



# The NCEA: A Work in Progress

*Prepared by Executive*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Now that all the levels of the NCEA, including Scholarship, are in place, it seems appropriate for PPTA to review its position on the qualification system and identify priorities for action.
- 1.2 This paper picks up and develops the theme of the 2002 Conference paper 'The NCEA. Result: Not Yet Achieved', published halfway through teachers' first year of implementing the new qualification. It concludes that while the shift to a standards-based assessment system is a positive move, the qualification is yet to meet all of the requirements for an educationally valid qualifications system that is manageable for students and teachers, both at the level of the design of the qualification and its implementation. It can therefore be described as 'a work in progress' rather than a completed achievement.
- 1.3 The implementation of this new qualification system has certainly not gone smoothly. Furthermore, the implementation process is not yet complete. Ministry and NZQA officials as well as secondary teachers recognise that further work is needed to ensure that the system is operating as it should. No doubt at some Annual Conference in the future, it will be possible to adopt a paper titled 'The NCEA. Result: Achieved'. That time has not yet arrived.
- 1.4 But despite all of their concerns, teachers are demonstrably committed to making the new system work for their students and convinced that it is on the right track, even if it has not yet reached its final destination. In the PPTA focus group research report published in March 2005<sup>1</sup>, it was clear that the vast majority of teachers do not wish to return to the previous plethora of norm-referenced qualifications that dominated the work of secondary schools until 2002.
- 1.5 This paper evaluates the qualifications system as it now stands, and reports on progress to address the problems that have emerged as the system has been implemented.

## 2. CRITERIA FOR A QUALIFICATIONS SYSTEM

- 2.1 In 1997, PPTA's Qualifications Framework Inquiry, *Te Tiro Hou*<sup>2</sup>, reported to the Curriculum Conference in July on their analysis of the educational validity of the Qualifications Framework as it stood then (prior to the development of achievement standards under the NCEA). They set eight criteria for an educationally valid qualifications system. It had to be:

- (i) Fair
- (ii) Inclusive

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<sup>1</sup> Alison, J. (2005) *Teachers talk about NCEA: Research report on focus groups with secondary teachers*, Wellington: NZPPTA.

<sup>2</sup> Allen, P., Crooks, T., Hearn, S., Irwin, K. (1997) *Te Tiro Hou: Report of the Qualifications Framework Inquiry*, Wellington: NZPPTA.

- (iii) Cumulative
- (iv) Clear
- (v) Motivating
- (vi) Coherent
- (vii) Constructive
- (viii) Manageable

2.2 At the 1997 Annual Conference, these eight criteria were endorsed as the basis for a qualifications system that would be acceptable to PPTA members.

2.3 Now that the profession has three years' experience of the NCEA, it is useful to go back to those criteria and consider how well it measures up against them as an educationally valid qualifications system.

#### 2.3.1 Inclusive and Cumulative

2.3.1.1 There is probably little disagreement that the NCEA is an inclusive and cumulative qualification. Because of the ability to gain credit for unit standards across a wide range of industry-linked and core generic areas as well as achievement and unit standards in traditional school subjects, there is no question that students, where their schools can timetable the options, have a very wide range of choices that lead to qualifications compared with pre-Framework days.

2.3.1.2 Furthermore these choices are cumulative, in that standards are at a range of levels and students can build towards Certificates at Levels 1, 2 and 3 over the course of their senior years. In addition, they can earn credits towards the NCEA but also towards other Framework qualifications. The PPTA research report *Teachers talk about NCEA* reported that "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". The report gave about twenty examples ranging from the National Certificate in Maths to the National Certificate in Equine Studies<sup>3</sup>.

#### 2.3.2 Constructive

2.3.2.1 *Te Tiro Hou* defined this as meaning that "Learners and teachers receive clear and helpful feedback on progress, and have more than one opportunity to attain the required standards"<sup>4</sup>. It can probably be said that this criterion has largely been met by the NCEA. It appears that teachers are finding they are generally able to give very useful feedback to

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<sup>3</sup> Alison, J., 2005 op cit pp.109-110.

<sup>4</sup> Allen et al op cit, p.99.

students and that this is heeded because of the availability of further opportunities to gain the internally assessed standards.

