NZQA
Digital Practice Exams 2021 User Experience Evaluation Summary Report

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NZQA would like to acknowledge the subject associations for Agricultural and Horticultural Science, Classical Studies, Media Studies and English, and the subject experts in Te Reo Māori and Te Reo Rangatira for their support and contribution to the success of digital practice exams 2021.

1.   Overview and context

A key element of the NCEA Online Programme and a way that NZQA can support the continuing growth of online assessment, is to provide the opportunity for schools to offer digital practice exams using NZQA's online exam platform.

We would like all kura / schools to have offered ākonga / students the opportunity to do at least one NCEA Online exam, by the end of 2022.

To support this journey, all schools had the chance to offer digital practice exams using our online platform from 2 August to 31 October 2021. This window let schools pick a time in Term 3 through to early Term 4 that best suited them. This would be beneficial for schools that have never done digital exams and for those increasing their participation in digital exams.

Schools have told us the impacts of COVID-19 make it especially useful to have some of their practice exams on the same platform as end of year NCEA exams. If conducted under exam conditions, the results could be used for Derived or Unexpected Event Grades if needed.

Key changes to practice exams in 2021 included:
- having a longer exam window (13 weeks)
- adding Media Studies and Te Reo Rangatira L1-3 (to the subjects offered in 2020)
- adding Te Reo Māori voiceover option to L1-3 Te Reo Rangatira exams and an embedded audio for the listening component in the Te Reo Rangatira L2 (AS 91777) exam
- updating training and support material used by schools (who carry out administrator, supervisor and marker roles)
- making NZQA's Learning Management System, Pūtake, available for participating schools to use
- making key materials and documentation available through the school's secure provider login.

The expected benefits and outcomes of NZQA offering 2021 digital practice exams include:
- supporting teachers to deliver practice exams to students that can be used to gather evidence for Derived / Unexpected Event Grades
- enhancing student familiarisation and preparation for NCEA Online digital external exams
- providing support for increasing school and student confidence to opt in, or scale up, through having meaningful practice options
- using features of the external digital assessment platform
- confirming key service requirements from schools and NZQA
- establishing the level of demand from schools for the digital practice exams
- being able to run a live test of the service/platform in a controlled way with a set number of schools.

We also ran the Te Ao Haka Pilot on 19-20 May 2021 – making history as the first 'digital-first' externally assessed time-bound event offered on the NCEA Online platform – in which some of the 271 ākonga / students from the 35 kura / schools provided their responses using video and audio.

Significantly, 17 of the participating kura and schools had never engaged in external digital assessment before but were willing to take up this challenge.

1.1   How practice exams were delivered and managed

NZQA worked with subject associations and subject matter experts so that schools could offer digital practice exams for English, Classical Studies, Te Reo Māori, Te Reo Rangatira, Media Studies and Agricultural and Horticultural Science at Levels 1-3. The digital exams were available to all schools, regardless of whether they were subject association members.

All levels of the Te Reo Rangatira digital practice exams included a new voiceover option which let ākonga listen to, as well as read, the exam instructions, questions and resources. The exam for Te Reo Rangatira Level 2 (AS 91777) also included an audio file for the listening standard.

Digital practice exams were available to schools for 13 weeks from 2 August to 31 October 2021. The original 'window of availability' for schools was extended by two weeks to address the impact of COVID-19, giving schools more flexibility to schedule exams at a time that suited them.

Of the 241 schools nationwide which indicated that they intended to take part, 152 schools had at least one student participate in a digital practice exam session. The COVID-19 lockdown in Auckland over this period meant some Auckland schools decided not to take part in digital practice exams, while 10 Auckland schools ran their digital practice exams remotely.

1.2   Outcome

Digital practice exams opened on 2 August and closed on 31 October. Schools identified the week that they intended to participate in the exams, so that support could be planned across NZQA business teams. A total of 11,782 students from 152 schools participated, with 857 students doing more than one session. Participation levels were reduced due to the impact of COVID-19 on schools and students but still showed a significant increase from 2020, when 6,236 students from 96 schools participated in at least one digital practice exam.

