile Urban Boys, roll 1200+).

INCREASED COSTS TO SCHOOLS

Schools have constantly complained the NCEA has increased costs to schools in a variety of ways and that schools have not been compensated for these. The focus groups provide evidence of some of this. Some costs are in the area of administration of entries and results; others are in the area of the assessment process.

Administration of entries and the sending of results has become a vastly more complex process than under the previous examination system. Extra staff have had to be employed to input and check data, and teachers also spend a lot of time on such processes. Furthermore, by making the entry and results submission processes Web-based, the burden has shifted to schools to produce printouts for checking that in the past were produced by NZQA:

I think NZQA are getting the whole thing on the cheap. They are relying more and more and more on the schools to do all of their processing of entries and all of this stuff, and they're paying us a pittance to do it. We're getting no more than we got under the old system, in fact, we're not even getting as much! You know, they give us something like \$1400 to enter 400, 500 students, verify all the marks - we don't even hand it in on paper now, we actually do it online or email them - so they don't even have to input it now, where they used to, we do it all now. But how do we pay somebody to do all that? The teachers do a lot of it, but somebody still has to check it, co-ordinate it and we have a woman who does this, and it's 50% of her job, just dealing with NZQA, inputting and checking... (Deputy Principal, Principal's Nominee, Mid Decile Urban Co-ed, roll 501-750).

A lot of the work that is done behind the scenes here is done by administration staff, and they put in enormous hours in data inputting, data checking, and because of that, I don't know if they get a hell of a lot on their pay scales, but if they weren't here, the workload that we would face would be huge, and I don't think people realise how much goes on behind... Well I don't think NZQA understands. They want to come and talk to the teacher who does the data-inputting, well there's no teacher that does that, it's done by someone else... (Principal's Nominee, Accountancy, Mid Decile Provincial Co-ed, roll 1001-1200).

MUSAC. I'm the person who does most of it. At the moment we have tried to encourage everyone to use it, but it's a matter of trying to make sure that the programme's available on all computers, and that's been an issue getting that done... You actually have to install the ability to access Classroom Manager onto every available computer and the time our computer whizz has to do that is limited. So it is improving, but the system we are running is that everybody gives me their marks and I enter them and then print out their mark book and then they have that to check (Principal's Nominee, HOD Science, Mid Decile Area, roll <500).

New equipment, texts, photocopying and computer support for the assessment process have also added substantially to school costs:

The three levels of NCEA have increased our photocopying bill massively and the school gets a \$1500 allowance for NCEA. That's my bill, alone. So that's been a huge issue (Health/PE/Food & Nutrition/Outdoor Ed, Mid Decile Urban Fringe Co-ed, roll 501-750).

In Science, the photocopying, and basically all the chemicals and the equipment that we've had to try and get in especially for these practicals, which we haven't got the money for yet. In NCEA Chemistry, we haven't had that equipment before that we need for certain achievement standards. And in Level 1, the chemicals we need for the practical standard they use up so much, it's not reusable and it's costing a lot more (HOD Science, Mid Decile Urban Fringe Co-ed, roll 501-750).

And the photocopying, we have a huge, huge budget (HOD Languages, Drama, Mid Decile Provincial Co-ed, roll 1001-1200).

Our computer system here is under so much stress that accessing and printing off materials can become... You might have to log on two, three or four times just to access and print off, simply because our computers are so over-stretched, and the printer may not be working, or the Internet

will be down, and it can be so frustrating (Biology/Science, Mid Decile Provincial Co-ed, roll 1001-1200).

We had to buy [exemplars from NZQA] for \$50 for one, and if you bought two, you saved \$25, but... [Colleague: They're trying to make money.] Yes, they sell samples, A3 photocopy, colour, oh you know. But if you buy another one, you save \$25 (Art/Design, Low Decile Urban Co-ed, roll 501-750).

HODs in an area school talked about their struggle with the absence of economies of scale for these extra costs:

We pay for the privilege [of using unit standard assessment tasks from NZAMT] which from the small school point of view is a huge part of my budget, just the membership of NZAMT, well it's a hundred dollars a year, regardless of the size of school, so for me that's quite huge, but I rely on that because I don't have to time to write my own resources and I don't have the support to sort of moderate them or anything... (HOD Maths, High Decile Area, roll <500).

Like, in the industry unit standards I had to buy a new drop saw this year. I got the Board of Trustees to cough up for a new drop saw and that was \$1600. And that's cutting everybody else's budget out now, but I had to have it to achieve the unit standard. Okay it's a very useful tool and it will be used a lot, but trying to keep up with the changes is quite hard ... The way I see it, we're a small school so we get a small budget from the government, but we're expected to do and supply the same as a large school. A large school gets a large budget. Okay, everybody's still wanting it, but if they need a Graphics programme, they can afford it. They only need one Graphics programme and it's spread amongst thousands or hundreds, whereas here it's one between two of them. It's a huge expense (HOD Technology, Graphics, High Decile Area, roll <500).

Well, photocopying exams for 20 students, because you're doing every standard as a standard. We don't have any administrative help at all, and then the photocopier will break down half way through too. We live to see another day, but you know. Those little words 'use of technology is expected' are scary words as far as I'm concerned because if, at Year 13 you have 1, 2, 3 or 4 students and you're looking at computer programmes and Graphics calculators and computer use, then, we don't have them. And it's like as [colleague] was saying...we don't have the budget to buy those sorts of things for our students. I have got Graphics calculators that the PTA have fundraised for, but to go back and say 'Look I'd like some new software for Year 13', it's like saying 'Give me another bite of your pie' when everyone else is needing a bit of the pie as well, so it's those sort of issues as well (HOD Maths, High Decile Area, roll <500).

It's the same with textbooks, the change of curriculum through the achievement standards. They took various bits out of the Science one and put various bits in, but the new NCEA textbooks which we bought, once they changed it, they didn't actually cover what we [needed] so what do you do now? I could only afford to buy 10 textbooks, I'm now going to buy another 10 next year, because I've saved up so I could buy another 10 textbooks! But another thing, the page numbers aren't going to be the same, and all these other things that when you go into a classroom and go 'Page 23...' That's just another little thing and it's money. A lot of stress I think in small schools does come from thinking about where we can save money on our budgets to get such and such. And we are sharing one piece of software between 3 instead of between 20. We did arrange with three other schools with the publishers, to cut down on their photocopying rights that you buy, where you're allowed to copy, but there was an arrangement made between five schools, where they worked out that, and said 'All of our Science departments together is the same as one big Christchurch school. Can we share the costs amongst us?' But even doing something like that, it's a time element, when we're one-man bands and we're trying to get everything done. But by the time we've rung six schools and we've agreed to negotiate it and so on, and got them all back again... (HOD Science, High Decile Area, roll <500).

