



Education Report: Proposed changes to NCEA in 2020 to respond to COVID-19: recommended interim communications

To:	Hon Chris Hipkins, Minister of Education		
Date:	12 May 2020	Priority:	Urgent – Response required by 4:00pm Wednesday 12 May
Security Level:	In Confidence	METIS No:	1228260
Drafter:	Richard D'Ath	DDI:	§ 9(2)(a)
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Messaging seen by Communications team:	No	Round Robin:	No

Purpose of Report

To recommend a two stage communications approach while we engage with the Professional Advisory Group for NCEA and Universities New Zealand on potential changes to the National Certificates in Educational Achievement (NCEA) for the 2020 school year, following our Education Report dated 8 May 2020 and your request for further consideration of options [METIS 1227996 refers].

Summary

- 1 In our advice dated 8 May 2020 we recommended changes to the NCEA qualification system to coincide with the announcement on Monday 11 May 2020 of the Government's decision on COVID-19 Alert Level, to provide clarity to the sector about what changes we will and will not be making and to assist with their planning.
- 2 The changes we recommended announcing were:
 - a. To address educational inequities caused by disruption to learning and assessment through some form of credit recognition, inclusion or award system.
 - b. To take pressure off the system through changes to the examination window and submitted subject submission dates and verification requirements.
 - c. Changes to University Entrance, based on the outcomes of consultation with Universities New Zealand and University Vice Chancellors.
- 3 We are seeking your confirmation that we may communicate about these changes today. Our communications, which include a draft media release attributed to you (enclosed as Annex A), and a follow-up email from the Chief Executive of NZQA to school leaders, will include announcement of the following, immediate changes:
 - a. Confirmation that examinations will proceed, but will be shifted back from 6 November to 16 November, to allow for another week of teaching, learning and assessment to be completed.

- b. An extension for the submission date for submitted subjects to give students more time to prepare – to 12 November 2020.
 - c. Waiver of the requirement for NCEA Level 1 and 2 Visual Arts verification to enable to schools to set their own submission dates.
- 4 We also recommend announcing that further changes are being considered, with details to be announced following further design work:
 - i. Changes to the requirements in 2020 for University Entrance to expand flexibility and recognise the disruption to teaching and assessment programme by reducing the credits required in approved subjects, subject to finalisation of the proposed change with Universities New Zealand.
 - ii. Implementation of a mechanism to equitably provide for students whose NCEA learning and assessment programmes were disrupted by COVID-19.
- 5 We are working with Universities New Zealand and University Vice Chancellors on the first change and are working with the NCEA Professional Advisory Group to explore the full range of options for the second change. Our goal in both cases will be to design mechanisms that are accessible and inclusive, while ensuring that it is underpinned by valid and reliable judgments that protect the credibility of the qualification.
- 6 Subsequent reports within the next week will provide further advice on these issues.
- 7 We recommend this approach to provide the sector with assurance following the Alert Level announcement on Monday that there will be relief available for NCEA students and programmes. Announcing the new submission, exam dates and changes to verification requirements will support secondary schools and wharekura to complete their planning this week for the return to Level 2. It will also highlight the direction we are taking on the proposed credit provisions, while still giving us time to complete high-level discussions and design work with the sector bodies.
- 8 We have engaged with the Professional Advisory Group on the contents of this paper. They are seeking clarity on any potential changes to NCEA, and some form of credit recognition or award process to provide equitable outcomes for students affected by COVID-19. They have differing views on the best mechanism to balance the trade-offs being discussed, and recognise that there will be upsides and downsides to each of the solutions being proposed. We are continuing to confer with individual members to work through their specific concerns.
- 9 They are in favour of the two stage communications approach, as are the other peak bodies we have engaged with in the last 24 hours. They feel this will provide the sector with more time to begin planning, without compromising the design process we have underway.
- 10 Based on your agreement to our approach, we will finalise our proposed communication material in consultation with your office, for release this afternoon.

Annex

Recommended Actions

The Ministry of Education recommends you:

- a. **Note** that in our Report dated 8 May 2020 the Ministry of Education and the New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA) recommended a series of changes to NCEA's requirements for 2020, to respond to disruption to learning and assessment caused by COVID-19 [METIS 1227996 refers].
- b. **Note** that we recommend a Ministerial press release announcing the changes referenced below in recommendations c. and d., to provide the sector with information to support their planning, and give them confidence that relief will be available for NCEA students and programmes adversely affected by COVID-19.
- c. **Agree** issue a media release communicating (draft enclosed as Annex A) the following changes to NCEA:
- i. Confirming that examinations will proceed, but will be shifted back from 6 November to 16 November, to allow for another week of teaching, learning and assessment to be completed.

