

In Confidence

Office of the Minister for Education

Chair, Cabinet Business Committee

NCEA review: Release of discussion document

Proposal

- 1 I seek Cabinet's agreement to release the Ministerial Advisory Group's discussion document on the NCEA review, and to commence public consultation on the Ministerial Advisory Group's proposals. This paper also updates Cabinet on my decision to extend the timeline for the NCEA review, to fully allow for robust and collaborative public engagement on NCEA.

Executive Summary

- 2 New Zealand's National Certificates of Educational Achievement (NCEA) are robust and well recognised qualifications, but can be strengthened further to give all young people access to an equitable, coherent and credible qualification that supports their wellbeing and the pathways they wish to explore.
- 3 As part of the NCEA review, I commissioned a Ministerial Advisory Group (MAG) on NCEA to develop a discussion document on proposals to strengthen NCEA. The discussion document is comprised of three components, which will form the basis for public consultation:
 - 3.1 The Ministry's *Background to the NCEA review*
 - 3.2 *Ministerial Advisory Group's Big Opportunities*
 - 3.3 *Ākonga Māori Commentary.*
- 4 The proposals the MAG has developed are:
 - 4.1 Big Opportunity 1 – Creating space at NCEA Level 1 for powerful learning
 - 4.2 Big Opportunity 2 – Strengthening literacy and numeracy
 - 4.3 Big Opportunity 3 – Ensuring NCEA Levels 2 and 3 support good connections beyond schooling
 - 4.4 Big Opportunity 4 – Making it easier for teachers, schools and kura to refocus on learning
 - 4.5 Big Opportunity 5 – Ensuring the Record of Achievement tells us about learners' capabilities
 - 4.6 Big Opportunity 6 – Dismantling barriers to NCEA.

- 5 I propose to release this discussion document towards the end of May 2018 to begin public consultation on the NCEA review. The public consultation will run from 28 May 2018 to 16 September 2018.
- 6 I will report to Cabinet with the consultation findings in November. I will seek Cabinet approval for proposals resulting from the NCEA review in February 2019, following the public consultation process.
- 7 This is an extension from the original timeline I indicated in December 2017, but reflects the opportunity provided by greater than anticipated public engagement and the success of the collaborative, sector-led process we have used to reach this point.

Background

- 8 On 13 December 2017 [CBC-17-MIN-0066] Cabinet approved the Terms of Reference for the NCEA review. Cabinet agreed that the review will be framed by five key principles: wellbeing, equity, coherence, pathways and credibility.
- 9 Cabinet approved the appointment of the Ministerial Advisory Group (the MAG) on 30 January 2018 [CAB-18-MIN-0011, CBC-17-MIN-0066 and APH-18-SUB-0005 refer].
- 10 The MAG is a group of innovative thinkers that has brought new perspectives on NCEA and challenged traditional thinking on senior secondary education and assessment.

Comment

Review work to date

- 11 I asked the MAG to propose innovative changes to NCEA for public consideration. The MAG has therefore developed a comprehensive Discussion Document, attached as Annex A, which will underpin a public consultation process beginning on 28 May 2018.
- 12 Alongside the work of the MAG, a Reference Group of key sector stakeholders has discussed and refined the key topics and ideas in the discussion document. The Reference Group includes representatives from the key groups who deliver and use NCEA, including teachers, employers, peak bodies, education agencies, tertiary institutes, industry leaders, iwi and wharekura.
- 13 The Ministry has also undertaken initial conversations with my Youth Advisory Group and groups of young people who have experienced NCEA, including Māori youth and Pasifika youth. These conversations have provided valuable insights and have also informed the development of the discussion document.

NCEA review discussion document

- 14 The attached discussion document is comprised of three components:
 - 14.1 The Ministry's *Background to the NCEA review* component: This sets out the background information needed to engage with the review, including a summary of NCEA, analyses of the current state of senior secondary education, and consultation opportunities for the public. Before appointing the MAG five guiding principles were identified by education agencies and the Ministry and were approved by Cabinet. These principles are wellbeing, equity, coherence,

pathways and credibility. I now propose to add inclusion to the second principle. These principles are highlighted in this section of the discussion document

