

15 October 2018

NCEA Ministerial Advisory Group
Ministry of Education
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Wellington
New Zealand

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Dear NCEA Ministerial Advisory Group members

Re: NCEA – Have Your Say

I am writing to you in regard to the NCEA – Have Your Say consultation to respond to the six 'big opportunities' the paper puts forward regarding potential changes to NCEA.

Business NZ is encouraged by the Government's focus on seeking to address issues with NCEA that has resulted in reduced educational outcomes and opportunities for young people, and the subsequent erosion of employer confidence in the credibility and currency of the NCEA qualification. We strongly support the principles underpinning the Big Opportunities document, notably, that NCEA needs to make space for the powerful learning needed for an individual's success in further study, work and life in the community.

Business NZ looks forward to working constructively with the Ministry of Education as a member of the Stakeholder Reference Group. This submission focuses on providing feedback to the focus questions and some general comments in regards to the themes identified in the Big Opportunities document.

Background and context

The importance of a high quality education system to provide opportunities to young people, and supply the business community with the skills and talents necessary to grow and prosper cannot be understated.

A recent survey of New Zealand Chief Executives identified 22.6% were concerned about the ability to recruit the necessary skills and talent to ensure their companies remain internationally competitive. While companies struggle to attract talented young people to their businesses, Statistics New Zealand data highlights one in eight New Zealanders aged between 15 and 24 are not in employment, education or training. In a tight employment market, much more can be done to ensure that young people are able to successfully transition in to the workforce.

The big opportunity presented by the NCEA Review is to more closely connect the world of work and the world of education through increased links between industry and the

schooling sector. In turn, this will assist in restoring business confidence in the NCEA qualification as a reflection that a young person has some technical skills and competencies needed for the workplace or further training, and also the intrinsic employability skills (communication, teamwork, positive attitude, resilience, problem solving) that will enable them to confidently navigate employment or education.

Questions for Submitters

The Big Opportunities paper outlines six concepts for improving NCEA. Given the strawman nature of the consultation document, BusinessNZ comments are limited to the key concepts and questions identified. A more detailed submission will be provided on specific recommendations in the next round of consultation. This paper has been consulted on with BusinessNZ members.

Focus Questions

What is the purpose of NCEA?

The purpose of NCEA is to provide currency and credibility as a qualification that reflects a young person has foundation skills that will enable them to succeed in employment, education or training.

What are our expectations for graduates with an NCEA?

Young people have literacy and numeracy levels that enable them to undertake further learning and employability skills (such as communication, problem solving, team work, self-management, resilience and a positive attitude), and the confidence in their developed skills to navigate successfully to employment or further education or training.

Big Opportunity 1: Creating space at NCEA Level 1 for powerful learning

Rebuild Level 1 as a 40 credit qualification – 20 for literacy and numeracy and 20 for a project.

BusinessNZ supports the opportunity to focus on skills development and requisite literacy and numeracy that focuses on a rich learning experience rather than an assessment or credit driven programme. A coherent package of learning, which is meaningful for a young person and relatable to their own education or employment pathway will better develop foundation skills. This approach will also assist employers to have confidence that NCEA Level 1 graduates have a foundation of skills that prepares them for further learning in the workplace.

What might projects look like?

Projects that are undertaken in the workplace, or enable young people to have a real world experience that lifts core employability skills and some technical skill acquirement will support young people to have a greater understanding of the skills necessary for the workforce. As the NCEA document notes, 20% of school leavers do not obtain NCEA Level 1 – it is critical for these young people to have foundation skills to take in to

the workplace given the broad range of experiences and training opportunities available in employment when tertiary education options are limited.

What would need to change to make this work for you?

BusinessNZ strongly supports projects being co-designed with industry to ensure relevance to the skill needs of New Zealand businesses, and to give young people a realistic experience and understanding of the dynamics of being in the workforce.

School leaders would need to include positive relationships with local businesses within their leadership mandate. While outside the scope of the NCEA review, BusinessNZ will be supporting this approach within the context of the Tomorrow's Schools Review.

Projects that are benchmarked to an industry standard will give greater confidence in the relevance of the skills obtained through NCEA. This approach can assist with managing consistency and moderation and encourages schools to work across the education system to ensure the quality of an industry relevant learning experience. BusinessNZ would anticipate that this will go some way to increasing the readiness of young people to confidently enter the workforce.