2.3.2.2 However the provision of further opportunities for assessment has always been a vexed issue, and it is interesting to recall that the Secondary Leaders Forum (the government's main consultative body on NCEA) was very split even before the qualification was implemented on whether or not there should be a firm rule limiting further opportunities to just one. Teachers worry about the lack of uniformity between schools in terms of the number of 'reassessments' offered, the lack of parity between internal and external assessment because the former offers further opportunities and the latter does not, and the huge workload which can be involved. On the other hand, many teachers believe that the availability of further opportunities is motivating for students<sup>5</sup>.

2.3.2.3 On all the other five criteria, there would probably be more disagreement about whether the NCEA measures up.

### 2.3.3 Fair

2.3.3.1 *Te Tiro Hou* explained 'fair' as requiring that 'Credits and qualifications accurately describe learner achievement, and are trusted'<sup>6</sup>. The PPTA research showed that teachers did not trust that the moderation system ensured that consistent standards were being applied in all schools. They believed that too few assessments were being moderated, and they thought the quality of moderation was too variable and the judgements inconsistent. They had little faith in the appeal process, and instead were simply 'playing safe' by sending work that was not on the margins next time. They wanted the moderation system to include support mechanisms where teachers needed advice and guidance as a result of their experiences with moderation<sup>7</sup>.

2.3.3.2 PPTA has put up proposals for a moderation advisory service staffed by teachers with time allowances and units. At the time of writing this paper, the fate of these proposals is not known. In the meantime, NZQA has been persuaded by the report's findings that there are things that can be done with the moderation system and in the communication strategy to enable teachers to feel safe about sending work on the margins and to encourage them to use the appeal system.

2.3.3.3 Teachers in the focus groups also had justifiable concerns about the lack of year-to-year consistency in the externally assessed standards. This lack of consistency was raised by PPTA with the NZQA Board in 2004, immediately upon the first two years of Level 1 results becoming available, but is only now being seriously addressed by them (see below).

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<sup>5</sup> Alison, J. 2005 op cit pp.43-47.

<sup>6</sup> *ibid.* p.95.

<sup>7</sup> Alison op cit, pp.71-80.

Until these issues are resolved, it is not possible to say that the NCEA is a completely fair system.

#### 2.3.4 Clear

- 2.3.4.1 The QFI report defined 'clear' as meaning that "Learners and teachers can readily obtain clear and helpful information and guidance about the content, criteria and expected standards for particular credits or qualifications"<sup>8</sup>. There is no doubt that standards-based assessment provides much more specific information to teachers and students about what is required than norm-referenced assessment systems ever do. However the lack of consistency in the externally assessed standards and the inadequacies of the moderation system make it impossible to say that there is complete clarity about the expected standards required to obtain the credits (or to achieve at the higher levels of Merit or Excellence).
- 2.3.4.2 The Ministry of Education undertook to provide through the NCEA website four sample assessment activities with exemplar material for each internally assessed achievement standard, which would certainly have helped to provide clarity for teachers about the requirements of these standards. This did happen in many subjects, but not in all, and the number seemed to decline over the successive levels. Furthermore there have been continual complaints from teachers that the quality of these resources has been very uneven and that they have not always been updated in a timely fashion to reflect changes in the standards that they purport to assess. Contracts are being advertised currently to enable about 50 further resources to be produced across a range of subjects, and this is an improvement. PPTA has argued, however, that it is still insufficient to meet the needs of teachers.
- 2.3.4.3 Furthermore, no such material has been produced for unit standards, despite the central agencies being aware that unexpectedly high numbers of schools are using unit standards, for a variety of reasons<sup>9</sup>. The resource materials produced for unit standards during the 1990's are now thoroughly out of date and have not been replaced.
- 2.3.4.4 A further problem has been that NZQA was responsible for exemplifying the externally assessed standards, and their approach to providing sample assessment activities was minimalist. Only one sample exam per standard went up on the website before the first year of assessment of that level, and then that sample was replaced by the actual exam the following year. In the case of Scholarship, the material was even more minimalist, providing very little clarity about expectations, and this appears to have been one of the reasons why many teachers were reluctant to encourage their students to attempt Scholarship in the first year.

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<sup>8</sup> Allen et al 1997, op cit, p.97.

