

**TO: CEOS of: Tertiary Education Organisations
Industry Training Organisations**

**ATTENTION: Academic Managers
Quality Assurance & Qualification Development Managers
NZQA Moderation Liaison**

Review of New Zealand Curriculum derived achievement and unit standards

The Ministry of Education (MoE) and the New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA) are currently conducting a review of New Zealand Curriculum derived standards to align them with the *New Zealand Curriculum 2007*. Please see the attached.

Enquiries

Please send any enquiries relating to this circular to email: nqs@nzqa.govt.nz

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Linda Glogau
Manager, Qualifications Development and Tertiary Moderation

Review of New Zealand Curriculum-based achievement and unit standards

The Ministry of Education and the New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA) are currently conducting a review of the New Zealand Curriculum derived standards to align them with the *New Zealand Curriculum 2007*¹. The alignment process started mid-2008 and will result in a phased introduction of the reviewed standards, with Level 1 standards in 2011, Level 2 in 2012 and Level 3 in 2013.

This process will ensure that curriculum-derived standards are aligned to the *New Zealand Curriculum 2007*, and addresses issues of duplication, credit parity, consistency, fairness and coherence with all standards on the National Qualifications Framework (NQF).

This process affects Tertiary Education Organisations (TEOs) that have been assessing and reporting credits against unit standards or achievement standards at level 1-4 that currently link to the *New Zealand Curriculum*. TEOs should consider this impact and provide feedback during the upcoming consultation.

Sector consultation

The draft matrices and Level 1 standards will be sent out for consultation in June (a four-week consultation period). The Level 2 and 3 standards will be sent out for consultation in August. The consultation is being undertaken by an independent contractor – Research New Zealand.

Consultation will occur directly with TEOs who have registered credits against any affected unit standards, Industry Training Organisations with qualifications containing reviewed standards and representative bodies with an interest in this review.

Background

The New Zealand Curriculum alignment process sits within a broader standards review process being undertaken by NZQA.

The standards review process will address issues of duplication, credit parity, fairness, consistency, and the coherence of all NQF standards. It is taking place in four stages:

- Stage 1 Establishment of principles by which the standards will be reviewed (*completed*). For more detail see <http://www.nzqa.govt.nz/ncea/docs/standards-review-bckground.pdf>
- Stage 2 A review of curriculum-derived standards at Levels 1, 2 and 3 (*underway*).
- Stage 3 A concurrent review of all other non-curriculum derived standards (*underway*).
- Stage 4 A review of the NCEA qualifications considering any impacts resulting from the New Zealand Curriculum alignment process (*has just begun*).

Stage 2 – Alignment of standards with the *New Zealand Curriculum 2007*

The Ministry of Education and NZQA have asked subject associations to contribute to the alignment process. The subject association writers are currently developing subject matrices and drafting changes to standards and/or developing new standards for sector consultation.

¹ The *New Zealand Curriculum 2007* may be viewed at <http://nzcurriculum.tki.org.nz/The-New-Zealand-Curriculum>

In reviewing the standards to ensure alignment with the *New Zealand Curriculum* 2007, subject association writers have been asked to:

- link the standards with New Zealand Curriculum (NZC) achievement objectives at NZC levels 6-8²;
- write all curriculum-derived standards as achievement standards; and

Note: Any provider who currently has accreditation for the appropriate fields, sub-fields, domains or specific unit standards automatically has (or will have) accreditation for the achievement standards located in those areas or the replacement achievement standards.

Achievement standards have two modes of assessment: internal or external. Assessment (and national external moderation) of the internally assessed achievement standards operates in the same manner as assessment for unit standards.

Internally assessed achievement standards are noted on the assessment plans submitted annually to NZQA's Tertiary Assessment and Moderation unit in the same manner as for NZQA-managed unit standards.

Assessment for externally assessed achievement standards is either by a time-bound written examination (the majority) or by submission of portfolio. These assessment events currently occur annually in November. Information about what TEOs have to do if they assess against externally assessed standards can be found on the NZQA webpage at <http://www.nzqa.govt.nz/ncea/acrp/tertiary/index.html>

- address issues of duplication between curriculum derived achievement and unit standards. (Due to historical reasons in the development of the curriculum derived achievement and unit standards, there are a number of achievement and unit standards linked to the previous NZ Curriculum statements where issues of duplication occur. This issue is currently being managed by an exclusion list.)

