



Education Report: Changes to NCEA in 2021 to respond to COVID-19

To:	Hon Chris Hipkins, Minister of Education		
Date:	24 August 2021	Priority:	Urgent
Security Level:	In Confidence	METIS No:	1269812
Drafter:	Richard D'Ath	DDI:	9(2)(a)
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Messaging seen by Communications team:	No	Round Robin:	No

Purpose of Report

The purpose of this paper is for you to:

- **Agree** to a package of operational and policy changes to the NCEA qualifications to address the risk to student achievement caused by COVID-19 related disruptions.

Summary

- 1 COVID-19 is again causing disruption across the education system and its impacts on learners studying towards an NCEA are uncertain. The sector reports improved readiness to adopt remote learning and assessment practices, but an elevated anxiety that two years of disruption are compounding potential learning loss, and that the timing and suddenness of this lockdown carries greater risks of disruption to assessment and student disengagement.
- 2 As we found last year, NCEA's flexibility is a true strength. Schools can make changes to the timing and evidence gathering process for internal assessments, and teachers and students can modify their learning programmes to change the number and type of assessments to respond to the COVID-19 response. To support this, the Ministry and NZQA have issued guidance on how each achievement standard can be assessed remotely, have provided digital devices and connectivity to NCEA students, and have made hard copy resources available free of charge.
- 3 As with last year, we also seek your approval to implement a series of operational and policy changes to NCEA. The operational changes are:
 - a. Delaying the NCEA Level 1 Mathematics Common Assessment Task (MCAT) from 14 or 16 September for two weeks – to 28 or 30 September. This will give students who were due to sit the MCAT more time to prepare.
 - b. Delaying the dates of end of year NCEA and NZ Scholarship exams by two weeks. Subjects where students prepare a portfolio instead of sitting an exam – like Visual Arts – will also have the due date for these portfolios moved back by two weeks.

- c. Waiving the requirement for schools to provide portfolios from students sitting NCEA Level 1 or Level 2 to NZQA to verify. This also means there will be more time for students to finish their work, and for teachers to mark it.
- 4 We have also worked with the NCEA Professional Advisory Group and peak body representatives to confirm the parameters for the reimplementation of last year's policy changes to the requirements of the NCEA qualifications. This includes:
 - a. Reactivating the Learning Recognition Credit system using the same parameters that you agreed last year (up to 10 Level 1 credits, 8 Level 2 credits, or 8 Level 3 credits, earned at a rate of 1 credit per 5 credits achieved) [METIS 1230263 refers].
 - b. The NZQA Board confirming changes to University Entrance to reduce the requirements from 14 credits in three approved subjects to 12 credits in three approved subjects, along with the current literacy and numeracy requirements and attainment of NCEA Level 3.
 - c. Changes to Certificate Endorsements and Course Endorsements to reduce the number of credits required for these Awards. Certificate Endorsements will require 46, rather than 50 credits at Merit or Excellence Level, and Course Endorsements will require 12 Credits rather than 14 at Achieved, Merit or Excellence Level [METIS 1228520 refers]. (noting that course endorsements are available at achieved from 2021).
- 5 The changes to University Entrance will also be subject to agreement from University Vice Chancellors and University New Zealand, which we are confirming overnight. We will inform you if the outcomes of these discussions require us to amend our advice on University Entrance.
- 6 In addition, we note that:
 - a. We do not recommend amending the earning rate or cap for the Learning Recognition Credits or modifying the University Entrance changes we made in 2020. While the final NCEA result distribution in 2020 exceeded the 2019 distribution, especially for Level 3 and UE, we support the advice of your Professional Advisory Group and peak bodies that suggests continuing with a generous approach and maintaining last year's policy settings is prudent given uncertainties about the impact of the lockdown on the 2021 cohort.
 - b. We do, however, note that there are credibility risks associated with a second year of potentially elevated attainment, although our discussions with the University sector and our analysis of media coverage following this year's results release seems to indicate that there is a general acceptance of the approach taken to date (i.e., prioritising student wellbeing and engagement in learning).
 - c. In consideration of the likely scenarios from this point, we recommend that the threshold for triggering these changes in a specific region or school is at least four weeks total of Alert Level 3 or 4 lockdowns over the course of an academic year.
 - d. Should there be additional lockdowns during the current calendar year, we will provide you with further advice, as we did during 2020.
- 7 If you agree to these changes, you may wish to use the attached key messages at your 1pm COVID-19 press conference). NZQA and the Ministry of Education will then

