

6 December 2023

[REDACTED]

Tēnā koe [REDACTED]

## **Official Information Act Request**

Thank you for your request under the Official Information Act 1982 on 10 November 2023:

*Please treat this as a complaint as well as an inquiry under the Official Information Act.*

*I'm a parent of a Year 11 student and a professional author, writer and editor, and I'm concerned about the unfairness of some students being able to use a computer for the Level 1 NCEA paper, while others are forced to use pen and paper. That's an incredibly inequitable situation. (This is not in response to today's computer glitch, but a general complaint about the system.)*

*We all know how much easier it is to write and edit an essay on a computer, where you can easily draft, correct errors and rewrite passages. Plus, this is a generation that has grown up writing and editing on computers, and very rarely would they have written an essay by hand. Additionally, students with messy handwriting (which is many of them, seeing as this is a generation who have not been drilled in handwriting) are highly likely to be penalised if the markers struggle to read their papers. This has happened to my son in internal assessments this year.*

*The students using computers get an incredibly unfair advantage over those forced to use pen and paper. Seeing as 40% of students got to use computers, can you please confirm whether they are all assessed on the same criteria? (Which would be incredibly unfair.) If so, can you please provide statistics quoting the average mark of those who had the advantage of using a computer over those who were disadvantaged, in past NCEA English exams?*

*Can you also please confirm whether students with messy handwriting will get penalised if their handwriting is difficult to read or if they have had to scribble passages out, etc? Will allowances be made for this in comparison with those using computers?*

*I have seen suggestions in news stories that allowances may be given this year for students who feel penalised that they had to handwrite because of the computer glitch. If so, will allowances also be given for students who had to handwrite because they weren't give the option of using a computer in the first place?*

*If no allowances are given, how does NCEA can justify giving 40% of students sitting this exam an unfair advantage? (And please don't tell me it's not an advantage. If it wasn't an advantage, computers would never have caught on as a writing and editing tool.)*

## Response

Students are not obligated to use paper or computers for their NCEA English external assessments. Schools and students choose whether the assessment is completed digitally or on paper.

During the recent Level 1 English external assessment, a performance issue with our digital platform resulted in a number of students unable to undertake the Level 1 English examination digitally.

Schools have been provided with information about the process to follow where a student was adversely affected by the need to change from using a computer to paper.

### *Assessment criteria*

External assessments are marked against the same criteria, regardless of whether the student sat the assessment digitally or on paper.

### *Digital vs Paper – data from 2020 and 2022*

There is a small difference for Achieved or better grades between digital and paper:

- In 2020, 85.6% of digitally assessed results were Achieved or better, compared with 80.8% for paper (a 4.8 percentage point difference).
- In 2022, 81.9% of digitally assessed results were Achieved or better, compared with 78.4% for paper (a 3.5 percentage point difference).

#### Note:

- i. We have not included results for the 2021 Academic Year as the derived grades for unexpected events that were applied for Auckland, Northland, and Waikato are considered “paper” in our systems.
- ii. Familiarity with the medium is an important factor to consider when determining any differences between digital and paper assessments. If students do not access a computer for their external assessment, it is expected that they would have completed their learning without the use of a computer and would be comfortable with completing an examination on paper. However, we are also aware that a number of schools undertake teaching and learning programmes using digital devices, but still choose to enter their students for the paper version of the assessment.
- iii. Based on feedback from students, we can currently only speculate about any differences in achievement between students sitting external assessments on paper vs digitally. We mark the NCEA external assessments on a nine-point scale per item, so any difference is difficult to ascertain and nuanced. Subtle differences in achievement may not be identifiable in the same way if, for example, we used a 100-point scale. However, significant differences in achievement is an area we would monitor if we started to design assessments specifically to be completed online without everyone having to use that medium.

### *Handwriting*

Students are not penalised for poor handwriting; every effort is made by markers to “decipher” poor handwriting. In some cases, an assessment may be viewed by three or more markers. Students who have such poor handwriting that it cannot be read, should have access to a reader/writer through Special Assessment Conditions (SAC). More information on SAC can be found [here](#).

NCEA is a standards-based qualification, therefore each assessment is based on an assessment standard which states the expected outcome. If a student demonstrates they can meet the standard, regardless of the medium, then they are awarded the credits associated with the standard.

The principles of Universal Design for Learning, which underpin the design of standards and associated assessments, also mean that the form, method, and medium of assessment should not be barriers to achievement.

On that basis, there is no need to make allowances for the medium a student may use as it does not inhibit them from meeting the requirements of the standard.

Your response may be published on our website after five working days. Your name and contact details will be removed before publication.

If you require further assistance or believe we have misinterpreted your request, please contact Elizabeth Templeton in the Office of the Chief Executive, email [elizabeth.templeton@nzqa.govt.nz](mailto:elizabeth.templeton@nzqa.govt.nz) or telephone (04) 463 3339.

You have the right to seek an investigation or review by the Ombudsman of this decision under section 28(3) of the Official Information Act 1982. Details of how to make a complaint can be found at [www.ombudsman.parliament.nz](http://www.ombudsman.parliament.nz). You can also telephone 0800 802 502 or write to the Ombudsman at PO Box 10152, Wellington, 6143.

Nāku nā



Dr Grant Klinkum  
Pouwhakahaere/Chief Executive