

SUMMARY

This paper examines why teacher support for the NCEA has struggled to rise beyond a "fragile consensus" since its 2002 inception and advocates major changes in government policies to enable the NCEA to fulfil its potential.

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1. Introduction

- 1.1 PPTA, and secondary teachers, have been the guardians of the NCEA over many years, because we can see its undoubted benefits for students. As a standards-based assessment system that is based on the principle that all students should have opportunities to succeed and to fulfil their potential, the NCEA has clear advantages over the previous norm-referenced qualification system, which had a built-in failure rate.
- 1.2 In fact, PPTA activists were pushing for standards-based rather than norm-referenced assessment for student qualifications from as early as the 1960's. Their reasons were always about equity, and about motivating the increasing range of students staying on into the senior secondary school by allowing a greater range of skills and knowledge to be recognised.
- 1.3 Standards-based assessment (SBA) gives teachers greater professional autonomy to design meaningful programmes for their students, and to use a wider range of assessment tools. In comparison with norm-referenced assessment, SBA is much more high trust.
- 1.4 However, by the late 1980's the profession's reasons for supporting SBA came into conflict with a political shift to neo liberalism which also recognised that SBA had advantages, but for very different reasons. The neo-liberal arguments for SBA were about:
 - Transparency of what students knew and could do in order to reduce 'transaction costs' for employers,
 - Avoiding waste of 'human capital',

- Being better able to monitor the success of the schooling system and teachers as individuals, and
- Flexibility and choice for students.

NZQA was set up in 1990 in this political environment.

- 1.5 In the 1990's there were teacher trials of a model of SBA, called Achievement Based Assessment (ABA), mainly for Sixth Form Certificate. ABA used four or five grades or levels of achievement. However, a Qualifications Framework made up of only pass-fail unit standards was developed and the work on ABA was abandoned.
- 1.6 NZQA attempted to get teacher support for using unit standards for the whole school curriculum. Although many teachers, especially those in lower decile schools, valiantly attempted to make this work because at least it was a standards-based system, a broad consensus of support from the profession was never achieved. The 1990's saw constant conflict between teachers and the government over many issues, and qualifications were a particular flashpoint. There were two bans on work on unit standards during the 1990's, in 1992-93 and 1995-96.
- 1.7 The concerns about the Qualifications Framework listed in a 1996 PPTA conference paper would be very familiar to teachers today:
 - Lack of adequate resource provision, with teachers having to reinvent the wheel in every school
 - Workload pressures
 - Pedagogical issues - concerns about the fact that in unit standards only credit or no credit were available, and also about atomisation of learning into small and excessively detailed standards
 - The process of implementation – timelines, etc.
- 1.8 It was PPTA that brokered a solution, through establishing an expert panel to find a way through the impasse. This was the Qualifications Framework Inquiry.

2. The Qualifications Framework Inquiry (QFI)

- 2.1 While the decision to set up an expert panel, the QFI, was made by PPTA Annual conference 1995, industrial action against implementation of both the Qualifications Framework and the Curriculum Framework meant it couldn't work until late 1996. Its report was published in July 1997.¹

- 2.2 The QFI report established many of the principles on which NCEA is

¹ Peter Allen, Terry Crooks, Shona Hearn (now Smith) & Kathie Irwin (1997). Te Tiro Hou: Report of the Qualifications Framework Inquiry. Wellington: PPTA.

based. They were unequivocal that any future secondary school qualifications must be able to earn credits on the Framework, because this was the way that students could have access to a wide range of learning, contextualised for them, and recognised through a secondary school qualification. While we would be unlikely to propose anything different today, there are issues caused by this decision that are discussed later in this paper.

2.3 Their solution to teachers' concerns about unit standards was that for school curriculum subjects they must be redesigned to include the following:

- Provision for merit and excellence;
- Increasing the size of standards so there were fewer per subject;
- Less detail in the standards.

This is essentially a description of today's achievement standards.

2.4 They said that successful implementation would require:

- Improved approaches to moderation
- A realistic time-frame, and
- Improved support and resources.

2.5 They also, significantly, set out eight criteria by which any qualifications system should be judged:

- Fair
- Inclusive
- Cumulative
- Clear
- Motivating
- Coherent
- Constructive
- Manageable

These criteria continue to be useful benchmarks against which to evaluate the NCEA.

