



NEW ZEALAND QUALIFICATIONS AUTHORITY
MANA TOHU MĀTAURANGA O AOTEAROA



30 May 2006

Secondary School Examinations 2005 Report to Stakeholders

Dear Colleague

The 2005 secondary school assessment season is now over. The students have their results, the relevant statistical information has been made public and the final ceremonies have taken place. This is, therefore, an opportune time to report back on how this went overall and what we have learnt for the future.

Everything can be improved but, overall, the 2005 season was a success.

The marking process

You will have seen reports about new monitoring procedures used during marking. These new procedures were an enhancement to those traditionally used and not a move away from standards-based assessment. Their purpose was to better ensure that we could accurately assess students against the national standards, and provide greater assurance about fairness to students by enhancing consistency in the results from year to year.

Consistency from year to year

By way of context, inter-year changes in student performance can occur for a number of reasons.

These can include 'real-world' factors, such as when the actual performance of the students sitting an exam changes. For example, in 2005 in a level 1 geology standard, the students did not perform as well as we expected. Conversely, in a level 3 geology standard the students performed better than expected. In both cases the exam question and the assessment schedule were appropriate – it was the actual performance of the students that changed. The assessment process correctly picked up a change in what the students sitting the exam knew and could do.

In other cases, the candidate numbers can fluctuate and therefore the characteristics of the students entering can change markedly. This effect is more noticeable in standards with small entry numbers, such as the level 3 technology standards.

By contrast, unacceptable variation occurs when something in the assessment process itself has inadvertently changed, so that changes in the results are not a reflection of changes in student understanding and performance. For example, if a question in an exam is confusing, then students may respond in a way that was not anticipated. When this happens a process is initiated to re-assess students' work in a way that minimises any disadvantage to them.

Monitoring and investigation

The enhanced monitoring procedures worked as follows.

Prior to the exams, NZQA used all the information available from past years to derive a profile of expected results for each of the 335 externally assessed standards. This was done by reviewing past results for each standard and making a judgement as to what results we expected in the upcoming examinations, standard by standard. Then, as soon as marking began, NZQA sampled early results. If they diverged too much from our expectations they were investigated to find out why. If the divergence was for sound reasons (i.e. something real had changed in what the students knew or could do) then the marking went ahead and the results stood. If the divergence reflected something artificial that the process itself had injected, then corrections were made and the marking was restarted from scratch.

NZQA had to formalise its expectations for each standard because merely comparing results year to year was not enough. For example, consider a hypothetical standard, in which in 2003 50 per cent of the candidates gained achieved, in 2004 70 per cent gained achieved, and then in 2005 once again only 50 per cent gained achieved. In that case judgement would be required to determine whether, if at all, either the 2004 result or the 2005 result reflected unacceptable variability. Almost certainly, it couldn't be both.

However, results were not required to fit a precise range of success rates. If better than expected results occurred, but a review showed the marking was consistent with the standard, then the results stood. The key purpose was to provide fairness to students.

NZQA used this procedure in 2005 for all externally assessed achievement standards and it worked well. In total, in 17 standards some questions were re-marked, this being 5 per cent of the 335 standards assessed.

Communicating the results

About 144,000 students received their National Qualifications Framework results by post in late January, with over 99 per cent of students receiving their results by mail on 26 January. About 12,000 students accessed their results on the NZQA website as well. The delivery of the results to students was successful.

New Zealand Scholarship

During this period, the 2005 New Zealand Scholarship examinations also took place, and these too went well.

Scholarship in 2005 was different from Scholarship in 2004. A new marking system was implemented to ensure clearer ranking of student performance and to ensure that in each subject about 3 per cent of potential (not actual) candidates gained Scholarship, so long as their work met the standard required.

More than 6,500 students sat the 2005 Scholarship exams, spanning the 27 Scholarship subjects. As a result, 1,805 students received Scholarship awards this year, worth in total more than \$3 million over the next three years, to assist in their tertiary studies.

The very high standards required of Scholarship were not compromised. In 6 out of the 27 subjects not enough students reached the Scholarship standard and, as a result, in these subjects the 3 per cent target was not reached. The Qualifications Authority, the Ministry of Education, principals and teachers will be working together to support teachers and students to achieve better results in the future in these subjects without compromising the very demanding requirements of Scholarship.

Scholarship Technical Advisory Group

Both the Ministry of Education and the New Zealand Qualifications Authority are especially grateful for the assistance with Scholarship that came from the Scholarship Technical Advisory Group, appointed to advise NZQA. It is chaired by Gary Hawke, Head of School of Government at Victoria University, and includes John Hattie, Professor of Faculty of Education at University of Auckland and Terry Crooks, Professor of Education and Co-Director of the Educational Research Unit at Otago University. Their input has been invaluable.

Transparency

Throughout, NZQA was open with its stakeholders and the media. Numerous briefings were provided to the media and others, and problems or issues were publicly identified, along with the actions taken in response.

Conclusion

Looking at both NCEA and Scholarship in 2005, we conclude that the students can feel they have been well served, and the expectations of the wider community have been met. The rigorous processes developed to monitor results and to identify issues have provided a strong platform on which to build. The information gained provides the most comprehensive picture yet of students' achievements under NCEA and Scholarship. This will contribute to the continuing refinement and improvement of assessment in schools.

The New Zealand Qualifications Authority and the Ministry of Education both thank the numerous teachers involved, including those who worked as examiners, checkers, critiquers, moderators and markers, who have worked so hard. The support of the wider education sector also has been greatly appreciated, along with, of course, the efforts of the students and their parents.

Yours faithfully



Howard Fancy
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Ministry of Education



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