<sup>9</sup> Alison 2005 op cit, pp.60-62

### 2.3.5 Motivating

- 2.3.5.1 The PPTA focus group research<sup>10</sup> found that there is not universal agreement among teachers that the NCEA is motivating for students. There seems to be little doubt that it is motivating for less able students. Such students benefit from being able to accumulate credits as they progress through the year; to focus on their strengths; to have more than one opportunity to succeed; to access a wider range of choices, all of which were able to be credited towards the same qualification; and to carry over to another year credits earned the previous year.
- 2.3.5.2 The research also found that the NCEA is offering challenge to the more able students, and that assertions that the qualification would constitute ‘dumbing down’ have been thoroughly disproven. Able students have been challenged by the wider range of learning activities opened up by internal assessment, and by being required to perform at an excellent level in specific areas rather than simply to perform at a good level over everything if they are to gain Excellence.
- 2.3.5.3 The group about whom some teachers are concerned is the group of students in the middle range of ability, some of whom are believed to be aiming just for Achieved rather than the higher levels, and for only the 80 credits required for the Certificate. This is generally seen as a negative impact of the design of the qualifications system, although some teachers regard it as evidence that students are taking more control of their own learning and managing their workloads in order to live balanced lives.
- 2.3.5.4 These issues are touched on in NZCER’s second report of their three-year *Learning Curves* study<sup>11</sup>, and a slightly different picture emerges there. Further research is being commissioned by the Ministry of Education to explore this and related issues.

### 2.3.6 Coherent

- 2.3.6.1 *Te Tiro Hou* interpreted ‘coherence’ as being about avoiding fragmentation of learning, and expressed a concern that teachers might “see learning as a series of narrow tasks to be ticked off on a checklist” and that they would tend to assess easily measured outcomes rather than the ones that are more difficult to assess<sup>12</sup>.
- 2.3.6.2 The achievement standards developed for the NCEA were part of an attempt to avoid such dangers, in that they generally represent larger chunks of learning and do not have the

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<sup>10</sup> *ibid.* pp.29-36.

<sup>11</sup> Hipkins, R., Vaughan, K., Beals, F., Ferral, H. (2004) *Learning Curves: Meeting student learning needs in an evolving qualifications regime. Shared pathways and multiple tracks: A second report.* Wellington: NZCER.

<sup>12</sup> Allen et al 1997 *op cit*, p.99.



specificity of the unit standards' elements and performance criteria. The negative side of this is that it is harder to achieve consistency between teachers or between exam markers when the standards are described at a more general level, but this is a trade-off with which most teachers would probably agree.

2.3.6.3 Furthermore, the existence of a robust moderation system, and copious consistent, high quality sample assessments that include exemplars of student work should compensate for the more general descriptions in internally assessed achievement standards. Sound exam checking and check marking processes should ameliorate the problems in external assessment. Unfortunately none of these requirements have been totally met.

### 2.3.7 Manageable

2.3.7.1 Manageability of the qualification is not only in relation to teachers, but also to students. It appears that students are finding ways to make it manageable by choices they are making, but these are not always wise choices in the eyes of their teachers or parents.

2.3.7.2 The challenge has been for schools and individual teachers to find ways to make the system manageable for them. Options which have been tried include limiting the number of credits offered in courses, limiting the number of further opportunities for assessment, and running further opportunities at the same time as practice exams for the external assessments.

2.3.7.3 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 from the PPTA research<sup>13</sup> and from the Australian Council for Educational Research study of secondary teacher workload conducted for the workload workstream under the Secondary Teachers' Collective Agreement<sup>14</sup> 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.

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<sup>13</sup> Alison, 2005 op cit.

<sup>14</sup> Ingvarson, L., Kleinhenz, E., Beavis, A., Barwick, H., Carthy, I., & Wilkinson, J. (2005) *Secondary Teacher Workload Study Report*, Melbourne: Australian Council for Educational Research.



