



NEW ZEALAND QUALIFICATIONS AUTHORITY
MANA TOHU MĀTAURANGA O AOTEAROA

QUALIFY FOR THE FUTURE WORLD
KIA NOHO TAKATŪ KI TŌ ĀMUA AO!

Aide-Memoire: Preparation for holding examinations

To:	Hon Chris Hipkins, Minister of Education
From:	Dr Grant Klinkum, Chief Executive
Date:	17 September 2020
Reference:	CR 21036

Purpose

1. This aide memoire briefs you on NZQA's approach and preparations for holding this year's New Zealand Scholarship and NCEA Level 1-3 examinations under COVID-19 Alert Levels 1-4.
2. It also provides you with the circumstances under which we would seek to invoke an Unexpected Event and an outline of the quality assurance approach underpinning any use of the Unexpected Event Grade (UEG) process.
3. NZQA intends to release this briefing after the end of the 2020 examination cycle, once all quality assurance is completed and students have access to their final results.
4. The Ministry of Education has been consulted on this aide memoire.

Assumptions

5. The following assumptions underpin our approach:
 - i. All students should have the opportunity to sit external examinations in 2020.
 - ii. Examinations can run at Alert Levels 1, 2 and 3, consistent with the appropriate health and safety measures as agreed by the Ministry of Health (See Table 1).
 - iii. NZQA should invoke the UEG process if any region is placed under Alert Level 3 during the examination period.
 - iv. NZQA should invoke the UEG process for affected schools if any region is placed under Alert Level 3 over a period that includes at least one week of Term 4 (starts 12 October).
 - v. Under current Alert Level 4 conditions, NCEA examinations would not proceed (See Table 1). All NCEA students in the affected area would have access to a UEG. There may be options for New Zealand Scholarship examinations to proceed at a later time.

Table 1 sets out a summary of the intended approach to holding examinations under each Alert Level

Table 1

Alert Level	Intended approach	Arrangements	Considerations
1 & 2	NCEA Level 1-3: yes NZ Scholarship: yes	Appropriate health and safety measures are in place at examination centres	The Derived Grade process is available to any student who is not able to sit the examination on a case-by-case basis.
3	NCEA Level 1-3: yes NZ Scholarship: yes	Strict Ministry of Health requirements are in place	The UEG process is invoked. Some students may be unable to sit the examinations due to family or health circumstances.
4	NCEA Level 1-3: no NZ Scholarship: (maybe)	NA	NA
		<i>Being explored</i>	NZQA will explore the potential to reschedule NZ Scholarship examinations to commencing no later than the end of January 2021, subject to an analysis of impact on students.

Situation

Preparing school examination centres for Alert Level 1–3

6. NZQA is able to run examinations at Alert Level 1 and 2, and the additional requirements for examinations to proceed at Alert Level 3 have been agreed by the Ministry of Health. These procedures, designed to high safety standards, will be applied at all alert levels. Alert level restrictions may apply to a town, city, territorial local authority, region, or nationally.
7. If any region is placed under Alert Level 4 in November, NCEA and NZ Scholarship examinations would not be logistically possible in that region. NZQA is considering the feasibility of rescheduling the national NZ Scholarship in this eventuality.
8. NZQA is working with schools to establish and confirm the arrangements for holding examinations under Alert Levels 1-3. Planning for each examination centre is addressing the need for sufficient rooms and increased invigilator and administrative staffing to ensure social distancing. Planning also includes arrangements for managing the flow and separation of students on entry and exit from examination sessions consistent with the social distancing requirements under Alert Levels 1-3.
9. NZQA's planning includes the provision of additional contingency staffing for Examination Centres to ensure there is cover for staff who may not wish to continue if there was a change in Alert Levels or who need to self-isolate. Regionally based NZQA staff and/or teachers are also being prepared in case they are needed at any time to assist with examination supervision.
10. All examination supervision staff are being asked to confirm to NZQA their willingness to work under these alert levels. This is especially important as exam supervision staff tend to be in the older age group. This year, NZQA is undertaking a national recruitment campaign to mitigate the risk of examination centres being unable to recruit sufficient staff through the usual channels.
11. A plan has been developed to ensure that NZQA is able to manage NCEA and NZ Scholarship examinations in the event that the Wellington Region is at Alert Level 3 or 4 but other regions are at Alert Levels 1, 2 or 3.
12. NZQA's planning also includes ensuring the availability of sufficient marking capacity under Level 3 Alert conditions.

