

NCEA Review Detailed Submission Westlake Girls' High School



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Context

Westlake Girls' High School (WGHS) is a Decile 9 school located on Auckland's North Shore with a roll of over 2200 students. We are a high performing school in all aspects; academically, in sport and co-curricular activities. Our strategic focus is personal excellence and student wellbeing. Two areas directly impacted by NCEA and its design.

For senior students we have a single assessment system - NCEA. Our approach to teaching and learning is undergoing a current review and at present sits on the spectrum between innovative and traditional.

We have a large number of foreign fee paying students and domestic ESOL students who have added English and literacy requirements that need to be specifically catered for.

Our community is very invested in the school and have high expectations of their children, the success of the school and performance of staff across all year levels. We are also a member of the Pupuke Kahui Ako and are mindful that any changes brought about by this review will have consequences for those primary and intermediate students in our area as well.

The impact of NCEA on our students and staff is extensive, with some of the biggest concerns for both groups being around workload and assessment pressure.

What follows is some of our views on NCEA and how the changes could influence us as a school.

WGHS Views on NCEA

Our Experiences of NCEA

- What works well:

We love the flexibility of NCEA and that students can be assessed on what they can do at a particular time. It also makes the creation of courses more adaptable for individual students which means all students have the opportunity to work well towards succeeding and achieving to their full potential regardless of ability and background. There is a certain amount of transparency in NCEA that we appreciate as well with clear guidelines and boundaries through the provision of assessment specifications, clarification notes and moderation feedback. The ability to work cross-curricularly and to integrate standards into single assessment tasks is also a positive aspect of NCEA (and one that needs further investigation and support by NZQA to make happen effectively). The ability for students to produce folios of work is also a well-received aspect of NCEA. This allows students to use their internal work and to show development of skills and ideas over time in a creative fashion while working on small, manageable chunks of work throughout the year. The nature of having both internal and external assessments as part of the NCEA qualification (and specific courses that are offered) means that students are able to better plan their year ahead, know what they need to do and are able to go into examinations with less stress and pressure to achieve everything if they are already some of the way towards obtaining their NCEA level certificate.

- What does not work well:

The biggest barrier to NCEA was identified as being workload - for both teachers and students. Students feel overwhelmed by large assessments and the number of standards that they encounter across the curriculum. Staff are writing, managing, marking and moderating multiple standards for each year level to provide students with multiple opportunities to achieve the necessary standards. For some students this also results in a number of standards they do not necessarily need. This has also resulted in students credit counting, selecting subjects based on higher credit numbers offered or avoiding units of work if they have already gained the number of credits needed (thus they end up in not submitting work or not attempting standards in exams). Teaching has been broken down into standards which means teachers cannot create more holistic units as they must prepare students for set assessments. This also affects students as they do not gain a holistic understanding or knowledge of the subject as a whole.

- Who NCEA works for:

It was identified that NCEA can work well for two distinct groups of students under the right circumstances - high achieving, intrinsically motivated students and those students who have a tendency to struggle at school. Those who are high achievers would probably be successful under any assessment model as they are motivated, have good time management and work consistently towards an end goal. For these students NCEA and the way it is designed works for them as they are able to complete standards internally and have a good foundation for endorsements (both subject and level) when they go into examinations at the end of the year. Those who struggle at school or under test conditions and take longer to achieve results are also assisted by the flexibility of the NCEA model. Due to the nature of NCEA, this allows schools to recognise difference, build tailored programmes to the needs of the students, combine Achievement Standards courses with Unit Standards courses and give multiple opportunities for students to gain credits across a range of curriculum areas. Schools are also better able to cater to the needs of their particular communities and different types of learners.

- Who NCEA does not work for:

Conversely, NCEA does not work well for a number of different stakeholders. These include, but are not limited to the following groups:

- *Tertiary -School Partnerships* - NCEA may give students a false idea of the expectations of academic learning required at universities due to nature of how it is assessed. It also does not work well with particular university course requirements which dictate what needs to be taught (context and content) in schools so that students can gain entry into said courses. This removes the ability for cross-curricular assessment due to University Entrance (UE) as well as what standards are taught in specific subjects such as Science, Mathematics and English. Tertiary providers seem to be driving what NCEA can look like in schools, reducing the flexibility of NCEA which is one of its strengths.
- *High Achieving Students* - While NCEA can work well for high achieving academic students, it also places them under a great deal of stress in terms of assessment overload, expectations, the need to gain UE and rank scores for tertiary providers as well as the community expectation of maintaining high results. This causes undue

stress on students and can lead to burnout, assessment fatigue and anxiety which is particularly noticeable in Year 12 and 13.