- 2.6 The QFI report was not universally welcomed by PPTA members. There was tension between members who were committed to change and welcomed the QFI's way forward, and members who saw many dangers in changing from the existing norm-referenced system.
- 2.7 It was argued by some that the existing system separated schools from other institutions, and thus served to keep the threat of EFTS funding of students, a logical consequence of 'seamless' qualifications, away from the secondary school.² (For those schools trying to survive today while sharing funding with tertiary institutions for senior students on trades academies and other tertiary courses, the damage of EFTS funding to the ability to run comprehensive senior programmes is now very real.)
- 2.8 Despite these concerns, the 1997 PPTA Annual Conference gave conditional support for change along the lines recommended by the QFI, including the placement of any future school qualification on the Framework.

3. Achievement 2001 – the birth of the NCEA

- 3.1 By the end of 1997 the government could see that PPTA was offering a solution to end the ongoing conflict, and a qualification designed to meet the needs of secondary school students had to be developed. The work on this was called 'Achievement 2001' because 2001 was the original 'go live' date. (Thankfully, in November 1999 'go live' was deferred a year by Minister Trevor Mallard on the grounds that insufficient support was still not available to teachers so they could implement the qualification successfully. Whether it was sufficient by 2002 is debatable.)
- 3.2 Work began in the Ministry of Education, and there began to be a realisation that without input from the profession, no school qualification could be developed. As a result, the Ministry began engaging with PPTA, and by Annual Conference 1999, PPTA:
 - Had committed to facilitating a national consultation exercise alongside the Ministry,
 - Had secured representation on all the subject panels, and
 - Had significant membership of the Leaders Forum which was to become the key advisory body for NCEA.
- 3.3 Yet successive annual conferences around that time continued to express reservations about the same issues as always: resourcing, time for implementation, and the quality of Ministry and NZQA change management processes.
- 3.4 Teacher support could never to be taken for granted. Even in 2001, the year before the NCEA began, a conference resolution noted "the fragile consensus among PPTA members around the NCEA".

² Alison, J. (2007). Mind the Gap! Policy change in practice. School qualifications reform in New Zealand, 1980-2002. PhD thesis, Massey University. P.120.

4. The fragile consensus continues

- 4.1 The NCEA began in 2002 with Level 1. In 2003, schools were given a choice between moving straight on to Level 2 or offering Sixth Form Certificate for one last year, but very few stuck with SFC. The following year Level 3 replaced Bursary.
- 4.2 In 2004, PPTA conducted focus group research in nine representative secondary and area schools, involving 105 teachers, and gained valuable information about how teachers saw the new qualification, and what the issues were in making it a success.³ The “fragile consensus” referred to in 2001 remained, with 63% of teachers judging the NCEA to be either better than the old system but with improvements needed, or clearly better, and the rest split between wishing to return to the old system or unwilling to commit to the NCEA as being an improvement.⁴
- 4.3 In 2005, an annual conference paper evaluated the NCEA against the QFI’s eight criteria for a high quality qualifications system, and suggested that the NCEA did not yet meet all of those criteria. In particular, the paper suggested that the NCEA was still not:
- **Fair:** Because of poor moderation and inconsistency from year to year in external assessments.
 - **Clear:** Because of the lack of exemplars of student work for all standards.
 - **Motivating:** The PPTA focus group research⁵ had suggested that the NCEA was not motivating some students to aim for higher grades than Achieved.
 - **Coherent:** Because of the continuing possibility of fragmentation of learning into packages related to individual standards rather than looking at the whole curriculum.
 - **Manageable:** The focus group research⁶ and a study of secondary teacher workload⁷ concurred that the NCEA was not manageable for teachers or for students. Various attempts to ameliorate the workload, e.g. by limited the credits in courses, or reducing the number of assessment opportunities, had been countered by “the lack of stability caused by annual reviews of the standards and the sometimes quite major changes that have resulted from these reviews”.⁸ It is worth quoting here the final paragraph on manageability from the 2005 paper, because really none of the issues listed there have gone away, and further issues have arisen since.

