



Level 3 Vocational Pathways Awards discussion paper

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Purpose

The purpose of this paper is to provide a basis for discussion when considering the purpose and characteristics of a Level 3 Vocational Pathways Award.

Background

The Level 1 and 2 Vocational Pathways were introduced in 2013-4. The intent of Vocational Pathways is to improve the choice of programmes offered to all students in senior secondary and tertiary by:

- highlighting the relevance of learning to future jobs or careers (line of sight from education to employment)
- emphasising the practical connections between learning and employment/ industry contexts (contextualising learning within broad sectors)
- acknowledging learning in the six Vocational Pathways as part of NCEA Level 2 (through identifying achievement and unit standards valued by each industry sector).

Along with gaining NCEA Level 2, students have the opportunity to gain a Vocational Pathways Award in one or more of the Vocational Pathways. This Award signals that students have knowledge and skills valued by that industry.

Since mid 2014, the Ministry has been working with key stakeholders to develop a Level 3 achievement standards map and Levels 3-6 qualifications maps to provide students with clear qualification pathways. Stakeholders include the Overarching Working Group (OWG) from the recent Levels 1 and 2 refinement project, the New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA), industry and education representatives and groups. During the formation of the Levels 3-6 maps, the need for a Level 3 Vocational Pathways Award was discussed.

Considerations included whether there should be an Award and if so what could this look like. Consultation feedback indicated significant support for an Award:

- *Students are becoming more and more familiar with the pathways and when preparing to enter higher level study want the recognition of the Level 3 qualification to align with their Vocational Pathway.*
- *A Level 3 Vocational Pathways Award is definitely required. It adds a natural pathway for students who have already undertaken a Vocational Pathway at Year 11 and/or Year 12. As full contextualised programmes are developed it is even more important that this pathway continues into Year 13 and NCEA L3. Not having this stair-casing opportunity could limit uptake at Level 2.*
- *It would give secondary, tertiary and industry the opportunity to have more robust career pathways directly into industry and reduce the gap for some students from secondary to tertiary study or employment.*

The remainder of this paper outlines some options for a Level 3(+) Vocational Pathways Award and then gives further background on the differences between Levels 2 and 3 Vocational Pathways and how these may influence acknowledgement of vocational achievement.

Constitution of an Award

A Vocational Pathways Award will need to communicate to employers the value of a student's vocational achievement. The following options explore different ways in which this value could be recognised and communicated.

1. Vocational Pathways graduate profile

A graduate profile is developed for each Vocational Pathway with representatives from industry. This could describe overarching competencies for any graduate with a Vocational Pathways Award, or there could be a different profile for each pathway, or a mix of generic and particular. It should also align with the NZQA provided definition for Level descriptors of qualifications on the New Zealand Qualifications Framework, which can be found at <http://www.nzqa.govt.nz/assets/Studying-in-NZ/New-Zealand-Qualification-Framework/requirements-nzqf.pdf>

In order to state that a learner has become a Vocational Pathways 'graduate' there would still be a need to consider how this graduate status would be identified, and how we would capture evidence towards the graduate profile. For example, it may be achieved through means other than the achievement of standards such as programme approvals aligning with a Vocational Pathways Graduate Profile.

2. Using assessment to define vocational achievement

The following options use an assessment approach to define vocational achievement. The options provide a sense of continuity from Level 2 to 3, using the Level 2 model, in terms of the credit values associated with achievement standards and qualifications to calculate achievement of a Vocational Pathway.

a. Recognition of credits from the achievement standards and qualifications maps

To gain a Level 3 Vocational Pathways Award, similar rules to the Level 2 Award could be applied. For example, students would need to gain NCEA Level 3 or equivalent and 60 of these credits from achievement standards, or qualifications, would need to be from one particular pathway.

The Award enables recognition of vocational achievement for all students including those that are on more traditional pathways to degree level study. There is no split of standards/qualifications into 'recommended' and 'sector-related'.

b. Recognition of credits from the qualifications maps only

This option would follow the same rules as 2a, but the credits would only be drawn from the Level 3-6 qualifications maps. This would explicitly recognise industry learning and rule out recognition of learning related to the New Zealand Curriculum.

This option would make it more difficult for students possibly heading towards degree level study to gain an Award. It is putting a 'stake in the sand' that vocational achievement is drawn from industry learning.

c. Use of 'sector related' status

This option builds on the requirements outlined in option 2a. 60 credits are drawn from one Vocational Pathway, with the additional requirement that students need at least 20 credits from mapped industry certificates that can be regarded as 'sector-related.'

This option provides most students with the opportunity to gain an Award, including those who are on a more traditional pathway to degree level study but whose programmes include a specified component of industry learning.



3. Use of endorsement to drive process

This option presents the concept of a Vocational Pathways 'Award' as a marker of vocational achievement through the use of a symbol.

Each qualification and/or achievement standard that has been mapped to the Vocational Pathways will have a symbol showing the alignment to a specific Vocational Pathway(s).

This option is not a quantifiable option as outlined in option 2, although it can be collated as a visual on the Vocational Profile. This option enables students to show how the certificates, diplomas and/or achievement standards are recognised in Vocational Pathways.

4. Attestation of industry experience

In this option students undertake their programme of study and carry out industry experience either formally or informally. Industry experience could be part of a formal learning programme though secondary and/or tertiary, and/or part of the student's own work life. The attestation would need to align with the intent of the qualification from the New Zealand Qualifications Framework and possibly align with profiles developed for each of the Vocational Pathways. The attestation could be recorded as part of the Vocational Pathways on a student's Record of Achievement.