- *Employers* - Most employers have no idea how NCEA works, what credits are worth and how they make up a NCEA award. This added confusion discredits NCEA and the learning that takes place as it is often overlooked as not being useful as employers have no understanding of how it works. The fact the NCEA has been around for 15 years and this is still the prevailing viewpoint should be a concern to the education community.
- *Teachers* - The constant workload that comes with a large number of assessments that are offered at schools is detrimental to teacher wellbeing. Teachers are expected to write assessments, check against national standards, benchmark, mark, and offer resubmissions for each standard offered. At times reassessments opportunities are also provided for students, which requires this to all be done again. Internal and external moderation also needs to be completed. This is just one aspect of a teacher's workload and needs to be done in conjunction with all other parts of the role. It is extensive and time consuming.
- *ESOL/International students* - many students who come to study in New Zealand are in danger of not meeting the requirements of literacy standards due to the nature of how and when they are assessed. This puts a great deal of pressure on students who are not English language first speakers as the majority of the writing credits available for UE literacy are only assessed in external examinations. This means that students could quite possibly miss out on getting their Level 2 or 3 qualification due to the fact they might have gained a Not-Achieved grade for an external standard. This seems unfair that their ability to achieve rests on this and more provisions for UE literacy need to be provided to mitigate this.

How NCEA can be improved

- **The unintended consequences of NCEA and why they have occurred:**

There are many unintended consequences of NCEA that we can see. The most prevalent of these seems to be 'credit-counting' by students due to the problem of over assessment. Students are regularly entered for more standards than required, which gives them plenty of opportunities to be able to succeed, but creates added pressure on staff and students alike. Students are motivated by credits, they are numerical in value and therefore students can literally count and accumulate them like points. The system is designed this way and to a certain extent encourages this by 'rewarding' students for their achievement like a star chart motivates a child to complete tasks. This is also driven by public, parent and community perception that more is better in terms of credits at a high level. This means that they are more results focused. Schools feel the pressure of this, which is in turn placed on teachers and then students. The over assessment and credit counting also adversely affects both staff and student well being. The levels of anxiety over assessments is commonplace amongst students, particularly as we are a high achieving girl's school with predominantly conscientious students. There seems to be a widespread emphasis on quantity over quality and in the case of our school both quantity and quality.

Students often choose to opt out of particular standards and credits which also causes problems with their learning; namely lack of deep learning, fragmentation of subject

knowledge, no overall understanding of key concepts or skills and the problem of teaching to assessment rather than for learning. A consequence of this is that it could lead to setting students up with false expectations of the demands of tertiary education, where assessment all contributes to a whole grade, and students cannot opt in or out of assessments at will without repercussions to their overall grade (and possible future placement in ongoing courses).

Other side effects of NCEA are that it has led to an increase in teacher workload (due to setting assessments, marking, moderation, resubmissions and so forth), a general lack of understanding of what it entails by the public, and inequity between standards and subjects.

- How to improve them:

In order to improve some of the unintended consequences, there needs to be some change.

Suggestions we can think of include:

- Standards need to be meaningful and equitable across curriculum areas
- More of a focus on the skills offered and critical analysis rather than the rote learning that has crept back in (especially with generic standards)
- Reduce the emphasis on credits and remove subject endorsements so there is more flexibility with working cross-curricularly and combining standards
- Reduce the number of assessments done
- Assess when ready, not at set times (including for externals)

Overall Perspective on the Big Opportunities

Overall staff feel positive about the proposed changes and see great value in focusing on 'rich learning' and including a project or multiple projects in Level 1. People are interested in students being provided with more collaborative learning opportunities. They see benefit in students also learning from and collaborating with organisations and individuals in the community. While staff feel positive about some of the proposed ideas, significant concerns were raised about the support needed and time that will be provided to implement these changes. The teacher shortage was mentioned at length with concerns about further staff resignations due to the increased workload (as a product of these changes). This is a point that cannot be overlooked and it is important to note that it is also linked to the perceived current problems and restrictions posed by NCEA.

