National Council of Women of New Zealand
Te Kaunihera Wahine o Aotearoa

14 September 2018   S18.35

Submission to the Ministry of Education
on the NCEA Review

Introduction

0.1.   The National Council of Women of New Zealand, Te Kaunihera Wahine o Aotearoa (NCWNZ) is an umbrella group representing 200 organisations affiliated at either national level or to one of our 15 branches. In addition, about 450 people are individual members. Collectively our reach is over 450,000 with many of our membership organisations representing all genders. NCWNZ's vision is a gender equal New Zealand and research shows we will be better off socially and economically if we are gender equal. Through research, discussion and action, NCWNZ in partnership with others, seeks to realise its vision of gender equality because it is a basic human right. This submission has been prepared by the NCWNZ Education Standing Committee, after consultation with the membership of NCWNZ.

0.2.   NCWNZ welcomes the opportunity to contribute to this review of NCEA. As an introduction to the views of most members, we offer this underlying principle as articulated by one respondant: "Education is the gateway to an equitable society".

Comments on the 6 Big Opportunities

1.   Creating space at NCEA Level 1 for powerful learning

1.1.   There was general support for keeping a focus on literacy and numeracy, and this was seen as very important to our education system. There was also general support for less assessment overall, in order to focus on learning and teaching.

1.2.   Many members advocated for keeping the range of subjects studied at Level 1 broad, rather than too specialised and in-depth.

1.3.   There were varied opinions on the subject of the balance between internal and external assessments. For example some members believed that Level 1 should be totally internally assessed with exams introduced for Levels 2 and 3, and others thought that external assessment was necessary at Level 1.

1.4.   There was wide support for projects, with many members seeing them as a flexible way of catering to different types of learners, and enable meaningful and relevant learning connected with learners'

interests. However there was an equally wide range of questions and concerns about the practical implementation of projects. For example, some concerns were:

- Teacher workload associated with projects.

- The need for well-designed support systems.

- The breadth of subjects that would or could be integrated into projects, and the potential for 'missing out' subjects that are not currently popular. This is of particular concern to NCWNZ, as without sensitive guidance, the current gender segregation seen in subject enrolments could be exacerbated.

- How it could be ensured that the basic knowledge for particular subjects would be covered in order to progress to Level 2 (Chemistry was given as one example).

- The suitability of the project approach for those learners who did better under a structured teaching approach.

- The balance of the project credits to other subject-based credits (some members would prefer 60 credits – literacy 20, numeracy 20, other subjects 20 – and no project).

- The difficulties of assessing (from a teacher's perspective) and comparing (from an employer's perspective) a wide range of projects.

2.   Strengthening literacy and numeracy

2.1.   There was an overall theme of the importance of a focus on numeracy and literacy, and good teaching in these areas. Clarification of expectations was generally viewed positively.

2.2.   Digital literacy was generally seen as important for a modern education system, although there were a variety of opinions on how that should be taught or integrated, as well as a number of concerns. Some points were:

- The cost and availability of technology is variable and reflects the inequality in our society. An increased emphasis on digital literacy without a supporting policy for access to technology could widen the inequality gap.

- While some members thought that digital literacy should be explicitly taught, others advocated for an integrated approach where such literacy was taught through use in other subjects and the proposed project.

- Concerns were expressed around safety and use of digital technology, for example addiction to online games, access to pornography, and cyberbullying. These issues must be addressed alongside any focus on digital literacy.

2.3.   The concern from members about cyberbullying is particular pertinent given the recent recommendations from the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) Committee, following the eighth periodic report on New Zealand. Although the

final Concluding Observations are not yet available, the Advance Unedited Version of 20 July (CEDAW/C/NZL/CO/8) recommends that the New Zealand government:

> *24 (a) Systematically collect data on harmful practices, including cyberbullying targeting teenage girls, and to implement measures, such as awareness campaigns in schools, to prevent such practices.*[1]

3.   Ensuring NCEA Levels 2 and 3 support good connections beyond schooling

3.1.   The proposals for pathways opportunities were generally received favourably by NCWNZ members. They pointed out that many of these programmes already exist - for example STAR programmes, Trades academies, Pathways programmes – and these are generally seen as successful. There is occasionally some stigma attached to these programmes, however if they were more of a mainstream option, this might be reduced.

3.2.   Some of the benefits of pathways opportunities were seen as:

- Relevant learning.

- Learning catered for individuals.

- The ability to differentiate school pathways between an academic, trade or other type of focus. One suggestion was that this could open up possibilities for considering other jobs and careers, for example being a carer (no matter what gender the learner identifies with).

3.3.   There were also some concerns about implementing a wider range of pathways opportunities:

- The potential for exploitation of young people, in the name of 'experience' and 'education'.

- There was a range of comments about the interactions between schools, polytechnics and universities, both positive and negative. The safety and legal issues of having under 18-year-olds in tertiary institutions are a particular concern.

- The possible lack of extension for some learners, and whether it would suit those students who are not yet independent learners.

- The trade-off of time spent on pathways opportunities and other subjects, especially subjects which have a lot of basic knowledge to understand in order to progress to higher levels.

- The logistics of arranging, monitoring and assessing pathways opportunities for individuals could be high.

- Some members thought that some of the proposed opportunities should be done as extra-curricular activities.