3 Alison J. (2004). Teachers talk about NCEA. Research report on focus groups with secondary teachers. Wellington: PPTA. Download from <http://www.ppta.org.nz/resources/publication-list/3194-teachers-talk-ncea>

4 Ibid. p.9

5 Ibid.

6 Ibid.

7 Ingvarson, L., Kleinhenz, E., Beavis, A., Barwick, H., Carthy, I., & Wilkinson, J. (2005) Secondary Teacher Workload Study Report, Melbourne: Australian Council for Educational Research.

8 PPTA (2005). The NCEA: A work in progress. Wellington: PPTA.

However, the overall conclusion of the PPTA research was that the new qualifications system could certainly not yet be described as 'manageable'. The factors generating the extra teacher workload that has undoubtedly been a feature of the NCEA are many and varied, and therefore finding a solution to them is complex. It is clear ... that the NCEA has impacted negatively on all teachers' workloads. This is particularly so for teachers with curriculum responsibilities such as Heads of Department. There are also particular problems for teachers in small and isolated schools. The lack of stability caused by annual reviews of the standards and the sometimes quite major changes that have resulted from these reviews has also added to teachers' workloads.⁹

4.4 This fragile consensus continues today. NZCER's survey of secondary schools in 2012¹⁰ revealed that the level of unequivocal support for the NCEA by teachers has moved only 4% in nine years, from 65% in 2003 to 69% in 2012. This is hardly overwhelming support.

5. Why is the NCEA still not fulfilling its potential?

5.1 The PPTA vision of an equitable qualifications system that would enable every student to reach their potential, through being able to access while at school a wide range of learning, has not come to pass. This has been largely as a result of government action, or inaction. A low trust agenda continues to be seen in government policies such as:

- The 85% Level 2 target,
- The hands-off approach to a lack of credit parity,
- Excessive moderation (for both internal and external practice assessments),
- A laissez fair approach to the excessive workloads of students and teachers, and
- The intrusion of EFTs funding approaches in the senior school.

5.2 The 85% Level 2 target

5.2.1 Numerical achievement targets have no place in standards-based assessment systems. They create perverse incentives that prevent teachers from looking for the best possible ways for their

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Hipkins, R. (2013). NCEA one decade on. Views and experiences from the 2012 national survey of secondary schools. Wellington: NZCER.

students to achieve their potential. Such targets put pressure on teachers to ensure that every student in their class gets the maximum number of credits possible, as early in the year as possible, so that they can be sure to achieve the 80 credits needed for the level certificate.

- 5.2.2 The currency becomes the credits, not the quality and relevance of the learning programme. This also becomes a major workload pressure for students, who face constant assessment across their subjects. The Education Review Office has highlighted this in their recent national report on secondary student wellbeing.¹¹
- 5.2.3 Such targets also encourage “credit farming” where standards are offered by teachers, not because they are the most valuable to the student, but because they most easily deliver credits. Students themselves seek out courses which are perceived to deliver the most credits for the least effort, but these may not be the courses that will most benefit them in the medium and long term. The supposed motivational benefits for students of having merit and excellence, and course and certificate endorsement, are lost when the emphasis goes onto the number of credits.
- 5.2.4 The 85% target has also had a significant workload impact. Progress was being made a few years ago in encouraging schools to place a limit of 18 to 20 credits on any one course. NZQA and the MOE ran a roadshow advocating this, and PPTA adopted policy that from 2011, “members be encouraged to limit the number of credits ... to a maximum of 20”.¹² However, once the 85% target was set by the government, the attention shifted from minimising to maximising the number of credits students gained.
- 5.2.5 In recent years, PPTA has seen the emergence of “summer schools” which take advantage of the fact that results can be submitted as late as February of the following year. Students who have not quite achieved the entry requirements for a tertiary course can come back to school and finish them, or pick up extra credits. This makes the beginning of the year particularly stressful for teachers involved.
- 5.2.6 It is simply dangerous, in any system which has large amounts of internal assessment, to set targets for achievement. Teachers must be free to exercise the best possible judgements without pressure to “deliver credits”. Making high stakes assessment judgements for the students they teach, and with whom they are expected to develop close professional relationships, is already a significant tension. To lay targets on top of that situation is extremely risky to the credibility of the qualification.
- 5.2.7 Before the 85% target was created, secondary schools were

11 Education Review Office (2015). Wellbeing for young people’s success at secondary school. Wellington: Education Review Office. Downloaded from <http://ero.govt.nz/National-Reports/Wellbeing-for-Young-People-s-Success-at-Secondary-School-February-2015>

12 <http://ppta.org.nz/resources/publication-list/1426-18-credits>

already faced with media attempts to create league tables to compare schools, and these were often fallacious because of the way data was used, and encouraged superficial assessments of schools. The 85% target has simply exacerbated this problem.

