

Education Report: Recalibration of the Quality Assurance System for school-based assessment

Date:	7 September	NZQA Priority:	Medium
Security Level:	In Confidence	Report No.	CR22710

	Action Sought	Deadline
Minister of Education	<p>a. note that NZQA, in consultation with the Ministry of Education, have been considering changes to the quality assurance processes for school-based NCEA assessment as part of preparations for the implementation of the new achievement standards from 2023.</p> <p>b. note that NZQA has received advice from one of its advisory groups, the Expert Group Assessment, that underpins proposed changes to strengthen the quality assurance of school-based NCEA assessment.</p> <p>c. note that the changes to the moderation system will not compromise NZQA's regulatory role in ensuring valid and nationally consistent assessment in schools.</p> <p>d. note that NZQA has had feedback from schools that increased assessor support for school-based assessment would be valued by the sector as the new achievement standards are implemented, from 2023.</p> <p>e. agree to flexibility with the current numeric and sampling model of 100,000 external moderation samples per annum, reducing moderated samples to 30,000 - 50,000 and changing the selection criteria to optimise coverage and impact.</p> <p>f. agree that in future, decisions on NZQA's quality assurance</p>	30 September

	<p>operating model in schools can be made by the Minister of Education as part of the annual letter of expectations process with NZQA, following consultation with the Ministry as the standard setting body for achievement standards and NCEA qualification owner.</p> <p>g. agree that the content in annex 1 be included in the October Cabinet paper</p> <p>h. agree that this report is not proactively released as part of the next publication of documents</p>	
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Enclosure/Appendix: Yes

Round Robin: No

Contact for Telephone Discussion (if required)

Name	Position	Telephone	Cellphone	1 st Contact
Andrea Gray	DCE - Assessment	(04) 463 4264	section 9(2)(a)	√

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 Withdrawn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:

Recalibration of the Quality Assurance System for school-based assessment

Executive Summary

This briefing outlines proposed changes to the moderation of NCEA (National Certificate of Educational Achievement) achievement standards. NZQA undertakes the moderation of internally assessed student work achieving credit towards NCEA. Moderation provides assurance that teacher assessment decisions are made to the national standard.

The proposed changes are to be aligned to the implementation of the new achievement standards arising from the Review of Achievement Standards (RAS), effective from 2023. We are calling this work 'Recalibration of the Quality Assurance System for School-based assessment'.

If NZQA makes no changes to the way we currently conduct moderation activities, there is a risk that national consistency of school-based grading decisions will not be achieved in a timely manner, i.e. for grade distributions to stabilise at expected levels and for teacher/moderator agreement rates to reach an acceptable range.

NZQA is proposing that the best way to manage this risk is to use a mix of regulatory, capability building and data levers to deliver impact and value to the sector during the RAS implementation years. This will require a rearrangement of current quality assurance activity: a new assessor support service and reduced external moderation.

NZQA's current external moderation system settings were set in 2011 by Cabinet (Cab Min 11 (34/6) refers). This paper seeks agreement to flexibility with the current numeric and sampling model of 100,000 external moderation samples per annum, reducing moderated samples to 30,000 to 50,000 and changing the selection criteria to optimise coverage and impact.

This paper also seeks agreement that a section seeking approval for NZQA to a rearrangement of quality assurance activity be included in the Ministry of Education's proposed October Cabinet update on NCEA.

Recommended Action

It is recommended you:

- a. **note** that NZQA, in consultation with the Ministry of Education, have been considering changes to the quality assurance processes for school-based NCEA assessment as part of preparations for the implementation of the new achievement standards from 2023.
- b. **note** that NZQA has received advice from one of its advisory groups, the Expert Group Assessment, that underpins proposed changes to strengthen the quality assurance of school-based NCEA assessment
- c. **note** that the changes to the moderation system will not compromise NZQA's regulatory role in ensuring valid and nationally consistent assessment in schools.

d. **note** that NZQA has had feedback from schools that increased assessor support for school-based assessment would be valued by the sector as the new achievement standards are implemented, from 2023.

e. **agree** to flexibility with the current numeric and sampling model of 100,000 external moderation samples per annum, reducing moderated samples to 30,000 - 50,000 and changing the selection criteria to optimise coverage and impact.

