

Taking the pulse of NCEA

Findings from the NZCER National Survey of Secondary Schools 2006

Rosemary Hipkins

New Zealand Council for Educational Research, 2006

Executive summary

This is the second major report of findings from the NZCER 2006 National Survey of Secondary Schools. The first report addressed planning and reporting processes in schools and was released earlier in 2007. NZCER national Surveys are actually four surveys in one—one each from secondary school principals, teachers, trustees and parents. On the whole, these separate surveys cover complementary, but not identical, questions. The core material of this report was a set of Likert scaled items about the NCEA that were identical in the four surveys, or nearly so.

Key new findings about NCEA

The report endorses findings that have already been reported elsewhere. For example, it confirms the impact of NCEA implementation on teachers' workloads and in budget areas such as photocopying. However the report also informs NCEA debate in some areas where systematic data has not been easily accessible up until now, or where new dimensions can be added to existing knowledge about NCEA. Six such areas of new findings summarised in this executive summary.

Support for NCEA in 2006

In 2006 support for NCEA from secondary principals, and from teachers who were senior managers, continued at high levels (this was also the case in 2003). Eighty-nine percent of principals were personally supportive of NCEA and the majority of this group *strongly* agreed

they were supportive, as did many senior managers. In 2006, most principals felt they had either successfully sustained or improved their school's implementation of NCEA over the 3 years since the last national survey. Most principals also saw NCEA as a valuable record of student learning, and three-quarters of them said it had motivated lower achieving students to do better. Views were more evenly split about whether it motivates higher achievers to do better.

While there was more divergence in the views of teachers and trustees, overall more were positive were than not, both in their support for NCEA and in the view that it is a valuable record of student learning. Teachers and trustee's views on whether NECA motivates lower achievers to do better were evenly split, and overall they were more likely to disagree that it motivates higher achievers to do better.

Those teachers and trustees who were more negative about NCEA were more likely to express concerns about other aspects of their work, including some that were seemingly only tangentially related. Where lack of support was expressed, it may be the case that the NCEA has been acting as something of a "lightning rod" for more general concerns about secondary education. This effect was particularly strong in the pattern of teacher responses and the many associations with being negative about NCEA are reported in Section 6.

High levels of uncertainty amongst parents

The pattern of parents' responses was characterised by high levels of "not sure/don't know" responses. Around half the sample responded this way to each of the NCEA items. Half of the parents also felt the school had not kept them well informed about NCEA. As for the teachers and trustees, those parents who were more negative about NCEA were also more likely to express concerns about other aspects of their child's schooling, with the NCEA perhaps acting as a "lightning rod" for other concerns such as anxiety about progress, or lack of contact with the school.

Lack of support for further systemic change

Patterns of responses suggested there is no mandate for further high-level design changes to the qualifications system. Few teachers or trustees, and even fewer principals, wanted to return to the previous system. Similar numbers of parents agreed as disagreed, but again their most common response was uncertainty. Few principals, parents or trustees wanted to start again and design another qualifications system. There was more support from teachers for this suggestion, albeit outweighed by those who either disagreed, or were uncertain.

Understanding of NCEA among community stakeholders

A majority of principals and teachers thought that employers do not understand the NCEA. Also, around half of them were unsure if universities understand NCEA. A majority of principals,

teachers and trustees similarly felt that parents do not understand NCEA, although just under half the parents thought they did understand it! These views doubtless contribute to the finding that around a third of each group are unsure of the NCEA is a credible qualification in the wider community.

Reducing assessment pressures on students

The view that assessment is driving the curriculum, even at years 9 and 10, was widely shared amongst principals, teachers and trustees. Even so, few schools appeared to be employing, or even actively considering, some steps they could potentially take to manage over-assessment. More principals than teachers were willing to consider measures such as placing strict credit limits on individual courses and encouraging students to prioritise assessments. Both principals and teachers were relatively evenly divided between holding the view that limits should be placed on the numbers of either internal or external assessment events students faced, and those who thought no such limits should be imposed. Very few respondents of either group were willing to consider managing assessment pressures by postponing NCEA assessments for some students until year 12 or year 13..

NCEA implementation and educational agencies

More principals than teachers said that it takes too much time to assemble the information required by NZQA. Notwithstanding the pressures of their co-ordination role, middle managers were no more likely to say this than other teachers, but nearly half the teachers said they did not know. A third of the teachers believed that NCEA moderation processes take too much time but again a similar number said they did not know if this was the case.

Principals and senior managers were more likely than other teachers to say they could access timely advice and support from NZQA staff. A majority of principals said they could access such support from MOE (especially local or regional staff), PPTA, School Support, and ERO. By contrast, around half the teachers were unsure about whether they could access timely advice and support from any of their potential sources, including their local subject association, School Support advisers, NZQA moderators and staff.

A bare majority of principals saw no conflict between policy messages from different sources such as MOE and NZQA, or NZQA and School Support advisers. However, around a third of principals and nearly two-thirds of the teachers were unsure if such conflicts existed.

Downloaded from: <http://www.nzcer.org.nz/pdfs/15782-summary.pdf>