

Chapter 16:

New Zealand Examining Bodies in the South Pacific

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This chapter focuses on the roles of New Zealand examining bodies in the smaller states of the South Pacific. To permit understanding of the changing nature of relationships between these bodies and the South Pacific countries, the chapter includes some discussion of developments within New Zealand itself. The chapter may usefully be read in conjunction with Chapter 7, which discusses Samoa, and with Chapter 13, which deals with the South Pacific Board for Educational Assessment (SPBEA). Parts of the present chapter overlap with those chapters; but patterns and relationships are addressed from a different angle.

Much of the chapter takes a historical approach to indicate changes over time. It shows the ways in which New Zealand bodies first provided their examinations in unadapted form, then provided specially-tailored assessments, then largely withdrew that specially-tailored provision, and finally developed a system for supporting clients within South Pacific countries where desired.

Background

Presentation of background should start with examinations in New Zealand itself. During the late 1960s, a University Bursaries examination and a Sixth Form Certificate qualification were introduced in New Zealand. Many other examinations already existed, and pressures upon the students were considerable. Looking back, most observers feel that New Zealand's senior secondary school students faced too many national assessments, and that the school curriculum was excessively influenced by examination demands.

Table 16.1 shows New Zealand school qualifications in 1970, together with the authorities responsible for them. School Certificate, University Entrance and University Bursaries were public examinations operated by specifically-designated examination boards. The Sixth Form and Higher School Certificate assessments were operated by the government's Department of Education. The fact that no single authority had responsibility for national qualifications caused problems in articulating syllabus changes

within national curriculum subjects. It also created obstacles to establishment of standard approaches to national assessment.

Table 16.1: Principal External Secondary School Examinations, New Zealand, 1970

	Qualification	Authority
Year 11/Form 5	School Certificate	School Cert. Examination Board
Year 12/Form 6	University Entrance	Universities Entrance Board
	Sixth Form Certificate	Department of Education
Year 13/Form 7	University Bursaries	Universities Entrance Board
	Higher School Certificate	Department of Education

During the early 1970s, New Zealand's secondary teachers' union argued for modification of the system, particularly to introduce an element of internal assessment. After a series of Educational Development Conferences across New Zealand, a report from an advisory council on educational planning gave public support to many of the union's views (Educational Development Conference 1974). Internal assessment was recommended provided that adequate between-school comparability measures were developed, and that teachers were given resources to match the increased workload associated with new procedures.

The recommendations of the 1974 report were not immediately implemented in full, but did lead to some changes. By 1980, assessment in several School Certificate subjects was partly based on marks gained during course work; and in one subject, Art, assessment was entirely through course work. Changes had also begun to occur in the University Entrance and University Bursary examinations. In Geography, for example, practical fieldwork had become part of the overall assessment. Further changes during the 1980s led to extension of internal assessment across all three national examinations. Inter-school comparability was achieved through statistical moderation.

The Sixth Form Certificate had been introduced by the Department of Education as a possible alternative to the University Entrance examination in 1969. The award was loosely moderated across schools from 1974, but it was not as valued by students as the well-established and prestigious University Entrance examination. In the framework for the Sixth Form Certificate, schools awarded grades on 1 to 9 scale, where Grade 1 was high quality work from a course based on the University Entrance examination prescription. However, the links between the two qualifications, and the

extent and nature of comparability, were not widely understood by parents and employers.

Even less understood was the Higher School Certificate. This award's credibility was maintained artificially by making it a requirement for the basic tertiary study grant. The qualification was issued by the Department of Education to Form 7 students on the basis of attendance and course completion, following recommendations by schools.

South Pacific Participation in New Zealand Examinations

The South Pacific countries and territories which have been most closely linked to New Zealand's system of qualifications are Samoa, Tonga, Fiji, Cook Islands, Niue and Tokelau. Patterns in each of these places are here considered in turn.

Samoa was a New Zealand dependency which gained sovereignty in 1962. Paradoxically, in the initial years of independence Samoa became more rather than less involved in New Zealand national examinations. This was chiefly because independence coincided with the expansion of secondary education. Since the country already had strong links with New Zealand and its education system, it seemed natural for Samoan schools which developed Form 5 programmes to ensure that students were prepared for the New Zealand School Certificate examination. This was not surprising, as many of the courses were drafted by expatriate New Zealand teachers and government advisers, who were guided by their own backgrounds and experience.

When the numbers of students moving into Form 6 increased, the Samoan authorities requested the New Zealand Universities Entrance Board to allow schools in Samoa which satisfied prescription requirements to participate in the New Zealand University Entrance examination. This request was granted; and with it came the right of successful candidates to enter New Zealand universities.