When I first started at this school, we had one office person, that was all that was needed, and quickly that got changed to two with NCEA. Now, how many office people do we have now? Four. Those poor people in the office are working their bums off... the paperwork required just to run the school. We used to get snowed under and say 'Can you get this typing done?' We can't do that any more. We started off with one office person, we now have four, and they're snowed under. Now why is that? I'm not just talking about our workload, I'm talking about the whole workload here (HOD Technology, Graphics, High Decile Area, roll <500).

But trying to get away to do any courses is bloody near impossible. You go to the Deputy and... say you've got to fill in the application for professional development. And I did this and she said, 'Well, the budget's screwed already' (HOD Technology, Graphics, High Decile Area, roll <500).

What happens with relief sometimes is we have to use the [nearest city] pool, so the school is actually paying double travel; you're paying relievers to come here and our travel to go there (HOD Maths, High Decile Area, roll <500).

There needs to be some change in the base funding and the per student funding and an understanding that rural schools and small schools have basically the same administrative needs as a large school, there's not much difference (English, High Decile Area, roll <500).

Staff in another small rural school were really feeling the pinch after a roll drop which had led the BOT to reduce ancillary staffing for curriculum to make the budget balance:

We need the ancillary staff. I have never been in a school where I've had to do my own photocopying [before], but I do my own photocopying and typing the exams and all that sort of thing, I do that myself, because I don't want to ask the ancillary staff, they are so busy that it is not fair on them to get them to photocopy, or 'Can you type up my exams?' I do it all myself (HOD Languages, Mid Decile Rural Co-ed, roll <500).

And it's impacting on your teaching, because you're standing at the photocopier, you're filing. You're not actually trained or paid to do that, you're paid to actually teach kids... We've had a few problems actually, because our roll did drop, our ancillary staff has been cut by up to two, and that's a financial situation that I think the government has got to address. In terms of operations, we actually have to do the same amount of work as a big school... I've come from big schools in the city and you come here and you just shudder at the lack of finance and there's all this sort of, the lack of ancillary staff. You know, in a big city school, you know, it's grossly unfair. I think that as a small school this one does very well, we do extremely well, on just a shoestring of a budget (HOD Social Sciences, Mid Decile Rural Co-ed, roll <500).

And our board has just had to direct teachers to do their own work ... Basically our teachers have been asked, where possible, to do their own admin work, so that it will lessen the load on our ancillary workers. So, that's the situation in a school of this size. You feel guilty actually giving work to them... (HOD Technology, Graphics, BOT Staff Rep, Mid Decile Rural Co-ed, roll <500).

CONCLUSIONS

The government may have expected that the clamour for more resources for NCEA implementation at school level would fade once the qualification was fully implemented, however this research shows that resourcing is, and will continue to be, a huge issue for schools. There are no surprises in the concerns expressed here, except perhaps the pleas for sample assessment resources for unit standards. Sample assessment activities and exemplars for external standards is probably the one area that time will fix, because a body of actual exams will be built up over the next few years now that all levels have had at least one year. But sample assessment activities and exemplars for internally assessed achievement standards and for unit standards are still required. Teachers want not just the original sets, modified as the standards are revised, but also additions to the bank of sample assessments so that schools have a wider choice to either use or model their own on, and so that those who are depending on the Web-based resources do not end up using the same resources year after year.

Professional development is still needed. Teachers want to access the experts in their subjects and to share ideas with their colleagues in other schools. If it is genuinely believed by government that NCEA implementation is a six-year process, then the professional development which was provided in the first years needs to be continued. There are some really good things happening in some schools, and they need to be shared with teachers in other schools.

The increased costs to schools are also demonstrated here, and must be recognised through increases in secondary and area schools' operations grants. In developing a formula for this, the lack of economies of scale for small schools needs to be taken into account.

(See Recommendations 3, 4 and 6)

16. NZQA/MOE ADMINISTRATION

“How am I supposed to plan?”

Teachers showed very little awareness of the different roles of NZQA and the Ministry of Education in relation to the NCEA, using the agency names interchangeably, hence the title of this chapter refers to both central agencies.

NZQA responsibilities about which concerns were expressed were timeliness and quality of communication to schools, the complexity of the entry and results processes, and the cost of fees for students. Navigation of the NCEA website, which is linked from both the Ministry’s and NZQA’s website, is an issue for some teachers. Teachers also believe that both agencies need to do much more to communicate to parents and the wider community about the NCEA, in particular to share what these teachers believe to be ‘good news’.

It is interesting that despite the presence of many senior managers, Principals’ Nominees and heads of departments in the groups, no-one volunteered their perceptions of the work of NZQA’s main school liaison mechanism, the School Relationships Managers.

TIMING AND COMMUNICATION

The biggest areas of concern for teachers in terms of NZQA administration appear to be timing issues around marking schedules and exams, examiners’ reports, notification of revisions of standards, and notification of revisions of sample assessment tasks. These issues came up in most groups, as can be seen from the sample of comments below. One teacher seemed to put the concept of management of change in a nutshell:

If they just have a little bit more control in the way they programme to change things. And okay, changes need to be made, but let’s stick them all in a timeline (HOD Maths, Mid Decile Urban Co-ed, roll 501-750).

Teachers in one school could not see why the exams and their marking schedules could not be available on the website pretty much as soon as the marking process was completed:

Well I must admit that the Science marking schedules that have come through from exams are very easy to follow, but one of the big concerns that we have is the time it takes to get the marking schedule and the exam papers onto the Net. The kids have sat the exam, the exam could be on there now [November] They’re marking the papers, so they could pretty much be putting the marking schedules on there now too. .. It could be on by the time the kids come back, early Term 1, it doesn’t have to wait until the middle of the year. Okay, the examiner’s report might take a little bit longer, but why are we waiting so long for the exam and the marking schedule? (HOD Science, Mid Decile Urban Co-ed, roll 501-750)

Well, they don’t have to wait till the middle of June or July, or whenever they decide to put it on the Net... (HOD Maths, Mid Decile Urban Co-ed, roll 501-750).