formally write to all secondary school principals, and information will be provided in the school bulletin and on Ministry and NZQA websites as required.

Recommended Actions

The Ministry of Education and NZQA recommends you:

- a. **Note** that to support schools and wharekura to use NCEA's flexibility to support students through COVID-19 related disruption, the Ministry of Education and NZQA have reactivated our teaching and assessment practice supports, including issued guidance on how each achievement standard can be tailored for remote delivery, provided digital devices and connectivity to NCEA students, and made hard copy resources available free of charge.
- b. **Note** that the Ministry of Education and the New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA) recommend a series of immediate operational changes to NCEA for 2021, to respond to disruption to learning and assessment caused by COVID-19.
- c. **Approve** our recommended operational changes
 - a. Delaying the NCEA Level 1 Mathematics Common Assessment Task (MCAT) from 14 or 16 September for two weeks – to 28 or 30 September.
 - b. Delaying the dates for end of year NCEA and Scholarship exams by two weeks, including the due date for externally assessed portfolios.
 - c. No longer requiring schools to provide portfolios from students sitting NCEA Level 1 or Level 2 for NZQA to verify. This also means there will be more time for students to finish their work, and for teachers to mark it.

Yes / No

- d. **Note** that following consultation with your NCEA Professional Advisory Group and the sector peak bodies, the Ministry of Education and NZQA recommend reimplementing the policy changes to NCEA's requirements you agreed to in 2020, to respond to disruption to learning and assessment caused by COVID-19 in 2021.
- e. **Approve** our recommended policy changes to NCEA's requirements:
 - a. Reactivating the Learning Recognition Credit system using the same parameters that you agreed last year (up to 10 Level 1 credits, 8 Level 2 credits, or 8 Level 3 credits, earned at a rate of 1 credit per 5 credits achieved), noting the trigger described in paragraph 6c.
 - b. The NZQA Board confirming changes to University Entrance to reduce the requirements from 14 credits in three approved subjects to 12 credits in three approved subjects, along with the current literacy and numeracy requirements and attainment of NCEA Level 3.
 - c. Changes to Certificate Endorsements and Course Endorsements to reduce the number of credits required for these Awards. Certificate Endorsements will require 46, rather than 50 credits at Merit or Excellence Level, and Course Endorsements will require 12 Credits rather than 14 at Achieved, Merit or Excellence Level.

Yes / No

- f. **Note** that communications material to support a potential announcement at your 1pm COVID-19 press conference is attached as **Annex 1** to this report, and that the Ministry and NZQA will then issue communications as per paragraph 7.
- g. **Note** we will update you as we receive updates on what the University Vice Chancellors and University New Zealand have agreed regarding changes to University Entrance.
- h. **Agree** to proactively release this report as part of the next regularly planned COVID-19 information release.

Yes / No

Grant Klinkum
Chief Executive
New Zealand Qualifications Authority

Hon Chris Hipkins
Minister of Education

24/08/2021

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Proactive Release

1. It is intended that this Education Report is proactively released as per your expectation that information be released as soon as possible. Any information which may need to be withheld will be done so in line with the provisions of the Official Information Act 1982.
2. We recommend that this Education Report is released in the next regularly scheduled COVID-19 proactive release.

Annexes

Annex 1: Key Messages for potential announcement on 25 August 2021