- 14.2 The *Ministerial Advisory Group's Big Opportunities* component: This sets out the MAG's overarching vision for the NCEA review, and identifies their six 'Big Opportunities' - key proposals from the MAG for changing NCEA, on which they recommend we receive specific public feedback through the review.
- 14.3 The MAG's *Ākonga Māori Commentary* component: This explains the NCEA review's operation for Māori in both English- and Māori-medium contexts, in both English and te reo Māori. It is designed for ākonga, whānau, kaiako, hapū and iwi, and discusses how the NCEA review might impact Māori ākonga, and some of the unique consequences of the review (including the Big Opportunities) for Māori medium settings and Māori education.
- 15 I am seeking your agreement to release the discussion document. Because the proposals being tested in the document in the *Ministerial Advisory Group's Big Opportunities* component have been developed by the MAG, I am not seeking Cabinet agreement on the proposals at this stage. I am seeking Cabinet agreement on the *Background to the NCEA review* component.
- 16 The consultation process supported by the discussion document will gather feedback and comments on NCEA in general, including feedback on the MAG's proposals. In addition to the discussion document, the consultation process will be supported by other communications and support material across a range of media, to ensure the content of the discussion document is accessible to every New Zealander.
- 17 Following release of the document, the NCEA review will engage with the public through various means, from social media campaigns to regional events. Workshops, focus groups, and digital channels will be three major avenues. These approaches will be actively employed right through the consultation period, which will conclude on 16 September 2018.
- 18 The feedback gathered during the consultation will inform the proposals I will bring to Cabinet in February 2019.
- 19 I am seeking an extension to the original timeline I indicated to Cabinet in December 2017, where I signalled my intent to provide you with my final recommendations by the end of 2018. This change reflects the opportunity provided by greater than anticipated public engagement with the review, and the success of the innovative, collaborative, and sector-led process I have asked the Ministry of Education to use to reach this point.
- 20 This new timeline will still allow implementation to begin in 2019, and for funding proposals to be submitted as part of Budget 2019. It will also address education sector feedback that the pace of the review needs to be slowed, to ensure proper deliberation of any changes.

Discussion document Proposals

- 21 The document encapsulates the MAG's vision for NCEA, of making "space for the powerful learning needed for success in further study, work and life in the community".¹

¹ NCEA Review Discussion Document: Big Opportunities, page 8.

- 22 The MAG has developed six 'Big Opportunities' for NCEA, alongside a proposed approach to implementation. These proposals are ambitious and innovative, and I want to use these to challenge New Zealanders to think about how we can strengthen NCEA.

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

- 23 The MAG proposes to restructure Level 1 NCEA from an 80 credit qualification to a 40 credit qualification, which would be made up of 20 literacy and numeracy credits and 20 credits of project-based assessment. The MAG suggest that the project would ideally be driven by learners' passions, so it could be collaborative, community-based, subject-based, or based on an extracurricular interest.
- 24 The integrity of the NCEA level 1 qualification would be maintained, as deep and broad learning programmes would continue to be taught but with less pressure from assessment driving teaching and learning programmes.

Big Opportunity 2- Strengthening literacy and numeracy in Level 1

- 25 Big Opportunity 2 proposes to introduce strengthened expectations for literacy and numeracy at NCEA Level 1, based on the literacy and numeracy skills and competencies required for success in further education, work and life.
- 26 Students would continue to complete 20 credits of literacy and numeracy as a part of their 40 credit level 1 qualification, but the ways in which this literacy and numeracy is assessed would be strengthened.

Big Opportunity 3- Ensuring NCEA Levels 2 and 3 build good connections beyond schooling

- 27 The MAG propose to require that at least 20 credits of the 60 credits in each of NCEA Levels 2 and 3 would be dedicated to pathways opportunities, which give young people access to learning relevant to the pathways they want to pursue.
- 28 These opportunities would be pursued through partnerships both inside and outside schooling, such as research projects, community projects, work experience, enterprise, and higher level study, which enable rich learning to be accessed.
- 29 The MAG consider that young people's learning outside school, through extracurricular activities, community work or employment, is often undervalued by NCEA. They have concluded that levels 2 and 3 need a sharper focus on encouraging these learner-driven experiences, and better connecting them to a learner's NCEA and wider course of study.

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

- 30 Big Opportunity 4 is to shift the culture in our education system from achieving as many credits as possible in NCEA, to encouraging quality teaching and learning, by adjusting accountability and quality assurance settings (such as moderation and Education Review Office (ERO) reviews), and providing professional learning and development opportunities.
- 31 NCEA was originally envisioned as a system to recognise a range of high quality, coherent courses drawn from across the curriculum. The MAG has identified that shifts in resourcing and support, moderation, quality assurance and accountability could help

schools and kura deliver on this vision. This would strengthen teaching practice while reducing workload and stress

- 32 The MAG has identified that a range of different levers could help make these changes, including:
- 32.1 Using Professional Learning and Development, resources and tools to encourage practice shifts in schools and kura
 - 32.2 Encouraging Communities of Learning | Kāhui Ako to replace achievement objectives like “X% of learners will achieve NCEA Level 2” with objectives relating to coherence and rich learning, or to transitions
 - 32.3 Changing reporting or accountability requirements on schools, such as through annual reporting, ERO reports, or National Education Learning Priorities (NELPs).