No, we get the marking schedule... it’s usually the end of Term 1, early Term 2, same time as the final results (Deputy Principal, Principal’s Nominee, Mid Decile Urban Co-ed, roll 501-750).

Teachers in two schools were also irritated by the time it took to get examiners’ reports:

We actually found the markers’ reports exceptionally good ... Unfortunately we had to get them off the Net and it took them a long time to get on there (English/Transition, Mid Decile Urban Co-ed, roll 501-750).

I think that's also part of the problem, that I think we don't get feedback quickly enough from the Ministry and the markers and the moderators. Half way through the year is not good enough and so... Well, I mean we should be getting that at the very latest by the end of Term 1 (Commerce/Computing, Mid Decile Urban Fringe Co-ed, roll 501-750).

Teachers accepted the need to revise the new standards after they had been used for a year, but found the late notification of the final revised standards very stressful because it meant that they were scrambling at the last minute to get organised for the new year:

And that just brings me to another point, it's the timing of the changes, because, for example, I've just downloaded, and I was just at a Science teacher's review of the exam on Tuesday of this week, and the new Level 2 achievement standards, they were not available at that stage, they were available the next day, but one of them is not available. I've downloaded the new standards, and it's right late in the year when you're planning for next year, and they have, the changes have resulted in two of the Version 1 achievement standards to make a new Version 2 - so it's quite major. When I was on the website, I could find the new number, I can find the new titles, but there are no achievement standards actually on the website. How am I supposed to plan for next year? I think they need to look at making changes so that they are on the website mid-year, so that you've got plenty of time to download them... Just from my perspective, in terms of trying to manage things... getting updates on earlier in the year so that you've got a bit of time before they have to be implemented (HOD Science, Mid Decile Urban Co-ed, roll 501-750).

Like [colleague] of course, the problem for him is that next year is 'When do I put my assessment stuff together? How long do I wait?' You know, that aspect. It happened in English, it happens that you prepare stuff at the end of the year before, because you want to have it all ready to go, and suddenly it's changed, and the worst thing is that people seem to think that you'll be able to change it just like that - but there's the photocopying thing, there's every other teacher in the school. And, of course, you almost feel like you need to be logging on to the website every day to actually make sure you've picked up what has been changed (English/Media, High Decile Urban Boys, roll 1200+).

What I've found is NCEA changing; they've changed quite a few of the units at the beginning of this year, or Level 1 when they did the review. But we didn't actually have the actual, we had some draft copies at the end of last year, which then meant that I had to hurriedly re-write my program. And they were only draft and how the hell am I meant to write this if it's only a draft? And it wasn't until the beginning of this year when the final one came out that I had to hurriedly re-write my program, and it did require a lot a re-writing to make them fit (HOD Technology, Graphics, High Decile Area, roll <500).

They are so damn pedantic with us, I'd like to see that there are similar standards met from the centre. Level 2 achievement standards have been reviewed this year. Here we are now, the seniors have finished, we are preparing for next year, but we do not yet have the new copies of the achievement standards. So the stuff that we have had moderated this year, we can put that down and fix the alterations but that standard will change. So next year we are going to have that task that we did, the moderator's comments and the new standard, to come up with a new task. This year, for Level 1, the new copies of the Level 1 standards didn't arrive until the middle of the next year. Now, they were an improvement and I think these will be an improvement too, but they've got to be out in a timely fashion. Teachers are entitled to a life, we do not want to be going on with this at home (HOD Humanities, Low Decile Urban Co-ed, roll 501-750).

In Level 3 Stats, we got the course at the end of November, and there were significant changes that we didn't know about. I went to my second meeting and we didn't actually have a course to look at, it didn't come through until November and there were significant changes there. So we're zapping through our holidays and it's time once again. And I think, well you know, you'd think that it should be getting better - but the reality is that it doesn't (HOD Maths, Mid Decile Urban Co-ed, roll 501-750).

I get the feeling that certainly in the Level 3 Biology this year that they were making it up as they went along and I made the mistake of sorting out the assessment in January this year and so I got everything off the Internet and put all my work together and on the first day of school, the students were given the work that they had to do for the internal assessment this year. Now, by the middle of February, I went back to it and I found that it [sample assessment] wasn't there. A new one had appeared since the middle of January. And that was assessed unfortunately by the moderators and they said the one I used was out of date (HOD Biology, High Decile Urban Boys, roll 1200+).

My sort of concern there is basically what [colleague] has just mentioned, is how the notification actually comes through. Sometimes unless you actually go in, and you will see there is a change, you don't know.. I actually got a notice earlier this year that all the Business Administration units were going to expire at the end of 2004. I put myself forward for the advisory group and have been waiting and waiting to see, you know, what these units are going to look like, and I've been sending away to NZQA and getting no response, so in desperation the other day, I rang somebody who said that they expire 2004, but there's nothing likely to come online until 2006. So I've been waiting all this time trying to organise my courses for next year. So why do they leave it until the end of the expiry date before they start looking at making changes? Why shouldn't they... If they knew it expired at the end of 2004, why didn't they start looking at it at the end of 2003, or the beginning of 2004? (HOD Commerce, Mid Decile Urban Co-ed, roll 501-750).

We've got unit standards that are no longer, their expiry date is 2003, which means that we have this year, but the new ones are not already on the Net, so we don't know which version you... Do you continue on with that one? This is an internal. We've tried to look for the reviewed ones, we don't understand why they're not up in term 4 so that, they must know how schools operate. This is the time for planning etc, so we've got a gripe with that (English/Transition, Mid Decile Urban Co-ed, roll 501-750).

Teachers in many schools mentioned the difficulties of keeping up to date with changes in achievement standards and their sample assessment tasks and with changes in unit standards:

And of course you almost feel like you need to be logging on to the website every day to actually make sure you've picked up what has been changed (HOD English, Media Studies, High Decile Urban Boys, roll 1200+).

And the revised standards, I think maybe all schools should receive an email from the Ministry saying that 'These standards have been revised, inform your staff'. Not 'Well, you'll just have to keep checking the site to see what's changed'. I mean, we've got better things to do than keep going and checking what's been changed and what haven't (Commerce/Computing, Mid Decile Urban Fringe Co-ed, roll 501-750).

