



NCEA Level 1 Pulse Check survey to members

Introduction

“Atrocious shambles, unsustainable stress, a nightmare at every level, a disaster, debacle, rushed, under-prepared, poorly resourced, insufficient, unmanageable, appalling lack of support, ridiculous workload, a fiasco, biggest shemozzle, a professional insult, a complete mess, disappointing, massive confusion and overwhelmingly crap”.

These are just some of the ways our members described the implementation of the new Level 1 NCEA in response to a ‘pulse check’ survey – the results of which were released at the PPTA annual conference in early October 2024.

The survey, carried out in September 2024, was completed by PPTA Te Wehengarua members across more than 200 schools. Eighty-three percent of respondents said resources were arriving too late, and 80% were concerned about the availability and usefulness of resources.

Eighty-one percent of respondents said they were dissatisfied with the exemplars and 75% were dissatisfied with the support from the Ministry of Education and New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA).

Respondents commented they were frustrated with the lack of clear guidance on assessments, resulting in work having to be repeated and confusion about what meets the standards. Many teachers commented they were feeling overwhelmed, especially in smaller schools where resources are stretched thin.

Almost 80% of respondents said they were happy with the support for the changes that they received from their own subject department in their school, and 70% were happy with the support they received from their own subject association. See the Appendix for the full set of quantitative results from the survey.

Background

PPTA Te Wehengarua has long advocated for a qualifications framework that is fair, inclusive, cumulative, clear, motivating, coherent, constructive and manageable. These criteria came from the Qualifications Framework Inquiry (QFI) *Te Tiro Hou*, established in 1997 by PPTA Te Wehengarua. While *Te Tiro Hou* was commissioned by PPTA Te Wehengarua, the inquiry was conducted independently from the Association and its policies. The current experience of the implementation of the new NCEA Level 1 has failed on many of these criteria.

What was intended back in February 2020 when cabinet confirmed the NCEA Change programme, was for a process to strengthen NCEA by making a series of changes to increase accessibility, strengthen literacy and numeracy, simplify the structure through fewer, larger standards, create equal status for mātauranga Māori and make clearer pathways to further education or work. These changes were also intended to improve well-being and workload for students and teachers alike.

There was positivity about the future improvements that could be made to a qualification which had become too flexible to be meaningful - however, we had no idea of the reality that this change would bring. Of course, this new direction for NCEA was decided before the world was thrown into disarray by the Covid-19 Pandemic which paused and prolonged the changes that were being developed. Under very difficult circumstances the change programme forged on and after many challenges and setbacks a new Level 1 qualification has emerged, significantly different from what it was but also considerably unfinished and under-resourced.

Despite the best intentions of those on the Professional Advisory Group (PAG), the Review of Achievement Standards team (RAS) or the Subject Expert Groups (SEGs), in 2024 we find ourselves deeply unhappy with the final ‘product’ and the unintended consequences that the NCEA change programme has brought to Level 1 of our National Certificate of Educational Achievement. Such are the concerns from our members that, not content to answer solely the quick-response questions in the pulse check survey, collectively they sent in over 30,000 words detailing their frustrations.

The voices of members

It is appropriate that a selection of some of the actual comments of members is included in this report. As a member-led organisation, any attempt to paraphrase these comments would be disingenuous to our mantra of listening to the voices of members. It is important to acknowledge that each comment represents one voice, not all voices – however, alongside the quantitative data, there are clear concerns emerging. Comments are loosely grouped according to key sections of the survey.

Confidence to implement NCEA level 1

- There are far too many changes ALL happening at once.
- I literally had to introduce the standard by telling students that I am as in the dark about this as they are because there is no way I could feign confidence.
- The lack of supporting documents and clarity of expected levels of achievement make it impossible to guide the students with any level of confidence.
- I am teaching a vague standard assessed by an external exam for which the NZQA have just one example exam which contains completely erroneous physics. I have no confidence that the intent (if I read it right) of the standard will be assessed in the exam. I feel professionally insulted by the process.
- I was really looking forward to the changes at Level 1 (and how they filter upwards), but the constant back and forth and lack of any kind of decisive answers from NZQA and the MoE have left me lacking in confidence in them.
- I am embarrassed to be in this profession when level 1 was so badly implemented how will the new curriculum ... be supported when the MoE has been gutted [of staff]. I have no confidence ... after 30 years teaching.