AGREE/DISAGREE

f. **agree** that in future, decisions on NZQA's quality assurance operating model in schools can be made by the Minister of Education as part of the annual letter of expectations process with NZQA, following consultation with the Ministry as the standard setting body for achievement standards and NCEA qualification owner.

AGREE/DISAGREE

g. **agree** that the content in annex 1 be included in the October Cabinet paper

AGREE/DISAGREE

I don't think this change needs Cabinet approval. CH

Proactive Release Recommendation

NZQA recommends that this report not be proactively released, as the changes to the moderation system are still being developed, and sector engagement has not yet commenced.

h. **agree/disagree** that this report is not proactively released as part of the next publication of documents

AGREE/DISAGREE


Dr Grant Klinkum
Chief Executive
7 September 2021



Hon Chris Hipkins
Minister of Education

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Recalibration of the Quality Assurance System for school-based assessment

Purpose of Report

1. The purpose of this briefing is to update you on proposed changes to the quality assurance of school-based NCEA assessment that NZQA has underway as part of preparations for the implementation of the NCEA Change Package from 2023.
2. This paper proposes that content for the Ministry of Education's October Cabinet update on the NCEA Change Programme include a recommendation that Cabinet give approval for flexibility in the allocation of moderation resources as part of these changes.
3. The Ministry of Education has been consulted on this briefing.

Background

Where moderation fits within the assessment system

4. In looking at the overall system, the core elements of valid and reliable assessment are:
 - a. well-constructed assessment standards that align with curriculum, and with taxonomies that support key decisions and clearly discriminate at the grade boundaries;
 - b. high quality assessment tasks and activities, and supporting resources;
 - c. effective moderation to ensure consistency across assessors in the award of grades; and
 - d. data and intelligence for assessors to inform their assessment judgements and practice and how well these align with the achievement standards.
5. National external moderation provides assurance that assessment decisions, in relation to achievement standards, are consistent nationally. External moderation of internally assessed standards in secondary schools/kura ensures that assessment judgements (marking of students' work) are nationally consistent.

Current moderation system

6. NZQA's quality assurance system for internally assessed standards is the Managing National Assessment system (including moderation). It must provide teachers, students and the public with confidence in the grades awarded from assessment against the standards regardless of where the assessment occurs. As school-based assessment is an integral part of credentialing towards NCEA, NZQA's moderation system is intended to ensure that all school-based grades awarded to students are valid and reliable, and that assessors are clear about the reasons for the moderator's assessment decisions.
7. Schools moderate every standard being internally assessed to ensure that judgements are consistent with the requirements of the achievement standard and that the results have been checked. In addition, NZQA conducts national external moderation of internally assessed standards to provide assurance that assessment decisions in relation to the assessment standards are nationally consistent.

8. Prior to 2011, NZQA was required to externally moderate ten (10) percent of all results. This level had been increased from three (3) percent to enhance the credibility of NCEA internal assessment at the time. Agreement rates¹ did increase, but there was a considerable increase in workload for teachers and NZQA. In 2011 Cabinet agreed to an effective reduction in moderation requirements, to:
 - a. The 'National Systems Check': a random sample of 5,000-10,000 pieces of student work for the calculation of agreement rates; and
 - b. The 'School Check': a purposively-designed sample of 90-95,000 pieces of student work from all secondary schools to examine performance at the school level and target schools and subjects not performing as they should.
9. This sampling methodology for external moderation has remained unchanged. For 2019, the work of 102,532 learners was moderated for 365 selected standards at Level 1, 422 selected standards at Level 2 and 412 selected standards at Level 3. This sample works out to be approximately 4 percent of all results submitted.
10. For the past five years, the national systems check (NSC) has shown an overall agreement rate at grade level of between 81.8 percent and 85.6 percent, as shown in figure 1 below.² Agreement rates do vary by level, with level 2 and 3 agreement rates being slightly lower than level 1 agreement rates.