Feedback on Big Opportunity 1 - Creating space at Level 1 for powerful learning

What we like about it:

Big opportunity one offers a new perspective on NCEA and a move away from excess workload for both staff and students that is prevalent under the current system due to over assessment. Staff liked that this would change under this proposed new opportunity and that it would also put an emphasis on minimum requirements for Numeracy and Literacy with a focus in this area. By reducing the amount of credits, it was felt that this allowed more scope for deeper, more

meaningful teaching as well as time to pick up teachable moments as there would be less focus on the assessment and need to get credits than the joy of learning.

What we don't like about it:

There are several concerns about how the big opportunity might affect students, particularly those less motivated or less able who would not have enough opportunities to reach the 40 credit threshold in order to obtain Level 1. The project was of obvious concern for many staff members as many questions were left unanswered as to how it would be implemented and who would be responsible for it. They included the following:

- Will the project work and scope of the opportunity provide students the necessary skills required to be successful at Level 2?
- Who will mark the projects? If teachers are expected to do so, will training and time be provided for this?
- How is it proposed that the projects will be externally moderated? There needs to be consistency across schools around the country. Does that then mean that a framework for the project is provided or will we need to create our own off a standard or template?
- How will they be assessed?
- What are the health and safety issues as well as cost issues associated with these community projects? How will they be managed?

While in general the idea of the project is fine and for many an exciting prospect, the logistics of how it will and can work are fraught with difficulties. Due to the size of our school and the number of students in a year group (in some cases over 500 students), it needs a great deal more thought as to how it would incorporate the community aspect as well as the impact on teaching, learning, classing, timetable and the motivation of the students. There is also the added concern about authenticity and continued promotion of excellence of these projects. This will come down to how they are expected to be completed, how they are marked and how involved students are in their own learning.

How we can improve it:

While we have some ideas on how this could look for our school and how to incorporate it into a new NCEA Level 1, staff would like some clear expectations and materials from NZQA about what they want. These include; specific assessments, marking guidelines or rubrics and support to implement this rather than relying on the goodwill of schools to make it happen. The suggestion was also made that perhaps 20 credits is too much to attach to one assessment/project. We would like to see the project broken down into either two half year projects worth 10 credits each or a project that is cross curricular where they can work on aspects of the project through any of their chosen subjects over the course of a year. This way students are always working towards an end goal and do not have half their grade for the year resting on one project. If students had the opportunity to collect credits for aspects of the project in different subject areas, at least they would still gain some credits towards their NCEA Level 1.

Feedback on Big Opportunity 2 - Strengthening Literacy And Numeracy

What we like about it:

This opportunity was generally well received. There have been concerns for a while now about the consistency of literacy standards across curriculum areas. There are also considerations to take into account with numeracy and whether or not the standard of numerical understanding nationally is slipping compared to the OECD due to the current structure of NCEA which separates out the learning into small chunks rather than as a connected whole. This big opportunity then, provides more focus on valuable, essential skills for lifelong learning. The literacy focus is an important component of understanding for all subject areas and helps to improve deeper understanding of concepts through accessibility to subject related literary texts. The strengthening of literacy also means that there is more consistency across subjects of what the benchmark is for literacy requirements. This also means that employers and tertiary institutes are more confident in knowing what that the people they are hiring or teaching have met a more rigorous literacy and numeracy benchmark.

What we don't like about it:

As aforementioned, a current concern that exists around both numeracy and literacy as it stands is that the the standards of what "passes" in these areas is too low. The vagueness of the description of 'strengthening' then needs further clarification, support and staff upskilling so that people are clear on what the new standard of measure is. If there is to be more focus on strengthening both literacy and numeracy, staff questioned if that would divert time away from other areas of learning so more time could be spent focusing on just literacy and numeracy. This in turn could lead to more assessments and high workloads for both staff and students, which seems counterintuitive as we would hope the NCEA review is trying to alleviate this in the first place. Another point made is that there needs to be a provision made for ESOL students who may not meet the new literacy requirements and that as a result could be precluded from achieving NCEA and going onto further study in New Zealand. This is also an ongoing concern that literacy assessment will once again become the sole responsibility to English Departments, which we would hate to see happen.