Many follow-up comments referred also to the stress and anxiety that the implementation had brought:

- This caused me considerable angst.
- This whole implementation programme has been a fiasco to say the least. It has caused me unsustainable stress.
- This has been hit and miss and made for a stressful year and probably not as enjoyable for the students as it could have been.

The plight of small and rural schools

- The smaller the school the harder it is as we are teaching multiple subjects and don't have colleagues teaching the same subject to discuss things with and trying to find people to meet with is difficult and then you have to do that in your own time and it's only beneficial to the small school the other school/teacher is just doing it out of the goodness of their heart and it's increasing their workload. Small schools need extra support.
- Changes were made for the benefit of large well-resourced schools, with large numbers of students at each level and access to "language assistants". Little or no thought seems to have been given to schools with small multi-level groups or to online or correspondence courses.
- Being a sole charge teacher in a small school with the axing of the [TKI email] community earlier in the year has left me feeling unsupported and generally left to my own devices.
- Lack of PLD in small towns is concerning, feeling unprepared, going into partial NCEA L1, lucky we have an amazing subject association.

Support received

Over 80% of respondents expressed dissatisfaction with communication from MoE and NZQA, and well over 70% in some of the support materials - exemplars and assessment guidelines.

- I remain completely appalled at the lack of information flowing from both the Ministry of Education and NZQA.
- Workload to change/adapt programs and implementation is huge issue, along with lack of communication or communication received too late.
- I'm personally happy with recent changes in direction, but the lack of transparency and communication is concerning.
- Removing examples and past papers for 12 and 13 beyond 3 years was also a joke and pointless as those year levels are barely impacted yet. Generally poor communication from officials leading these and they always go back on what they say. English for instance is meant to have this recommended/prescribed text list with compulsory Shakespeare which has not been mentioned since its first post - we are planning 2025 so they are late if they expect us to teach set texts to classes.
- Engagement with new assessments has been very low. Half of the small number of my students who attempted the digital submission externals obviously failed because they didn't follow the instructions. The material wasn't online until a few weeks before assessment, so we had limited time to ensure students understood the task or processes to register.
- Due to the stress of bad communication from NZQA and bad online resources, joy has been removed from both the teaching and learning.

Teaching and Learning programmes

Key areas of concern here include increasing workload, lack of resources, meeting the needs of diverse learners, supports for literacy and numeracy.

Workload

- "Workload won't increase?" Hogwash! Now add in a continued change (English), after things changing during the course of teaching the content this year, I am at my wit's end, timewise. The small amount of time to plan and change my programmes has massively increased my anxiety level. Massive stress.
- The non-exam externals have real benefits but are a massive workload on teachers and the PN in particular setting up the systems for them to be able to be assessed in the school.
- The workload has been unrealistic, not sustainable, and unsupported. All guess work re what is expected at the level for the standards etc.
- Massive increase in workload. Requires so much additional workload for all department personnel who teach Year 11. Timing of resource release has been a shocker.
- My workload has increased with the implementation of the changes.

Lack of resources

- The lateness of changes and lack of resources has been extremely time-consuming.
- I am a new beginning teacher and am really struggling with the lack of clarity and resources.
- The lack of resources, exemplars and time to get our heads around NCEA L1 English has been incredibly stressful.
- In all my years of teaching this has been the hardest due to lack of resources, receiving updated standards during term time having already taught the standard. Mixed specifications and clarifications. Having to design courses from scratch. It has been beyond a joke! It has had a negative impact on teaching & learning, and our student outcomes.

- Internal assessments/mark schemes curated entirely by own school, create disparity across NZ depending on how each school has interpreted unclear assessment specifications. Too little too late.

Meeting the needs of diverse learners

- Not catering to a wide range of learners. More about testing their ability to write a set number of words & follow a set script.
- The exemplars do not reflect the diverse range of students - none that can technically be shown to students match anywhere near how my school students write/approach work.
- The new standards and CAAs are worse for all kinds of diverse students! Particularly Māori and Pasifika, English language learners, and those from low socioeconomic backgrounds.
- The implementation is leaving students without the necessary background requirements for L2.