5.3 Failure to address lack of credit parity

5.3.1 The NCEA is a “multi-field qualification”, which means that standards from anywhere across the Framework can be credited to an NCEA. There are no requirements for an NCEA to include any achievement standards.

5.3.2 There is a notional rule for the whole Framework that one credit should represent ten hours of learning and assessment time, including independent learning by a student. Teachers believe that the application of this rule in the development of standards has been far from stringent. It appears to them that industry unit standards that are in use in schools generally deliver more credits for fewer hours of work than achievement standards.

5.3.3 There is also a perception among teachers that some industry unit standards are not placed at the appropriate level of the Framework. While NZQA has developed descriptors of what is required for each level, and checks every standard submitted for approval against this, these are very general descriptors. For example, Level 2 is described as follows:

- Knowledge: Basic factual and/or operational knowledge of a field of work or study
- Skills: Apply known solutions to familiar problems and apply standard processes relevant to the field of work or study
- Application (of knowledge and skills): General supervision, requiring some responsibility for own learning and performance.

Whether the problem is that some industry unit standards are incorrectly levelled, there is certainly a perception that there is a problem.

5.3.4 There may also be issues to do with the assessment methods used rather than the standard itself, with teachers relating experiences of students gaining Level 2 or even Level 3 credits from filling in workbooks.

5.3.5 PPTA has been raising these issues with NZQA for years, but it has never been satisfactorily addressed.

5.3.6 This leads to significant credibility issues for the NCEA. Is an NCEA gained at a private training establishment (PTE), and made up entirely of unit standards, the same as one from a school? Is it appropriate that students can do a unit standards-based short course of agriculture unit standards over a two-week holiday, and

come back to school with most of Level 2 achieved already? How does this sit with the teacher who the following term is trying to engage those same students around a five-credit drama standard AS91214 “Devise and perform a drama to realise an intention”, which will take most of the term to complete?

- 5.3.7 Employers also continue to struggle to work out how to evaluate the relative merits of different students’ NCEA qualifications. While larger employers with big HR departments have probably become skilled at reading a Record of Achievement and assessing whether the standards achieved indicate the right kind of skills and knowledge for the position, the majority of employers in New Zealand are small businesses who are often not au fait with the complexities of the system. While the Vocational Pathways initiative is intended to assist with this, it is unlikely to fully solve the problem even when it is operating effectively, which it is not yet – see below.

5.4 Excessive moderation

- 5.4.1 Despite NCEA having the highest possible agreement rates that could be expected from any moderation system internationally¹³, the government brought in a requirement that NZQA moderate at least 10,000 items of student work annually, across a random sample for the National System Check, plus the samples collected from selected standards for the School Check sample.
- 5.4.2 While NZQA claims that this latter sample is increasingly targeting standards and departments where there is cause for concern, teachers see little evidence of this. Even if that is happening, it is unlikely to be addressing the real problem, which is a lack of professional development for teachers who are struggling, especially in the smaller subjects.
- 5.4.3 Furthermore, the two different moderation samples mean that schools have to manage two separate processes for collecting items of student work per year.
- 5.4.4 Besides the external moderation of specific standards, teachers are required to do internal moderation of all standards every year. This is a particular problem for teachers who are the only person in their school doing a particular subject. This may be because the subject is delivered to only small numbers of students, or because it is a small school. These teachers are required to work with someone in another school to discuss their assessment judgments.
- 5.4.5 In addition, NZQA decided in 2009 to “solve” what they perceived to be a problem in the process for estimating grades for students seeking compassionate consideration for external assessments by introducing a “derived grade” process. This caused a relatively light check marking process for practice assessments to become

13 In 2014, the agreement rate for the National System Check was 91.9% at the Credit level, and 82.8% at the Grade level.

an onerous process similar to that used for internally assessed standards.