How can we improve it:

We need to have some consistency across all subject areas and 'tools' to teach the required level of expectation so that students are getting a consistent message (and are able to meet the new standard). This could be supported by nationwide Professional Development on what is expected in terms of literacy and numeracy in terms of guidance on what the benchmark is, how to teach to it, and how best to assess these new benchmarks.

Feedback on Big Opportunity 3 - Ensuring NCEA Levels 2 and 3 support good connections beyond schooling

What we like about it:

There were a number of aspects that staff liked about this opportunity including the idea that this would offer opportunities for more students to look at goal setting and developing workplace skills while still at school. This could give them a variety of experiences that will help them make more informed decisions about their future. It also allows schools to create

and build on links between themselves, tertiary providers and employers, which is somewhat lacking currently. This opportunity also allows for more community engagement and real life learning which is valued in our community.

What we don't like about it:

The main problem with how this would work comes down to logistics. We are a large school with approximately 400-450 students each senior year group and we already struggle to place our small number of Gateway students in the community on work placements. It would be an even more demanding task to do this for all students in these year groups, not to mention all the other high schools who would be looking to do the same within the North Shore community. We are also wary of how the time out of school would affect attendance in the long run and how motivated students would be to complete their placements.

How can we improve it:

The project or work placements need to be somehow integrated into the curriculum rather than running alongside it. This way both teachers and students will have more ownership of what they are doing. Professional industries, employers and tertiary providers also need to be on board to provide context, background and guidance. This will help schools and also students develop a knowledge base and understanding of the expectations before embarking on the various pathways that could be offered. We also see that this opportunity needs to be purposeful and for a reason rather than just because it has to be done as part of an NCEA requirement.

Feedback on Big Opportunity 4 - Making it easier for teachers, schools, and Kura to refocus on learning

What we like about it:

This opportunity allows a focused move to 'growth mindset' and encourages the journey of learning rather than the outcome for students. It also allows them to develop personal interests and knowledge that helps with intrinsic motivation while reducing stress for both themselves and their teachers. We would hope that this idea helps promote greater enjoyment in learning with more varied content while also providing more space for teachers to choose what is taught. By providing teachers with better access to resources it would also allow more freedom to teach rather than focusing on assessment, marking, and resubmissions that has become commonplace with NCEA (as aforementioned).

What we don't like about it:

It is unclear to many how it will fit with the current criteria for University Entrance and whether tertiary providers will change their expectations around what they require for students to entry particular courses. The suggested design for coherent courses needs to be equitable over subject areas. They also need to be well thought out by professionals who understand the demands of the variety of learners schools are catering for ie, not someone

who has been out of the classroom for a long time and is writing resources without understanding connections to the students and their diverse needs.

How can we improve it:

To add strength to the proposal, we would like to see a shift in a number of areas:

- More ability to assess cross-curricularly with frameworks provided to support this on a larger scale than what is done currently
- Making sure the reduction in the number of credits offered is not just a school by school choice so as to eliminate parental pressure and students expectations creeping back up to the current number of credits students are entered for
- Allow more variety in the way subjects are assessed rather than through examinations and written assessments
- Make sure those helping design the resources are well trained professionals with recent experience as classroom practitioners

Feedback on Big Opportunity 5 - Ensuring the Record of Achievement tells us about the learners' capabilities

What we like about it:

This opportunity was fairly well received by staff as they saw it as a positive way to provide more detail about what has actually been achieved and will be more user-friendly for employers. Another positive of this opportunity is that it was seen as a good way to show all-round involvement in school rather than just focusing on academics.

What we don't like about it:

Some people were concerned that there would be too much information provided and the record of learning could be lost in that. Another concern was figuring out who was responsible for making this happen- students themselves or were teachers expected to do it for them. If this was the case, it would then add further work to teacher workload.

How can we improve it:

Make sure that there is a section on key competencies, include life skills relevant to the student, and do not make it too wordy.