In contrast to Samoa, Tonga was in the United Kingdom rather than the New Zealand sphere of influence. Tonga always retained its sovereignty, but between 1900 and 1970 the United Kingdom had control over many of its external affairs. Despite the British influence, many Tongans went to New Zealand for education because New Zealand was closer. When local provision of secondary schools expanded, Tonga also turned to New Zealand for examinations. As in Samoa, Tongan students, first in Form 5 and then in Form 6, were prepared for the New Zealand School Certificate and University Entrance examinations.

Fiji was a British colony between 1874 and 1970, and thus even more strongly within the United Kingdom sphere of influence. Because of this,

initially the schools were tied to the University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate. However, from the 1960s Fijian schools switched progressively to the New Zealand School Certificate and University Entrance examinations, because they were cheaper and because their timetable fitted the Fijian school year more conveniently. During the 1970s, Fiji provided the bulk of the entries from South Pacific countries in the two New Zealand secondary examinations.

Cook Islands, Niue and Tokelau all have histories as dependencies of New Zealand. Cook Islands and Niue attained self-government in free association with New Zealand in 1965 and 1974 respectively, while Tokelau remains a New Zealand dependency. These constitutional arrangements have given students from all three territories full access to education in New Zealand. As secondary education in Cook Islands developed, schools introduced New Zealand examination programmes. Niue has only one high school, which also prepared students for the New Zealand School Certificate; and both Niue and Cook Islands were permitted to assess students for the Sixth Form Certificate. Tokelau did not have its own senior secondary school. Tokelaun students went either to New Zealand or to Samoa where, as previously described, the New Zealand examination system prevailed.

Towards National and Regional Qualifications in the South Pacific

Form 5 education in these South Pacific countries became less elitist as numbers participating grew. With this growth, which coincided with local curriculum development initiatives, came increased interest in the possibilities of national syllabuses and of national and regional qualifications. Policy makers felt that emerging political independence should be reflected not only in education administration, but also in what students were taught and how and where they were examined.

This view was identified by the South Pacific Commission (SPC) through regional educational seminars; and as early as 1964 a request was made through the SPC that alternative papers for Pacific candidates be provided in metropolitan examinations. The New Zealand authorities were initially unwilling to oblige, because such developments could have led to increased dependency at a time when national aspirations were becoming paramount. However, the 1970s brought action both in New Zealand and in the smaller states. Special options for South Pacific candidates were introduced progressively in the New Zealand School Certificate, and in 1978 an alternative English paper was developed for the University Entrance examination. English was a compulsory paper for entrance to universities, and the New Zealand universities, through the Universities Entrance Board, accepted that the alternative English prescription which was only available

in the South Pacific countries could count towards the entrance qualification.

Progress on the development of a regional body was slow; but the New Zealand government funded a working party in 1977 which reported to the SPC in the following year. Its key recommendation was that the South Pacific Board for Educational Assessment be set up to assist the countries of the region to develop assessment strategies for the support of national education certificates. Agreement was reached with member countries in 1979, and the SPBEA met for the first time in Fiji in 1980.

Part of the New Zealand desire to encourage the SPBEA arose from the view that changes to assessment and examination practices in New Zealand itself were impeded by the need to consider the effects of proposed changes on the school systems of the smaller countries. During the early 1980s, the secondary teachers' union, in a move which was supported by the government's Department of Education, proposed abolition of the University Entrance examination. However, in 1981 the newly-elected Minister of Education from the National Party cited difficulties for neighbouring countries as one reason why such a step could not immediately be taken.

Given the context of overall reform and of problems arising from international linkages, it is not surprising that the optional papers based on alternative prescriptions for candidates in the smaller countries had a limited life. In 1982, the Department of Education indicated that its South Pacific Options, as they had come to be known, would be withdrawn in 1985, and urgent negotiations took place to sort out suitable replacements. Discussions were held with SPBEA officials, and the member countries also negotiated independently as they sought appropriate solutions for their own concerns.

The deadline for the withdrawal of the New Zealand School Certificate from the South Pacific was postponed twice: first until 1987 and then until 1988. This allowed some leeway for national governments to devise their own procedures. The Tongan authorities decided that they required a Tongan School Certificate. To assist them, the New Zealand Department of Education provided resources and advice. Form 5 examinations were administered in Tonga in 1987 for the first time, and the SPBEA has provided ongoing technical support. Samoa, Kiribati and Tuvalu launched their own School Certificates in 1989, also with professional and technical assistance from the SPBEA.

The establishment of these national certificates was facilitated by inter-country cooperation of various kinds. Some papers were obtained by Kiribati and Tuvalu from Samoa, and others were shared between Kiribati and Samoa. Until 1996, New Zealand provided papers in subjects with limited candidature; and the SPBEA has always been able to gain further

support in these endeavours from professionals in New Zealand.

