

SPANZ 2019: address by Dr Karen Poutasi, Chief Executive of NZQA

Ngā mihi nui kia koutou katoa

Ko Karen Poutasi ahau

Ko au te po whakahaere o te Mana Tohu Mātauranga o te Aotearoa

nō reira, tenā koutou, tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou katoa.

Before I start, I'd like to take this opportunity to thank Mike for all his work. As president, it's been a real pleasure working with you and equally I'd like to congratulate Deidre and say how much NZQA looks forward to working with you too. It's a really important relationship for us.

What I would like to do is equally extend that appreciation to all SPANZ members. Thank you for the work you do and have done with NZQA in the past year, and in particular to those of you who have had teachers, Principal Nominees, students and exam centre managers engaged in the 2018 Digital Trials & Pilots and co-design activities for the new digital assessment platform.

Leading the Way is the theme of your conference and you truly have been leading the way in this regard, we really appreciate this support.

Feedback from the 2018 surveys continued to be excellent, you'll be pleased to know. You may have heard already that 97% of students who responded "overall found completing this exam a positive experience". We survey them after each exam, and that's a really high figure. You figure into making that successful.

Let us just therefore get some feedback from the ECMs and students...

[\(video of ECM and students\)](#)

...so there we go, from those really at the coal face.

You won't necessarily be able to see that in detail but it's a slide about our [past present and future](#) that I am going to talk to.

After four years of Trials and Pilots, NZQA is now moving to our new assessment platform and will roll that out over the next couple of years.

In 2019 it will be a fully functional system from a student and school perspective, and in 2020 we will be finishing the work on some of the back end NZQA processes, and more visibly for schools, looking how the assistive technologies for Special Assessment Conditions can be used with the platform.

As you probably know, we are offering 35 digital exams this year – the text-based subjects.

We want all students in all schools to be able to go online for their exams when they are ready. And a big part of readiness from the student's perspective is whether they have been learning online. Here's what some teachers have told us about their experience of teaching supported by digital technologies...

[\(video of teachers discussing digital teaching and learning\)](#)

...so again, just a few clips of experience and we welcome that feedback. And indeed apropos feedback, our School Relationship Managers have been working closely with their schools since the Managing National Assessment seminars in February and March of this year. We've asked schools about their confidence levels and readiness to participate in the 2019 exams, and if they are ready, what exams they are considering.

With 385 responses so far, we've been developing a good picture nationally and are currently drilling into the data school by school.

Here's a snapshot of what we have found so far:

- (Over 200 schools have indicated they are considering students entering one or more digital exams this year
- Around 75% of respondents agreed that their Board of Trustees believe that digital learning & assessment is a priority for their students
- Nearly 90% of responding senior leadership teams agree that they promote digital learning and assessment
- Nearly all responding schools deliver some or all of their curriculum and assessments digitally
- Just over 80 % of respondents say their students value digital learning & assessment.

These are high figures, but for us it's a matter of hearing what you're saying. We've interpreted a fair bit of this feedback as: we think you are saying that digital exams are the right way to go, that they aligns with your approaches to teaching and learning, and that NZQA and schools are "on the way" to getting it right, but that there is more work to do for us as agencies to support schools – particularly where there are challenges to participation.

In this regard, NZQA is continuing to work with – particularly the Ministry and Network for Learning, but other colleague agencies as well - on addressing those challenges where they fall within their particular remit. And these organisations are walking with us and with you as the scale of NCEA Online increases to have more schools and more students participating, and of course more subjects. Of the 17 days of exams in November and December this year, only two don't not have a digital exam. So we're slowly, slowly building up our repertoire of online exams.

So, that's lots of information about today and the near future. We're also looking at longer-term possibilities and opportunities where digital technologies can enrich assessment, offer more authentic tasks, and improve validity and reliability as demands of the assessment and credentialing system continue to evolve. That's especially important as we see the emerging changes from the NCEA Review and work with the Ministry on what will be an extensive review of the Achievement Standards.

