

**REVIEW OF NZQA'S PROVISION OF  
ANNOTATED EXEMPLARS OF  
STUDENT WORK FOR NCEA AND  
NEW ZEALAND SCHOLARSHIP**

**JULY 2017**

# **Review of NZQA's provision of annotated exemplars of student work for NCEA and New Zealand Scholarship**

## **Introduction**

Following the conclusion of each year's National Certificates of Educational Achievement (NCEA) and New Zealand Scholarship examinations, the New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA) publishes annotated exemplars of candidates' work on its website.<sup>1</sup> These annotated external exemplars assist teachers and students to understand the quality of work required for Excellence, Merit and Achievement levels in the externally-assessed NCEA achievement standards.

Exemplars of student work for internally-assessed achievement standards are also provided on the website to assist teachers to make assessment judgements at the Excellence, Merit and Achievement grade boundaries for these standards.

In mid-June 2017, NZQA became aware that an exemplar of student work at Excellence level selected following the 2012 NCEA examinations was largely reproduced from an exemplar selected following the 2011 examinations.

NZQA initiated an internal investigation into why the exemplar was not identified as being largely reproduced from the previous year's (2011) exemplar. In addition, given the role and importance of annotated exemplars in assessment of students' work for the NCEA qualifications and New Zealand Scholarship, NZQA commissioned an independent specialist to conduct a review of the process for selecting and publishing exemplars.

## **The Reviewer**

Gregor Fountain, the Principal of Paraparaumu College on Wellington's Kapiti Coast, conducted the Review. Prior to being a school leader, Gregor had significant involvement in History education, leading school History Departments in Wellington, the Waikato and Auckland. During this time, he held a range of contracts with NZQA in the setting, marking and critiquing of NCEA and New Zealand Scholarship History examinations. Between 2004 and 2006, Gregor was the Chair of the New Zealand History Teachers' Association.

## **Terms of Reference**

The Terms of Reference for the Review are attached as an appendix to this report.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.nzqa.govt.nz/qualifications-standards/qualifications/ncea/subjects/>

<http://www.nzqa.govt.nz/qualifications-standards/awards/new-zealand-scholarship/scholarship-subjects/>

## Summary

The selection of an exemplar of student work which was largely reproduced from an exemplar from a previous examination was an isolated error made by the History examination team in 2012. However, there are a small number of externally assessed achievement standards in History, Social Studies and Media Studies, where the generic approach to question-setting and the subsequent similarity of questions from year-to-year, provides an opportunity for candidates to rote-learn pre-prepared or externally-sourced answers and potentially be rewarded for doing so. The Reviewer has recommended some actions for NZQA to take to address this issue. Further recommendations aim to strengthen practice throughout the sector in relation to the authenticity of student work for both examination and school-based assessment.

## Recommendations

The Reviewer recommends that:

1. *NZQA strengthen the process for the selection of exemplars for externally-assessed standards by applying, where appropriate, processes currently used for the selection and annotation of exemplars for the internally assessed standards.*
2. *the final selection and annotation of the external assessment exemplars be delayed to the New Year and be made available to the examination team for quality assurance at their February review meeting.*
3. *consideration is given to providing partial exemplars for the generic questions identified (from History, Social Studies and Media Studies examinations) which illustrate the skills required without providing a whole answer which could be rote-learned.*
4. *NZQA consider whether new annotated exemplars are required for every externally assessed standard each year. External assessment exemplars should stay online for a maximum of three years and then be removed.*
5. *NZQA liaise with the Ministry of Education with the aim of regularly refreshing the Te Kete Ipurangi (TKI) sample assessments.*
6. *NZQA work with the Ministry of Education and professional subject associations to develop teacher confidence in writing school-based local assessment tasks, reducing teacher reliance on the online sample assessments.*
7. *NZQA consider developing:*
  - a. *a video for students and teachers, to be used in assembly or a similar forum, concerning authenticity of student work in internal assessment, external assessment and portfolio work.*
  - b. *online and easily accessible advice to students and teachers on ensuring authenticity of assessment work.*