Shortly after the announcement about phasing out South Pacific Options in the New Zealand School Certificate came a further announcement about phasing out the University Entrance examination. This announcement was made by the New Zealand Minister who had been elected in 1984 as part of a Labour government. The new Minister announced that after 1985 the University Entrance examination would cease to exist. The Minister also announced that the Sixth Form Certificate would be the only New Zealand national secondary qualification at Form 6 from that time. As a way to solve the problems of international dependency, the Minister indicated that the Universities Entrance Board would assist the smaller countries with interim examination arrangements until alternative procedures were put in place.

The Universities Entrance Board representative notified the SPBEA of the New Zealand government's decisions at the SPBEA's 1985 annual meeting. By that time, it had become evident that a regional Form 6 examination involving all Pacific countries that had participated in the University Entrance examination would no longer be possible. The Fijian Ministry of Education had been turned down in 1982 when it had asked the Universities Entrance Board to enter candidates in the Form 7 University Bursaries examination. The Ministry's response had been to strengthen an emerging Fiji Form 7 examination, which by 1985 was operating in many schools and providing a suitable end-of-school qualification. The Fijian government felt that this qualification both served the interests of its Form 7 students and satisfied political objectives; and education officials and senior teachers were considered to have sufficient expertise in the setting and marking of examination papers to manage a similar exercise at Form 6. The government therefore decided that the Fiji School Leaving Certificate, a new examination for Fijian students only, would commence when the New Zealand Form 6 examination ceased to be available. At the same time, the Cook Islands government, whose people had access to New Zealand as of right, sought and was granted permission to continue to assess for the New Zealand Sixth Form Certificate. The Cook Islands government therefore informed the SPBEA that it did not need a further school qualification at Form 6.

Recognising that regional arrangements for other countries could not be introduced instantly, the New Zealand Universities Entrance Board agreed to run an interim Pacific Form 6 examination for three years to 1988. By that time the SPBEA was ready to administer its Pacific Senior Secondary Certificate (PSSC) examination in 10 subjects. The examination included substantial internal assessment; and in English, for example, this allowed for

national interpretations in the way the course work was prescribed and marked. Of the University Entrance countries, only Samoa and Tonga participated at that time. However, they were joined in 1989 by Solomon Islands and Kiribati.

The New Zealand Qualifications Authority in the South Pacific

In 1987, a Labour government was returned to office in New Zealand for a second term. The government focused on the way state social services were delivered, with the operations of its Department of Education as a primary target for attention. In 1988, a task force which had reviewed the administration of education reported to the government (New Zealand 1988). The task force argued that the time had come for radical change to the structure of the New Zealand education system. Its report promoted simple and uncomplicated systems, with discrete services that operated effectively through clear lines of accountability. There was to be no overlapping of responsibilities between state education agencies, and care had to be taken to ensure that organisations with similar functions acted in concert. By 1990, after the issue of further reports which spelled out the detail (e.g. New Zealand 1989), there was no School Certificate Examination Board, no Universities Entrance Board and, indeed, no Department of Education with assessment responsibilities.

In place, instead, was a New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA), set up to provide a unified approach to the validation and administration of school qualifications and thus by implication expected to simplify the existing uncoordinated and confusing system. The Authority was required to develop a framework for national qualifications in secondary schools in which all qualifications were to have a clear purpose and a relationship with each other. The system for gaining qualifications was to be flexible, with recognition given to competencies already attained.

This new system permitted traditional relationships with other countries to be maintained, because the Authority was charged with assisting overseas governments and international agencies in the development and operation of examinations and related awards. The Authority was also required, after consultation with the universities, to establish and maintain a common educational standard as a pre-requisite for university entrance. This was achieved in 1990 through a mechanism based on defined performance in the Form 7 University Bursaries examination.

In 1991, as the NZQA pursued its primary objective to develop a framework of qualifications, it knew that the school examination structure it had inherited would be in place for some time. The NZQA was not threatened by this. It had established a focused examination unit which was

committed to developing common and transparent processes. The officials in the examination unit continued to work with education ministries in South Pacific countries, and the NZQA was invited to SPBEA annual meetings as an observer. A number of NZQA staff had been closely involved with assessment in the smaller states during the 1980s, and were well placed both to maintain established arrangements and to consider ways in which systems could usefully be changed.

In particular, these staff could respond to requests which were soon to be made concerning Form 7 education by some South Pacific countries. As noted, during the early 1980s Fiji had turned to New Zealand when Form 7 education had expanded in Fiji. When thwarted by the Universities Entrance Board, ostensibly because of that Board's view that it was already promoting inappropriate courses at Form 6 with its University Entrance examination, Fiji went ahead with its own Form 7 qualification. Samoa also developed its own Form 7 qualification in conjunction with the National University of Samoa. Tonga, however, required a more school-centred basis for its Form 7 students. In 1990, the Tongan government considered a number of alternatives and then approached both the NZQA and the New South Wales Secondary Board of Studies, in Australia, to solicit responses on the possibility of partnership. The fact that the PSSC prescriptions had their origins in New Zealand's University Entrance examination contributed to a decision to work with the NZQA rather than the New South Wales board. Arrangements were made for a new Tonga National Form 7 School to prepare candidates for the University Bursaries examination. It was significant for Tonga that the qualifications for entrance to New Zealand universities again became available.