I'm aware that they have changed, and once again we have quite a good network and the network that tends to keep us informed about when, for example, the new versions are up and that type of thing. But it would seem to me that there has been very little consistency within the editing of versions. One thing I look at has one particular type of wording and then I might look at it a couple of months later and that wording has been changed slightly without us being advised of it. In the assessment schedule for example, which is quite frustrating (HOD Languages, Mid Decile Urban Co-ed, roll 501-750).

Changes in the standards and the assessments, and things going on the Web when we don't want them to be going onto the Web, and things changing, and we're not kept adequately up to date about what's happening (HOD Languages, Drama, Mid Decile Provincial Co-ed, roll 1001-1200).

I get my Science ones from the 1997 [unit standards assessment material]. Every time I use one I have to go back to the website to see whether they've changed the unit standards overnight, and so, well, relatively speaking, just to check for updated ones (HOD Science, High Decile Area, roll <500).

One group of HODs in the Mid Decile Urban Co-ed school talked about their efforts, successful and unsuccessful, to register to be advised of updates:

I've also applied three times to be advised of updates and I have never yet been advised of an update... Oh, there is a thing about it - 'you can register here'...I've done that three times! (HOD Science).

It didn't work for me. I've only tried it once (HOD Maths).

I've been getting updates... But the updates are not subject specific, they're just an update for anything, so you might go in there and it might not be your subject that is involved, so it's issued generically. I just get an email that says there has been an update today, and that's it. So I know, I can go in... (HOD Commerce).

No, the latest one, you can actually upgrade to get an update on a particular page, because you can now add new pages - I found that last night (HOD Science).

We haven't had any updates (Deputy Principal, Principal's Nominee, Geography/ Computing).

The Maths Association came in for praise again, this time for notifying teachers about changes:

I have to say, my Association's very good at sort of informing, someone will stumble across it and so it will go through the network (HOD Maths, Mid Decile Urban Co-ed, roll 501-750).

ENTRIES AND RESULTS

There was surprisingly little complaint about administration of entries and submission of results, even though there were a number of Principals' Nominees and senior managers in the focus groups. It would appear that many of the concerns which were endemic in the early years of NCEA have now been resolved.

The one school which was struggling with the administration of results was not using any of the standard software for the process. Instead, they used a database established by the school using generic software to enter results and then somehow converted this data into a suitable form for submission to NZQA. It appeared that this was not working well and was resulting in a lot of staff time being used checking and re-checking results.

The issue which generated the most discussion was the identification of standards, both in terms of version numbers and of standard numbers. Teachers in both groups in one school, the Mid Decile Urban Co-ed, explained their frustrations:

Now when we record any results, we have to put the version number on. Now, when you open in Word, you don't get anything, so to get the version number, you've got to open the .pdf file. Why can't they put the version number on the Word one so that you don't have to go through the whole rigmarole of doing it? (HOD Commerce).

Well I can get the version on the Word one... (HOD Science).

If you print it, not if you get it on your screen, you've got to print it to get it off Word (HOD Commerce).

True (HOD Science).

So if you go in and you open up a standard in Word, it hasn't got the version number on the top. You have to go into the .pdf, open it, find the version number, close it and go back again (HOD Commerce).

We came out with all these 1.1, 1.2, and 1.3, and now they've all got a 90000 number or whatever it is. Now, if you look at the achievement standards, they have both the number and the 1.1, 1.2, which is fine, they've got both of them. But if you get some information from NZQA, say they want a standard for moderation, you've only got a 7-digit number, and so you've got to go racing back through to see what particular achievement standard they are wanting. I mean why can't we have both, so that people know immediately which one they want? (HOD Science)

Well, yes, but there's another anomaly in there, in that in Classroom Manager, which is one of the major ways of sending results through, it will only print the 1.1s and the 1.3s when you want to print out a school report, you cannot print 90000 numbers. If I've got in Geography, I don't know, my report says Geography 3.1, but if I want to report it as 90701, I can't because of comparability, because who the hell knows what 90701 stands for? It's actually 3.1, but I can't get that up at the top, you see what I'm getting at? They've gone away from one, but you can't actually get the software to give it to you, and these are all things that they're going to have to address, but how do you get someone to address them? [Researcher: Isn't that a Musac issue?] Well, but it isn't, because you download the files from NZQA of your standard, you actually get a file from NZQA of

the files you're allowed to assess against. And in that, it's got the 3.1, the 3.2, the 3.3, you can't get it to actually accept [the five digit numbers]. So there's a problem there (Deputy Principal, Principal's Nominee).

One of the other things I'm finding frustrating is that we were brought up with 1.1, 1.3, 2.1 or whatever, and now all of a sudden we have these 5-digit numbers that are appearing, the 93105 or something, and I find that really confusing, because it's a second number that's been attached to an achievement standard and there doesn't seem to be any consistency. It would be really nice if those numbers actually had a pattern so that you would know that 93*** was Level 1, and then 931** was Sciences Level 1. If they had some connection - there's no cohesion between the different numbers (HOD Languages).

One teacher expressed a wish for results to be able to be submitted to NZQA more often during the year, so that students who left before the end of the year would be able to access a record of learning which reflected all achievements:

My other issue is that because we're a school our results get sent in at the end of the year, so I teach a lot of alternative kids that maybe only want to stay on until they get their literacy requirement or something and they could get it in the first month and fine, I enter it in the school system, but they're not actually going to get that until the next year, because our system is still based on the old School Cert thing where you have your exam at the end of the year. So if our kids can get all their credits in the first term, which some of them do, why can't they take them away and use it somewhere else? I mean it seems like they've made this supposedly wonderful flexible system and just kept the structure from the old one, and it's stupid, because I will have students that are actually leaving and we will write them a letter saying these are the credits that you've actually passed if they want to go on to a job, but they can't see it on the Framework, because it's only on the school system. But why can't NZQA cope with that and say 'Okay you can submit your results once a term' or something? (English/ESOL, Mid Decile Urban Fringe Co-ed, roll 501-750)

STUDENT FEES

The teachers in the Low Decile Urban school were the only ones who raised the subject of student fees, and this was mentioned by four teachers across the two groups:

We have just received data from when we did the data analysis of last year's NCEA performance. The most important piece of information other than the success rate was that [only] 62% of the cohort entered and we know why that is, and it's got nothing to do with the students' willingness to be assessed but it's got a lot to do with the ability of their families to pay the \$150 to enter. It is being addressed [by the reduction for 2005]... We do [advance fees for students and collect later], when we can support students by either long term payments, we also use the agency fees from NZQA to pay some of the students, we use any money that we have in our welfare fund to support people, but there are still people that are embarrassed by asking (Deputy Principal (Curriculum), Low Decile Urban Co-ed, roll 501-750).