8. *NZQA should investigate the use of online tools to detect potential plagiarism in examination candidates' work and promote the use of plagiarism tools in schools for both students and teachers.*
9. *the focus of NZQA's Best Practice Workshops be extended to include support for teachers preparing students for external assessment and the effective and appropriate use of exemplars.*
10. *NZQA's School Relationship Managers should continue to have an explicit focus on ensuring authenticity of student work through their Managing National Assessment (MNA) visits to schools and in the seminars, workshops and presentations which they lead.*
11. *NZQA should consult with subject associations and other relevant professional organisations to explore ways in which generic questions used to assess candidates in identified achievement standards can be varied from year-to-year.*
12. *NZQA should consider instructing marking panels for the identified external standards with generic-style questions to keep a record of the context which each candidate has used, with the aim of making the identification of group-prepared or externally-sourced answers easier.*

## **Background**

The New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA) is responsible under the Education Act 1989 for managing the national assessment of secondary school students. New Zealand's National Certificates of Educational Achievement (NCEA) Levels 1-3 are national qualifications for senior secondary school students. Most NCEA subjects comprise externally assessed achievement standards and internally assessed and externally moderated achievement standards. NZQA is also responsible for the management of the New Zealand Scholarship qualification which is externally assessed.

The use of annotated exemplars of student work is an important and accepted practice in teaching and learning, and NZQA has published exemplars of candidates' work since the 2006 examinations.

The 2006 exemplars were produced to provide guidance for teachers and students for those standards where achievement rates in 2005 were significantly lower than expected, indicating that the requirements of these standards were not well understood.

The Ministry of Education and NZQA commenced a joint project to align the achievement standards to the *New Zealand Curriculum* in 2008. In order to support this work, NZQA implemented a project in 2009 to develop sample examination papers and annotated exemplars of student work for all of the externally assessed achievement standards. These resources were first published in 2010 for Level 1 to assist teachers in their understanding of the new standards which were assessed nationally for the first time in 2011.

Following the 2011 examinations, NZQA published a full set of annotated exemplars for each standard and did so again in 2012.

In mid-June 2017 NZQA became aware that an exemplar of student work at Excellence level for Level 1 History, selected following the 2012 NCEA examinations, had been largely reproduced from an exemplar selected following the 2011 examinations. This is the only occurrence since 2012 of very similar pieces of examination candidates' work at any level of NCEA, or for New Zealand Scholarship, being published in separate years as annotated exemplars.

How the rote-learned essay in 2012 came to be published as an annotated exemplar is the focus of an internal NZQA investigation separate from this Review which focuses on the established purpose of, and process for, selecting and publishing exemplars for both externally and internally assessed standards. This external Review also seeks to make recommendations to NZQA on guidance for teachers and students on what is appropriate when sourcing material or drawing on facts and examples, and the judgement of what would constitute the inappropriate reproduction, or plagiarism, of another person's work.

## **Review process**

The Reviewer convened a meeting at NZQA's offices on 11 July 2017. Papers relating to annotated exemplars, internally and externally assessed achievement standards, and New Zealand Scholarship were provided to the Reviewer prior to the meeting. NZQA management and assessment and editorial staff were interviewed and provided supplementary documents as requested.

## **The Wider Context – NCEA and *The New Zealand Curriculum***

The revised *New Zealand Curriculum*, which was first assessed for national qualifications in 2011, released several senior curriculum programmes from their previous content requirements. As a result, teachers and students were able to develop course content based on their own interests with virtually no restriction. Although largely welcomed by the teaching community, this change posed a challenge for some of NZQA's NCEA external examination teams, notably those for Level 1 History, Media Studies and Social Studies. Their response was to set generic examination questions through which candidates could use the content they had studied in any topic to answer a very general question. Given the tight parameters of standards-based assessment within an examination, an outcome of this approach was that the examinations had very similarly worded questions from year to year. In short, the curriculum pushed the focus wide, while examination-based standards-based assessment attempted to tie it down.