Supports for Literacy and Numeracy

- I am in support of the CAA in theory. I like that there is a standard that will be able to tell if a person is numerate or literate, but there has been little concern for students who struggle. A solution is that a student should be able to get Level 1, 2 and 3 either endorsed with Numeracy and Literacy, one of the two or neither.
- I think the CAAs for Literacy and Numeracy are excellent and are needed based on research and what we have seen in schools. The move to fewer larger standards has meant that we don't have the same options to provide learning environments that suit the needs of our learners. Instead, we are trying to make everyone fit into one programme. The old standards allowed for courses to support students. I think we should have just looked at changing the credit values of standards and keeping the standards and the CAAs for Literacy and Numeracy.
- The literacy and numeracy Co-requisites are an inequitable way of assessing lit and num. Putting students into a high stress exam is unfair, there are so many other ways to assess than an exam. This has caused so much stress, extra workload and preparation for students not to mention the resourcing of these exams. Having to have enough chrome books, supervisors, sorting a room and timetabling puts a lot of pressure, stress in schools.
- Literacy and numeracy CAA have overtaken the teaching programmes.
- I feel very sad about these changes which are disadvantaging so many of our ākonga.

Support received

Helpful

- I am generally happy with the support provided by my subject association, who have done their best as always to produce resources and tests. I do feel, however, this should all have been ready to go at the start of the year, not halfway through term 1 when planning had been done, and teaching was underway.
- Subject associations have tried to help but they are guessing as they don't have the information either. It seems unbelievable that we are teaching something that is still changing while we are teaching it and that no one really knows what exactly the standards are.
- The work of the students I am moderating shows that teachers are working exceptionally hard, with very little information, to do the best they can. They would likely benefit from someone like me visiting and helping allay their concerns about some of these standards. I've spoken at my subject association and tried to give all the information I can about assessing these (sub)standards, but it is not enough (from an official moderator).
- If it wasn't for a very hardworking HOD and department staff, and students who have worked steadily, it would have been even worse.

- Great support by the NCEA facilitator ... a lifesaver. If it wasn't for her, we'd have no idea of which direction to pitch at.
- The current government got rid of our helpful NIFs. The previous NIF was somewhat helpful.
- Thanks to NIFs [NCEA Implementation Facilitators] who are trying to shore up the ship!
- The subject association to which I belong has 3 members of the SEG in it, this has helped to keep the subject up to speed with the design, planning and implementation of the Achievement Standards.

Unhelpful

- Will take time to embed. Making changes to the current model by politicians tinkering is unhelpful as is not having consultation.
- It is not acceptable to have no common resources or clear exemplars produced (or when they do arrive, they are too late), and that no one will give you a definite answer when you seek clarity from a NIF or Ministry person. We should have exemplars showing what the boundaries look like - a High NA, a low A, a high A, a low M, a high M and a low E.
- Our local NIFs are non-existent. We have to travel to the Waikato where they have NIFs who are able to support us.
- MOE and NZQA could have avoided many of the problems they have experienced with the roll out of L1 if they had consulted more widely.
- It is frustrating that support is slow from NZQA/MOE and they don't appear to be working together.

The comments from members express deep dissatisfaction with the implementation roll out. And so, it was necessary to bring to our PPTA Te Wehengarua Annual Conference an opportunity for our teachers to respond to the current dire situation and to insist that this is improved.

Annual Conference paper recommendations

At the 2024 PPTA Te Wehengarua Annual Conference, where members vote on and set the direction for the mahi of the Association for the following year, delegates voted unanimously on a paper calling for improvements to NCEA Level 1, and another calling for the work of the Principal's Nominees to be better acknowledged.

Better implementation plan needed for NCEA Level 1

Recommendations include:

1. That PPTA Te Wehengarua advocate to the Ministry of Education that there is an implementation plan developed to urgently improve NCEA Level 1 achievement standards' assessment processes, that includes genuine engagement with the teaching profession.
2. That PPTA Te Wehengarua insist for NCEA Level 1 achievement standards' assessment, that an improvement plan is to be fully planned and clearly communicated before the end of Term 4, 2024.
3. That PPTA Te Wehengarua continue to insist that the Ministry of Education and NZQA commit to providing the additional resources required to ensure that the changes will meet the five principles of a strong NCEA qualification: coherence, credibility, equity and inclusion, pathways and well-being.
4. That PPTA Te Wehengarua insist that the Ministry of Education ensures that NCEA resources for all subjects and professional development reaches every teacher, in all areas of the country.

5. That PPTA Te Wehengarua seek an effective review process to inform the development and rollout of NCEA Levels 2 and 3 for all subjects.