- 5.4.6 This significant increase in internal moderation has arisen simply because NZQA appears not to trust teachers' professional judgement about what their students would have achieved if they had been able to attend the exam.

5.5 Incompetent, excessive and under-resourced change

- 5.5.1 Year after year of the NCEA there has been change that has had significant implications for teachers, and yet implementation of that change is never done well or resourced adequately. Implementation failure always means more work for teachers, and yet teacher time is never costed into the equation. A recent example of this is a statement in NZQA's evaluation of the eMCAT pilot conducted in 2014:

- *The contract with Education Perfect to develop and host the eMCAT constituted a value of \$30k. **Work completed by teachers was on a voluntary basis.** (Our emphasis.)¹⁴*

- 5.5.2 The process of aligning all achievement standards to the revised curriculum, which required rewriting of nearly every standard and then the flow-on changes in schools' assessment programmes, for example, went as smoothly as it did only because of the hard work of teachers. One principal told a recent independent review that teachers were "the unsung heroes" of that process because there was so much to do and they just got on and did it.¹⁵

- 5.5.3 A current example of poor change management is the project to define "vocational pathways" through the NCEA. These "pathways", which are lists of standards that would be useful for students planning particular career directions, were launched in a blaze of publicity in April 2013, but the implementation was criticised by a Visiting Fellow embedded in the Ministry of Education to study the project. In her report, published August 2013, Eileen Harrity wrote:

- *Considerable confusion ... seems to exist among stakeholders as to what is expected of schools... These tensions highlight a risk that has not been fully addressed in the design phase. Essentially all schools should choose the approach that best meets the needs of their students. However, that assumes that all schools have the understanding, capacity, and resources to implement Vocational Pathways even in their most basic form. Without additional guidance and clear expectations, schools may struggle to successfully implement the Pathways.¹⁶*

¹⁴ NZQA (2014). Report on the eMCAT project, December 2014. Downloaded from <http://www.nzqa.govt.nz/assets/About-us/Our-role/innovation/2014-eMCAT-report-final.pdf>

¹⁵ NZQA (2014) An independent review of the effectiveness of NZQA's implementation of the 2007 NCEA enhancements: Report of the panel, 22 December 2014. Downloaded from <http://www.nzqa.govt.nz/about-us/news/review-the-2007-ncea-enhancements/>

¹⁶ Harrity, E. (2013). Vocational Pathways: Using industry partnerships and personalised learning to improve student outcomes. Wellington: Fulbright New Zealand. Pp.16-17.

5.5.4 These implementation issues persist, for example:

- The absence of a clear rationale for what should or should not be included in a pathway led to major disparities between the pathways in terms of the number and type of standards included. This has caused such a mess that all pathways are now being reviewed in detail, with likely major content changes for 2016.
- There is still no clarity as to what Level 3 pathways will look like, and whether there will be awards available at that level, despite the fact that increasing numbers of students are gaining Level 2 pathway awards and no doubt looking for the equivalent at Level 3.

5.6 Failure to properly consult with teachers

5.6.1 NZQA and the Ministry of Education set up groups to consult with teachers, but leave these groups feeling ineffectual and frustrated.

5.6.2 While a consultative group, the Secondary Qualifications Advisory Group (SQAG), successor to the NCEA Leaders' Forum from the early days of the NCEA, meets about ten times a year with NZQA and MOE officials, PPTA representatives are increasingly gaining the impression that the agencies are not terribly interested in seeking the advice of this group. They rarely table items or papers and wait for the sector representatives to put forward items, and promises made at the meetings often fail to result in action. In the meantime, work on all sorts of matters continues, and such groups find themselves being presented with fait accompli, or else discovering that major decisions have been made without any consultation with the group set up for that purpose.

5.6.3 The Workload Advisory Group, established in 2014 by NZQA and MOE at PPTA's insistence, has so far been unable to deliver anything of substance. The response from the MOE and NZQA to a number of significant recommendations from the group has largely been dismissive, conveying messages such as "in hand already", "up to schools/subject associations/teachers", and "not our job".