## **Exemplars and Assessment Tools**

Annotated exemplars aim to support student achievement and teacher understanding of the requirements of the achievement standards. However, for a small number of achievement standards, some students appear to be accessing exemplars directly, independently of their teacher, and using them inappropriately as answers for their examinations. Exemplars may also be shaping teacher actions in some cases as they prepare students for the examination. These practices tend not to occur as much in the external examination subjects where contexts for questions or examination resources are different each year.

The Reviewer analysed a range of exemplars and other assessment tools currently available through the NZQA and related websites. He discussed with NZQA managers and staff the

issues outlined above, the exemplars and assessment tools. There were also discussions about the processes and timelines used to select and develop exemplars and related resources; and the length, nature and longevity of the online resources, especially for external assessment. The reviewer also discussed with NZQA staff whether it is necessary to have new exemplars provided for every externally assessed standard each year.

The focus of the exemplars chosen to support external assessment differs from that utilised to assist internal assessment practice. The external examination exemplars illustrate Excellence, Merit and Achieved grades of student achievement with the aim of developing teacher understanding and scaffolding students to higher grades. By contrast, the exemplars used for internal assessment focus on the Excellence, Merit and Achieved grade boundaries with the primary aim of supporting teacher assessment judgements.

There are robust processes in place for the selection, annotation and publication of exemplars of internal assessment. This is appropriate due to the high proportion of standards used for national assessment that are internally assessed and the need for internal assessment practices to be strong to ensure consistency of judgements across schools. Some of the processes used to develop annotated exemplars for internal assessment are not in play for the development of the exemplars for external assessment, where the selection of the exemplars is currently the final task given to examination contractors at the conclusion of the marking process, often just prior to Christmas. Several benefits could ensue if the final selection of external assessment annotated exemplars was delayed until the New Year. Panel leaders could be asked to identify a wider pool of possible student papers at the conclusion of the marking process from which they could make final selections under less time pressure in January or February. The selected exemplars could then be quality assured by the examination team at their February review meeting.

The Reviewer noted that the annotated exemplars used for internally assessed standards were partial rather than complete pieces of student work. Given the issues relating to the generic standards where very similar wording is used for each year's examination questions, there was a discussion about the pros and cons of using parts of answers as exemplars to illustrate Excellence, Merit and Achievement rather than a full answer which could be used by a candidate in a subsequent examination.

### *Recommendations*

- 1. NZQA strengthen the process for the selection of exemplars for externally-assessed standards by applying, where appropriate, processes currently used for the selection and annotation of exemplars for the internally assessed standards.*
- 2. the final selection and annotation of the external assessment exemplars be delayed to the New Year and be made available to the examination team for quality assurance at their February review meeting.*
- 3. consideration is given to providing partial exemplars for the generic questions identified (from History, Social Studies and Media Studies examinations) which illustrate the skills required without providing a whole answer which could be rote-learned.*

4. *NZQA consider whether new annotated exemplars are required for every externally assessed standard each year. External assessment exemplars should stay online for a maximum of three years and then be removed.*

One issue discussed was the high use of internally assessed tasks sourced from the Te Kete Ipurangi (TKI) website within schools across all subjects. The ongoing use of these tasks without adaptation has created a large body of completed work which could potentially be passed from one student to another, between years and even between schools.

#### *Recommendations*

5. *NZQA liaise with the Ministry of Education with the aim of regularly refreshing the Te Kete Ipurangi (TKI) sample assessments.*
6. *NZQA work with the Ministry of Education and professional subject associations to develop teacher confidence in writing school-based local assessment tasks, reducing teacher reliance on the online sample assessments.*

## **Educating the Sector on Authenticity and Use of Exemplars**

The issue which sparked this review involved a candidate rote learning an exemplar published on the NZQA website and recalling it within the context of an examination, thereby presenting inauthentic, plagiarised work. NZQA, Principals, teachers, Principal's Nominees, subject associations and other professional organisations each have a role in the education of students and teachers around what constitutes authentic student work.