Figure 1: NSC agreement rates from 2015-2019

	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Credit	92.5%	92.1%	92.1%	91.6%	91.6%
Grade	84.6%	84.9%	83.2%	81.7%	81.8%

Discussion

11. The implementation of the NCEA Review Change Package and the Review of Achievement Standards offers an opportunity for the standard setting body (the Ministry of Education) and the quality assurance agency (NZQA) to align programmes to support teachers/assessors with the introduction of the new achievement standards.
12. The changes agreed by Cabinet as part of the NCEA Review package and the Review of Achievement Standards (RAS) will attend to many of the pressures highlighted during sector consultation, such as course coherence and grade trends, including pressure on higher grades (for example, in 2020 27 percent of internally assessed achievement standards were graded at excellence, compared with 14.4 percent for externally assessed achievement standards). However, the implementation of the new standards will require quality assurance mechanisms to ensure high quality assessment, and schools will require additional moderation support.
13. If NZQA makes no changes to the way we currently conduct moderation activities, there is a risk that national consistency of school-based grading decisions will not be achieved in a timely manner, i.e. for grade distributions to stabilise at expected levels and for teacher/moderator agreement rates to reach an acceptable range.

¹ Agreement rates show the frequency with which moderator's grades match with the assessor's grades.

² These are overall agreement rates. Agreement rates do vary by level and are lower for merit and excellence than achieved and not achieved.

14. NZQA and MoE also recognise the need to ensure national grade distributions for internal and external assessment are aligned and that there are mechanisms to manage that in the first years of the implementation.
15. NZQA is proposing that the best way to manage this risk is to use a mix of regulatory, capability building and data levers to deliver impact and value to the sector during the RAS implementation years. This will require a rearrangement of current quality assurance activity: a new assessor support service and reduced external moderation.
16. The proposed changes to the moderation operating model still adhere to the established principles of moderation but we are shifting the emphasis of aspects of the system to ensure that NZQA's quality assurance has the intended effect of supporting valid and reliable school-based assessment.
17. The proposed changes will bring together the various moderation mechanisms used by NZQA in a holistic way to ensure teachers have a consistent understanding of the requirements of the new achievement standards.

A new assessor support service

18. The new assessor support service will be an annual structured programme of front-end subject level assessment guidance and data for the new standards, and opportunities for teachers to collaborate and share expertise to refine their grading decisions through various channels. NZQA is currently working through costings for the changes to determine what is achievable within existing fiscal allowances. It is intended that this new service be introduced in 2023, when the new Level 1 achievement standards are implemented.
19. NZQA will be undertaking a co-design process with schools and kura to determine the best configuration of services for the assessor support service. More front-end support will be welcomed by schools, but how this support will work in practice will need school involvement, particularly to avoid adding to teacher workload.
20. An alternative model for developing and delivering advisory support will be required for Te Marautanga o Aotearoa curriculum subjects, Te Ao Haka and Te Reo Māori, the latter two being New Zealand Curriculum (NZC) based subjects. The design of this will be developed alongside the NZC subject approach, adapting existing kahui models with an advisory focus.

Changes to external moderation

21. As the new achievement standards are introduced, NZQA is proposing to change to a single, reduced, moderation sample. Sampling methodology will ensure that a sufficient sample of each new achievement standard is moderated every year, and that at a minimum, every school is moderated for every learning area in which they offer assessment. It will be possible to moderate a sufficient sample of each new achievement standard as there will be fewer achievement standards post RAS. Currently there are 3-6 internal standards per subject per level (and more for some subjects). RAS will deliver two internal standards per subject per level.
22. Our evidence suggests that a sample size of approximately 30,000 – 50,000 will be sufficient to determine national consistency of grading decisions at the standard level. The 5,000-10,000 sample that comprises the NSC is no longer needed, as improved sampling processes for the school sample make it redundant. The improved sampling process allows national agreement rates to be calculated from the single sample.