5.6.4 What is required, if the issues around the NCEA's unmanageability are to be addressed, is active engagement by the agencies with teachers and their representatives to seek out actual reductions in the current assessment workloads of students and teachers.

5.7 Failure to enable all students to have worthwhile programmes at school to the end of Year 13

5.7.1 More and more students want to remain at school to the end of Year 13. Parents are increasingly aware that the long-term outcomes for students who do five full years of secondary education are far better than for students who leave earlier, and yet the Ministry has failed to provide adequate opportunities for the full range of these students.

- 5.7.2 Those destined for university are well provided for, but the Ministry's answers for the rest are ones that require students to be only part-time at school, with negative consequences for the school's ability to maintain curriculum breadth for the rest. Schools are being accused of leaving students stranded without options at the end of Level 2 and privileging those en route to university, when the problem is caused by Ministry failure to adequately resource the curriculum breadth that is required for the full range of students.
- 5.7.3 The work on developing Level 3 Vocational Pathways contains major threats to senior curriculum delivery. Ministry officials argue that Level 3 pathways that are not university-oriented will require students to be part-time at a tertiary institution or in a work placement earning Industry Training (ITO) credits. This could mean a significant proportion of a school's Year 13 being 0.6 at school and 0.4 elsewhere, for example. This is achieved by using an EFTS-funding formula, whereby the school and other institution share a per student amount, even though the school is likely to be offering 100% of the pastoral care.
- 5.7.4 Developing timetables is a nightmare in these circumstances. The EFTS approach assumes that when a student is not in the school, the resource allocated to them is not needed, but a student is part of a class, and while an individual may be off at a polytechnic a day a week, the rest of the class needs to be taught. Furthermore, if the student doesn't turn up to polytechnic, it's the school that has to follow up with the family and the student, not the polytechnic. The small extra allocation for pastoral care nowhere near meets the need.
- 5.7.5 Part of the problem is that ITOs are reluctant to allow schools to assess against their Level 3 standards because they have written them to require a work context. The government has taken a hands-off approach to this, so the ITOs have all the power.

5.8 Failure to resist the dominance of the universities

- 5.8.1 Teachers have complained for years that the universities wield inordinate power over the senior school curriculum. One might have assumed that the introduction of the NCEA would reduce this, but it has not happened. Furthermore, in recent years this power has been wielded in a quite arbitrary fashion, with individual universities making the University Entrance requirements almost irrelevant by imposing extra requirements for entry.
- 5.8.2 The last review of the University Entrance requirements resulted in a decision to tighten the subject rules and resulted in a 9% drop in UE achievement in 2014 (using participation-based data). The drop in achievement was not caused by any reduction in the capability of 2014's Year 13 students, but was largely because until 2014, students could present with a "third circle" that was made up of standards from more than one subject. PPTA argued against removing this flexibility in the "third circle", but our view did not prevail in the face of the self-interest of the universities. Predictably,

universities had to make special arrangements for admission in 2015 of some students who just missed this part of the UE requirements.

- 5.8.3 Universities have also shown themselves unwilling to trust schools' ability to put together coherent cross-discipline courses. Schools want to create innovative courses at Year 13, such as Agribusiness or Performing Arts, and for these to be able to be used for University Entrance. However, under the current rules, a student doing such a course could achieve Excellence in it, but still not be able to count it towards University Entrance because it is made up of standards from different subjects. This is particularly galling when the universities themselves offer cross-discipline courses of this kind.
- 5.8.4 The decision has also led to a ludicrous situation where subjects which are taught at universities but do not yet have achievement standards have been left out of the three subject requirement. This includes Psychology, a popular Year 13 subject which has unit standards with three grades of achievement. These standards could easily be turned into achievement standards, but NZQA and the Ministry have refused to do so. This reduces students' willingness to choose such subjects in Year 13 because of the risk of not gaining the 42 credits in three "approved" subjects and missing out on University Entrance.