---

[1] CEDAW/C/NZL/CO/8 Advanced unedited version of 20 July
https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CEDAW%2fC%2fNZL%2fCO%2f8&Lang=en

3.4. A typical comment which indicates the view of many members is:

> *Sounds like a good idea. Those who do not go on to trade courses or university need to feel as valued in our community as those who do go on to trades courses and university.   Our community is short of carers in rest homes for instance and NCEA should support good connections here just as much as for those who choose other pathways post-secondary education.*

3.5. A counter view is shown in this comment:

> *Individualised learning could be difficult for schools with less resources and materials, and in terms of assessment be more resource intense - ie teachers' time. There will be less opportunity for co learning with peers and collaborative learning which is a valuable experience.   It is unclear how this will link with the expectations of simplifying assessment and managing workloads of teachers.*

4. Making it easier for teachers, schools, and kura to refocus on learning

4.1. The main suggestion that NCWNZ members had for making it easier for the system to focus on learning was smaller class sizes, also expressed as better teacher-student ratios and more teachers. This was seen as paramount for allowing greater knowledge of learners, managing teacher workload, and enabling greater individualisation of learning programmes.

4.2. The contribution of less formal assessment requirements was also mentioned often as a way of allowing teachers to focus on teaching and responding to the learners.

4.3. Another comment was around sharing best practice between teachers. This was expressed, for example, as "sharing of resources between teachers in different subject areas" and "the best teachers in NZ should be employed to pool their knowledge".

4.4. A better use of technology was advocated as a way of managing teacher workload, and streamlining systems, which was seen as useful in allowing more time for focusing on learners.

5. Ensuring the Record of Achievement tells us about learners' capabilities

5.1. Members generally agreed that the extra information should be captured somewhere. There were varied opinions on whether this information should be on a record of achievement, a school report, or a CV.

5.2. Again, members were concerned about the implications of workload for teachers, for example the query that "would verifying out of school information put a costly burden on school staff without adding much to information that is already available?"

5.3. There was also a concern about the inequality of access to extracurricula activities, particularly because of the costs and/or isolation (for example, children who live on farms). NCWNZ members

would not like to see changes made to the education system that increase the already high levels of inequity in our country.

5.4.   An example of the varied opinions on this topic is shown from this branch discussion:

> *Comments ranged from "good reporting is essential to outline learners' capabilities" to "Rubbish, pigeon holes students and adds to teachers' workload."*

6.   Dismantling barriers to NCEA

6.1.   NCWNZ members were supportive of any attempts to remove barriers to learners being able to equitably access NCEA. This is reinforced by the CEDAW Committee in the Advance Unedited Version of 20 July (CEDAW/C/NZL/CO/8), which recommends that the New Zealand government:

> *32(a) Take all necessary measures, including through increased resources, to facilitate access to secondary and tertiary education for rural girls and women;*
>
> *32 (f) Address all impediments to the education of rural girls, including financial and transportation obstacles for rural girls.*[2]

6.2.   Most members commented specifically on the two examples given, and supported the removal of fees and increasing accessibility to SACs. One comment from a young adult pointed out the current irony: "There's not much point teaching all the courses for free, only to have proving it to someone else put out of reach."

6.3.   One discussion produced a number of other suggestions:

- Social welfare support, with social workers in schools, and in-home support.

- Alternative study options, such as after school study rooms for students who have no safe learning area at home.

- Community hubs, where students can go either for study or to get away from adverse home circumstances where there can be physical and mental support.

7.   A vision

7.1.   One comment we feel is worth including is from a member who articulated an innovative vision for education:

> *I think that from the people I know who failed NCEA or did not achieve it - they do not fit the mould of someone who sits, listens, reads, learns, and regurgitates information. They enjoy listening to music, shopping, eating, watching movies, being with friends, or being alone writing or just sitting. They didn't care about learning about wars of the past because they*

---

[2] CEDAW/C/NZL/CO/8 Advanced unedited version of 20 July
https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CEDAW%2fC%2fNZL%2fCO%2f8&Lang=en

had so much drama at home they had no space in their head for it. They needed time during the day to chill out and relax so they could just get through to the next day. There is no alternative to school as we know it. I don't think we need to make NCEA 50% academic 50% extra-curricular. There needs to be two totally different pathways. There is a rise in parents choosing to home-school their kids because they believe the world should be the classroom. I think it would be great to have a 100% community, project-based, fluid, highly visual and verbally engaging framework that operates in parallel to NCEA, a 100% numeracy and literacy based system. One that doesn't force students to go to school and be someone they aren't. For many kids, if there was a stress-free environment whatever that might be for them (free, outdoors, quiet, active, close to home, far away from home, food three times a day, a place to cook their food) then maybe they will be as prepared for the workforce and raising the next generation as those who find the traditional schooling system works for them. It's all about building self-confidence at the end of the day. It isn't a case of compromising. We need invention and innovation in our schooling system - one that understands people better.

8.   Summary

8.1.   NCWNZ members supported any measures that were considered to reduce inequality in society, and equally, pointed out potential for some of these strategies to increase inequality if not implemented with support. Members were concerned that teachers were supported to provide quality teaching, in particular through manageable workloads. There were mixed views about projects, particularly around the size of the project, the logistics of such individualised learning and the potential for increasing teacher workload. Further concerns were around the need to cater for a variety of learners, avoid a 'one size fits all' approach, and ensure broad learning across a range of subjects.

Gill Greer
Chief Executive

Suzanne Manning
Education Standing Committee Convenor