



**Briefing to the Incoming Minister:
NZQA's roles and responsibilities related
to the university sector**

He whakahoutanga ki te Minita tomo mai:

**Ngā mahi me ngā kawenga a NZQA e pā ana ki
ngā whare wānanga**



Mana Tohu Mātauranga o Aotearoa
New Zealand Qualifications Authority



Introduction

This Briefing provides you with a brief introduction to NZQA's work as it pertains to the university sector.

NZQA's role

The New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA):

- administers, quality assures, and reports on three NCEA levels for senior secondary school and New Zealand Scholarship examinations
- awards University Entrance
- sets the statutory rules for the whole tertiary education sector, and
- manages quality assurance in the non-university part of the tertiary sector.

NZQA and the University Sector

While the Ministry of Education (the Ministry) and the Tertiary Education Commission are your lead advisors on matters related to universities, NZQA has a range of touch points with the university sector.

There will be occasions when NZQA requires your decision on matters related to our work that relates to universities and there will also be times where we may seek your guidance on operational policy work that interfaces with universities.

We are of course available to provide you, as Minister for Universities, with information, advice or support relevant to our mandate.

This briefing covers NZQA's work most relevant to the University sector. Most of this work is done in conjunction with Universities New Zealand (UNZ)¹, as both NZQA and UNZ have responsibilities for quality assurance.

UNZ is the peak body for New Zealand's eight universities, and the operating body for the Vice Chancellor's Committee (VCC). NZQA, UNZ and the Academic Quality Agency for New Zealand Universities (AQA) meet regularly across the year to progress items of mutual interest through the Joint Consultative Group.

Engagement with you

As specific matters requiring your guidance or decision arise, we will provide you with aide memoires or 'Education Reports'.

Given NZQA's relatively limited role in relation to the university sector, we propose to provide you with a brief quarterly report on our work related to the university sector. Please advise if you wish to have more (or less) frequent regular reporting.

¹ <https://www.universitiesnz.ac.nz/>

Where interagency items on your regular education agency meetings touch on matters related to NZQA’s mandate we would, of course, be happy to join meetings for those matters.

What we will be asking of you in the next quarter

We anticipate that we will be engaging with you on the following areas over the next quarter.

- Changes to the Code of Pastoral Care delegation to the University sector.
- Changes to the New Zealand Qualifications and Credentials Framework.
- Ongoing qualifications, credentials and quality assurance matters as they arise.

Who we are

Information on NZQA’s Board, leadership team, and key external advisory groups can be found on our website: <https://www2.nzqa.govt.nz/about-us/our-structure/>.

Key contacts have been included in the cover memo.

NZQA’s roles and responsibilities related to the university sector

Administering and maintaining the New Zealand Qualifications and Credentials Framework	4
Working together - two quality assurance entities in the tertiary education system	5
Setting rules	5
Administering the Education (Pastoral Care of Tertiary and International Learners) Code of Practice 2021	6
Maintaining the University Entrance list	7
Sharing data with universities.....	7
Growing and administering international qualification recognition.....	8

Administering and maintaining the New Zealand Qualifications and Credentials Framework

The New Zealand Qualifications and Credentials Framework (NZQCF) is at the centre of New Zealand’s education and training system. The NZQCF is the definitive source of information on New Zealand’s quality assured qualifications and micro-credentials.

The NZQCF includes information about qualifications and credentials, including qualification types and levels.

NZQA’s role

NZQA is responsible for administering and maintaining the NZQCF.

In relation to listing qualifications and micro-credentials on the NZQCF, NZQA and UNZ have distinct functions, described in the table below.

Table – Functions of NZQA and UNZ relating to listing qualifications and micro-credentials on the NZQCF

	Able to:		
	Approve and list qualifications and micro-credentials	Approve programmes and micro-credentials and grant accreditation to provide them	List micro-credentials on the NZQCF
NZQA	Yes, except for those developed by universities	Yes, to tertiary education organisations (excluding universities)	Yes
UNZ	Yes, but only for those developed by universities	Yes, to universities	No – requests must be made to NZQA (although this has not yet occurred)

NZQCF settings are periodically reviewed to ensure the features of the framework are current and fit for purpose, particularly the description of the 10 levels and definitions of qualification types. NZQA works with UNZ in reviewing the NZQCF.

What’s topical

We are in the final stages of the current review of the NZQCF. We expect to publish a booklet in the next quarter that describes the features of the framework. It will include updated level descriptors and descriptions of the qualification types, along with a new visual representation which presents qualifications and micro-credentials across a spectrum rather than as a hierarchy.

Working together – two quality assurance entities in the tertiary education system

While both NZQA and the VCC have distinct responsibilities under the Education and Training Act 2020, in practice NZQA and the VCC are partners in protecting the reputation and credibility of New Zealand’s qualifications system domestically and internationally. We each do this through discharging our quality assurance responsibilities. UNZ are the statutory authority for the quality assurance of academic programmes delivered in New Zealand’s universities.

What’s topical

The VCC have recently signalled a fundamental review of their approach to quality assurance.

The Ministry of Education and NZQA have an interest in ensuring that the changes, which appear to have been partially driven by financial considerations, have the independence and oversight necessary to ensure stakeholder confidence in qualifications.

NZQA has appreciated UNZ’s open engagement on its future intentions for its quality assurance arrangements. This reflects the long history of engagement on areas of mutual interest to protect the integrity of the qualifications system.