\$75 is still a lot of money and a lot don't qualify for financial assistance so there needs to be some... Well if their parents are earning more than the limit, or they don't have a Community Services Card, they're not eligible for that, they're just outside. One of our staff for instance has two boys at this school and was really concerned because he thought he was earning too much money and wasn't going to apply for financial assistance this year whereas he qualified last year. So it's a problem that people that earn slightly more than that... It's like here's the barrier and they can get financial assistance for more than one child in the family but that's not huge. It's still a lot of money for most of our families. It's a very middle-class perception of what's available and what's okay to pay and I think going down to \$75 is actually much, much better. Part of it also...for instance I had a girl come this morning with \$200 - \$150 plus \$50 late fee - this morning [11 November], because her mum thought she couldn't sit the exam for Maths unless she paid, and I knew that she couldn't pay earlier this year because she was actually waiting for the money to come back from the electricity payout, you know? And she's now got that money and she was frightened that her daughter wasn't going to be able to sit any of her exams. And it seems to me unfair - they did not have the money in the middle of the year, they had the money now, why did they have to pay \$50 more? You know, that is penalising her for a financial situation that is outside her control... See I can't go through a pupil file and gain financial information on families and say 'Okay, I'll generate a form and send it out so that families don't have to worry, just tick, sign and send it back in', whereas I can do that when there is more

than one child in the family, I can generate an application form for financial assistance for two or more children quite easily. That information on financial background just isn't there and you can put out the information as much as you can but it still is a barrier if people have to front up and say 'I'm poor', it's humiliating (Principal's Nominee, HOD Science, Low Decile Urban Co-ed, roll 501-750).

And it's that barrier as well isn't it, because they just put their heads down. So we could tell kids that there is financial assistance before teachers rang home and tried to talk about the fact that there was financial assistance. But they still had to fill in the forms and come in and apply for it. So there's still that barrier of holding your head up and saying 'I need some support' and being able to fill in the forms and understand the process and get that money and then get that sorted (HOD Humanities, Low Decile Urban Co-ed, roll 501-750).

You have students that will complete the course but they didn't pay the fees, and that is huge here. Of the students in Year 11 that will sit NCEA Level 1, 20% of them haven't paid their fees, but there will have been information that has gone home all year that has said 'Should you not be able to afford to pay these fees, this is what you can have', you know, and then when they come the following year they go 'Miss, I didn't get any credit for....' They haven't got any credit and then once it unfolds you find out that they haven't paid for their subjects. 'But I passed everything, so how do I get it?' (Art/Design, Low Decile Urban Co-ed, roll 501-750)

WEBSITE NAVIGATION

In one group teachers discussed the difficulties for teachers and for students navigating the NCEA website, but this appears not to be a major problem. Where it was raised, at the Mid Decile Urban Fringe Co-ed, it was described variously as:

- Not the easiest thing to manipulate.
- Definitely not user-friendly.
- It tells me that it's leading me somewhere and I'll be able to find everything that I want there and then I go in and there is just nothing there.
- It goes round and round in circles. It needs better indicators... I was looking for last year's Accounting exam. It took three teachers to find it and then, I don't know what that says about our intelligence, but it did take three of us to find it. [Colleague] found it, but she actually stumbled across it at some other stage.
- It's because when you click in the side panel when you get to that, there is something for standards and something for assessment things, and everyone clicks on the standards and not on the one below for assessments. You know, it's a little trick. It wasn't that simple, but somehow, basically, you have to know the trick to find anything, and then you pass the trick around to other people, so that they can do it.
- But then I learnt where something was and then it got removed, but there was nothing there to say it had got removed and it just kept taking me back to another page, and I knew I had found it before and spent hours doing it and going back now and thinking that I'm going able to do it really easily.

SHARING THE GOOD NEWS

Teachers believe that NZQA and the Ministry of Education need to do more to inform parents and the wider community about how NCEA works and what it can offer. Teachers in both groups in one school expressed a wish to see NZQA doing more 'sharing the good news' about NCEA:

I feel really sad when I hear those kids on TV coming out of exams and saying 'Level 3 NCEA is rubbish' or whatever. That's what they're getting, I mean, they don't know it's rubbish, they just know what people have said to them. They've read the newspapers and they've been told 'What you're getting is not worth anything' and I think a very bad job is being made of selling and explaining this new system. I want the people that are in charge of it to do a much better job of selling it and explaining it, but often they're not clear either (English/ESOL, Mid Decile Urban Fringe Co-ed, roll 501-750).

I'm surprised there aren't more people in NZQA that are skilled in public relations, to, you know, put that positive spin and churn out the good news. Because there is good news, we feel it. For me the system is better, because it works for kids, it's as simple as that (HOD English, Mid Decile Urban Fringe Co-ed, roll 501-750).

Well some of what [colleague above] was talking about does go on. In fact, because some industries who are engaged with QA and the Qualifications Framework, they deal with stuff, they get monthly newsletters and all the good stories, all this information and statistics. I constantly see it because of our ITO, what is put out comes to us. And you know, manufacturing, and agriculture and automotive, all of those areas. So, yes, I think that is happening and I think the level of understanding out there is much greater than we realise. I think that what we hear about is the negative side, because that's what goes in the press, all right, to be honest. Whether it's all good enough, or quite there yet...I mean, we've had huge mail outs to our community. I think three times, on NCEA information. So every household in this district has what QA has sent to us...but obviously there's still more work to be done (HOD Social Sciences, Outdoor Ed, Mid Decile Urban Fringe Co-ed, roll 501-750).

Teachers in many schools expressed a belief that employers did not yet fully understand the NCEA, and that it was the government's job to remedy this. (NZQA have since published material for all employers to improve their understanding of NCEA.)

There's an onus on other people to be knowledgeable about what a Record of Learning is all about, and what NCEA is all about, and I think that's the next level of public education I guess, to empower employers, tertiary providers, all those people, with the knowledge to see that it means you achieved 80 credits of a particular nature and you have to look specifically at those credits to see what this student can do (Deputy Principal (Curriculum), Visual Arts, Low Decile Urban Co-ed, roll 501-750).