### 3. MOVING FORWARD

#### 3.1 NZQA's Selective Deafness

- 3.1.1 PPTA has had many opportunities to express its concerns about aspects of the design and implementation of the NCEA, however it would be fair to say that until recently it has been difficult to have those concerns heard and responded to. The same has been true of individual teachers, who have constantly complained that they have been bounced from one implementation agency to the other and heard by neither.
- 3.1.2 An example of this is the concerns that PPTA, along with a number of academics, raised in 2004 about the year-to-year variations in the externally assessed standards at Level 1 between 2002 and 2003. As reported in the 2004 Annual Report, PPTA raised this in June 2004 in a letter to the NZQA Board, copied to the Secretary for Education. There was little reaction to that letter, apart from some inconclusive discussion at the Secondary Leaders' Forum meetings in August and November 2004, where representatives of the school sector argued strongly that there needed to be an emergency plan in place in case of 'rogue' exams in 2004. Their calls went unanswered by NZQA.
- 3.1.3 NZQA could no longer ignore the problems, however, when the furore over Scholarship results erupted at the beginning of 2005. This was an issue of subject-to-subject variation rather than the year-to-year variations that PPTA had been signalling, but helpfully, that distinction was lost on the media and the public. Suddenly variation in external assessment became a problem that NZQA could no longer ignore.
- 3.1.4 The government initiated a number of reviews: the States Services Commission (SSC) review of Scholarship; a Scholarship Reference Group to come up with a new way of assessing Scholarship; the SSC review of NZQA's processes in relation to NCEA; and an SSC review of three stand-alone education agencies (NZQA, TEC and ERO) and their relationships to the Ministry. A review of literature and practice in relation to variation has been commissioned by NZQA and will be reported soon. Discussions are being held with assessment experts outside NZQA in order to access a wider range of ideas on possible ways forward.
- 3.1.5 The solutions to the problem of variation in external assessment under a standards-based system are much harder to find than the evidence for its existence, however, and the Association has continued to press for the search to continue apace. The changes to Scholarship for 2005 will lead to a greater degree of consistency between subjects. Whether the year-to-year consistency at Levels 1 to 3 will be improved markedly as a result of the tweaking of exam setting and marking processes currently under way is less certain. More significant changes probably need to be made to reach a level of year-to-year consistency that the profession and the community can live with, and these could well be at the level of the design of the qualification as much as at the implementation level. PPTA continues to press for urgent work on this, while recognising the need to avoid change that would cause a further acceleration in teachers' and students' workloads.



## 3.2 The PPTA Research

- 3.2.1 PPTA's focus group research with teachers, conducted in 9 schools in November 2004 and released on 10 March 2005 under the title *Teachers talk about NCEA*, has provided a highly effective foundation for pushing for decisive action to address the issues with NCEA. It has generated significant attention from media, government, academics and the profession, and the recommendations of the report have dominated the attention of the Secondary Leaders Forum since then. The Forum also established a subgroup, the Leaders Forum Qualifications Group or LFQG, which is meeting monthly or more often and is keeping a close watch on the detail of the Ministry and NZQA implementation processes.
- 3.2.2 The report contained eight recommendations, which were endorsed by Executive at its meeting in May 2005.
- 3.2.3 The first recommendation called for a range of reviews of aspects of the NCEA, to be done in consultation with the profession. The most urgent of these was a review of NZQA's processes in relation to external assessment, and these have certainly been closely scrutinised in the course of the various reviews described above. The other urgent review called for was in relation to the change management processes of NZQA and the Ministry of Education, and this has also been the subject of much scrutiny in those SSC reviews. The LFQG group is serving a useful purpose in keeping track of the work of both agencies at the level of detail that can prevent problems developing.
- 3.2.4 The other reviews were largely about qualification design issues such as the relative credit values of standards, the 80 credit requirement for the Certificates, the possibility of a Merit level in unit standards and the sufficiency of the current range of levels in achievement standards. These were not flagged in the report as urgent but are still on the agenda.
- 3.2.5 The second recommendation was for research into the impact of the NCEA on student motivation, an issue discussed above. It is anticipated that research that includes this aspect will be commissioned during the current financial year.
- 3.2.6 The report also called for a revitalised professional development strategy for NCEA for at least the next three years, but the government's response to this recommendation has been somewhat half-hearted. Two half-days and a small amount of funding (dropped into school budgets in July 2005) have been provided, and at this stage for just one budget year only. Schools are being asked to complete a Needs Analysis, and this may serve to persuade government that the needs require ongoing and more substantial funding. On the bright side, there is much-needed Professional Development on Scholarship being offered this year, although the relief allocation to schools is insufficient for all teachers involved with Scholarship to necessarily be able to attend, unless their schools can provide further relief.
- 3.2.7 A further recommendation directed issues to working parties established under the Secondary Teachers' Collective Agreement.





These were addressing the workload generated by school-based assessment under the NCEA (directed to the Teacher Workload working party), and developing an enhanced moderation service that would include an advisory component to support the work of teachers (directed to the Career Pathways working party). Both issues are being actively pursued in those working parties.

