



Accelerated Change in the Senior Secondary School

A paper from Executive

1 Background

1.1 PPTA Annual Conference 2010

At PPTA's 2010 annual conference, members called for a range of workload control measures to alleviate some of the demands of implementing the realigned achievement standards across three levels. Conference delegates called for:

- Teacher Only Days (TODs),
- Assessment limits of 20 credits per course,
- Job sizing of the principal's nominee role,
- The establishment of the PPTA NCEA Workload Taskforce, and;
- Increased support for teachers to implement the various changes to teaching and assessment.

This paper reports on what has happened, and what is still taking place (or not), as well as exploring the impact of youth guarantee initiatives on the senior school.

2 NCEA workload

2.1 The stress of standards alignment

PPTA's term four 2010 workload survey demonstrated high levels of stress amongst members, as they prepared to implement the revised level one standards. Neither the Ministry of Education (MOE) nor the Qualification Authority (NZQA) met published deadlines, and many of the promised assessment resources were not fit for purpose.

Members' predictions that stress levels were likely to increase during 2011 and 2012 as the level two implementation rolled out have proved correct. There are still numerous problems across a number of subjects, which are compounded by ongoing communications issues from central agencies in Wellington.

2.2 PPTA Survey June 2011

The June 2011 branch survey showed strong but variable views on the question of possible implementation delays for NCEA levels two and three (for full results see the PPTA website).



What remains clear is that teachers continue to experience high levels of frustration arising from MOE and NZQA failure to provide assessment tasks and resources in a timely fashion; that the best practice moderation workshops, whilst useful, are expensive and difficult for many teachers to access and that what the central agencies continue to offer schools is generally too little, too late.

2.3 The work of the workload taskforces

PPTA's NCEA workload taskforce met in November 2010 and developed a set of recommendations which informed the work of the new NZQA workload advisory group. The NZQA group, which included significant PPTA member representation, developed 23 recommendations under the following headings:

- Nature of assessment;
- Support for assessment;
- Moderation;
- Communications including websites;
- Principal's nominee role; and
- Kura.

The group's recommendations are attached as **Appendix 1**.

The ministry and NZQA developed a response to the recommendations organised according to:

- What has been done already;
- What is being done;
- What will be done; and,
- What will have to wait.

This document is attached as **Appendix 2**.

2.4 What will have to wait?

Critically, the bulk of the recommendations organised under "what will have to wait" are those likely to make a significant positive difference to teacher workload. Hence, PPTA has serious reservations about either the MOE and/or NZQA's ability to enact the types of changes that will offer any significant support to secondary and area school teachers, certainly within the next couple of years.

2.5 Reducing Moderation

In particular, the requirement for moderation of 10% of student work places a huge burden on teachers and one, moreover, not justified by the current agreement rates. The external moderation agreement rates for the NCEA for 2010 reached levels right at the top of what could ever be expected, given that



some element of subjectivity will always exist in a standards-based assessment system that seeks to enable holistic assessment. Far fewer samples are required for statistical validity, probably only around 2-3% of all work.

The 10% requirement is a political over-reaction to media attacks on the credibility of NCEA. The workload around moderation will not decrease until politicians find the courage to publically support our indigenous qualification and the professionals who deliver it.

2.6 Fewer Credits is better

The 2010 annual conference passed a recommendation encouraging members to set an upper limit of 20 credits per course. Even though teachers do not always find this straight-forward, offering slightly fewer credits in a course can have a positive impact on teacher workload, as well as moving students towards a more positive focus on teaching and learning, rather than on preparation for assessment. Merit and excellence endorsements for NCEA certificates and courses may also encourage students to achieve fewer credits at a higher level, rather than gathering as many 'achieved' credits as possible. Although there are exceptions, a continued focus on offering no more than 18-20 credits per course is likely to benefit teachers and students, and PPTA continues to endorse this.

2.7 Teacher Only Days (TODs)

Ongoing lobbying resulted in the provision of two Teacher Only Days (TODs) for NCEA alignment work this year. PPTA and Secondary Principals' Council (SPC) continue to lobby the minister to make a further commitment to four TODs in each of 2012 and 2013, ideally to be announced during 2011, so that schools have time to plan for their inclusion in their yearly calendars. The provision of TODs is one of the easiest mechanisms for reducing workload and at minimal cost. The proposed TODs are run by teachers for teachers but supported by online resources prepared by NZQA.

Teachers need time to work together on the ongoing alignment and implementation issues. TODs offer a smart and simple response and PPTA will continue to lobby for these.

3 Secondary-Tertiary interface

3.1 Life-long learning; short-term funding

Governments of various stripes have flirted with lifelong learning, seamless pathways, youth transitions, access to tertiary and workplace training, and the like, for a number of years, all with a goal of ensuring students go on to work or further education or training.

While many schools currently use the very successful Gateway programme and the Secondary Tertiary Alignment Resource (STAR) to support transitions from school to work and further study, the government's focus in the youth guarantee policy shifts the focus and funding away from secondary schools to tertiary



institutions. The resulting policy is, in PPTA's view, strong on rhetoric and weak on co-ordinated implementation, communications or support for schools.