Some of you will recall the 2014 timeframe when NZQA set itself a goal to co-design with the sector and make exams available online. We're well on that journey and we also want to, not pause but accelerate in a way, because this is the time to carve out a space, with you, to start the next wave of innovation. Again, leading the way. We know that the lead time to implement high quality innovation in a way that is helpful for students, schools, and their teachers can be several years.

We are using an approach that we're calling Innovation Trials, where we take an idea, prototype it, work with a small group of potential users, develop it further and try it out with other users - and most of this will happen outside the exam cycle, which is how it differs from the 2015 – 2018 Trials and Pilots. When any idea well-formed, and it works, then we will bring into the quality assurance and planning for scaling and implementation.

So that's juts a little bit of Trials and Pilots, where we are now working on a new platform and where we're into the reality of online exams and how we evolve them forward.

Equity is absolutely key and is a bottom line motivator for many of the innovations we are exploring. As part of our extensive co-design work, and taking learning from our Digital Only Level 1 Science Trial last year – and thank you to those who had students participating in that. We've worked quite closely with small groups of Māori and Pasifika students to more

deeply understand their assessment experience and what they think would better enable them to show what they know and can do.

As a result of that we've got several areas that we're looking in greater depth at:

In Biology Level 3 students may experience visually richer resources that help them address the question. One example being, if you could rotate an image of a moa skull, students would be able to tap into more insights into its habitat and diet and substantiate those with what they see

In Biology Level 1, students might be able to experience an adaptive assessment which covers the journey of a microbe through the gut and the different conditions impacting that journey. That's actually being prototyped with a game designer, to see how interesting we could make that.

This is just to give you a bit of insight to the thinking that we're doing, and both those ideas were developed by our Pasifika STEM Ambassadors who are Year 2 Health Science university students. So they're able to reflect back on their experience and help us look at how it could be different.

In Te Reo Rangatira Level 1, students may be able to hear the question read out aloud as well as being able to read it themselves. That seems a no-brainer.

In foreign language subjects, students may have more control over the playing of the audio files for the listening standard.

In Mathematics, which I know is dear to a large number of your hearts, we know from our experience in 2015 with the e-MCAT that the current technologies are not yet ready for a high-quality mathematics digital assessment – and again, this is why we're using the text-based subjects to date. We are working with a small group of teachers to look at how tools like Desmos might be able to work as part of the solution, and how we could ask our questions differently to reduce the gap between what the technology can support and a valid and authentic maths assessment.

Other innovation work we are doing is to look at the opportunity to reduce the need for students whose school is not currently an exam centre having to travel to sit their exams. So this is, in a way, being a little bit more thoughtful about what students experience.

Our Māori & Pasifika students have told us the environment in which they sit their exams can make them feel welcome, safe and more confident, and our early look at the data suggests that students are more likely to be absent if they have to travel to an exam centre. Some have suggested that sitting an exam on their marae in the whare with photos of their tīpuna around them would feel about right. I'm sure that will resonate with you as much as it resonated with us. We are looking at what we can do differently in that space.

Finally, NZQA continues to be excited and challenged by the opportunities emerging in the world of teaching, learning and assessment and the role of digital technologies to support that, and I reiterate our commitment to work with you, to learn from you and to support you on this journey. The whakataukī that I quite like in that regard is: He waka eke noa / We're all in this together, and I thank you again for this.

The last words belong to the students...

[\(video of students discussing change\)](#)

Out of the mouths of babes, as it were. Whenever I get apprehensive, I rely on a few little clips like that to bring us back into the world that our students are living in at the moment.

We have to step forward with care, but we certainly have to step forward. This is NZQA's mantra: Qualify for the Future World: Kia noho takatū ki tō āmua ao, and we think that is really important for us all, as we look for our contribution to the future.

No reira, tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou, tēnā koutoa katoa.