Big Opportunity 5- Ensuring the Record of Achievement tells us about learners’ capabilities

- 33 Big Opportunity 5 proposes to update the NCEA qualifications’ Record of Achievement to include better summary information, to allow spaces for learners to add extracurricular information, and to describe the particular capabilities and attitudes that have developed.
- 34 The Record of Achievement currently records a learner’s NCEA results but doesn’t give a full picture of the wide range of things they’ve learned. To signal the value of this learning, much of which doesn’t result in credits, the MAG considers that we need a Record of Achievement that acknowledges and values learning across learners’ lives. This includes through employment, community work, extracurricular activities, and cultural groups. This would help learners make better pathway and career decisions, and provide a basis for communicating their achievements to parents and whānau, employers, tertiary organisations and their community.

Big Opportunity 6- Dismantling barriers to NCEA

- 35 The MAG proposes to make it easier for all learners to access NCEA, by improving access to Special Assessment Conditions (SAC)², removing fees for NCEA and improving curriculum supports in areas of need, so that there is no financial or resourcing barrier to accessing the qualification. This Big Opportunity is designed to be inclusive, and offer opportunities for New Zealanders to signal the barriers they experience or perceive to all learners accessing NCEA.
- 36 While designed to provide all learners with equitable access to assessments, there are still barriers for some learners in getting an SAC entitlement. While recent changes have made it easier to access SAC, there are still some barriers to access remaining for some learners.
- 37 The MAG proposes to:
- 37.1 Ensure the application process is readily understandable and evidence requirements are clear.

2 Special Assessment Conditions provide learners with learning support needs with modifications to assessment tasks, such as access to a reader-writer, or access to examination papers in braille.

- 37.2 Introduce a process to allow accredited school leaders to determine learners' SAC eligibility.
- 37.3 Extend supports such as those used for SAC to learners who speak English as a second language, where English language skills are not meant to be part of the assessment.
- 38 Each domestic NCEA student is charged \$76.70 per year to have their NCEA results recorded and to receive certificates, with an additional charge of \$30 for each Scholarship Award entry. Non-payment of fees can bar learners' progress to further study or employment as NCEA credits can be excluded from their Record of Achievement.
- 39 Removing fees from NCEA would end the issue of learners not receiving their NCEA because they weren't able to pay fees, and could improve access to Scholarship for learners in low decile schools.
- 40 The MAG also propose reviewing areas where teachers may have insufficient access to quality curriculum supports, such as in some Wāhanga Ako for Māori medium education, and identifying opportunities to develop relevant resources.

Approach to consultation on the NCEA Review

- 41 I seek your approval to release the discussion document on 28 May 2018 to begin robust public consultation on the NCEA review. I also seek your approval to make minor editorial changes to the discussion document, before it is publicly released.
- 42 The Ministry of Education will undertake a comprehensive, multi-channel consultation that gives all New Zealanders an opportunity to contribute. This will enable us to gather meaningful feedback and comments on the proposals for NCEA, and understand the appetite for change.
- 43 Stakeholders will be able to offer their perspectives through workshops, 'Have your say' surveys, focus groups, digital channels and social media, and community-led engagement across the country. The Ministry will also undertake intensive consultation with the education sector, children and young people, parents and whānau, teachers and educators, tertiary providers, industry and employers through formal meetings that give key stakeholder bodies an opportunity for structured input. New Zealanders will also be encouraged to make written submissions.
- 44 A team of Regional Champions, made up of will lead the regional conversations. The Regional Champions will be the public face of the review at a regional level, while providing the link between the review and local organisations and networks
- 45 In addition, there will be tailored engagement with Māori young people in Māori medium and English medium education, Pasifika young people, young people with additional learning needs, Rainbow youth, young people in Youth Justice facilities, young people studying through Te Aho o te Kura Pounamu | The Correspondence School, young people Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET), and young people who have not attained NCEA. This engagement will ensure that we capture the experiences and feedback of all learners who engage with NCEA.

- 46 The consultation process on the NCEA Review will ensure that Pasifika values are embedded in our consultation approach.
- 47 Insights will also be drawn from reviews being undertaken as part of my Education Portfolio Work Programme, including the Education Summits. Similarly, I expect that engagement on the NCEA Review will provide insights for other aspects of my Education Portfolio Work Programme, which may inform other programmes such as the Education Workforce Strategy and work to support a focus on progress across the curricula.

Risks

- 48 The MAG's proposals represent significant and challenging change for the education sector, including for teachers, kaiako and providers. I have asked the Ministry of Education to provide advice on these proposals, in consultation with the New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA), the Tertiary Education Commission (TEC) and the Education Review Office (ERO).
- 49 I am aware that any suggestions of changes to NCEA, and discussion of rationale for changes, may be seen as implying that NCEA is an ineffective or poor qualification. Furthermore, stakeholders may see the proposals contained in the discussion document as likely to reduce the credibility and coherence of NCEA, and to undermine confidence in the qualification. However, I am confident that New Zealanders are able to have a robust discussion about the purpose and design of NCEA, including ways to strengthen the qualification, without undermining it.
- 50 There is a risk that the education sector and the public experience consultation fatigue due to the volume of consultation occurring this year. This is particularly likely for the voices that we want to ensure we hear, including Māori stakeholders, Pasifika stakeholders and stakeholders with additional learning support needs. This will be mitigated by careful planning and coordination, to ensure we are able to share insights from across my work programme.