3.1 Unintended Effects

The rhetoric is about reducing the number of NEETs (youth aged 16-19 who are Not in Employment, Education or Training), but early signs are that this group is mostly unrepresented in the new trades academies and other youth guarantee programmes. Rather than focusing on students at risk, the new academies (and other secondary-tertiary programmes) are taking students who *may be* or are *not at risk* of educational failure or alienation at all. The reason for this is simple; in order to maintain funding levels, tertiary providers have to show evidence that students complete their courses. This model means that tertiary providers would rather take students who have a proven track record (e.g. NCEA level one or near level two completion) than unqualified school leavers or NEETs.

3.3 Quarterly Funding

The youth guarantee is being funded by stripping an estimated \$6 million a year out of secondary schools. When a student moves from secondary to other education providers (or work) schools lose funding. This may sound logical but has the effect of diminishing the curriculum range and pastoral support available to all those students who remain at school. Should a student change their mind and return to school during the same academic year, as is already happening, the funding ought to return to the school but presumably minus the cut that has already gone to the tertiary provider.

The most disappointing aspect of this cut to secondary school budgets is that the evidence, including from the Prime Minister's own science adviser Sir Peter Gluckman¹, is that intervention needs to be early in the life of the child to be effective. A policy that provides support to disengaged students **once** they have left school is doomed to fail. Before it provides for another 7,500 youth guarantee places as proposed in the 2011 Budget, the government needs to look carefully at what is **not** being funded and the consequences of that.

Without the certainty of funding that secondary schools (and other providers) need, useful and flexible pathways for students may not emerge. In the end, the only 'guarantee' may be of another cost-cutting model dressed up to look like student choice.

3.4 The first casualty of competition is truth

Although there are a number of successful trades academies based in secondary schools² the ministry preference seems to be for lead roles in trades academies to be offered to tertiary providers. This is despite their comparative

¹ For more discussion the Gluckman report, *Improving the Transition: Reducing Social and Psychological Morbidity During Adolescence*, see PPTA News July 2011 http://www.ppta.org.nz/index.php/resources/publications/doc_download/1158-ppta-news-july-2011-volume-32-no5

² Some examples of secondary school trades academies are here: <http://www.edgazette.govt.nz/Articles/Article.aspx?ArticleId=8413>



lack of experience in offering pastoral guidance to teenagers, and, indeed, the impossibility of them ever replicating anything like the range of support secondary schools provide through form periods and extra-curricular activities.

Regardless of the rhetoric of dual enrolment and flexible learning, the system design would appear to be channeling students out of schools and into tertiary environments, rather than offering pathways that are genuinely flexible and responsive.

3.5 Vocational Pathways

In the light of this, PPTA is supportive of the ministry of education initiative aimed at developing clearer vocational pathways for NCEA.³ Consultation is currently underway with secondary and tertiary sector representatives and industry training organisations, with a view to releasing the pathways qualification proposals in early 2012.

PPTA acknowledges that students are best served by a range of learning contexts and opportunities - particularly as they reach the school leaving age. However, much of the developing 'youth guarantee' appears to be focused on saving government money and on replicating programmes that are already working in schools (eg, Gateway). If New Zealand is to develop truly responsive and flexible learning pathways for our young people, there will need to be significantly more work done to provide adequate funding, along with clear frameworks and brokering that allows the notion of dual enrollment to work (in both directions).

3.6 Careers advice

One of the perennial questions that arises under a system that supports student choices is whether they are sufficiently informed to make valid selections. As a result, there has been an intensified focus on careers advice. Careers New Zealand has, somewhat unhelpfully, developed a set of 64 performance benchmarks in the belief that this will assist careers advisers.⁴ For busy teachers, who already have more than enough to do without having overly detailed audits and performance indicators pushed onto them, this is extremely disappointing.

Clearly a more sensible approach would be to invest in ongoing access to quality PLD, including visits with relevant industry and tertiary providers. The MOE pathways advisory group has also noted concerns about the currency and effectiveness of careers advice in schools. These concerns are grounded in an obvious lack of both time and support for careers advisers, who are currently funded to fulfill the role on the smell of the proverbial oily rag.

³ <http://www2.careers.govt.nz/educators-practitioners/career-edge/career-edge-june-2011/clearer-career-pathways-for-young-people/>

⁴ <http://www2.careers.govt.nz/educators-practitioners/career-education/planning/guidelines-and-effective-practice/career-education-benchmarks/>



Given the government's intense focus on qualifications and career pathways for young people, now is the time to ensure that any changes to the role of school careers advisers are useful and supportive, unlike the compliance-focused benchmarks currently in development.

4 Summary

Unfortunately, there is still very little light at the end of the tunnel from senior schooling to further education, training and work. The NCEA rollout continues to rely on large doses of teacher goodwill, in the face of lagging timelines from under-resourced teams at the ministry and NZQA. Meanwhile, the youth guarantee appears to be as much of a political football as it ever was. Clear analysis and implementation that does not prioritise one sector over another, along with support for students with the greatest needs, is required.

Recommendations:

1. That the report be received
2. That PPTA endorse the work of NZQA's workload advisory group and demand urgent action to implement all its recommendations.
3. That PPTA continue to advocate for an 18-20 credit assessment guideline per course.
4. That PPTA call for further Teacher Only Days for NCEA curriculum alignment work, four in 2012 and four in 2013.
5. That PPTA continue to monitor the various Youth Guarantee initiatives, with particular focus on teacher workload, student pathways, and funding to secondary schools.
6. That PPTA call for improved time allowances and training for careers advisers, and for the careers grant (CIG) to be increased.

Appendix 1



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Appendix 2



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