6. Looming privatisation

- 6.1 Teachers are beginning to be aware of the latest major change for the NCEA, what NZQA calls, oddly, "Future state". NZQA officials are beginning to attend meetings, largely with principals, to share their vision of "Assessment anywhere, any time, online and on demand". The presentation consists largely of video clips with teacher "champions" waxing eloquent about the benefits to learning of using digital technologies. There is a dearth of concrete information about timelines, hardware and software requirements, or teacher professional learning plans, let alone any analysis of the increased workload likely to be involved at the introductory and full implementation stages. In other words, the standard approach to change from the government agencies: vision, ideas, spin, marketing, and a complete absence of practicalities.
- 6.2 Furthermore, the small trials in digital assessment that have taken place so far have involved a significant increase in privatisation, with NZQA contracting out various projects such as trialling a digital MCAT (Maths Common Assessment Task). The company trialling the eMCAT, Education Perfect, is very adept at selling its products, and has used its contacts with schools for the eMCAT to market itself. PPTA objected strongly to the fact that workshops to inform schools about the 2015 eMCAT were advertised by Education Perfect, not by NZQA, and charged \$30 per teacher per two-hour session.
- 6.3 There are major resourcing issues with this shift to digital assessment, and PPTA has been arguing that NZQA must ensure that all schools have adequate equipment and infrastructure to support digital assessment be-

fore anything but small pilots take place. Regrettably, the NZQA response is generally that school resourcing is not their responsibility, and that they only have to keep schools informed about directions and timeframes to give them time to gear up. The assumption that schools can and will do so is dangerous in this context.

- 6.4 The Ministry of Education, whose responsibility school resourcing is, provides no specific information about the technical capability that schools will need for this brave new world of digital assessment. The Ministry's resourcing of ICT stops at the level of infrastructure, and does not cover the hardware required.
- 6.5 On the other hand, a Crown Company, N4L, is being given a significant role in this "future state" work, and quite detailed plans are being made for ways to use N4L's portal, The Pond, for moderation, with a streamlined process that allows for its use for internal moderation flowing into external moderation as required. Whether this will help to reduce the burden of moderation for teachers is yet to be seen.

7. Governments' failure to defend the NCEA against competition

- 7.1 While unfettered operation of markets is a fundamental tenet of capitalism, no-one involved with the early development of the NCEA could possibly have suspected that this would extend to governments allowing a free market in qualifications using public money. Yet that is what has happened, with our indigenous qualification, the NCEA, having to fight for its place alongside overseas qualifications.
- 7.2 Successive governments have proven gutless against conservative state schools who seek competitive advantage by offering overseas qualifications such as Cambridge or the Baccalaureate instead of the NCEA. These schools make public assertions that portray the NCEA as lacking credibility, claim it is not internationally accepted (which is completely untrue), and assert that it is not sufficiently motivating for the more able students.
- 7.3 As a result of this, the credibility of our national qualification is undermined. Because Cambridge, in particular, is largely externally assessed and therefore requires significantly less teacher effort than the NCEA, there is a body of teachers within the state system who advocate for it as alleviating workload stresses. These teachers may well be part of the 21% of teachers who continue to not support the NCEA.¹⁷ Politicians must decide whether they want a national school qualification at all, and if so, move with urgency to address the NCEA issues raised in this paper. The alternative is a steady drift to foreign qualifications because they are more manageable for students, teachers and schools.

8. The PPTA solution

- 8.1 The NCEA would have collapsed under its own weight long ago if it had not been for the massive efforts of teachers, over more than a decade, making it work despite the problems outlined above.
- 8.2 The NCEA requires extensive collaboration between teachers within and between schools, especially for marking and moderation purposes. As the QFI described it, teachers need to be “socialised” into an understanding of what a standard looks like in practice.¹⁸ This is an ongoing demand, with new teachers entering the profession, and constant change of standards. But time for collaboration has never been provided, and professional learning opportunities have been woefully inadequate.
- 8.3 The NCEA also requires time for administration for every teacher: monitoring students’ submission of work, entering and checking results, providing further opportunities for assessment, etc. The time demands on middle and senior leaders are even greater.
- 8.4 Furthermore, the qualification’s potential to shape innovative curriculum, pedagogy and assessment for the benefit of students has never been realised. Most teachers are too busy just keeping their heads above water to find time to work together to share ideas about innovation.
- 8.5 Workload research being conducted currently by PPTA is revealing that the hours worked by secondary teachers continue to rise inexorably to levels which are simply not sustainable.
- 8.6 Yet it seems that from the point of view of government officials who make these decisions, teacher time and good will are bottomless resources. They are not.
- 8.7 PPTA has tirelessly defended the NCEA to the public. Secondary teachers have held it together by dint of their hard work and professionalism. The issues highlighted in this paper are well-known to the Ministry of Education and NZQA. None of this is news, but the agencies have failed to seriously acknowledge or address them.
- 8.8 Recommendation 2 of this paper sets out some minimum requirements for action by government if PPTA is to continue to support the NCEA. They need to:
- Abolish percentage achievement targets.
 - Take action about the lack of credit parity between assessment standards.
 - Significantly reduce moderation requirements
 - Stop tinkering with the NCEA structure and processes unless change will reduce student and teacher workload.