Principal's Nominees need more support

The pulse check survey also highlighted the dire situation that Principal's Nominees (PNs) have found themselves in with one member summing up the situation for their PN as follows: *Our PN is extremely over worked and there needs to be significant changes made to make the PN position manageable.*

Recommendations unanimously agreed on at Annual Conference:

1. That PPTA Te Wehengarua calls on the Ministry of Education (MOE) to recognise the value and importance of the Principal's Nominee role; and provide appropriate tagged resourcing of time, remuneration and new staffing, and for the Executive to present this to members for next collective negotiations.
2. That PPTA Te Wehengarua calls on the New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA) to closely monitor workload of the PN to ensure it is sustainable.
3. That PPTA Te Wehengarua continues to use all professional and industrial forums to seek better appropriate recognition and support for the role of the Principal's Nominee.
4. That PPTA Te Wehengarua calls on the MOE to address all resourcing needs created by the National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA) change package, literacy/numeracy and curriculum alignment so that it is adequate for all schools.

PPTA Te Wehengarua is keen to work with the Ministry of Education to enact all these recommendations. Some of these recommendations require urgent action.

Recommendation: A commitment to two Teacher Only Days for secondary schools for 2025 with a focus on NCEA level 1 implementation and curriculum implementation.

Final words

Teachers are used to change and when they have the appropriate supports, they will make things work. One respondent to the survey stated that *"even the parts that are not quite right yet have very good points. The large lurches from one thing to the next are not good for the rollout. As the changes are here to stay, we need to work on making it work and workable for students and teachers"*. While no doubt others believe this too, unfortunately the failings of the implementation have been so great that these have taken centre stage.

As we began this report with the words of many of our members, so we will end it with the words of one member who sums up the concerns and requests of the collective.

*[PPTA Te Wehengarua members are] gravely concerned about how 2025 will unfold. Without exemplars, concrete guidance, or clear communication from both MoE and NZQA, the coming years will be even more difficult for both teachers and students. We need actionable answers, support, and exemplars as soon as possible to help us navigate these new standards effectively. **Our students deserve the best chance at success**, and without the proper tools, we are failing them. [We are] urgently requesting answers and immediate actions to resolve these issues. Teachers need to be equipped with the resources and clarity required to deliver meaningful and effective instruction under these new standards.*

Appendix:

Quantitative results from pulse check survey

Respondents

- All are members of PPTA Te Wehengarua
- 87% fully implementing Level 1
- 10% partially implementing Level 1
- 3% not offering Level 1
- 1.5% not offering Level 1 in 2025

Summary of results

- More respondents generally **do not feel they can confidently implement** the NCEA changes for Level 1.
- More respondents are **generally dissatisfied with support received**
 - Exemplars 81% dissatisfied
 - Communication from MoE 77% generally dissatisfied
 - Communication from NZQA 73% generally dissatisfied
 - Clear assessment guidelines 74% dissatisfied
 - Assessment activities 67% dissatisfied
 - Marking schedules 66% dissatisfied
 - Moderation support and feedback 63% dissatisfied
 - Authentic assessment with GenAI 56% dissatisfied
 - Teaching and learning notes 53% dissatisfied
- More respondents are concerned about the following in relation to their Level 1 NCEA programmes (than are comfortable)

○ Increasing workload	86% concerned
○ Resources arriving too late	83% concerned
○ Availability of useful resources	80% concerned
○ What will happen for students who don't get lit-num?	78% concerned
○ Meeting the needs of diverse learners	71% concerned
○ What is happening in assessment in my subject	64% concerned
○ Robustness of moderation	58% concerned
○ Having literacy and numeracy co-requisites	41% concerned 37% generally comfortable
- General Agreement with the following statements

○ The lack of resources and late resources increase workload	93%
○ Making changes to my programmes is increasing workload	88%
○ The current lack of clarity about the changes is unsettling for students	87%
○ The literacy and numeracy co-requisites increase workload	72%
○ Common Assessment Activities (other than literacy and numeracy) will increase workload	64%
- General Disagreement with the following statements

○ The changes will better meet the needs of diverse learners	62%
○ Fewer achievement standards will decrease workload	58%

- Support received – generally helpful
 - My department 78%
 - My subject association 70%
 - My own professional networks 66%
 - My school 64%

- Support received – generally unhelpful
 - Ministry of Education 81%
 - NCEA Implementation Facilitators 47%
 - NZQA 73%