NZQA has stressed to schools the critical importance of students presenting authentic work to assessors and examiners. There is documentation on authenticity on the NZQA website and this matter has been discussed at Principal's Nominees workshops, Managing National Assessment (MNA) visits and general liaison visits to schools. NZQA's work in this area could be strengthened by the development of further resources, the promotion of online plagiarism tools and the broadening of the Best Practice Workshops to include the preparation of students for external assessment.

#### *Recommendations*

7. *NZQA consider developing:*
  - a. *a video for students and teachers, to be used in assembly or a similar forum, concerning authenticity of student work in internal assessment, external assessment and portfolio work.*
  - b. *online and easily accessible advice to students and teachers on ensuring authenticity of assessment work.*
8. *NZQA should investigate the use of online tools to detect potential plagiarism in examination candidates' work and promote the use of plagiarism tools in schools for both students and teachers.*
9. *the focus of NZQA's Best Practice Workshops be extended to include support for teachers preparing students for external assessment and the effective and appropriate use of exemplars.*

- 10. NZQA's School Relationship Managers should continue to have an explicit focus on ensuring authenticity of student work through their Managing National Assessment (MNA) visits to schools and in the seminars, workshops and presentations which they lead.*

## **Examination Questions**

The Review identified three subject areas where generic approaches to external assessment were prevalent with minimal variation in the wording of the questions set from year to year. These were History, Social Studies and Media Studies. This issue is most problematic at NCEA Level One where candidates are generally rewarded for description rather than higher level analysis or evaluation. Given the broad and permissive nature of the curriculum and the approaches emphasised through the Teaching and Learning Guidelines in each of these subjects, it is important that students studying different contexts are not penalised through a narrowing of the assessment task. However, some alternatives to the examination questions being similar every year need to be explored.

### *Recommendation*

- 11. NZQA should consult with subject associations and other relevant professional organisations to explore ways in which generic questions used to assess candidates in identified achievement standards can be varied from year-to-year.*

## **Marking Processes**

NZQA has a strong record of investigating examination irregularities. To this point, these appear to have largely involved following up on issues identified by examination supervisors rather than responding to authenticity issues identified by markers. Processes which discourage students from presenting examination answers which are largely drawn from someone else's work could be strengthened.

### *Recommendation*

- 12. NZQA should consider instructing marking panels for the identified external standards with generic-style questions to keep a record of the context which each candidate has used, with the aim of making the identification of group-prepared or externally-sourced answers easier.*

## **Acknowledgements**

The Reviewer wishes to acknowledge the support provided by NZQA for the conduct of the Review. Papers and specially prepared briefing documents were provided prior to the meeting. In particular, the Reviewer appreciated the way in which NZQA management and staff engaged in the discussions and willingly provided extra information requested to assist the Reviewer in his work. It is apparent that NZQA is aware of the potential issues concerning authenticity of student assessment work, especially within the digital age, and that it is eager to enhance its processes, and lead others in the sector, to ensure that the national assessment system is, as far as possible, reliable, valid and fair.



# Appendix: Terms of Reference



**30 June 2017**

## **REVIEW OF THE PROVISION OF ANNOTATED EXEMPLARS OF STUDENT WORK**

### **TERMS OF REFERENCE**

#### **Background**

The New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA) is responsible under the Education Act 1989 for managing the national assessment of secondary school students. New Zealand's National Certificates of Educational Achievement (NCEA) levels 1-3 are national qualifications for senior secondary school students. Most NCEA subjects comprise externally assessed achievement standards and internally assessed and externally moderated achievement standards. NZQA is also responsible for the management of the New Zealand Scholarship qualification which is externally assessed.