Of the 188 schools outside Auckland who had planned to take part in the 2021 digital practice exams, 142 did.

For the first time, a school in Niue participated in digital practice exams, with 14 students doing Level 1 English. This experience involved concerted effort by the Niue Education Ministry, Niue High School, the NZQA digital team, Niue Public Service and supporting businesses. Telecom Niue and the Niue Power Commission made school connectivity a priority and an upgraded fibre optic cable was completed. The Principal's Nominee reported 'Internet connectivity was excellent; the test was run smoothly and no disruptions at all'. The students were excited and proud to be the first students in Niue to complete digital exams.

In the lead-up to digital practice exams we regularly communicated with participating kura and schools about what was happening and what they needed to do to prepare for the exams.

We sent targeted emails to schools and kura which included information about:
- how to access learning modules through Pūtake (NZQA's Learning Management System) e.g. videos and activities
- key resources located under Schools' Provider Login area e.g. administrator, supervisor and marker guides; assessment schedules
- the dedicated digital practice exam section on NZQA's website
- materials available to help their students get ready e.g. checklists, familiarisation activities
- marking and accessing exam responses.

1.3   Survey information

Separate surveys were designed and administered to measure students', exam administrators', supervisors' and markers' self-reported satisfaction and experience of the digital practice exams during Term 3 of 2021. The surveys were presented for students, exam administrators, supervisors and markers respectively to complete online, as soon as possible after submitting their digital exam response.

Each participating school had a key contact for digital practice exams who provided each survey group with a link to the applicable survey on Qualtrics, once the exam was completed.

NZQA received survey responses as follows: from 444 students attending 32 unique schools; 211 from school-based users (administrators/supervisors/markers) in 63 unique schools.

1.3.1   Students

Of the student respondents, 4.3% (22 of 507 responses) identified as Pacific and 11.0% (56 of 507 responses) as Māori.

The schools attended by 3.60% (16 of 444) of student respondents were in the decile band 1 to 3, 55.18% (245 of 444) in the decile band 4 to 7, and 40.31% (179 of 444) in the decile band 8 to 10.

The table below shows the number of survey responses received, by practice exam session.

Digital Exam Session	Count of Survey Responses
L1 - AGRI	8
L1 – CLAS	6
L1 - ENGL	177
L1 - MEDIA	4
L1 - TERM	1
L1 - TERR	1
L2 - AGRI	9
L2 - CLAS	7
L2 – ENGL	153
L2 – MEDIA	17
L2 – TERM	0
L2 – TERR	0
L3 – AGRI	5
L3 – CLAS	5
L3 – ENGL	80
L3 – MEDIA	20
L3 – TERM	2
L3 – TERR	0
TOTAL	**495**

The respondents were not required to answer all the questions, so the response rate between questions varied.

1.3.2   School-based survey respondents

56 responses (out of the 211 school-based user responses received) indicated they had an administration role; 79 of the 211 had a supervisor role; and 76 of the 211 indicated their role was as a marker.

2. Feedback from survey respondents

These insights will help us to improve future NCEA Online services, processes and support resources to meet the needs of schools.

2.1 Students

During the survey, student respondents were asked what they thought we could do to improve digital practice exams. Some common suggestions included:

- Enable keyboard shortcuts
  - Attempting to use keyboard shortcuts have caused forced closure of windows or logouts (e.g. CTRL F).
- Website redesign for online NCEA exams, e.g.
  - simple and more user friendly;
  - easier navigation to locate exam.
- Mobility of viewing between exam pages.
- Spell check enabled for the entirety of the exam without need to refresh.
- Enlarge the font of the exam instructions and materials.
- Promote more tips on how to navigate the website, such as pointing out that when one of the boxes for a second text has not been filled in it will indicate that the student's response is not complete. Create a 'not attempted' tick box.