Note: Where a unit standard duplicates the outcomes of an achievement standard, it will be recommended for expiry. If it does not, and the outcome of the unit standard can be directly derived from the New Zealand Curriculum (NZC) at level 6 (other than those one or two subjects, where there is already an agreed occasional link to level 5), then it will be converted to an achievement standard.

If a unit standard no longer links to the NZC or its links are below level 6 (other than those one or two subjects where there is already an agreed occasional link to level 5) and does not duplicate another standard but is well used in the wider education sector, subject associations may make a recommendation to NZQA for it to be retained. Any such unit standards that NZQA determines warrant retention will be reviewed and the curriculum link removed.

² NZC level 6 is at NQF Level 1; NZC level 7 at NQF Level 2, and NZC level 8 at NQF Level 3.

Alignment of Standards with the *New Zealand Curriculum 2007-Guidelines*

The following guidelines have been provided to the subject associations undertaking the alignment process. These guidelines are in response to concerns expressed by school principals, teachers and others, in 2008, following initial consultation on some draft matrices.

1. Place of content and context in standards

Note: *content* is defined here as the concepts, skills and knowledge required to achieve a standard, and *context* as the vehicle that might be used to deliver the content.

- The set of standards for a subject level should encapsulate the key content (concepts/skills/knowledge) for that subject level, and reflect what is documented in the Teaching and Learning Guidelines (where one has been developed).
- Guidance on which contexts may be suitable will be provided, where necessary.

2. Format of New Zealand Curriculum-derived standards

- All standards derived directly from the NZC learning areas will be written as achievement standards.
- While achievement standards may be written with A, A and M, or A, M, and E grades, it is expected that, in general, all curriculum-based achievement standards will have three grades.

Note: Unit standards will be reserved for non-NZC derived standards (and may have M or E grades as appropriate).

3. Balance of internal and external assessment

The expert advice to have no more than three standards assessed in a three-hour written examination resulted in initial draft matrices for several subjects appearing to have less external and more internal assessment than in the past. This consequence has been perceived in some parts of the sector as change in policy in terms of the ratio of internal to external assessment for NZC-derived standards.

- There has been NO change in policy.
- The decision about whether a standard should be externally or internally assessed must reflect the advice in the Standards Review Principles paper [ref Principle 3: A standard must allow valid and reliable assessment]. However, a general swing towards a greater proportion of internal assessment across levels 1, 2 and 3 for student programmes is not intended.
- When the balance of internal and external assessment includes consideration of available unit standards, the proportion of internally assessed standards is reduced in most subject areas.
- In general, 6 credits for an externally-assessed standard assessed in a three-hour written examination will be regarded as the maximum.
- It may be appropriate to have a heavier external assessment load at level 3.

4. Impact of standards review on student programmes

A likely effect of the standards review is that the number of NZC-derived standards available for some (primarily school) students will become more limited, particularly at NQF Level 1. Significant work is underway to develop mechanisms to address the needs of the students in question. This could involve:

- Functional literacy and numeracy standards (literacy and numeracy in context). These standards will be aligned to the Adult Learning Progression Steps (developed by the Tertiary Education Commission), the Adult Literacy and Life Skills (ALL) survey levels, and the National Standards in literacy and numeracy for years 1 – 8.
- Advice to schools to encourage a greater use of the range of qualifications on the NQF.
- Advice to schools to encourage some students to achieve the required level for a qualification over a period of time (for example taking two years to achieve NCEA Level 1).

Note: The structure and content of the NCEA qualifications are being reviewed as part of stage 4 of standards review.

5. Writing grade criteria

The *Standards Review Principles* paper advised that qualitative differences in achievement must be used to differentiate between grades.

- The requirements for each grade should be articulated in as much detail as possible, including the key competencies where appropriate and viable.

Note: Assessment resources will be produced to test the standards and further improvement of achievement criteria will result from this. Quality checked exemplar material of student work will be published for each grade boundary.

Resources being developed

- Teaching and Learning Guidelines are being developed by the MoE to help secondary schools (and other providers) to design learning programmes that align with the New Zealand Curriculum. The guidelines will provide assistance for teachers in developing learning outcomes, possible learning progressions, effective pedagogy, and possible content and contexts for learning.
- Assessment resources to support the implementation of the reviewed standards.
- Quality assured exemplars of student evidence at the grade boundaries.

