



NEW ZEALAND QUALIFICATIONS AUTHORITY
MANA TOHU MĀTAURANGA O AOTEAROA

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NCEA and NZ Scholarship Examination Contingencies

Date:	19 October 2021	NZQA Priority:	High
Security Level:	In confidence	Report No.	CR23081

	Action Sought	Deadline
Minister of Education	<p>It is recommended you:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">Note that members of the Professional Advisory Group and other school leaders have raised a range of perspectives about external exam issues.Note that NZQA considers an Unexpected Event Grade to be appropriate for regions which have had a COVID-related disruption in Term 4 (because of the proximity to exams).Note that the Chief Executive of NZQA intends to invoke a regionally based Unexpected Event on 20 October for Auckland, Waikato and Northland.Note the planned arrangements for running examinations when schools are open for senior students.Note the contingency arrangements that could apply for NCEA and NZ Scholarship examinations under Alert Level conditions with schools not open.	Friday 22 October 2021

Enclosure/Appendix: Yes

Round Robin No

Contact for Telephone Discussion (if required)

Name	Position	Telephone	Cellphone	1 st Contact
Grant Klinkum	Chief Executive		[REDACTED]	√
Andrea Gray	DCE Assessment		[REDACTED]	

The following departments/agencies have seen this report:

- Ministry of Education
 Tertiary Education Commission
 Other (specify)

Minister's Office to Complete:

- Noted
 Seen
 Approved
 Needs change
 Withdrawn
 Overtaken by Events
 See Minister's comments
 Declined

Referred to:

Comments:

NCEA and NZ Scholarship Examination Contingencies

Recommended Action

It is recommended you:

- a. **Note** that members of the Professional Advisory Group and other school leaders have raised a range of perspectives about external exam issues.
- b. **Note** that NZQA considers an Unexpected Event Grade to be appropriate for regions which have had a COVID-related disruption in Term 4 (because of the proximity to exams).
- c. **Note** that the Chief Executive of NZQA intends to invoke a regionally based Unexpected Event on 20 October for Auckland, Waikato and Northland.
- d. **Note** the planned arrangements for running examinations when schools are open for senior students.
- e. **Note** the contingency arrangements that could apply for NCEA and NZ Scholarship examinations under Alert Level conditions with schools not open.

Proactive Release Recommendation

NZQA recommends:

- f. **Agree** that this report is proactively released after the results release from this examination round in 2022.

Agree/ Not Agreed



Dr Grant Klinkum
Chief Executive

19 October 2021



Hon Chris Hipkins
Minister of Education

19 / 10 / 2021
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NCEA and NZ Scholarship Examination Contingencies

Purpose of Report

1. This paper summarises the intended approach to running the 2021 NCEA and New Zealand Scholarship examinations, based on the assumption that senior students are attending school in person from 26 October. It also notes the intention for the NZQA Chief Executive to declare an Unexpected Event for affected regions, and sets out contingency arrangements should one or more regions be in Alert Level conditions with schools not open and limitations on student attendance.

Background

2. The NCEA and New Zealand Scholarship examination period has been moved two weeks (now 22 November - 14 December 2021). The assumption is that students should have the opportunity to sit examinations if possible. No further dates changes are feasible or beneficial.
3. PAG members and other Principals have outlined the following concerns and views about the upcoming exams:
 - a. there is a wide range of views from strong support for exams to proceed through to limited support for exams being held;
 - b. there was strong support for NZQA to invoke an Unexpected Event, combined with the opportunity for students to sit exams where possible;
 - c. student readiness for exams has been impacted by the extended disruptions;
 - d. the short runway to exams post lockdown has eroded preparation time;
 - e. there are high levels of student anxiety relating either to uncertainty or the expectation to sit exams;
 - f. whānau are concerned about their children's return to school;
 - g. the return to school has been variable in previous lockdowns because of these concerns;
 - h. if schools were not open for instruction, there was strong support for limiting exams to NCEA Level 3 and New Zealand Scholarship, for manageability of any required bubbles.

Proposed approach

Unexpected Event declaration

4. To mitigate the concerns raised, the fact that the Delta COVID disruptions are not experienced evenly between and within regions, and the increased risk of inequitable outcomes, the NZQA Chief Executive plans to invoke a regionally based Unexpected Event for Auckland, Waikato and Northland on 20 October. NZQA will continue to work with schools and students with border issues.
5. Each year schools are required to provide standard specific, quality assured evidence of a student's learning for each externally assessed Achievement Standard entry; the Unexpected Event Grade (UEG) is a robust alternative grade if the student is prevented from sitting an examination or their performance is impaired.
6. Existing NZQA guidance creates an expectation that students will attend exams, if possible, under a UEG event. This aligns with the expected intentions you will

communicate about senior students being back in school, but will be updated if required. Students attending exams in affected regions will then be awarded the best of their UEG or exam grade.

7. NZQA has robust processes for managing exceptions to exam attendance, including for the COVID scenario. In these circumstances, if the student has undertaken the learning, the UEG would mean that a student who does not attend still receives their school-assessed grade in lieu of an examination result.