The use of exemplars is an important and accepted practice in teaching and learning. Following the conclusion of each year's NCEA and New Zealand Scholarship examinations, annotated exemplars of candidates' work are published on the NZQA website. These annotated external exemplars assist teachers and students to understand the evidence required for Excellence, Merit and Achievement levels in the externally-assessed achievement standards.

Exemplars of student work for internally-assessed achievement standards are also provided to assist teachers to make assessment judgements at the grade boundaries for these standards. The internal assessment exemplars are reviewed on a thematic basis when it is deemed appropriate.

In mid-June 2017, NZQA became aware that an exemplar of student work at Excellence level selected following the 2012 NCEA examinations was largely reproduced from an exemplar selected following the 2011 examinations.

NZQA has initiated an internal investigation into why the exemplar was not identified as being largely reproduced from the previous year's (2011) exemplar. In addition, given the role and importance of annotated exemplars in assessment of students' work for the NCEA qualifications, NZQA has commissioned an independent specialist to conduct a review of the process for selecting and publishing exemplars. The independent specialist will review the guidance for teachers and students in the use of exemplars and in the sourcing of other material. This is particularly important given the increasing use of digital resources and assessment, and the availability of tools available to detect inappropriately referenced material.

The Reviewer is asked to produce guidance on what is appropriate when sourcing material or drawing on facts and examples, and the judgement of what would constitute the inappropriate reproduction of other's work or plagiarism.

## Objectives

The Review has been established to:

- **consider** the established purpose of exemplars and their use in:
  - a) providing guidance for teachers and students on Excellence, Merit and Achievement levels in the externally assessed standards; and
  - b) assisting teachers to make assessment judgements at the grade boundaries for the internally assessed standards.
  
- **make recommendations** to NZQA in relation to:
  - a) the current process for selecting and publishing exemplars;
  
  - b) the purpose of exemplars, the appropriate number and length of exemplars, the process for selecting them and the length of time for which they should be available to teachers and students; and
  
  - c) guidance for teachers and students on what is appropriate when sourcing material or drawing on facts and examples, and the judgement of what would constitute the inappropriate reproduction of another person's work or plagiarism.

## Scope

The scope of the Review includes the annotated exemplars for both the internally and externally assessed achievement standards.

The Reviewer will ascertain through documentation and discussions with appropriate NZQA staff how the system for providing guidance on the appropriate use of exemplars can be improved.

The following are out of scope for this review:

- Reasons why the 2012 exemplar was not identified as being largely reproduced from the previous year's (2011) exemplar.<sup>2</sup>
  
- Changes to the fundamentals of the assessment system, such as the NCEA and NZ Scholarship standards and structure, marking and results procedures, and certification.

## Timeframes and Reporting

The Reviewer will meet with NZQA during July 2017 and the final report should be submitted to NZQA by 25 July 2017.

The report will be published in late August / early September 2017.

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<sup>2</sup> This matter is being reviewed separately.

## **The Reviewer**

Gregor Fountain is the Principal of Paraparaumu College on Wellington's Kapiti Coast. He was previously the Deputy Principal at Wellington College, where his portfolio responsibilities included leadership of teaching and learning, curriculum, assessment and staff professional development. Prior to being a school leader, Gregor was heavily involved in History education, leading school History Departments in Wellington, the Waikato and Auckland. During this time, he held a range of contracts with NZQA in the setting, marking and critiquing of NCEA and NZ Scholarship History examinations. Between 2004 and 2006, Gregor was the Chair of the New Zealand History Teachers' Association. He is currently a Trustee of the Wellington Loop. His Masters of Education thesis focused on the impact of national assessment on History teacher's curriculum decisions.

## **Support for the Reviewer**

Subject matter experts will be available to provide advice to the Reviewer and a secretariat will also be provided.