Setting rules

NZQA sets rules as part of our role in managing qualifications and quality assurance arrangements in the tertiary and secondary sectors.

NZQA’s role

NZQA is responsible for making the rules for:

- listing all qualifications and micro-credentials on the NZQCF, and
- approving, delivering and quality assuring listed qualifications and micro-credentials.

Before making rules that relate to universities, NZQA must consult UNZ as universities are required to apply the relevant rules.

What’s topical

We are making changes to some of the rules which we consulted on late last year. We expect to submit the updated rules for approval by the Minister of Education within the next quarter. We will provide the relevant rules to you and the Minister for Vocational Education at the same time.

The key changes:

- relate to requirements for listing qualifications and micro-credentials on the framework, and will clarify that
 - a qualification must meet the description of the qualification type, and
 - a micro-credential will be listed at the NZQCF level it most closely aligns with.

Administering the Education (Pastoral Care of Tertiary and International Learners) Code of Practice 2021

The Education (Pastoral Care of Tertiary and International Learners) Code of Practice 2021 (the Code) makes sure that tertiary and international learners enrolled with New Zealand education providers are safe and supported.

The Code sets out what education providers must do to ensure the wellbeing and safety of their learners.

NZQA's role

NZQA has been appointed the administrator of the Code. NZQA has delegated the Code Administrator responsibilities for monitoring universities to UNZ².

What's topical

In 2024, UNZ wrote to Minister Simmonds asking that the responsibility for Code administration for universities be moved from NZQA to UNZ.

The Ministry of Education's advice was that the Education and Training Act 2020 does not allow for two administrators to be appointed under the same code. Minister Simmonds' preference was for NZQA to expand the Code delegation to UNZ.

NZQA received in-principle approval for an expanded delegation from Minister Simmonds and Minister Stanford in December 2024. The expanded delegation would mean that in addition to being responsible for monitoring universities giving effect to the Code, UNZ will also:

- be able to enter and inspect a university or university student accommodation
- receive complaints from learners and the community in relation to a university and its implementation of the Code
- issue a notice or impose a sanction if a university breaches the Code
- share appropriate information with education quality assurance agencies and relevant government agencies, and
- produce annual reports regarding the administration of the Code.

In drafting changes to the delegation, NZQA aims to achieve a balance between reducing reporting requirements for universities and UNZ, while ensuring that UNZ:

- fulfils its expanded responsibilities under the delegation, and
- is able to assure the NZQA Board that it is discharging those responsibilities.

NZQA will remain responsible for matters involving serious harm to or death of a student. The updated delegation is being finalised for approval by the NZQA Board.

² The formal delegation is to the VCC.

Maintaining the University Entrance list

University Entrance is the minimum entry requirement for learners under the age of 20 undertaking degree-level study at universities in New Zealand. Being awarded University Entrance also supports students who wish to undertake tertiary study overseas, particularly Australia. The award of University Entrance is recorded on a learner's New Zealand Record of Achievement (NZRoA)³.

NZQA's role

NZQA regularly reviews the University Entrance list of approved subjects to ensure subjects and associated achievement standards are relevant and adequately prepare learners for degree-level study. NZQA undertakes consultation with the council of each university, UNZ, and key education institutions as part of these reviews.

Changes to University Entrance require endorsement by the council of each university, UNZ, and approval by NZQA's Board.

What's topical

Aligned with the NCEA Changes, NZQA is undertaking a review of the University Entrance award structure to ensure it remains fit-for-purpose. The review was paused in 2024 with the Minister of Education's decision to defer the implementation of the new NCEAs Level 2 and 3 until 2028 and 2029 respectively. The review will recommence in alignment with the introduction of the new NCEA Level 3.

An external reference group, with representatives from universities and peak education bodies, is being used to develop options ahead of public consultation. Work is likely to recommence in 2026.

Sharing data with universities

NZQA's role

NZQA has a Memorandum of Understanding with UNZ for sharing data with universities. This is for the verification of learners' NCEA results and attainment of endorsements (e.g. Excellence and Merit certificate endorsement) and awards (i.e. University Entrance) as part of the universities' admission processes.

Universities also provide NZQA with data on attainment of qualifications and credentials for maintaining learners' NZRoA.

³ The NZRoA is an official transcript of all the qualifications, credentials and standards on the NZQCF and Directory of Assessment and Skill Standards (DASS) achieved by a learner, as reported by schools, tertiary providers and universities. Employers, education providers and other organisations can engage NZQA to verify a learner's NZRoA.

Growing and administering international qualification recognition

NZQA's role

New Zealand is signatory to three major qualification recognition agreements – the European 'Lisbon Convention', the Asia-Pacific 'Tokyo Convention', and the Global Convention. These agreements are a commitment to recognise each country's qualifications following the principles and guidelines set out in the convention.

NZQA applies the convention principles when evaluating overseas qualifications in relation to the NZQCF. Universities also apply these principles when recognising overseas qualifications for admission to university programmes in New Zealand.

NZQA liaises with overseas certifying and validating bodies to facilitate the recognition of New Zealand qualifications overseas and to recognise overseas qualifications in New Zealand. NZQA works with universities and UNZ as needed.

NZQA is also New Zealand's National Information Centre for qualifications recognition. We undertake a range of functions including:

- providing information about New Zealand's education, qualifications and quality assurance systems, including the university system
- providing advice about recognising qualifications in New Zealand or overseas, and
- offering information and advice to support qualifications recognition processes carried out by other New Zealand organisations that need to recognise overseas qualifications.