2.2 Administrators, supervisors and markers

During the survey, administrators, supervisors and markers were asked to comment on any specific difficulties they encountered or any improvements they would like to see.

Specific difficulties included:
- Login issues.
- Print option feature needed.
- Ability to add comments:
  - Formative assessment difficult as highlighting and commenting throughout the exam papers was not optimal
  - No ability to add comments on NCEA exam papers
  - Students lack the ability to read any comments.
- Saving marking progress:
  - Need ability to mark and save progress
  - Inability to compare student responses
  - Removing feature that allows school related users to edit student responses can cause loss of student work.

Suggested improvements included:

"It would be helpful if a save option of progress was automatic. Being able to download students' exams would also be helpful, as practice exams are learning opportunities and currently there does not appear to be a simple and streamlined way."

"A digital platform is great for benchmark exams but it needs to be suitable for formative feedback meaning teachers need to be able to highlight and comment on the exam paper so that students can see it. Also, students need to be able to get back their paper, so that they can use it for study purposes."

2.3   What went well

The survey also asked administrators, supervisors and markers about anything else they found useful or helpful that had not already been mentioned. Here are some of their responses:

Administrators
> *The training modules on Pūtake were excellent and made things simple. You need to add one for updating supervisor and markers details and generation of new passwords.*
> *I appreciated having multiple opportunities to run through the ECM digital training - it took 3-4 runs through the materials to feel confident. Thank you for making it available in multiple forms (ie last year's training day, webinar, videos, booklet).*

Supervisors
> *The preparation was very good. Main difficulties were within the school wifi on the day - gave us the chance to remedy it before the NCEA exams.*
> *Being able to log on beforehand and practise was helpful.*
> *As a supervisor, it was much easier to supervise than getting them to practise on something like Google Classroom, where it was much harder to monitor … (copy and pasting from another doc etc). The NZQA portal felt much more secure in terms of authenticity.*

Markers
> *I was pleased to get all the English marking schedules in one document. This made it easier than having to get the administrator to send me one for every exam I was marking.*
> *The comment tool and overall grade tool were easy to use.*
> *Not having to decipher handwriting made the marking process faster and easier!*

3.   Lessons learned from these digital practice exams

- Improve collaboration on exam editing by having a designated editor for digital practice exams, ideally located onsite at NZQA for at least two days per week. Start work on developing user guides earlier to ensure an up to date quality product.
- Provide clearer information in the Administrator Guide about password resetting, including the "forgotten password" process and the steps to take when the forgotten password process is not working.
- Consider schools' request to have access to NZQA's contact centre for support at start of the school-working day.
- Ensure instructions are clear in all collateral material about how to preview exams (such as the Administrator Guide and the Summary 1-pagers) and highlight the importance of the DPE admin following the step-by-step process.
- Good preparation and support enabled one school to run digital practice exams successfully from offshore (Niue), providing evidence that digital exams can be run internationally.
- Update all collateral to include the correct URLs for student access to the assessment or access by administration/supervision/marking users.
- Mitigate pressure caused by late entries by considering a different entries process for 2022, no longer relying on schools' intentions for end of year digital entries (e.g. Principal's Nominees could have a separate SMS tick box to indicate entries for digital practice exams).
- Consider the impact on schools and NZQA if in the future digital practice exams need to be run remotely (e.g. in event of local natural disaster, further COVID-19 lockdowns).
- Consider developing tips for schools on the risks around sharing login information and how to better manage practice exam security issues.
- Include detailed information in the Marker and Administrator Guides about what markers need to do to extract or highlight students' responses.
- Improve school users' experience by outlining how the different school digital practice exam roles

(administrator, supervisor, marker) interact.

- Use of NZQA's training videos published on Pūtake (Learner Management System) familiarised users with the exam system and provided a better and more confident experience for participants.
- Improve the design and location of the website banner for students accessing digital practice exams, to differentiate it from other NZQA services.