



SECONDARY PRINCIPALS' ASSOCIATION OF NEW ZEALAND INC

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President's Comment 5

NCEA

Another round of examinations all but completed (the national indicators for the 2005 round still to be released) and from my perspective the signs are encouraging.

With hindsight the "re-marking" of some scripts was a "storm in a teacup". The issue was an inherent external assessment problem and those who used it as an opportunity to re-mitigate the greater philosophical debate were being mischievous. Put simply, there has always been variability in externally set and marked examinations. When you break an examination down to an investigation on a question by question (standards) basis the variability will be accentuated. In the past where that variability breached thresholds of acceptability the marks were simply shifted (scaled!). This year the unacceptable variability was managed by remarking scripts. In reality 17 standards (questions) from 335 were remarked.

Let's be honest. NCEA with its underlying standards-based assessment approach, is the most radical change to have occurred in the secondary sector in 100 years. (Matriculation??). It is still in the early stages of its implementation and probably has last chance status.

I made my opening comment that the signs at NZQA are encouraging because I have noted a shift from crisis-management to an approach which is about developing ongoing improvement processes. No where was this more evident than in scholarship. I had the opportunity, as your representative, to review scholarship prior to its release. This year's scholarship examinations unearthed the academic top scholars of our country; we should do nothing that takes the focus away from celebrating their success.

There are a number of contributing reasons for the improvement surrounding scholarship examinations. Not the least of which is that there was a 'management strategy' for improving scholarship and that the 2004 Scholarship Reference Group's recommendations were adopted. Significant were:

- The establishment of an independent technical advisory group of experts;
- The establishment of a stakeholder overview advisory group (that Roger Moses was added to this group when we criticised its membership is another positive indicator of the willingness of NZQA to be more inclusive);
- The marking schedules that were developed moved away from an entrenched 'die in the trenches' standards-based approach to one which allowed for some ranking (Calculus was marked out of 120).

The independency of the technical advisory group (Professors John Hattie and Professor Terry Crooks) has helped significantly in adding to the integrity and confidence of the scholarship examinations.



As part of the 'continuous improvement approach' the recommendation from the technical group is that the 2006 scholarship marking schedules adopt a common nine point (0-8) marking scheme. Such marking schedules indicate a move on the part of NCEA to a more inclusive position "The Third Way" (Cedric Hall 2004).

There are good signs that what has been learned in scholarship will, where appropriate, be transported into NCEA generally.

I want to assure you through representing you on the Leaders' Forum and the Leaders' Forum Qualification Group, that the issues preventing NCEA from moving from a credit to a merit and possibility an excellence have been identified and that there are strategies in place to address those issues.

Issues identified:

- Variability
- Public understanding
- Public confidence
- Student motivation
- Extending more able students
- Robust moderation of internal assessment
- Inclusiveness
- International acceptability

In a future newsletter I will discuss some of the strategies being used to address these issues.

Graham Young
President