Impact of Further Disruption on Students

13. The loss of teaching and learning time during Term 3 presented challenges for students as this is a critical period during which NCEA students complete much of their final internal assessment and start preparing for their external examinations. In many cases students' assessment programmes were reduced and/or delayed because of the earlier lock down in Term 2, and more recently in Term 3 for Auckland students. The changes announced recently for additional Learning Recognition Credits and adjustments to the Certificate Endorsement requirements for Auckland students will assist students to remain on track to achieve their qualification. However, any further disruption will require additional considerations.
14. Schools are working hard to prepare students for the upcoming examinations. NZQA is continuing to provide schools with support on how to collect evidence for school-assessed grades for externally assessed standards should a school be unable to run examinations due to COVID-19 lockdown or any other event. NZQA developed templates earlier in the year for each externally assessed Achievement Standard to guide teachers in the assessment and preparation of UEGs as part of the contingency planning for COVID-19.
15. Some students may not be able to sit an examination either because their parents do not wish them to attend under the conditions of that alert level or the student needs to remain in self isolation¹.
16. We have considered how best to address potential disadvantage to students arising from a change in alert levels between now and the commencement of examinations, or during examinations.
17. If examinations are held under Alert Level 3 conditions, all students will be encouraged to attend. We anticipate, however under Alert Level 3 conditions, some students will not be able to attend and some students may have impaired performance. For example, students who have family members in high risk groups, such as those living in multi-generational households may have reduced attendance. This is likely to impact on Māori and Pacific students in particular.
18. If there are further Alert Level 3 conditions from the start of Term 4 or during external examinations, we have to consider whether additional measures will be required to ensure all students have the opportunity to be fairly assessed.
19. An additional measure to ensure students have a fair assessment opportunity is to invoke the UEG process. A UEG can be declared by the Chief Executive of NZQA, following an exceptional event beyond the control of students, which prevents them from attending or finishing their examination, or impairs their preparation or performance.
20. A UEG would mean that a student who does not attend still receives a school-assessed grade in lieu of an examination result. It also means that if a student is still able to attend the examination, NZQA will award the better outcome of the UEG or examination result.
21. If the UEG process was not invoked under Alert Level 3 conditions, then:
 - i. students, who through no fault of their own could not attend the examination, would not receive a grade.
 - ii. students attending examinations who may have an impaired performance due to the Alert Level 3 disruptions will have no recourse.

¹ MoH guidance on medical conditions, compromised immunity, and those at risk can be found at <https://www.health.govt.nz/our-work/diseases-and-conditions/covid-19-novel-coronavirus/covid-19-information-specific-audiences/covid-19-advice-higher-risk-people>.

Current MoE advice to schools (<https://www.education.govt.nz/covid-19/advice-for-schoolskura/guidance-for-schools-for-alert-levels-1-4/>) advises that children vulnerable to the illness may choose to stay at home at Alert Level 2. For the purpose of these criteria, vulnerability has been defined by the MoH guidance above.

22. NZQA is planning to invoke an UEG for any part of New Zealand that goes into Alert Level 3 in Term 4 or during the actual external examination period.
23. The UEG and Derived Grade processes do not apply to New Zealand Scholarship examinations as this is a competitive examination.
24. Summarised below in Table 2 are the considerations under which a UEG would apply **under a return to Alert Level 3 conditions**.

Table 2

Situation	A period that includes at least one week of Term 4 (<i>Term 4 starts 12 Oct</i>)	During examination period 16 Nov to 9 Dec
Region or affected schools within a region.	UEG invoked. Students would still attend the examination but would be awarded the better of the UEG or examination result.	UEG invoked. Students have access to UEG even if they do not sit the examination.

25. Under Alert Level 4, all NCEA students in the affected area will receive UEGs.

Risks relating to invoking the UEG process

26. There is a risk that if the UEG process is invoked during examinations, there would be a reduction in the number of students attending NCEA examinations. In that case these students would need to rely solely on their UEG result. Analysis of 2019 UEG data shows that this may result in lower grades for some students not attending the examination.
27. In 2019, the grades schools submitted for UEGs tended to be lower than the student's final performance in examinations. This is not unexpected given students have additional time to review teacher feedback and to prepare for examinations post the finalisation of the UEGs by schools and submission of these to NZQA.
28. A comparison of 2019 UEG and examination results show that 33 percent of students achieved a lower UEG result than their examination result. By ethnicity the proportion of students receiving a lower UEG is similar: Māori (31.6%), European (32.7%), Pacific (32.5%) and Asian students (35.7%).
29. There may also be a risk to the credibility of NCEA if the UEG is invoked and students get the better of their UEG or examination result. A comparison of 2019 UEG and examination results show that 19.8 percent of students achieved a higher UEG result. By ethnicity the proportion of students receiving a higher UEG is similar: Māori (19.7%), European (20.8%), Pacific (17.9%) and Asian students (18.1%).
30. On balance, NZQA believes these risks are manageable and are outweighed by the risks of relying on examinations alone where students have compromised ability to attend or participate.
31. There is also a risk that a student opts not to attend an examination and NZQA does not hold a UEG due to schools submitting an incomplete set of UEGs. In 2019, 63.1 percent of all external entries had an associated UEG result. To mitigate this risk, NZQA will be actively monitoring flow of UEGs from schools and will be following up with schools where the rate of UEG provision is low.