This option would enable industry and tertiary to be more engaged with the recognition of a learner's achievement and understanding of Vocational Pathways. Quality assurance and recording of attestations would need to be considered.

Differences between Level 2 and 3+ Pathways

The following information is provided to give further background on the differences between Levels 2 and 3 Vocational Pathways and how these may influence acknowledgement of vocational achievement.

Purpose of Level 2 and 3 Vocational Pathways

Level 2 provides students with an indication of the broad direction they may be heading, and the learning that is valued by industry. It is foundational level and supports the flexibility students need at this level.

Level 3 and above builds on the foundation laid by the Levels 1 and 2 Vocational Pathways. It provides students with clear qualification information for progression, connecting secondary, tertiary and industry more closely together. Level 3 and above pathways are the first steps into the tertiary world where qualifications begin to be more specialised.

Recognition of industry learning and achievement in Vocational Pathways

The NCEA is the main school-based qualification for students at Level 2. At present students must achieve 80 credits in total (from achievement or unit standards). 60 credits must come from Level 2 or above and 20 from any level, as well as satisfying the literacy and numeracy requirements. Achievement standards comprise all those that align with the New Zealand Curriculum; and unit standards are competency based and generally assess industry learning.

In 2013-14, and now again during the Levels 1 and 2 Vocational Pathways refinement process, an extensive consultation process was undertaken to identify learning associated with assessment (unit and achievement)



standards that is valued by particular industry sectors, whilst supporting a broad curriculum foundation. These standards formed the basis of Levels 1 and 2 Vocational Pathways and the Level 2 Vocational Pathways Award. Students have a greater range of options available to them when progressing from Level 2. Whilst students have access to the NCEA Level 3 as the main school based qualification, students also have the opportunity to gain certificates or diplomas at Level 3, 4, 5 or 6 at school, tertiary and/or industry. There are also a greater number of certificates available at each level, compared with Level 2.

To gain the NCEA Level 3, students must achieve 80 credits in total (from achievement or unit standards). 60 credits must come from Level 3 and a further 20 from Level 2. As well students must satisfy the literacy and numeracy requirements. (There are additional University Entrance requirements that students may need to consider.) It is possible for students to gain the NCEA Level 3 and a Level 3, 4 or 5 certificate, or part thereof. If the certificates have been through the Targeted Review of Qualifications and registered as a New Zealand Certificate, and are assessed by other means, they currently cannot be counted towards the NCEA. NCEA can only be awarded on the basis of standards based assessment. While some students may not gain the whole qualification, credits gained towards a qualification, if standards based, will still count toward the NCEA. The Ministry are looking into this issue with NZQA.

Qualifications at Level 3 are the beginning of specialisation and these have been mapped to the Vocational Pathways. All the achievement standards for the NCEA have also been mapped to strengthen the connection between the New Zealand Curriculum and industry learning.

Level 2 Vocational Pathways Award

The Level 2 Vocational Pathways Award provides formal recognition of a learner's achievement using the Vocational Pathways. All students are able to show how their achievement can relate to the learning or skills training employers are seeking.

To achieve the Level 2 Vocational Pathways Award, the learner must:

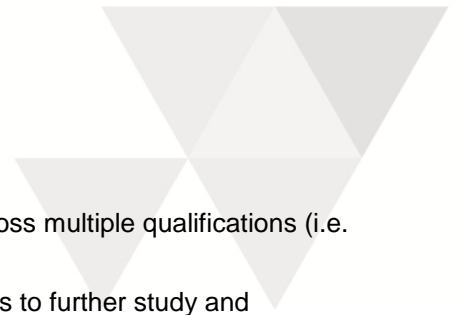
- achieve the NCEA level 2 which includes literacy and numeracy requirements, and
- achieve 60 Level 2 credits from the *Recommended* Assessment Standards for a Vocational Pathways sector, for example, Primary Industries, including a *minimum* of 20 Level 2 credits from the *Sector-Related* Standards for that pathway.

Students can achieve a Vocational Pathways Award in more than one Vocational Pathway.

Level 3 Vocational Pathways Award

The mapping of Level 3 achievement standards and Levels 3-6 qualifications provides the foundation for the formation of a vocational profile. A Level 3(+) Vocational profile will provide:

- a coherent, familiar transition for students who have already engaged with the Vocational Pathways
- a clearer basis for discussion for students who are seeking clarity around their study options relating to a pathway
- a clearer indication for tertiary and employers of a learner's areas of strength and interest
- greater information for students before choosing a Level 3(+) programme, and how this programme would fit in particular pathways
- an indication of how discipline/subject knowledge and skills are valued by industry to support access to higher level industry valued qualifications
- a signal to support progressive in-system discussions by educators with family and whānau that unpack pathways from education to employment in ways that meet all students' needs.



A Vocational Pathways Award can build on this profile to provide:

- an indication and acknowledgement of coherent learner achievement across multiple qualifications (i.e. NCEA and industry qualifications) in particular pathways
- students could use the status of a Vocational Pathways Award to progress to further study and employment
- alignment of the Awards component of the framework from Level 2 to 3 in a student's record of achievement.

There are risks in not providing an aligned systemic solution from Level 2 to Level 3 and beyond. Lack of alignment may mean that students find it difficult to be clear about the direction they are heading and employers could cease to engage in the Vocational Pathways approach. It could be more difficult to show how pathways continue from school, to further education and employment, and how Vocational Pathways encourage engagement in education or training to at least Level 4.



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