For further information on this alignment project please refer to:

1. Education Gazette, Number 3 – 23 February 2009 or
2. *Guidelines to the Alignment of Standards with the New Zealand Curriculum* at <http://www.nzqa.govt.nz/ncea/for-schools/curric-stds-review/guidelines.html>

Frequently Asked Questions

Q1. What is the difference between an achievement standard and a unit standard?

- A. Achievement standards are structured slightly differently to unit standards. They usually include merit and excellence criteria. More information on the differences between unit and achievement standards can be found at <http://www.nzqa.govt.nz/ncea/standards/units-achievements.html>

Q2. Are all standards linked to the New Zealand Curriculum now going to be achievement standards?

- A. Yes. Any standard that is derived directly from the New Zealand Curriculum will be an achievement standard.

Q3. What will happen to the unit standards we currently use?

- A. If the unit standard duplicates the outcomes of an achievement standard, it will expire. If it does not, and the outcome of the unit standard can be directly derived from the New Zealand Curriculum at level 6 (other than those one or two subjects where there is already an agreed occasional link to level 5), then it will be converted to an achievement standard.

If the unit standard is not derived from the *New Zealand Curriculum 2007* or its links are below level 6 (other than those one or two subjects, where there is already an agreed occasional link to level 5) and does not duplicate another standard but is well used in the wider education sector, subject associations may make a recommendation to NZQA for it to be retained. Any such unit standards that NZQA determines warrant retention will be reviewed and the curriculum link removed.

Q4. What will be the impact on the various National Certificates that we currently use that incorporate curriculum-derived unit standards?

- A. The various Level 1–3 National Certificates for which NZQA is responsible will be reviewed, concurrently, to ensure that they are still achievable through the reviewed standards. Industry Training Organisations will also be notified of any impacts on their qualifications arising from the alignment process so they can undertake any necessary reviews in a timely manner.

There are always transition arrangements put into place to ensure that learners are able to complete qualifications when changes to standards occur.

Q5. What about the students who would normally be undertaking programmes made up of curriculum-derived unit standards for their NCEA or other National Certificates?

- A. Organisations who have primarily been using New Zealand Curriculum-derived unit standards to assess their students will need to look at the subject matrices to determine which achievement standards have replaced the unit standards. In some cases, there

may not be a direct replacement. In other cases there may not be any replacement if the outcomes of those standards cannot be directly derived from the New Zealand Curriculum at level 6 (other than those one or two subjects, where there is already an agreed occasional link to level 5).

For those unit standards that no longer link to the New Zealand Curriculum at level 6 (other than those one or two subjects, where there is already an agreed occasional link to level 5) and where the unit standard is well used in the wider education sector and NZQA determines retention is warranted, the unit standard will be reviewed by NZQA. Such unit standards may include merit and excellence criteria as appropriate.

All the current NZQA non-curriculum-derived and ITO unit standards will still be available to organisations (as long as the organisation has the appropriate accreditation).

Q6. What will happen to those students who complete their courses, which may now include externally assessed achievement standards, early in the year? Will they have to wait until November for external assessment?

A. Yes but we are interested in hearing your feedback on how many students this may involve and any associated issues that we may need to consider in managing this issue.

Q7. Does this mean that there will be no more unit standards used in schools?

A. No. Unit standards will still be available for use, but there will not be any directly linked to the New Zealand Curriculum. See also the response to question 2. All non-New Zealand Curriculum derived unit standards will still be available (and may have M or E grades if appropriate).

Q8. Why is there a maximum limit of three externally assessed standards per subject per level?

A. This applies to standards assessed in a three-hour written examination. Each achievement standard assessed externally through a written examination requires a task to provide opportunities for students to produce sufficient evidence to enable a fair and valid assessment of their achievement against 3 levels of performance - achievement, merit and excellence. The shorter the time available for an assessment, the less evidence that can be collected. More evidence improves the validity and reliability of the measurement. A limit of three externals means that students can have a minimum of one hour to produce evidence for each standard.

Q9. Does this mean that each subject will have three externals at each level?

A. No. There may be up to 3 externals at each level. In the majority of subjects there will be three externals. However, it may be entirely appropriate to have none or one or two standards externally assessed, depending on the most appropriate and valid assessment mode for each standard.