How much specialisation should NCEA encourage at Year 11?

Given the inherent flexibility of the education system, it is recommended that for those young people that are likely to leave school as soon as able (age 16), the project design is utilised to provide a skill base for transition in to the workforce, supported through customised learning and connection to potential employment and training opportunities.

NCEA level 1 should not reduce opportunities for young people to be able to explore different education and employment pathways, and the implementation of NCEA level 1 with a degree of specialisation, while not cutting off potential subject opportunities at levels 2 and 3 will need to be carefully considered.

Big Opportunity 2: Strengthening literacy and numeracy

Benchmark literacy and numeracy at the level needed for success in further learning and employment.

BusinessNZ is strongly supportive of increased emphasis on improving literacy and numeracy skills. The link between literacy and numeracy and workforce productivity has been well established by the OECD across a range of international indicators. High levels of literacy and numeracy in the workforce, and the associated attributes such as willingness and ability to learn are critical to lifting the productivity of the New Zealand economy and meeting the challenges of the changing nature of the workforce in the future.

Should literacy and numeracy requirements get tougher for each level of NCEA?

Yes. If benchmarking of literacy and numeracy is adopted, the minimum standard would be expected to give young people the ability and opportunity to undertake

further learning. Given the importance of literacy and numeracy attainment, and in the interest of keeping young people engaged and challenged in school, the method and context of developing literacy and numeracy skills should be relatable to real world situations.

What should we include when we assess literacy and numeracy (e.g., digital literacy)?

Core literacy and numeracy will provide the foundation for other literacies such as digital. Key literacy skills should be embedded as foundation skills for every learner.

Big Opportunity 3: Ensuring NCEA Levels 2 and 3 support good connections beyond schooling

Introduce pathways opportunities to NCEA Levels 2 and 3, giving every young person access to learning relevant to their pathway (e.g from a community action project, work placement, research essay or an advanced tertiary course).

BusinessNZ strongly supports changes to NCEA that will enable young people to gain a greater understanding of industry opportunities and the dynamics of the workplace, which pathway opportunities have the potential to provide. Analysis of other pathway opportunities (Vocational Pathways, Gateway, STAR, Trade Academies, 3+2) and the persistently low transition rates to related employment and training pathways indicates that further work will be needed to ensure that both the learning is relevant and engaging for young people, and also reflective of the key skills, attributes and behaviours sought by business and industry. With mixed employment outcomes for tertiary education graduates, further work is necessary to ensure that the education system in general can be more dynamic and responsive to the changing needs of industries and businesses.

What might different pathways opportunities be?

The different pathways should enable young people to explore and gain exposure to different industries, and understand the required skills, abilities and opportunities available in those industries. Anchoring pathways in the real world context of the business environment will improve the relevance, currency and application of skills attained through pathway opportunities. Pathway opportunities could also be aligned and integrated with strengthening careers advice in schools.

Harnessing relevant local pathways opportunities will necessitate school leaders proactively building strong relationships with local businesses in order to be able to identify learning opportunities within their local communities. Facilitating business and industry connections across the region could also be undertaken through collaborative schooling arrangements where there may not be critical mass in a single school to support a particular pathway.

Should they be compulsory?

Given that the flexibility of NCEA is proposed to be retained, BusinessNZ would support the compulsory completion of a pathway, pending that it does not reduce opportunities for young people through inadvertent streaming of students.

How can we make sure every learner gets access to great, personalised pathways opportunities?

BusinessNZ supports schools taking innovative approaches to providing pathway opportunities for young people. In practice, this could be undertaken by:

- Partnering with businesses to provide exposure and experience opportunities across a range of work areas, with the emphasis of work experience type projects being on the development of key employability skills as well as technical skills.
- Proactively working across the education network (both in the compulsory schooling sector and across the tertiary education and training sectors) to provide learning opportunities that individual schools may not have the capacity or capability to deliver.
- Ensure that pathways are clearly articulated in terms of expectations (for example, behaviour in the workplace if undertaking a work placement), goals and outcomes to ensure that young people maintain motivated to succeed, and understand what success can look like.