My observation is that employers just don't understand it, that employers have got no idea what a Record of Learning is and what a Level 1 Certificate is, they're not quite sure of how they match (ESOL, Mid Decile Urban Co-ed, roll 501-750).

I think employers actually do like it, but I think they're scratching their heads because when there are a lot that you have not achieved...Because it's not actually telling the employer that they can't do this...They go 'Oh yes, you've got that and that and that, you didn't fail anything, you're in'. And someone else might come along and 'Oh, you've got twice as many things on there as someone else' and I think they're very confused about what's actually going on with the whole thing (Technology/Graphics, Mid Decile Urban Fringe Co-ed, roll 501-750).

My concern would be with the employer. If your student goes out into the employment area after Year 11, say, and they come to you with this NCEA bit of paper and it says 'You have unit 90417 in Maths' or, you know, there's so many different numbers and standards available, how does an employer know which are the ones that he requires? (HOD Maths, Mid Decile Rural Co-ed, roll <500)

Yes, well, I won't name any places but I've worked somewhere where they were enrolling somebody and they came along to me and said 'What does this mean? I don't know what the hell this means, it's got 2-3 pages...' and they said, ' [Name], did this kid pass?' (Science, Mid Decile Rural Co-ed, roll <500)

I don't know if employers can tell the difference between a unit standard and achievement standard can they? (Principal's Nominee, Accountancy, Mid Decile Provincial Co-ed, roll 1001-1200)

Well, I had a kid's Record of Learning that they brought in yesterday that they had taken down to an employer and he said 'Oh, geez, they certainly have a lot of Es didn't they' and they thought E was bad, fail... (English, Mid Decile Rural Co-ed, roll <500)

Some teachers fear that employers will place more faith in the externally assessed standards:

I think that people think, the community and employers, that externals have got greater sense of rigour. And people that I have spoken to who employ people have said that they will be looking at

externals, because you know that you're getting a consistent standard across the country, or they all think that there will be... (HOD English, Mid Decile Provincial Co-ed, roll 1001-1200).

I've had senior kids come up to me and say that the employers don't even look at your internals. And I think that's very unfair if that's what the weighting is going on (English, Mid Decile Rural Co-ed, roll <500).

Parents, also, are believed to be struggling with understanding the new system:

Parents don't understand NCEA. We send them a report with an exam mark not with their report, and parents come in, 'Explain this', they don't know, they see Es and As and Ns, they have no idea what they stand for, they just get what the students tell them, who just tell them what they want them to hear I guess, so...(Maths, High Decile Urban Boys, roll 1200+).

I think it's the old story that those parents who are interested will probably work out what's going on but parents who are not that interested will probably struggle more than before (HOD English/Media Studies, High Decile Urban Boys, roll 1200+).

I think NZQA need to bring out the dummies guide to NCEA for parents, every parent from the end of Year 10, explaining every little bit, you know 'Your child needs 80 credits, he/she will get Excellence, Merit, Achieved, N is a Not Achieved' and then it'll go on to everything they can think of, because I do think there is confusion in the public arena about this (English, Low Decile Urban Co-ed, roll 501-750).

Some teachers felt it was just a matter of time and the understanding would be there:

It's got to be given time to work. You can't just say it's not working because people have to put their minds to the understanding of it, parents weren't able to... Obviously education is going to have an impact everywhere, so parents must make the time to get to understand it, same as the employers, same as the universities, so they can figure out their requirements (Geography/Social Studies, High Decile Urban Boys, roll 1200+).

I find that because I mix with a number of groups in the community, that I think the parents are becoming much more knowledgeable about NCEA, about the qualifications system... I'll be out doing something in the community and someone will come and say 'Oh, what do you know about this?' That sort of information, which I think is quite good actually. I'm the Fourth Form form teacher and when I had the parents' evening I thought the parents were actually quite interested and quite knowledgeable about what their youngsters were doing (English, High Decile Area, roll <500).

CONCLUSIONS

The effective management of change appears to be the key issue here, and in this area the central agencies have fallen short. It is completely unreasonable to expect overloaded teachers to respond instantly to last-minute changes to standards, or to be aware of changes in their subjects unless they are directly notified that a change relevant to them has been made. Furthermore, a major change of this kind needs effective and timely communication to all who are affected: teachers, parents, employers, the tertiary sector, and the wider public. While some teachers expressed a sense of optimism that the understanding and valuing of the NCEA would improve over time, the events of early 2005 tend to contradict that optimism. NZQA and the Ministry of Education need to urgently direct their attention to improving their change management and their communications systems.

Schools complained that much of the administrative burden of assessment for qualifications had been transferred from NZQA to schools, but there had been minimal addition to school Operations Grant funding in recognition of this. The management of a much more complex system of entries and results requires additional support staff and computer software and hardware, and these have been met at a cost to other school

activities. Recommendation 6 advocates an urgent increase in secondary and area school Operations Grant funding.

An increase in secondary school expertise on the NZQA Board would also help to ensure that the issues for secondary schools are properly heard at that level. At this point there is only one Board member with a current secondary teaching background.

(See Recommendation 1, 6 and 8)

17. SUBJECT-SPECIFIC ISSUES

In the other chapters there is evidence that different subject specialists view some issues differently, but there are few clear patterns. This chapter discusses some issues which seem to be specific to particular subject areas.

ENGLISH

English teachers highly value the opportunity offered by the NCEA to more validly assess certain skills which have been core parts of the English curriculum but invalidly assessed in School Certificate and University Bursaries. These include oral language, research and creative writing:

I'm a huge fan of NCEA for English, I mean it just suits the subject perfectly in terms of the mixture of internal and external (HOD English, Low Decile Urban Co-ed, roll 501-750).

Certainly within English, it's enabled us to really assess English in a way we feel English should have been assessed right from the word go, as from 15 years ago when they took up internal assessment into School Certificate (HOD English/Media Studies, High Decile Urban Boys, roll 1200+).

