

## #7 Internal and external assessment in NCEA

### Introduction

The mix of internal and external assessment varies across subjects and NCEA Levels, so the mix of assessment varies for each student. It depends on the courses the school offers and the subjects the student chooses to study.

For example at Level 3:

- Student A studies mainly mathematics and sciences – about one third of credits are likely to be internally assessed, and two thirds by external examinations.
- Student B studies mainly English and the social sciences (geography, history, economics) – typically about half of the credits will be internally assessed, and half by external examinations.
- Student C studies mainly the arts – about 60% of credits are likely to be internally assessed, and 40% externally assessed.

Almost all schools use a mix of achievement standards (some internally assessed, others externally assessed) and unit standards (all internally assessed). Students being assessed through a mix of achievement standards and unit standards will have a higher proportion of internal assessment than those assessed using achievement standards alone.

### Impact of standards alignment

Achievement standards and unit standards are being reviewed. The review will affect Level 1 in 2011, Level 2 in 2012, and Level 3 in 2013.

Some of the changes will impact on the mix of internal and external assessment.

- Achievement standards only will be used to assess curriculum linked knowledge and skills.
- Unit standards will cover other skills and knowledge.
- Unit standards derived from the New Zealand Curriculum will be phased out, starting in 2011, and replaced with Achievement standards which are internally assessed.

### Comments from the sector

*“ In recent years we have been asking more of our teachers – they have been asked to make more judgements than before. Compared with the ‘90s and the one-off examination system, there’s been an immense change in the need to explain to students what is required of them. Most teachers have welcomed that shift. ”*

Emeritus Professor Gary Hawke  
 Senior Fellow, New Zealand Institute of Economic Research. Formerly Head of the School of Government and Professor of Economic History, Victoria University of Wellington

## Impact of standards alignment CONT.

- In each subject there will be a maximum of three externally assessed standards. This will change the ratio of internally and externally assessed standards that are available in some subjects.

There will be an examination for each externally assessed standard. Three externally assessed standards will be examined in a three hour examination. This will give students sufficient time to complete the examination and ensure assessment is reliable.

Previously, in some subjects up to six standards were assessed in a three hour examination. This often resulted in students running out of time and leaving out important parts of the examination.

## Mix of internal and external assessment

Across the country in recent years, there has been an almost equal mix of internal and external assessment for achievement standards. This is an average across the country – the mix for any one student will be different.

In 2010:

- 48.5% of results from achievement standards were from external assessments (out of 1,514,355 results).
- 51.5% of results from achievement standards were from internal assessments (out of 1,606,804 results).
- There were also 1,801,193 results for unit standards, all internally assessed.
- There was more external assessment at Level 3 than at other levels.

Details are provided in NZQA's [Annual Report on NCEA and Scholarship](#). The Report analyses internal and external results by variables including gender, ethnicity and school decile.

Researchers from Victoria University of Wellington interviewed students and parents between 2006 and 2008 and explored how parents and students felt about the mix of internal and external assessment:

“Parents thought the system enhanced self-esteem and liked the fact that there were different assessments (internal and external), particularly the fact that internal assessment allowed them opportunity to monitor their children's progress for those students who would otherwise not stay on task.”

## The learning experience

“NCEA provides flexibility with course structure to allow for students' needs and strengths. NCEA also enables authentic assessment of skills that can't be assessed in external exams only i.e. practical experiments and speeches.”

Head of Department, Lincoln High School

“The mix of internal and external assessment means students become skilled time managers leading up to an assessment deadline and juggling a mix of assessments, as well as being able to perform under the pressures of an end of year examination.”

Margaret van Meeuwen, Assistant Principal,  
Diocesan School for Girls

## Mix of internal and external assessment CONT.

*Students, parents and teachers are particularly positive about the mix of internal and external assessment. Internal assessment has provided students with the ability to spread their effort and workload across the entire school year, as well as providing better preparation for the future in comparison to a single assessment period following a year of study.”*

Meyer, L. H., Weir, K. F., McClure, J., Walkey, F., McKenzie, L. 2009. Motivation and Achievement at Secondary School. The relationship between NCEA design and student motivation and achievement: A Three-Year Follow-Up. Victoria University of Wellington.

## The learning experience

*“At the general level, not all students cope with the pressures of external examinations. The major benefit of internal assessment is assessment when students are ready, used in conjunction with a judicious approach to resubmission and reassessment. There are many aspects of learning that simply cannot be assessed adequately by external examination. Many of these could, of course, be externally assessed by having outsiders in to look at performance, examine things being produced or to watch demonstrations.*

*This approach carries considerable cost and disruption to programmes without adding a significant increase in confidence in the accuracy of the assessment. We are happy to have our internal assessment moderated and find it reassuring and useful. We expect our staff to reach a 90% agreement rate. Working to maintain this is not only an appropriate element of accountability but is setting high levels of professional expectation while it ensures regular and effective external review of our work.”*

John Grant, Principal, Kaipara College

*“I liked the internal assessment side of NCEA. I like to have time to put some thought into my work and it also helped with university. NCEA helped a lot with time management – I’m doing Environmental Sciences so there are lots of labs and tutorials. At one stage I had 24 university assignments due over 12 weeks, so NCEA prepared me well for all of that.”*

Jamie Rodriguez left Diocesan School for Girls in 2009