Feedback on Big Opportunity 6 - Dismantling barriers to NCEA

What we like about it:

This opportunity makes access to NCEA much fairer and equitable for all, which we all agree on. Removing fees from NCEA could remove the barrier that stands in the way of some students obtaining qualifications which is important for all students across New Zealand. Giving more students access to Special Assessment Conditions (SAC) would also help remove the stigma associated with learning difficulties and needing extra support. It also seems to alleviate the financial pressure associated with Educational Psychologists Reports often needed for SAC recommendations and approvals.

What we don't like about it:

We have a great number of students who already receive SAC for their NCEA assessments. This puts a great deal of pressure on the Learning Enhancement department at our school to provide readers/writers for these as well as finding separate accommodation for the SAC assessments to take place. The logistics of how this could work at a school the size of ours is difficult to fathom. There is a current deficit in the provision or resourcing for SAC and this opportunity does nothing to alleviate it. This must be addressed before anything else can be put in place.

How can we improve it:

Resourcing for SAC in terms of both Professional Development and finances needs to be provided externally. This needs to include comprehensive training for those who act as supervisors and reader/writers during assessments. SAC supervisors are currently kind hearted people who care about the students' best interest, but we can only rely on goodwill for so long. More support needs to be provided if we are to offer SAC for more students. A good way to help do this would be to train, appoint and pay SAC Coordinators in school to lead this. As aforementioned, rooming all the students with SAC is a logistical problem that will need to be addressed and supported nationally as schools cannot be relied upon to do this due to space constraints.

Another point raised is that it would be helpful if NZQA provided more differentiated assessments for students so that they could access the work and still experience success - this does not mean more Supported Learning Unit Standards, but instead more accessible forms of assessment for Achievement Standards.

Student Voice

What do you think is important for people to be able to learn and be able to do?

Students expressed a strong desire for their learning to be connected to real-life contexts and for them to develop life skills that could assist them to engage in the 'real world'. They felt that it was important for their learning to connect to contexts and/or problems they could encounter in real life situations. This could occur through collaboration between different subject areas to create 'real life scenarios' that they could be assessed on, or it could be within a single subject area that again provided this 'real life context' for example, learning about how electricity works in a household in Science. Some students felt topics focused on life skills such as financial management, and first-aid could be also useful. Students felt it was important to learn Interpersonal skills such as developing leadership, working with others and building positive relationships as these skills would not only prepare them for the workforce but also for having positive and meaningful lives and connections to others.

Students enjoy how NCEA standards build upon prior knowledge each year and they felt that it was also important for this to happen in years 9 and 10 as well. They also felt that the present emphasis on numeracy and literacy was important but could be improved to ensure all students achieve these basic skills.

Students felt that having balance and choice in their learning was essential and that equal emphasis should be placed between different curriculum areas to allow for this for example, Humanities, Arts and Sciences. A balanced approach to the ways in which students can engage with learning is important. Many students expressed interest in project based learning, and these students saw this as significant part of a broader learning experience.

Finally students felt that it was important for the focus to be on the learning taking place and developing their skills and knowledge, as opposed to the assessment of their learning. They acknowledged that the assessment is important but should not be the main focus.

Tell us about your experience with NCEA?

Students enjoy the flexibility of NCEA and appreciate having the balance between internal and external assessments. They feel this balance reduces pressure on students at the end of the year and allows for students with different strengths to achieve highly. Although they enjoy the balance of internal and external assessments, a number of students felt that it was still too stressful sitting three papers in a three hour period at the end of the year and felt two papers within this timeframe was more realistic. Students did describe a disparity between subjects as some subjects had a heavy emphasis on external assessments while others had more pressure on internal assessments. This means that students in some subject areas are under a lot more pressure than others at the end of the year in an external examination context. One issue that students also raised was that students lost motivation for the external assessments if they had already achieved enough credits in their internal assessments.

Students liked the grade boundaries of Achieved, Merit and Excellence and felt this created a goal that they could aspire towards. Extension students were the only exception, who felt the assessment of their learning was limited within the Excellence grade boundary.

The specificity of assessment criteria in both internal and external standards was at times limiting and students felt a more holistic approach to assessment would allow for more individualised outcomes. Students discussed that a more flexible approach could also be taken to the way they were assessed and would like opportunities to be assessed in groups as well as individually.

