

Navigating new assessment policy

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The last issue of *Assessment News* (Darr & Cosslett, 2024) outlined NZCER's position on possible assessment policy directions that had been signalled by parties within the new coalition government. Since then, the Government has released a plan for consistent assessment, which requires all primary schools to use standardised assessment tools twice yearly. The PATs are one of three choices of assessment tools that schools can use for progression monitoring in Years 3–8. This edition of *Assessment News* is written by members of NZCER's Assessment Services and Education Advisory team. The team reflects on how they are going about providing the support needed to help schools to navigate the new policy settings and build assessment and data analysis capability according to where each school is at and what they want to achieve.

With the recent announcement of assessment expectations for 2025 (*Govt Delivers Consistency for Assessing Kiwi Kids*, 2024) our Helpdesk and Education Advisory teams at the New Zealand Council for Educational Research (NZCER) are focusing on how we can provide the best possible support for any new or returning schools and kura. In recent years, NZCER has adopted the concept of *whakatere tōmua* (wayfinding) as part of how we navigate and pursue our organisation's contribution towards nurturing ākonga, realising potential, and helping communities thrive.

This article draws on wayfinding metaphors and concepts to describe how our Helpdesk and Education Advisory teams engage with schools, starting with an introduction to our team, aka our crew.

Our Helpdesk and Education Advisory crew possesses many years of teaching, senior leadership,

and principal experience across primary and secondary settings. There is a shared understanding and awareness of the troughs and crests across the educational seas that schools are navigating, and while we are all focused on supporting our ākonga, we know each school is on its own journey. Our crew draws on this knowledge and experience as part of supporting NZCER's kete of assessment and survey tools. Others in our crew have technical expertise in supporting online tools and the development of new products and support resources.

Our crew, and the tools it advises on, are in turn supported by a raft of specialist researchers, subject matter experts, statisticians and psychometricians, and communications and information technology experts. A strong strategic purpose for NZCER is to improve equity for ākonga and equity in education, upholding *mana Māori / whakamana Māori*. A recent

publication, *Ready for Partnership? A Tool for Creating Written and Visual Texts in Aotearoa New Zealand* (Hunia et al., 2024), has helped guide our approach to working in partnership and creating tools of relevance for ākongā Māori. We draw on our collective expertise, which gives us a wealth of skills and knowledge to tap into when working alongside schools to ensure the use of the evidence they gather is accurately interpreted and understood, so that when they make decisions to trim their sails, they have diagnosed the right problem and are putting their efforts into the right place.

The team dynamic also helps guide and propel development of new and refreshed content such as PAT Pāngarau | PAT Mathematics (2024), PAT Pānui | PAT Reading Comprehension (2024), and our beginning to re-assessment Te Urungi (2024). This refresh has made the tests more culturally relevant, more relevant to Aotearoa New Zealand's young readers, and more accessible. Additional aspects to the refresh are planned. These include supporting the tests with a range of resources (<https://www.nzcer.org.nz/tests/pats>) to assist kaiako and ākongā in achieving maximum outcomes from their use. These are the newest tools in our fleet and reflect our goal to develop and support fit-for-purpose educational tools and resources.

When our education advisers are working with schools, they are drawing on wayfinding principles by asking about the school environment and the strategic planning and goals schools are setting. This is a key part of planning professional development. We see schools as the experts about their local setting and our role is to ask about, and listen for, important information that can help us design and deliver relevant and useful training to support accurate diagnosis of student needs; therefore, where to build the capacity of kaiako. This approach might see our crew asking about related data or analysis the school has completed, or how and why certain assessment or survey tools may have been selected. We are also interested in professional learning teachers have been involved in and if it has helped schools to use the data strategically, finding where and how there is evidence of the impact of the professional learning.

For our helpdesk crew, we can look to wayfinding skills you might utilise before sailing into challenging weather. Preparation and checks of key equipment, confirming understanding of roles and responsibilities within the team, and clear communication are things we focus on to deliver timely support during busy periods. We appreciate that teachers and school leaders have limited time to seek support, and that delays with assessment set up or access to reporting can have a big impact. Our goal is to help as swiftly as possible and do our best to anticipate follow-up or related questions.

In between these busy periods (voyages) we reflect and review what went well and where we could improve. This reflection might focus on a specific feature on our NZCER Assist platform, a new or refreshed PAT assessment, or analysis of what support pages schools are visiting when seeking information.

As we look ahead to the upcoming changes for 2025 and beyond, we will continue to draw upon whakāterā tōmua as we navigate the important mahi of supporting schools and ākongā. If you need support or advice in deep or shallow waters, we are here to throw you a line.

Further information

If you wish for further information or support with the PATs, please email assessmentsservices@nzcer.org.nz or consider our range of available workshops at <https://www.nzcer.org.nz/workshops>

References

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