The one major area of concern among English teachers is that the level of written accuracy required by the achievement standards and by the unit standards may be unrealistically high at this point, given the low levels of written accuracy that many students are able to achieve at the time they arrive at secondary school:

Well I think it's been unfair on the students who are just coming out of the system now, because for the last twenty years, accuracy in English wasn't... We were ideas and, you know, process writing. Whereas now, all of a sudden we've said that it's got to be 99.9% accurate and I think that now, for the kids coming through it's okay, because we know now what they need to do. But those kids just coming out with Level 3 now, I think they've been hugely disadvantaged... For the last two years, both at this school and the previous school I was at, I have had students crying in my classroom. I have never had students in all my years of teaching feel unhappy with what was happening in my classroom. Students who have slogged their guts out in achievement standards and because they can't write accurately, they're not getting internally assessed achievement standards. Yet their ideas are brilliant, they were really putting the work in, and they can't reach it. And it's not happening in other subjects. Kids are coming to me and saying 'Look, I work as hard in your subject as I work here or here, I'm achieving - you are being unfair, you're marking us too hard, you're setting the standard too hard'. (HOD English, Mid Decile Provincial Co-ed, roll 1001-1200)

English teachers are also concerned about consistency in terms of use of word processing for writing. This relates to the accuracy issue because students with access to word processors can use the spell-checking and grammar-checking facilities, if their schools don't turn these off, but teachers have been advised that if their students are not able to use word processors, the teachers cannot substitute for this facility:

Well, we've got a very similar problem in relation to the use of computing in writing assessments. We have fourteen Year 12 classes this year and so it is impossible for us to put them all on computers to do their writing so we make them all handwrite. But it is possible in the standard to use a word processor, which means the students can use the spell check and the grammar check. But the instruction that comes from NZQA is that for students who are handwriting their work, the teacher cannot work as a word processor and we find that impossible to understand, if they can have spelling problems and grammar problems picked up by a word processor. We are not allowed to underline the problems. We can say to a student in general terms that 'You have a lot of spelling mistakes in this' but we can't underline them in the same way that a word processor can. Where's the fairness and the consistency in that? And there have been endless letters backwards and

forwards from the body representing [city] English teachers on this issue, and they refuse to budge...so it doesn't make sense (HOD English, High Decile Urban Girls, roll 1200+).

However, on the whole English teachers are very happy with the NCEA, and other teachers showed awareness that things had gone quite well in English:

When I was training as a moderator, we had to learn on the English achievement standards, and it was particularly well organised and developed. You know I think this is where the English is way ahead, the fact that it is so well developed and organised (HOD Science, High Decile Urban Boys, roll 1200+).

It's so preferable to what we had it's unbelievable (HOD Classics, English, High Decile Urban Boys, roll 1200+).

MATHS

Maths teachers' response to the NCEA is more mixed. They acknowledge that the numeracy requirements have increased the number of students staying committed to the subject into their senior years:

Even at the absolute lowest level, there are students at our Maths 103 level, that's our third tier of Mathematics at Level 1, that desire to achieve their eight credits for numeracy, so that they can at the end of the year have their Level 1 Certificate. Certainly it has given them a little more of a focus (HOD Maths, Mid Decile Provincial Co-ed, roll 1001-1200).

However, this has required Maths departments to design courses which cater to students who are not keen mathematicians but who need to achieve the numeracy standards, and some Maths teachers appear to be somewhat uncomfortable about this:

There are Level 2 courses now, including one that I'm writing at the moment, that have a predominance of Level 1 units in them... I was going to say that it's good to have students involved in study in this area, but I wouldn't say that it indicates that the achievement has improved. In many ways in fact I'd say that it has actually not helped (HOD Maths, Mid Decile Urban Co-ed, roll 501-750).

There are a few students in the mixed ability class that I have that are quite happily walking out of this school with Level 1 and Level 2 Maths, and it's across the board, they haven't done easy standards or anything. If I was an employer, I would not be confident to let them handle numbers. Even though we're saying they're fine. I can see how English can be really good, just from what I can see, NCEA seems to be very good for certain topics, but I can't see how Maths can really use it (Maths, High Decile Urban Boys, roll 1200+).

The Maths standards are seen to be unduly unforgiving in relation to students who make a small calculating 'slip' near the beginning of a problem which affects their final answer, and yet have demonstrated absolutely correct processes throughout. In the past, the 'slip' would have caused deduction of some marks, but it would not have led to a student completely failing, as it may now. This seems to Maths teachers to have inappropriately shifted the emphasis from process to product:

Well yes, there's no '2 marks out of 3' if you make that silly...a problem might involve quite a lengthy process of reasoning to get the final answer, but if you make a mistake early on, you're bugged basically, but you can still demonstrate a lot of skills along the way. Whilst previously we penalised them for that mistake and then allocated marks subsequently, that was easy. But now, I mean 'He's got the answer wrong' (HOD ICT, Maths, High Decile Urban Boys, roll 1200+).

It's not as good as the consistency most used to get on the old Bursary and School C, it was very much 'If you made that error, you can follow it through and can still get that question right', now it's more geared towards 'You must get so many parts out of 5, or so many out of 6' before you are getting that grade. Even if you've made an error, we won't take that into account, but you must get 3

out of 5 on the Achieved, or 4 out of 5 on the Excellence. But the Excellences usually like only have two parts to it, so it's 1 out of the 2, or 2 out of the 3 - then it's just a slight thing and it can be gone. And there's a number of...I can think of two excellent students in Year 13 now who have done that this year on internals, and it's just been a slight thing, and I know on the exam that the same thing is going to happen... [Researcher: And you haven't been able to reassess?] Oh yes, they've got Excellence on the internals, it hasn't been a problem because of the reassessment opportunities. But on the externals, there's just not that many internals in Maths, especially in the Calculus, there's only one internal and it's the same with the Level 2, we've got nine achievement standards and only three of them are internal... (HOD Maths, Mid Decile Urban Co-ed, roll 501-750).

Another issue for Maths teachers - the increasing demand for students to be literate in order to succeed in the subject - is covered under Chapter 12, General Assessment Issues – Literacy Requirements of Standards.

SCIENCES

For Science teachers, the main concerns are around the practicalities of assessing investigations, which are covered in various ways in Chapter 7, Managing Internal Assessment.

However, literacy requirements, especially at Level 1, were also an issue for a Science teacher:

Going back to the literacy thing, I find Level 2 and 3 Chemistry very clear, the Chemistry is the basis of the questions and the literacy requirement is less... But at Level 1 Science, where it's all obscured in all sorts of contexts and, you know, I say to the kids that the problem is fishing out what Chemistry is useful, and what Science you're being asked for. 'You know the Science, but you've got to work out...' Whereas, you get to Level 2 and 3, and it's really straightforward (HOD Maths, Chemistry, Mid Decile Provincial Co-ed, roll 1001-1200).