Students felt there were some transition issues between year levels and experienced a significant increase in workload between Years 9/10 into Year 11, and again from Year 11 into Year 12. They felt that NCEA could be structured in a way that would better prepare for the increased workload from year to year.

How could we improve NCEA so students can try different options without getting stuck?

Students would like to see more opportunities for exploration of a range of courses and contexts. Some ideas proposed were courses that catered to student interests and passions in to broaden horizons regarding both career and tertiary options. Bridging courses were suggested for exposure to a greater range of subjects and academic theory relevant to those on the tertiary pathway.

Students currently see their courses being very assessment driven and have a desire to be involved in authentic teaching and learning programmes.

How can the Record of Achievement better show what students can do?

Students expressed that they would like to see personal skills and character strengths highlighted in the Record of Achievement. Unpacking further their qualities that employers would be interested in, beyond achievement data, such as leadership, attitudes, values and contribution to wider life of the school such as extra-curricular involvement.

Experiences outside of school such as jobs and volunteer work which shows commitment to local community and citizenship was also seen to be important to include in their Record of Achievement to show them as a 'whole' person.

The idea of a student-led project, with clear aims, timelines, and importantly skills gained with its completion was proposed as an idea to be included in the Record of Achievement also.

Parent and Community Voice

What do you think is important for young people to learn and be able to do?

Parental voice began with concerns about the pressures of deadlines; they would prefer their daughters to be less driven by results and more motivated by the process of learning. They felt NCEA should be a system which encourages their daughters to build skills by being adaptable in different situations, to see new challenges as a positive process, and build personal confidence in their abilities to problem solve.

Parents described education as 'for life'. They want to be informed about how we are preparing their daughters to move into tertiary education or to the workforce. Parents also had a number of questions about their daughters transition beyond school. These included whether students leave education with secure knowledge which profession they will pursue, whether a degree means they will work in the field they are qualified in, and how we prepare them for moving into the workforce. Parents who are employers feel a tertiary degree reflects commitment and knowledge, but does not necessarily define whether an individual will be employed in that field. They believe employers are looking for workers who can problem solve, have leadership qualities, are adaptable, flexible, and have the drive and motivation to succeed in their roles. As a result they want their daughters to be equipped with these skills and qualities when they leave education. Parents feel the way NCEA is delivered currently is still a relatively traditional approach to education. They believe NCEA needs to provide students with experiences relevant to the rapidly changing world.

Parents also wanted to better understand what NCEA, and their daughters' results prepared them for in the future. Parents feel the results their daughters achieve do not clearly illustrate what they know and have learned. They are also aware that formal qualifications are now only one of many pathways through which employment is gained. A poignant expression came from a father who stated that as an employer, "qualifying the person rather than being qualified to the task" is more desirable. Initiative, and the desire to learn and adapt is more important in finding employment and being successful in the workforce, than being able to follow step-by-step instructions.

They discussed that students are remaining in secondary education for much longer, and they agreed that students are facing more rigorous demands in terms of what it means to be successful. Parents felt that the greater use of digital devices in education was a relevant issue, taking their daughters' focus away from person-to-person interactions with others. They noted their daughters increasingly lack patience due to the fast pace and immediacy of information available to them, and they lack diverse, varied research skills. This was of concern to them.

A final conversation was based around the "shifting traffic light down the road": are our students prepared for tertiary education? They feel that NCEA could better bridge the gap and to work more closely with tertiary institutions to ensure a smooth transition between educational settings. They suggested that our programs could be adapted to reflect each other more closely.

The final statement of the evening was that it was, "Nice to see it moving forward".

Alternative Suggestions

The following are suggestions that we at WGHS feel should be considered as part of the NCEA Review. Some others have been previously mentioned throughout the report as feedback on the Big Opportunities.