Big Opportunity 4: Making it easier for teachers, schools, and kura to refocus on learning

Shift culture from achieving as many credits as possible to encouraging quality teaching and learning.

BusinessNZ supports the refocus of NCEA on to ensuring a coherent and relevant learning programme, rather than being driven by credit collections.

How could we support teachers and school leaders to feel empowered and supported to practise this way?

BusinessNZ strongly supports greater involvement by the business community in supporting teachers and school leaders to understand the opportunities and challenges in their industries and to work collaboratively on ensuring that the NCEA learning programme is connected to real world relevance.

Drawing on the skills and expertise of local business leaders supports the professional development of teachers to stay connected and up to date on industry developments and how the future of work is evolving, to inform reflection on their teaching practice and learning programme design in terms of preparedness of young people to be able to successfully navigate further education or training.

Should all courses be quality assured?

The development process for standards and qualifications can be onerous and overly compliant. With well-defined learning outcomes, and utilising industry standards as benchmarks of skills and learning, quality assurance can be managed through fit for purpose mechanisms that sit alongside the NZQA quality assurance framework. BusinessNZ anticipates this would create room for innovation and collaboration between school and business leaders, and also ensure that schools can be more responsive to the changing nature of work rather than being bound by lengthy quality approval processes.

How could we help the wider community feel more comfortable getting involved with senior secondary education?

Local businesses can find it challenging to engage with schools and BusinessNZ considers that school leaders should include positive relationships with local businesses as a core part of their mandate. Many businesses currently partner with their local schools, either in the form of sponsorship, facilitating work visits and placements, taking part in careers days and providing employment and training opportunities for young people. There needs to be greater focus on ensuring that businesses are recognised as a key stakeholder in the community, and greater efforts made to foster relationships at every level of a school to generate opportunities for young people.

Big Opportunity 5: Ensuring the Record of Achievement tells us about learners' capabilities

Enhance the Record of Achievement with better summary information and space for learners to detail achievements outside of NCEA.

BusinessNZ strongly supports better articulation of the skills, achievements and attributes of a young person, particularly in regards to enabling employers to understand the skills and levels that can be brought in to the workforce, and particularly whether young people have completed the necessary core requirements for particular jobs (such as holding a drivers licence, or regulatory compliance programmes such as Site Safe).

How should NZQA and learner-made content be balanced?

There is space for greater innovation in considering how to showcase a young person's skills and ability. The existing Record of Achievement is a static document, and does not give insights in to the level of skill attainment, or the broader skill sets that may be developed through extra-curricular activities.

What could help the Record of Achievement communicate what learners can do?

BusinessNZ considers that new innovations, such as digital portfolios and platforms that showcase a young person's achievements and capture endorsements and attestations of skill levels and personal attributes will be more relevant for the future of work than a static academic transcript.

Big Opportunity 6: Dismantling barriers to NCEA

Make NCEA more equitable, starting with making it easier for learners to access Special Assessment Conditions and removing fees to enrol in NCEA.

BusinessNZ supports access and equity of young people in education.

Appendix One - Background information on BusinessNZ



BusinessNZ is New Zealand's largest business advocacy body, representing:

- Regional business groups [EMA](#), [Business Central](#), [Canterbury Employers' Chamber of Commerce](#), and [Employers Otago Southland](#)
- [Major Companies Group](#) of New Zealand's largest businesses
- [Gold Group](#) of medium sized businesses
- [Affiliated Industries Group](#) of national industry associations
- [ExportNZ](#) representing New Zealand exporting enterprises
- [ManufacturingNZ](#) representing New Zealand manufacturing enterprises
- [Sustainable Business Council](#) of enterprises leading sustainable business practice
- [BusinessNZ Energy Council](#) of enterprises leading sustainable energy production and use
- [Buy NZ Made](#) representing producers, retailers and consumers of New Zealand-made goods

BusinessNZ is able to tap into the views of over 76,000 employers and businesses, ranging from the smallest to the largest and reflecting the make-up of the New Zealand economy.

In addition to advocacy and services for enterprise, BusinessNZ contributes to Government, tripartite working parties and international bodies including the International Labour Organisation ([ILO](#)), the International Organisation of Employers ([IOE](#)) and the Business and Industry Advisory Council ([BIAC](#)) to the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development ([OECD](#)).