Consultation

- 51 The discussion document has been approved for release by the MAG. It has been tested with the NCEA Review Reference Group and with a steering group of relevant government agencies, including the Ministry of Education, NZQA, TEC and ERO.
- 52 NZQA, TEC, ERO Te Puni Kōkiri, the Ministry of Pacific Peoples, the Ministry for Women, the Ministry of Social Development, the Ministry of Youth Development the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment, Oranga Tamariki, the Department of Corrections, the Department of Internal Affairs, the Treasury, the Office of Disability issues, State Services Commission and the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet were consulted on the Cabinet paper.

Next steps

- 53 I will release an independent report summarising the outcomes of the public consultation in November 2018.
- 54 I will seek approval from Cabinet for proposals resulting from the NCEA review in February 2019.

- 55 Following Cabinet approval, the Ministry of Education will implement changes to NCEA. There is likely to be a significant period needed for work with the education sector, employers, young people and relevant communities to ensure the changes are successfully implemented and widely supported. In some cases, further consultation may be required. I will signal any proposals likely to require further consultation when I seek Cabinet's agreement in February 2019.

Financial Implications

- 56 No additional funding is required to support the release of the discussion document and the consultation process.
- 57 Development and delivery of the proposals contained in the discussion document is likely to have fiscal implications. It is not possible to estimate these until more detailed work has been done, following public consultation. I will provide detailed advice about any financial implications when I seek Cabinet agreement to any changes. If required, I will seek additional funding through Budget 2019.

Human Rights

- 58 The Discussion Document is consistent with the New Zealand Bill of Rights Act 1990 and the Human Rights Act 1993.
- 59 The consultation process on the NCEA review will ensure engagement with a diverse range of children and young people, whānau and communities, education providers, tertiary providers, and employers, to ensure that all people who experience and use NCEA will have an opportunity to provide feedback and comment on the proposals for NCEA.

Treaty of Waitangi obligations

- 60 This paper is consistent with Te Tiriti o Waitangi principles and obligations.
- 61 The consultation process on the NCEA Review will ensure that kaupapa Māori and tikanga Māori are recognised and embedded in our approach to consultation. Consultation will ensure that Māori learners in English medium and Māori medium education, whānau and communities, kaiako, leaders and education providers, and iwi and hapū are able to share their insights and experiences with NCEA and provide feedback on the proposals for NCEA.
- 62 The Ministry has had initial conversations with rangatahi Māori who have experienced NCEA, and with Māori medium educators. These conversations have provided valuable insights into the experiences of Māori young people with NCEA.

Legislative Implications

- 63 The proposals in the Discussion Document may have legislative implications. Further work will be carried out on these implications during the policy development stage. I will provide Cabinet with an analysis of any legislative implications when my proposals for NCEA are finalised.

Regulatory Impact Analysis

64 The proposals in the discussion document may have regulatory implications. Further work will be carried out on these implications during the policy development stage. I will provide Cabinet with an analysis of any regulatory implications when my recommendations for NCEA are finalised, including any required regulatory impact analysis.

Gender Implications

65 The discussion document has no gender implications. Consultation on the NCEA Review will focus on getting a wide range of perspectives, including Rainbow Youth and young people with diverse gender and sexuality identities.

Disability Perspective

66 The discussion document is consistent with the New Zealand Disability Strategy 2016-2026. The proposals have considered in particular how NCEA acts as a barrier to young people with learning support needs. We wish to hear what other barriers NCEA presents for children and young people with learning support needs.

67 The consultation process for the NCEA review will actively seek the views of children and young people with learning support needs, their whānau and communities, and their teachers, kaiako, providers and support staff, so that they can provide their experiences with NCEA and comment on the proposals.

Publicity

68 I intend to proactively release this Cabinet paper and other key documents relating to the development of the Discussion Document. Any information which may need to be withheld will be done so in line with the provisions of the Official Information Act 1982.

Recommendations

69 The Minister for Education recommends that the Committee:

69.1 **approve** the release of the three components of the NCEA review discussion document

69.2 **agree** to delegate to the Minister of the Education the power to make editorial changes and enhancements to the discussion document

69.3 **note** the discussion document will underpin public consultation on NCEA, which will inform my decisions on changes to NCEA

69.4 **note** I intend to submit my proposals for NCEA to Cabinet in February 2019.

Authorised for lodgement

Hon Chris Hipkins

Minister for Education