Quality Assurance of UEGs

32. The first part of this paper set out the arrangements to run external exams for NCEA and NZ Scholarship under Alert Levels 1 to 3, and set out a measured approach to using UEGs in the event of new Alert Level 3 or 4 conditions between now and the end of the external examination period. The following part of the paper sets out the quality assurance arrangements that underpin UEG processes.

33. NZQA requires all schools to submit UEGs to NZQA prior to examinations each year. Although NZQA has established quality assurance processes for UEGs and schools are familiar with these, the 2020 situation requires additional direction, reinforcement and monitoring. This will include a focus on direction to schools as to the requirements they must follow.
34. There are three steps to NZQA's UEG quality assurance approach. These are:
 - i. direction to schools on NZQA's requirements for their internal quality assurance processes of UEGs;
 - ii. monitoring the inflow of UEGs from schools against key dates and follow up with schools;
 - iii. review of final UEGs submitted in December.
35. NZQA does not propose sampling evidence gathered for UEGs at schools as part of the December quality assurance process. There would not be sufficient time to validly sample, verify, provide feedback and then for teachers to review and adjust grades without a three to four week delay to late January 2021 results release. NZQA's annual UEG/derived grade audit of up to ten percent of schools has not identified any systemic failings with the UEG/derived grade evidence gathering or quality assurance process.

Direction to Schools

36. By late September 2020, NZQA will issue additional direction, resources and support² to schools on the quality assurance requirements for UEGs. This will specify the criteria for determining that the collected evidence meets the requirements of the standards. It will also specify the process steps schools must follow for determining and quality assuring the UEGs awarded.
37. If the UEG process is invoked at Alert Level 3, NZQA will require school principals to provide a signed attestation that the UEGs reported to NZQA were based on verifiable, authentic, valid, standard-specific evidence, and that NZQA's quality assurance processes to determine these were followed.
38. Schools are expected to use data to inform the quality assurance process for their UEG grades. This data includes their school's externally-assessed grade distributions for previous years (available by downloadable data reports through NZQA's secure school portal) and comparisons of their previous years' UEGs with NZQA external examination grades achieved for those same years.
39. During September and October, NZQA will focus on UEG support to schools. This will include specific support for the relatively small number of schools that have known issues with their assessment practices identified through NZQA's Managing National Assessment processes.

Monitoring the inflow of UEGs from schools against key dates and follow up with schools

40. NZQA is monitoring the inflow of UEGs for each school. Schools submit UEGs progressively from August onwards with the bulk of UEGs submitted in October and November. Schools are expected to submit a result for every external standard entry for each student, either a grade (N, A, M, E) or SNA (standard not assessed). The expectation is that NZQA will receive a UEG or SNA result for 30 percent of NZQA-held externally assessed entries delivered by examinations by 15 October and 90 percent by 15 November.

² Since March 2020, NZQA has advised schools to gather evidence of learning for assessment, should students affected by COVID-19 disruption or illness at the time of the examination, require a grade. On 28 August, NZQA's advice to schools included a reminder about evidence gathering and a link to the evidence gathering templates.

41. At any given time, schools can download and check a UEG report from NZQA's secure school portal detailing the UEG grades NZQA is holding for their students.
42. Monitoring activity by NZQA will include a series of review check points between September and December on submissions to date, and regular follow-ups with schools with identified gaps in results provided.
43. From mid-October onwards, NZQA will analyse the grade distribution of UEGs submitted by schools by standard. NZQA will request schools to investigate and justify clear outlier grade distributions as part of the ongoing monitoring process.

Review of final UEGs submitted

44. NZQA will conduct an analysis of the finalised UEG results by 16 December. This will include comparison counts against prior years at a national, regional and school level of:
 - UEG distributions for 2020 as compared to final results distributions for 2019
 - UEG distributions for 2020 as compared to UEG results distributions for 2019
 - likely impact on national and school results distributions for externally assessed standards if UEGs are invoked.
45. The analysis will be broken down by region, decile band and decile, ethnicity and ethnicity by decile, and gender. The focus of the monitoring will be on outliers against information provided in the principals' attestations. Significant variations (of more than 10 percent) from past grade distributions will require an explanation.

Next steps

46. During September, NZQA will issue the additional direction and resources to support the UEG submission process. This will include a further reminder to schools about evidence gathering for externally assessed standards to inform a UEG.
47. Once requirements for examination procedures are finalised, more detailed information will be communicated with schools. NZQA will continue to work with schools to ensure that the UEG and Derived Grade processes can be applied as needed, so eligible students are not disadvantaged.



Dr Grant Klinkum

Chief Executive, NZQA

17 / 09 / 2020



Hon Chris Hipkins

Minister of Education

22 / 10 / 2020