- 3.2.8 A recommendation that secondary and area schools' Operations Grant funding be increased urgently to recognise the continuing financial impact on schools of qualifications assessment has gone unheeded so far. The 2005 Budget contained some increase in school operations funding, but failed to recognise the specific needs of secondary and area schools in a differentiated allocation for NCEA. The union will continue to press for this.
- 3.2.9 One of the recommendations was in the nature of a general statement of principle about a further design issue: "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." This was in response to fears expressed by teachers in the focus groups that NZQA had intentions to make Level 1 entirely internally assessed as a way of managing its workload in relation to external assessment. While PPTA is not aware of any evidence that NZQA currently has such an intention, it was felt that a warning shot across their bow was wise. In 2003, a circular from NZQA had asked schools to volunteer for a pilot involving internal assessment of Level 1 external standards. This circular had caused huge consternation among teachers, to the extent that the political fall-out led to the circular being withdrawn and any plans for such a pilot shut down.
- 3.2.10 The final recommendation was that two positions on the NZQA Board should be reserved for nominees with secondary teaching expertise. The Board is appointed by the Minister, and no position has ever been specifically reserved for someone with a secondary background. The Board has always been dominated by people from sectors other than secondary education. PPTA's efforts to have its nominees appointed to the Board have never met with success. It is PPTA's contention that NZQA's performance in relation to the NCEA might well have been of a higher standard if there had been a significant bloc of secondary people on the Board with on-the-ground knowledge of the issues and determined to closely monitor the organisation.

### 3.3 Review of NCEA

- 3.3.1 At PPTA Annual Conference 2004, the Minister announced his intention to conduct a 'review of NCEA' in 2005. What this review consists of has become clearer since then. It is a low-key exercise largely involving the compilation of information from existing sources available through NZQA and the Ministry of Education, such as School Relationship Managers and School Support Services, NZCER's *Learning Curves* study and the results of the PPTA research. The review is proceeding, and reporting regularly to the NCEA Leaders' Forum, but it is rather over-shadowed by other reviews and events in 2005.

### 3.4 The Cambridge Sideshow

- 3.4.1 This heading refers to Cambridge International exams, not the events at Cambridge High School of which probably the less that is said the better. Disaffection with the NCEA among the traditional schools that were the natural opponents of such a reform was not unexpected. The new system aimed to recognise a wider range of knowledge and skills and reduce the failure that was endemic in the old system, but those traditional schools had maintained their competitive advantage on the basis of commitment to maintaining the superiority of a particular body of knowledge and on the success of their own students in that system at the expense of the failure of students in other, largely low socio-economic, schools.
- 3.4.2 The NCEA was an attempt at a compromise between the traditional exam-based system and the unit standards experiment, to appease the schools that were wedded to the old system by including at least 50% external assessment in each subject rather than adopting the wholly teacher-assessed model of unit standards. One irony of that is that experience with external assessment using standards has highlighted the unreliability which is actually a feature of all exam systems, but which shows up glaringly when subjects are broken down into separate standards and the swings and roundabouts from aggregation of performances over a range of questions are absent. The faith that many people have had in exam marks has always been somewhat misplaced, but it is possible that relatively few teachers, let alone the public, have been aware of that.
- 3.4.3 Unfortunately, implementation problems with the NCEA have meant that the qualification has not gained the high level of credibility it needed to gain if the opposition was to be quelled. As a result, the number of schools entering at least some students for Cambridge International has increased steadily over the years of NCEA. Furthermore, the government seems to be legally unable to stop the trend. Education Minister Trevor Mallard, in response to a question in the house on 7 June 2005, said “Both the International Baccalaureate and the Cambridge exams are used extensively through New Zealand. I do not think there is any legal obligation for schools to offer NCEA at all.” This could be read as the Minister abdicating responsibility for NCEA, but may also be read as him accurately describing the legal situation. The Ministry of Education has never appeared to have a proactive policy on Cambridge, but simply a reactive one that relies on NCEA acquiring such credibility that there would be no motivation for schools to offer alternatives to it.
- 3.4.4 PPTA has become aware that schools are increasingly coming under pressure to offer Cambridge International because other schools with which they compete are doing so. There is a whole industry developing in which schools are being offered special deals by companies in order to meet the extra requirements of the Cambridge syllabuses, which has the impact of appearing to ‘normalise’ Cambridge.