☒ Agree ☐ Disagree
 - ii. For submitted subjects we will provide an extension for the submission date to give students more time to prepare – to 12 November 2020.

☒ Agree ☐ Disagree
 - iii. Waive the requirement for NCEA Level 1 and 2 Visual Arts verification to enable to schools to set their own submission dates.

☒ Agree ☐ Disagree
- d. **Agree** to also include in the media release described in recommendation c. that:
whether there should be
- i. NZQA is currently consulting with Universities New Zealand and University Vice Chancellors on changes to the requirements in 2020 for University Entrance to expand flexibility and recognise the disruption to teaching and assessment programme.

☒ Agree ☐ Disagree
 - consider how to
ii. NZQA and the Ministry are working with your Professional Advisory Group for NCEA to design a mechanism to equitably provide for students whose NCEA learning and assessment programmes were disrupted by COVID-19.

☒ Agree ☐ Disagree
- e. **Note** that we are working with Universities New Zealand, the Professional Advisory Group, and the sector peak bodies represented on that Group, to explore the full range of options, and will report back to you within the next week with advice on the changes described in recommendation d.

- f. **Agree** to proactively release this report following public announcements of the changes to NCEA described within

☒ Agree ☐ Disagree

Ellen MacGregor-Reid
Deputy Secretary
Early Learning and Student Achievement

12/05/2020

Hon Chris Hipkins
Minister of Education

12/5/2020

Grant Klinkum
Chief Executive
New Zealand Qualifications Authority

12/05/2020

Background

- 11 In recognition of the rapidly evolving COVID-19 situation, the Ministry of Education and the NZQA have developed an escalating series of potential changes to the NCEA to respond to disruption to the 2020 school year.
- 12 To date the Ministry and NZQA have issued guidance on how each achievement standard can be tailored for remote delivery, provided digital devices and connectivity to NCEA students, made hard copy resources available free of charge, and worked via NZQA's School Relationship Managers to support schools and kura to manage national assessments during lockdown. This work will continue as schools and kura return to face-to-face delivery over the coming weeks and months.
- 13 In our advice dated 8 May 2020 we recommended changes to the NCEA qualification system to coincide with the upcoming announcement on Monday 11 May 2020 of the Government's decision on COVID-19 Alert Level, to provide clarity to the sector about what changes we will and will not be making.
- 14 The changes we recommended announcing were:
- a. **To address disruption to learning and assessment by:**
 - i. Implementing a mechanism to equitably provide for students whose NCEA learning and assessment programmes were disrupted by COVID-19.
 - b. **To take pressure off the system:**
 - ii. Confirming that examinations will proceed, but will be shifted back from 6 November to 16 November, to allow for another week of teaching, learning and assessment to be completed.
 - iii. For submitted subjects we will provide an extension for the submission date to give students more time to prepare – to 5 November 2020.
 - iv. Waive the requirement for NCEA Level 1 and 2 Visual Arts verification to enable to schools to set their own submission dates.
 - c. **To address concerns about University Entrance:** NZQA is currently consulting with Universities New Zealand and University Vice Chancellors on changes to the requirements in 2020 for University Entrance to expand flexibility and recognise the disruption to teaching and assessment programme. The aim is to announce changes on Tuesday 12 May. We will update you once discussions with Vice Chancellors have been completed which is expected to be Monday. The changes will aim to reduce the credit requirements in the Approved Subject Requirements
- 15 In your agency meeting on 11 May 2020 you indicated in-principle support for the changes described above in paragraphs 15b. and 15c. (relating to the timing of submissions and examinations, and University Entrance). You have also asked for further advice on how the first of these changes could be implemented, balancing the accessibility of the recognition mechanism with ensuring that it is underpinned by valid and reliable judgments.
- 16 We now seek your agreement to communicate the changes to external assessments, via a media release (draft enclosed as Annex A).
- 17 In this media release we also recommend announcing that we are also progressing:

- a. Changes to the requirements in 2020 for University Entrance to expand flexibility and recognise the disruption to teaching and the assessment programme by reducing the credits required in approved subjects, subject to finalisation of the proposed change with Universities New Zealand.
- b. Implementation of a mechanism to equitably provide for students whose NCEA learning and assessment programmes were disrupted by COVID-19.