- *Removal of subject endorsements* - From our perspectives subject endorsements do not add value to our students nor do they allow us to use NCEA in the flexible manner in which it was designed. It stops us being able to do true cross-curricular work and marry up assessments in more than one curriculum area. There is too much focus on these 'awards' in the community as well as a perception that getting a subject endorsement is a pinnacle of learning. This makes subjects silos and removes creativity from courses. We are therefore strong advocates for the removal of subject endorsement.
- *Equity and depth of standards offered* - Achievement Standards should be bigger 'chunks' of teaching worth more credits that allow students to get a comprehensive understanding of the subject and what it entails. Currently NCEA is too fragmented and learning is lost as students and schools 'pick and choose' which standards to take or assess. By adding more depth to all standards there will also be an equity across curriculum areas and allow for more diverse learning to take place.
- *Assess students when ready* - students should be able to complete summative assessments nationally when they are ready to do so, not just at the end of the school year via external NCEA Examinations. While this opportunity is something NCEA is already working towards, the logistics of how to make it happen needs a great deal more research and support so that it is effective in every subject. This may require full-time examiners to be working on multiple online assessments throughout the year for it to be successful. However it would be in the best interest of the students to investigate this further.
- *More cooperation with tertiary institutes* - At present the way we run NCEA in schools can be hamstrung by universities based on their entry requirements for courses and the issues surrounding UE in general. If we use NCEA in the flexible way we want and allow more cross-curricular courses and integrated assessment in our school, we always need to take into account whether or not students will be able to get into courses at university by meeting their criteria. There needs to be a better flow-on from school to post-school study with universities and tertiary providers taking part in this conversation so that NCEA can work the way it has been designed.
- *More education for the public and employers about what NCEA actually is* - even though NCEA as it stands has existed for more than 15 years, there is still a lack of understanding of how it works in the public sphere. It should not be up to schools to teach people this, but instead should come from NZQA and central agencies so that employers know what they are looking for and parents understand how to support their children through the qualifications.

Key Points

The key points we would like to reiterate based on staff, student and community voice are as follows:

- *Concern over the projects and pathways opportunities* - There is a lack of clarity around how these will work for NCEA Level 1, 2 and 3. This includes (but is not limited to) the setting, marking, moderation and credits allocated to the project or pathway. For a school the size of ours it becomes an added stress to staff and student workload which negates the purpose of the NCEA changes. It also adds to the workload of the community and employers who are expected to be involved in taking students on as part of these projects. Making the connections with community partners is a big ask for large schools and it is imperative that support is offered in this area if it is expected to go ahead.
- *Workload expectations* - While the changes offer a great deal of opportunity, they do not seem to provide any particular concrete guidance with regards to reduction in workload for staff or students. It is crucial that this is addressed and needs to be done so via the curtailment of credit counting and a uniform maximum number of credits per year level across the country rather than leaving it up to individual schools to decide.
- *Assessments* - There are currently too many standards to choose from worth too few credits. This needs to be addressed so that assessment is more robust and equitable across curriculum areas and levels. It would also help reduce both students and teacher workload and bring back more authentic teaching and learning. There should also be a balance of internal and external assessment in all courses to help spread the assessment load.
- *Life beyond school* - Many of these proposed changes cannot take place unless there is better cohesion and cooperation between secondary education and tertiary providers. It is all well and good for us as a school to create innovative programmes and integrated curriculum with more opportunities for students, but this will only work if we are doing this in conjunction with tertiary institutes. Schools are often driven by the requirements of Universities and without them being on board with the changes, there is little point to making them.
- *Resourcing* - In order for any of these changes to take place there needs to be a significant amount of resourcing provided to schools and our community from the government. Staff need upskilling and the opportunity for professional development in these areas. Time needs to be provided for schools which allows changes to be made meaningfully and carefully so that the staff can create new programmes that fit the requirements of the new look NCEA. Substantial resourcing needs to be provided externally for SAC support and provisions as well if they are to be successful.

Further Comments

The overall opportunities offered by some of the suggestions in the discussion document are mostly positive in nature. They are broad enough to allow us (WGHS) to work within them and gives us scope about where we go next with our school curriculum. They also allow us to think about how to use our combined knowledge to the best of our capabilities while making decisions that are in the best interest of our diverse learning community. For many the opportunities are exciting and provides us with a good basis for making meaningful change to our curriculum and pedagogy in the school. Many of the opportunities align more clearly with what is considered the original intent of NCEA, which includes less focus on the collecting of credits and more focus on flexibility and integration of curriculum areas.

In order for the changes to take place and to be meaningful there is a lot that still needs to happen with more clarity, support and resourcing provided for all stakeholders - students, staff, schools, parents and the wider community.

We will watch and wait to see the outcome.