Running NCEA examinations safely

8. If schools are open, exams can be held safely under the public health guideline for the planned return of senior students to face to face learning, with the usual physical distancing of 1.5m for exam rooms and halls, and by focussing on good ventilation and reducing the likelihood of students congregating.

Running exams when schools are not open

9. We have assessed the feasibility of running exams in bubbles. Based on the scale of NCEA and New Zealand Scholarship (as compared with Cambridge or the International Baccalaureate) this is logistically complex, staff-intensive and inequitable for less well-resourced school communities.
10. In consultation with the Ministry of Education, NZQA recommends that exams be limited to Level 3 and New Zealand Scholarship, in the event that schools are closed. This reflects the logistical barriers to managing all three levels of NCEA safely in bubbles. For students entered for Levels 1 and Level 2 UEGs would be available.

NZ Scholarship examinations

11. NZ Scholarship is a competitive award, therefore, no UEGs are available for it. We also know the recognition, and to a lesser extent the financial rewards associated with NZ Scholarship, are important to some schools, communities and students.
12. We propose that NZ Scholarship examinations proceed as planned and under the same process detailed above. Most schools' NZ Scholarship cohorts are small, and so will be more easily accommodated. Where trade-offs must be made, we think that many schools will prioritise NCEA over NZ Scholarship.
13. If NZ Scholarship exams cannot run at all, we will provide further advice on options for awarding Scholarship. Principals, even where their schools are vested in this award, have expressed a variety of views about the priority of NZ Scholarship this year, but were interested in other options for recognising academic excellence.

Draft talking points – NCEA and NZ Scholarship exams

- I can confirm that NCEA and New Zealand Scholarship exams will proceed nationwide, at any school which is open, including in areas under Alert Level 3.
- NZQA, the Ministry of Education and Ministry of Health have been working together to ensure exams can be managed in a safe way.
- Students have worked hard this year, and it is important they have the opportunity to demonstrate what they have learned.
- Students will be expected to attend exams where possible.
- In Auckland, Waikato and Northland, the start of Term 4 has been disrupted, which is very close to exams and stressful for students.
- Auckland, Waikato and Northland students will therefore be eligible to receive Unexpected Event Grades. This could also apply to any other region locked down in Term 4 this year.
- These Unexpected Event Grades are based on a student's work during the year and reflect – at a larger scale – what happens every year for students whose attendance or performance in exams is affected by an illness or injury.
- Students from Auckland, Waikato and Northland who cannot attend an exam because of a specific COVID-19 disruption will receive their Unexpected Event Grade. Where they do attend the exam, they will receive the better of their exam grade or their Unexpected Event Grade.
- For all students sitting exams, we will have measures in place to protect their health and safety. These will align with public health guidance.

Q&As – NCEA and NZ Scholarship exams

1. Are Unexpected Event Grades available for NZ Scholarship?

No, Scholarship is a competitive exam, so awarding grades based on a student's work during the year would not be appropriate or fair.

2. What about students outside of Auckland/Waikato/Northland who are unable to attend exams?

Students outside Auckland, Waikato and Northland who are unable to attend exams have access to the Derived Grade process the same as in any other year.

3. What about students outside of these regions whose preparation was affected by lockdown in Term 3?

End of year exams were pushed back by 2 weeks to provide students with more time to prepare. In addition, all students will have access to Learning Recognition Credits, which recognise that schools had less time than usual to assess learning.

4. What should students do if they are unwell?

Stay home and – if they have cold, flu or COVID symptoms – call Healthline. Students should also talk to their school about Derived Grades.

NCEA and NZ Scholarship Exams to proceed

The Minister of Education, Hon Chris Hipkins, has announced that NCEA and New Zealand Scholarship exams will proceed where schools are open, including in areas where Alert Level 3 is in place.

“The New Zealand Qualifications Authority, Ministry of Education and Ministry of Health have been working together to ensure exams can be managed in a safe way, so students have the opportunity to demonstrate what they have learned,” Chris Hipkins says.

“With Auckland, Waikato and Northland also experiencing COVID disruption in Term 4 – when students are normally preparing for exams – NZQA has confirmed these students will be eligible for an Unexpected Event Grade, recognising the work they have done.”

“While students will be expected to attend exams where possible, this well-established ‘Unexpected Event Grade’ process will reflect – at a larger scale – what happens in any year when a student’s attendance or performance in exams is affected by an illness or injury.”

“Students from Auckland, Waikato and Northland who cannot attend an exam because of a specific COVID-19 disruption will receive their Unexpected Event Grade. Where they do attend the exam, they will receive the better of their exam grade or their Unexpected Event Grade.”

“Unexpected Event Grades are based on evidence gathered by teachers during the year; and undergo a quality assurance process to make sure they relate to the standard being assessed.”

“NZQA will work with schools on measures that align with public health guidance to protect students and staff in exam rooms. Social distancing is, of course, a normal part of exam conditions.”

“While classroom teaching and learning was disrupted by COVID-19, students have continued to work hard, and deserve the opportunity to safely demonstrate what they have learned. Today’s decision provides certainty, while ensuring those who are not able to perform at their best will have their specific circumstances recognised,” Chris Hipkins says.

ENDS