Confirming the changes for communication today

External assessment changes

- 18 External assessment forms an important component of NCEA and NZQA. Most externals take the form of an examination, and require an examination period with options for paper-based assessment. We recommend maintaining the examinations and only moving the examination window if necessary. Online examinations (administered onsite in examination systems as remote invigilation is not currently available) will be available for some subjects and will be encouraged but not mandated.
- 19 Holding New Zealand Scholarship Examinations is a priority as no derived-grade process for students whose examination performance has been impaired can occur. These examinations can be held more easily than others within some degree of physical distancing restrictions, as manageable numbers of students from each school participate.
- 20 We recommend shifting examinations back from 6 November to 16 November. This will provide for additional teaching, learning and assessment time during Term Four.
- 21 We do not recommend longer deferrals as we would not be able to complete a full examination timetable in the time available before Christmas. For example, a two week delay in the start of the examination window would require that Level 1 examinations be cancelled, which would disrupt the year for many students and teachers.
- 22 We would, however, indicate that if we assess at a later date that it is not possible to hold exams at the end of the year (i.e. there is too great a chance we will be in Alert Level 3 or 4 in October), we will need to cancel them (except potentially for some Scholarship examinations). This will clarify that there will not be partial changes here (e.g., cancelling Level 1 examinations only, or deferring examinations), and help schools to begin preparing for Unexpected Event Grade processes.
- 23 In anticipation of Unexpected Event grades potentially needing to be used in place of all NCEA examinations if these must be cancelled after June in response to public health guidelines or restrictions, NZQA will use its existing verification and quality assurance processes for grades derived in this way. This process has never been used at this scale before, so would need to be manageable by NZQA. Because of the quality assurance processes that surround the awarding of Derived Grades it should provide confidence that the results are valid and reflect the students' actual skills, knowledge, and competencies.

University Entrance

- 24 NZQA has engaged with University New Zealand on the options for amending the University Entrance Award criteria, and have provided a recommended option.
- 25 In creating these options, NZQA has considered the following principles, which include the expectations of universities:

- a. A student is considered ready for university if they are able to demonstrate depth and breadth of learning through attainment across three University Entrance approved subjects.
 - b. NZQA considers it fair that students who are close to attaining University Entrance, but whose learning and assessment was disrupted due to COVID-19 should attain University Entrance.
 - c. Schools can attest that the evidence of learning and assessment during the year shows that students can reasonably be considered to be ready for university in 2021.
 - d. Students who are likely to be disproportionately impacted by disruptions have fair access to University Entrance, such as those with health conditions, in rural areas, or without access to devices, from low decile schools, and particularly Māori and Pacific students.
 - e. The amended criteria for the University Entrance Award is one of a suite of responses to enable students to maintain plans to enter university in 2021.
- 26 We have engaged with both the Professional Advisory Group and Universities New Zealand on the proposed options, and will be providing you with advice alongside our further advice on credit recognition in next week's Education Report.

Producing further advice on credit recognition

- 27 We are working with the Professional Advisory Group, and the sector peak bodies represented on that Group, to explore the full range of options for using recognition mechanisms to provide relief for students whose learning was disrupted by COVID-19. As noted above, a subsequent Education Report next week will outline our recommended approach. We will be considering the following options, identified to date in our discussions with the sector.
- a. Option 1: reduce the size of the NCEA qualifications – reduce the size of the NCEA qualifications so that fewer credits are required for their award in 2020.
 - b. Option 2: Light-touch validation – Students would receive the credits in July, based on confirmation by the school of a light-touch validation process.
 - c. Option 3: Credit inclusion mechanism – Students would receive the credits later in the year, based on submission by the school into a thorough validation process.
- 28 We have engaged with the Professional Advisory Group two further times on the options above. Their recommendation is that we should look to provide the most clarity we can, as soon as is practical (while taking time to make a robust decision), and support some form of qualification system change to provide students with relief.
- 29 They have differing views on the best mechanism to balance the trade-offs being discussed, and recognise that there will be upsides and downsides to each of the solutions being proposed. We are continuing to confer with individual members to work through their specific concerns, and will continue to do so as we finalise our advice over the coming week.

Next steps

- 30 Subject to your agreement, we recommend issuing the draft media release enclosed in Annex A this afternoon.

- 31 We will then follow-up your media release with a communication from the Chief Executive of NZQA to school leaders, to follow an initial email communication last week. We will then respond to sector queries via NZQA's channels as required (School Relationship Managers, communications with Principals' Nominees, updates on the NZQA secure extranet etc.).

Task	Timing	Who
Tuesday 12 May		
Press Release issued	4.00pm	Ministry and NZQA
Email to notify peak bodies	4.30pm	Ministry and NZQA
Email to notify Directors of Education, Education Managers	4.30pm	Ministry and NZQA
Email to school and wharekura leaders	5.00pm	NZQA
From Tuesday 12 May		
Ministry and NZQA responds to any queries via both the media team, on Facebook or emails (reactive QAs and key messages available)	As appropriate	Ministry and NZQA