TECHNOLOGY

A number of Technology teachers expressed dissatisfaction with the Technology achievement standards, and said that they were choosing to assess using unit standards because of this:

Unfortunately a lot of kids get bogged down with the achievement standards in Technology. There's a lot of pre-planning. But in saying that too, I've taken a lot of the achievement standard planning and put it into the unit standards course, because in the end it actually develops their design work and that too. So I've sort of picked the eyes out of the achievement standards and put that into there, and slotted that in, it sort of marries into the curriculum, and I'm quite happy to do that. Next year, we're thinking about running two classes at Year 11, but offering a mixture of unit standards and achievement standards. We might have a base level of unit standards that they can sit and then if we've got people who can get through those standards and are looking for more, some of the brighter kids and the switched-on folks, they can carry on using achievement standards as well, that might sort of keep everyone happy (Technology/Graphics, Mid Decile Urban Fringe Co-ed, roll 501-750).

Last year I was head of Computing, and we went to a number of achievement standards involved with Technology, and it was one of these, bizarre... and the words 'word processing', 'databases', 'word' weren't in any of the achievement standards. And you had to always sort of interpret and it was always interpretations of like, what does requirements mean? Does that mean 2, or 10? And there was a lot of swanning around trying to work out what on earth was going on, and even the people who ran the courses quite often weren't sure about what certain things meant and it was always sort of a fog around these Technology achievement standards and I know a lot of people were deterred and encouraged to do unit standards. They were far more precise, far more direct, far more...and so the resources, what they gave us was loads and loads of student work and said 'This is other students' work, what do you think of it?' and you think 'Well, is it a pass?' and they sort of say 'What do you think?' and then you're like 'Well, does it meet the criteria?' and they were almost like 'Well you can decide'. It was a very weird and wonderful sort of atmosphere that was going on.

I went back to Physics after that mind you! (HOD Physics, Mid Decile Provincial Co-ed, roll 1001-1200)

Still, but they are diminishing by the year [use of Technology achievement standards] which is where the building and construction trade, the elementary construction skills certificate, that's where that has come out of, frustration with the achievement standards. Didn't suit our kids, so what can we offer them, and... (Principal's Nominee, Accountancy, Mid Decile Provincial Co-ed, roll 1001-1200).

When you compare for example the take up and the motivation of students in the school that used to do the old Technology achievement standards and those who are now doing the Building Tech unit standards, I mean there's just a huge change in the whole character of the course, the motivation of the students. Kids are absolutely on fire with doing real things, and making things that are really targeted on the future, in contrast with trying to do achievement standards in Technology which nobody understood (HOD Humanities, Low Decile Urban Co-ed, roll 501-750).

With the achievement standards they became more design focussed, so they have opted for the unit standards so the boys can still have the 'hands on' with the woodwork and metalwork... Right through, and there's also Carpentry courses at Year 12, and a Mechanics course, STAR funded (HOD Science, High Decile Urban Boys, roll 1200+).

In the Technology side, we've found the Technology achievement standards absolutely impossible to manage, and so we are now doing predominantly unit standards and we can design courses that really suit our students. So achievement standards have not worked for us at all there, but the unit standards are great, for workshop courses (HOD Technology/Graphics, Mid Decile Rural Co-ed, roll <500).

For Technology I went to unit standards, I was not happy with the Technology based school ones, so I went to ITOs which is Carpentry, they have been excellent. [Researcher: Do you want to talk about the Technology achievement standards and why you're not using them?] Because they're absolute crap! Excuse my expression... The expressed view at one of the meetings we had with the [inaudible] association [was] that they are designed for girls' schools without workshops... That's a sexist issue and I'm sorry, but they're designed for schools without workshops who want to do a lot of written work and make cardboard cut-outs. The technical and the actual physical aspects of making something I considered when I went through them and read them was about 10 -15%. You try and get these kids to do that, they would revolt and I'd be out of a job... I'm sure they would work perfectly well for some schools, some of them are still using them, but the Technology teachers that I've spoken to, the number of them that were told they had to do them when they were implemented, and they were pulling their hair out, they're so wordy and pathetic (HOD Technology/Graphics, High Decile Area, roll <500).

In contrast, a Technology and Graphics teacher at the High Decile Girls' school was happy with the Technology achievement standards, although numbers in her classes were smaller than she would have liked:

Technology follows the curriculum a lot more now... If you look at the curriculum and read the achievement standard, you can actually see quite clear links to the curriculum... We try to sell the subject, get kids to see what we do, but just don't seem to get the numbers (Technology/Graphics, High Decile Urban Girls, roll 1200+).

LANGUAGES

Languages teachers were generally happy that the NCEA offered opportunities to more validly assess skills in Languages:

I think that standards-based assessment is really useful for assessing students in Languages. I think that it is very difficult to put a number on a piece of writing, or a number or a percentage on a speech. And I think that when you are looking at standard criteria that you can be very clear on whether the students have achieved the standard or not, or whatever... (French/English, Mid Decile Provincial Co-ed, roll 1001-1200).

I think for my subject, and, also I only did one year of School Cert, but now it seems like a more realistic assessment of the subject. Before we were doing exams and the questions that were in the exams to measure the language ability didn't seem very realistic. Whereas now, there is a set criteria. When measuring someone's language ability it is very hard to give them a mark, but to have certain criteria seems more realistic (Japanese, High Decile Urban Girls, roll 1200+).

18. CONCLUDING REMARKS

This research provides an invaluable window into the thinking of secondary school teachers about one of the most major reform projects with which they have had to engage for many years. It is well understood by experts on education policy and educational change that no bright idea in the mind of a politician or a government official will ever be translated into a reality without the co-operation and effort of classroom teachers. The NCEA story is one of teachers toiling unceasingly over the past five years to turn a bright idea into a classroom reality which works for their students. They have not been helped by poor change management by the government agencies, nor by under-resourcing in terms of funding, materials and time. The lack of robustness in the systems which are required to provide quality assurance for the new qualification, such as the delivery of consistently high quality external assessments and effective external moderation systems has also been problematic for them.

Nevertheless, most teachers see the NCEA as a definite improvement on the previous qualifications system and believe schools are developing effective systems for the assessment of their students. This is testimony to the dedication of teachers, who will always endeavour to turn a sow's ear into a silk purse if that is what is required to meet the needs of the students who face them in their classrooms.