- 3.4.5 Some members may ask why it is a problem if schools are exercising choice in the qualifications they offer to students. Dr Liz Gordon, in one of her Factfiles that form the Quality Public Education Coalition resource on privatisation of education, points out the dangers of privatisation of qualifications. Cambridge International, while it claims to be a non-profit organisation committed to raising assessment standards worldwide, is in fact a different beast: “Faced with falling markets from its traditional developing countries base, as these nations have increasingly adopted indigenous exam systems, CIE has launched an aggressive recruitment campaign. With flamboyant use of its Cambridge branding (and strict controls over who may use the logo) and loyalty programmes based on both quantity and quality, the organisation acts more like a McDonalds franchise than a respected University”<sup>15</sup>.
- 3.4.6 Gordon argues that it is wrong for New Zealand schools to use taxpayer funding to purchase a foreign examination system when services are already available in New Zealand, and that offering foreign examinations “is a threat to the national curriculum and national standards”<sup>16</sup>. The costs which taxpayer funding is covering include extra resources in the form of books and other materials to prepare students for a different curriculum. PPTA should be supporting the development of a high quality publicly funded qualifications system for New Zealand school students, based on a curriculum which reflects New Zealand’s own particular view of its place in the world. Recommendation 3 seeks conference’s endorsement of that principle. While many members would argue that New Zealand does not yet have that, the abdication of increasing numbers of schools from the publicly funded system raises the likelihood that we never will.
- 3.4.7 There are also workload issues associated with schools offering Cambridge International Exams alongside the NCEA, as is the case in many schools which are dipping their toes in the Cambridge water but not jumping in fully. Teachers have to prepare students for two different sets of assessments, based on different curricula, often in the same class and certainly at the same level. One of the many reasons for member disaffection with the unit standards trialling in the mid-1990’s was that they were dual assessing, usually for both Sixth Form Certificate and for unit standards, and this was very burdensome. It is a sad irony that some PPTA members are now having to do this again because the ‘compromise’ which is NCEA is being rejected by some schools.
- 3.4.8 Furthermore, the Cambridge International exams are a reversion to a limited canon of ‘academic’ subjects’ being privileged over the wider range of subjects which is recognised through the NCEA. This conflicts with the goal set by *Te Tiro Hou* of having a qualifications system which is ‘inclusive’ (see 2.1 above).

<sup>15</sup> <http://www.qpec.org.nz/factfiles/examinations.doc> p.1

<sup>16</sup> *ibid.* p.2



#### 4. CONCLUSIONS

- 4.1 Secondary and area school teachers are, as usual, bearing the brunt of a major educational reform which has been poorly conceptualised and under-resourced. Warnings from the profession and from academics about the challenges which the reform would face and was facing went unheeded for far too long.
- 4.2 Nevertheless, most teachers believe that this kind of qualifications system comes much closer to meeting the needs of their diverse range of students than the previous system did, and for that reason will continue to try to make it work. They are dependent, however, on the central agencies getting to grips with the big issues that still need addressing, and doing so with urgency.
- 4.3 However, 'band aid' solutions are not needed here. If there are changes to the design of the system needed, these must be made after thorough discussion and research. There is no room for false starts or blind alleys when designing a qualifications system with which students and teachers must work. Any design changes required will need to be implemented incrementally and with generous timeframes.
- 4.4 Improvements to the resourcing of the system can and should, however, be made with due speed and without half measures.
- 4.5 It is a serious concern to the union that the NCEA has become a football to be kicked around by politicians seeking cheap political gain. Students' confidence in the qualifications system is being undermined by self-interested politicians. The NCEA was created under a National-led government, and implemented under a Labour-led government. There should be a broad consensus among politicians that a standards-based qualifications system is what New Zealand is committed to having, and that the task of government is to ensure that ours is the very best system that can be developed. Our students deserve nothing less than that.

#### **Recommendations (Conference minutes show that these recommendations were Carried)**

1. That the report be received.
2. That PPTA continue to give a high priority to advocating improvements to the design and implementation of the NCEA.
3. That PPTA support the goal of a high quality publicly funded qualifications system for New Zealand students, and oppose the offering of Cambridge International Examinations in New Zealand schools.
4. That there be a further report on progress to the 2006 Annual Conference.



## REFERENCES

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