23. Reduced external moderation will allow NZQA moderators to increase their focus on supporting schools/kura and teachers. The first years of implementation are crucial as they provide an opportunity to embed good assessment and marking practice across the teacher workforce. This will simultaneously address the risk that problematic practice will become commonplace, as once it is entrenched it is more difficult to address.

24. A summary of the proposed changes is included below as figure 2.

Figure 2: Summary of proposed changes

Current Moderation Arrangements	Proposed Changes
<p>100,000 samples of student work submitted annually including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> National System Check - a random sample of 5,000-10,000 pieces of student work for the calculation of national agreement rates School Check - a purposely designed sample of 90-95,000 pieces of student work from all secondary schools to examine performance at the school level and target schools and subjects that are not performing as they should be. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Flexibility with the current numeric model of 100,000 external moderation samples, reducing overall samples from schools to 30,000 to 50,000 Discontinue the National Systems Check and School Check methodology <p>A single sampling methodology that ensures:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> All new achievement standards are moderated every year as they are implemented, for at least two years post implementation A sufficient national sample for each achievement standard (100+) from a representative range of schools Every school to submit samples for moderation for every learning area they offer assessment in
<p>Each school on different moderation cycle depending on when their key date for submission of samples is (April to November)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Annual cycle for all schools with moderation occurring in the same year as the assessment Feedback to schools in time for planning for following year's assessments
<p>Limited assessor support, offered on request or via self-service</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enhanced assessor support - a structured programme of front-end subject level assessment guidance and data for the new standards including opportunities for teachers to collaborate and share expertise to refine their grading decisions. Assessor support based on data, evidence and insights from moderation activity and school engagement

Policy rationale

25. NZQA is obligated to meet the requirements under the guidelines on listing standards on the Directory of Assessment Standards (which includes reference to Consent and

Moderation Requirements) and the principles of moderation listed on NZQA's website³. In summary, these guidelines and principles require that the moderation system:

- a. must ensure assessment practice is fair, valid and consistent
- b. be appropriate to the nature of the outcomes and assessment evidence collected
- c. provide confidence that learners have achieved the performance criteria
- d. provide confidence in the reliability and consistency of assessor judgements about learner performance
- e. be cost effective
- f. focus on improving assessment practice.

26. NZQA is confident that the proposed changes to the moderation system will not compromise the system's ability to meet these principles, and in many cases the systems capability will be strengthened. There will be sufficient sampling to assess practices at a national level and focusing on front-end support will bring teachers in line with each other sooner, reducing risks to the fairness, validity and consistency of assessments.

27. Confidence in the assessment and moderation system is likely to be lower during implementation, while schools/kura and teachers are getting used to the new standards. Front-end support will bring teachers up to familiarity more quickly and will help to ensure that bad practices do not develop. A sufficient sample of each achievement standard will be moderated each year and will form the basis for guidance back to the sector on areas of improvement.

28. The purpose of having flexibility in the sample size is to ensure that NZQA will always have a sufficient sample to meet the principles outlined above. NZQA's commitments to the validity and fairness of the assessment system will always be met, and if a larger sample is needed, this will be implemented.

Agreement from Cabinet

29. NZQA is seeking your agreement to the following:

- a. flexibility with the current numeric and sampling model of 100,000 external moderation samples per annum, potentially reducing moderated samples to 30,000 to 50,000 and changing the selection criteria to optimise coverage and impact
- b. that in future, decisions on NZQA's quality assurance operating model in schools can be made by the Minister of Education as part of the annual letter of expectations process with NZQA, following consultation with the Ministry as the Achievement Standards standard setting body and NCEA qualification owner.

30. As the current moderation settings were set by a Cabinet decision, we are proposing including the changes in the October Cabinet update by the Ministry. The Ministry has endorsed this approach.