- Actively seek actual reductions in the workload of students and teachers.
 - Protect the curriculum breadth of the senior school by ensuring that school-based Level 3 programmes are available for the full range of Year 13 students.
 - Stop letting the universities' narrow view of the relative value of subjects and courses dominate the curriculum of the senior school.
- 8.9 Recommendation 3 requires that PPTA take a stand against privatisation of the assessment system. It is a national qualification, and NZQA must gear up to carry out its assessment processes into the future.
- 8.10 Recommendation 4 requires that PPTA lobby the government and opposition with a view to protecting our national qualification from competition by private providers of qualifications. NCE should not have to fight for "market share" against qualifications developed in other countries, which are being adopted by certain schools simply to gain "competitive advantage".

Recommendations

1. That the report be received.
2. That PPTA's continued support for the NCEA requires the following:
 - a. ~~Abolition of percentage achievement targets because they are dangerously inconsistent with the principles of standards-based assessment;~~
 - b. ~~Decisive action by NZQA to address issues of levelling and credit parity between standards across the Framework;~~
 - c. ~~Significant reduction in moderation requirements, both for internally assessed standards and for practice assessments for externally assessed standards;~~
 - d. ~~No further changes in NCEA structure and processes unless they are guaranteed to reduce student and teacher workload;~~
 - e. ~~Active engagement by the Ministry and NZQA, in consultation with PPTA, to seek actual reductions in the current workload of students and teachers;~~
 - f. ~~Extended resourcing to enable the provision of a wide range of learning pathways for all students who wish to remain at school full-time to the end of Year 13.~~
 - g. ~~Reduction of the dominance of universities over the curriculum of the senior school.~~

- ~~3. That PPTA continue to resist privatisation of education in all its forms, including the use of private companies to implement NZQA's digital assessment agenda.~~
- ~~4. That PPTA lobby the government and opposition parties with a view to a future ban on state and integrated schools offering Cambridge or International Baccalaureate qualifications~~

Recommendation 4 withdrawn



2015 Annual Conference Minutes

Minutes of the Annual Conference of the New Zealand Post Primary Teachers' Association (Inc) held at the Brentwood Hotel, Kilbirnie, Wellington, commencing at 9.45 a.m. on Tuesday 29 September, continuing at 9.00 a.m. on Wednesday 30 September and 9.00 a.m. on Thursday 1 October 2015.

NCEA: Can it be saved?

2. THAT PPTA's continued support for the NCEA requires the following:
- a. Decisive action by NZQA to address issues of levelling and credit parity between standards across the Framework.

Carried

 - b. Significant reduction in moderation requirements, both for internally assessed standards and for practice assessments for externally assessed standards.

Carried

 - c. Consistent, clear and timely feedback from NZQA to teachers across all subjects.

Carried (63 for; 46 against)

 - d. No further changes in NCEA structure and processes unless they are guaranteed to reduce student and teacher workload.

Carried

 - e. Active engagement by the Ministry and NZQA, in consultation with PPTA, to seek actual reductions in the current workload of students and teachers.

Carried

 - f. Extended resourcing to enable the provision of a wide range of learning pathways for all students who wish to remain at school full-time to the end of Year 13.

Carried

- h. Quality annotated student exemplars and a range of tasks for all standards funded by the Ministry, rather than relying upon the goodwill of subject associations.

Carried (64 for, 43 against)

- i. Reduction of the dominance of universities over the curriculum of the senior school.

Carried

- 3. THAT PPTA continue to resist privatisation of education in all its forms, including the use of private companies to implement NZQA's digital assessment agenda.

Carried