³ <https://www.nzqa.govt.nz/providers-partners/assessment-and-moderation-of-standards/principles/>

Risks

31. There is a risk that the proposed changes may be perceived as a reduction in NZQA's quality assurance of school-based internal assessment as the total number of pieces of student work externally moderated is reduced. There will be clear communication that this is a reconfiguration of services with the emphasis on the additional assessor support required during the new achievement standard implementation years. The model will be evaluated after the first year of implementation (end 2023) and regularly thereafter.

Consultation

32. The proposed changes to the moderation system have been developed by NZQA in consultation with the Ministry. The Ministry has endorsed the approach and supports the inclusion of the proposed content in Annex 1 in its October Cabinet paper.
33. The proposed changes have been discussed by the Minister's Professional Advisory Group (PAG) and NZQA's Expert Group Assessment (EGA), which provides technical assessment advice to NZQA on assessment, moderation, RAS and the NCEA Change Programme. Both groups have indicated their broad support for the shape of the changes, and the focus on improving the assessor capability. The NZQA Board also supports the approach outlined.

Financial Implications

34. NZQA is currently working through costings for the changes to determine what is achievable within existing fiscal allowances. The reduction in external moderation volumes and the smaller number of standards will free up resources to be directed at front-end moderation support. However, the assessor support model may require additional investment depending on the level of support to be offered to schools. Costs will increase depending on how much service is on-demand / targeted / face-to-face.

Next steps

35. NZQA has established a dedicated team to work on the proposed changes, and to manage the design and consultation with the sector.
36. In 2022, there will be no moderation of current Level 1 achievement standards, as it is the last year of the current standards being offered. Effort will be redirected to more targeted moderation of Level 2 and Level 3 current achievement standards and designing the assessor support service for 2023.
37. NZQA will brief you again in early 2022 on the design of the proposed advisory moderation service.

Annex 1: Draft Cabinet paper content

Proposal

1. It is proposed that Cabinet agree to a change to the moderation of NCEA (National Certificate of Educational Achievement) achievement standards. The New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA) undertakes the moderation of internally assessed student work achieving credit towards NCEA. Moderation provides assurance that teacher assessment decisions are made to the national standard.
2. The proposed changes are to be aligned to the implementation of the new achievement standards arising from the Review of Achievement Standards (RAS), effective from 2023. We are calling this work 'Recalibration of the Quality Assurance System for School-based assessment'.
3. NZQA has been working with a group of assessment experts and MoE on possible changes to the quality assurance system. NZQA has also consulted the Minister's NCEA Professional Advisory Group.
4. Starting with Level 1 in 2023, all achievement standards will be new. Teachers will generally not have experience (unless involved in the pilots) in interpreting and assessing the new internally assessed achievement standards as they are implemented.
5. If NZQA makes no changes to the way we currently conduct moderation activities, there is a risk that national consistency of school-based grading decisions will not be achieved in a timely manner, i.e. for grade distributions to stabilise at expected levels and for teacher/moderator agreement rates to reach an acceptable range.
6. NZQA is proposing that the best way to manage this risk is to use a mix of regulatory, capability building and data levers to deliver impact and value to the sector during the RAS implementation years. This will require a rearrangement of current quality assurance activity: a new assessor support service and reduced external moderation.
7. The new assessor support service will be an annual structured programme of front-end subject level assessment guidance and data for the new standards including opportunities for teachers to collaborate and share expertise to refine their grading decisions.

Recommendations

8. **Note** that the changes to the moderation system will not compromise NZQA's regulatory role in ensuring valid and nationally consistent assessment in schools.
9. **Note** that a new assessor support service be implemented with the new achievement standards.
10. **Agree** to flexibility with the current numeric and sampling model of 100,000 external moderation samples per annum, reducing moderated samples to 30,000 to 50,000 and changing the selection criteria to optimise coverage and impact.
11. **Agree** that in future, decisions on NZQA's quality assurance operating model in schools can be made by the Minister of Education as part of the annual letter of expectations process with NZQA, following consultation with the Ministry as the Achievement Standards standard setting body and NCEA qualification owner.