The NZQA's attitude to the Tongan request was very different from the position taken by the Universities Entrance Board with Fiji a decade earlier. Regulations were framed in such a way that portability of qualifications, outside as well as within New Zealand, was seen to be encouraged. For example, the NZQA's contacts with Australian state tertiary admission centres enabled candidates from any country to have their aggregate mark in University Bursaries considered for entry to tertiary institutions in Australia. The NZQA Assessment, Examination and Certification Regulations were approved in 1993 when candidates from Tonga had already gained University Bursaries certificates. The entry eligibility requirement in the regulations was defined to reflect a wider view, whereby for the first time candidates attending teaching institutions overseas could be accepted for entry if the institutions' courses of study had been approved by the NZQA.

The entrance regulation was also apposite. Candidates were academically

qualified for entrance to a New Zealand university if they gained grades of A, B or C in three subjects of the University Bursaries examination, provided that the candidates had also gained the New Zealand Higher School Certificate qualification. This course-completion certificate was seen to give greater breadth of study than grades in three subjects alone, but was only available to students who had completed their Form 7 year in a New Zealand school. Hence, a further explicit sub-section was added to the NZQA's regulations for entrance to university. Candidates were academically qualified if they gained three grades of A, B or C and had completed course requirements deemed by the NZQA to be equivalent to the New Zealand Higher School Certificate. A full Form 7 year at the Tonga National Form 7 School was accepted as equivalent.

Tereora College in the Cook Islands applied to teach and assess to the University Bursaries examination one year after the Tonga National Form 7 School's debut. The NZQA, unlike its predecessor, was able to receive and consider the request in terms of published regulations promulgated by its Board under the New Zealand's Education Amendment Act 1990. An NZQA official visited Tereora College to consider suitability under defined criteria, and checked carefully that the school could manage internal assessment as prescribed in the range of University Bursaries subjects to be offered.

In 1994, Vanuatu, through its education ministry, applied for its Malapoa and Matevulu Colleges to offer the University Bursaries qualification. These two schools were also visited by the NZQA, and first presented University Bursaries candidates in 1995. This represented an expansion into a part of the South Pacific in which New Zealand examinations had not previously been prominent.

The National Qualification Framework devised by the NZQA uses a standards approach by defining specific levels of performance across a wide range of activities (NZQA 1996). Learning outcomes, described as 'unit standards', provide assessment targets and include criteria which enable learner performance to be measured. Qualifications on the Framework consist of suitable groupings of unit standards at appropriate levels of difficulty. To gain a credit for a unit standard, a learner must meet all the listed criteria; and to complete a qualification, a learner must gain all the unit standards contained within it. A key objective is for credits to be carried from school to tertiary provider to employment. This aims to prevent unnecessary duplication of time and effort for both learner and provider.

All registered providers can apply to offer and assess to any registered unit standard, and providers outside New Zealand can apply to the NZQA

for registration and Framework accreditation. The government of Cook Islands has indicated that this will be its preferred option for Form 6 if the Sixth Form Certificate is phased out in New Zealand. Other initiatives will allow for Framework connections to be made. For example, the SPBEA, in approving a new prescription for computer studies in the PSSC, has linked its prescription objectives to unit standards in computing. Moreover, opportunities exist for compatible development in PSSC internal assessment and Framework moderation systems.

Among the challenges for the NZQA is to support South Pacific countries in standards-based developments as they move progressively to internal assessment in their senior secondary schools by balanced promotion, but not rigid enforcement, of the New Zealand Framework view. This, as has been seen, is the way examination links evolved to the advantage of Pacific countries in the past, and should remain the pattern for the future.

Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the evolution of examinations and qualifications in the smaller states of the South Pacific. Most observers feel that the introduction of national and regional certificates in the South Pacific generated immediate gains. The smaller countries were able to define and manage some of their own examinations activities; and the SPBEA, through its regional PSSC qualification, received greater international recognition and increased credibility. Authorities took immediate interest in prescribing appropriate internal assessment activities and in replacing the New Zealand examination content with material more suited to Pacific students. The SPBEA prepared support material for teachers in management and assessment techniques.

The account of events between the 1960s and the 1990s is an instructive example of changing relationships between a metropolitan country and smaller states. In the first phase, curricula in the smaller states became closely allied with the various New Zealand qualifications. This was the case not only in countries and territories with which New Zealand had, or formerly had, constitutional ties, namely Samoa, Cook Islands, Niue and Tokelau, but also in countries with which New Zealand had no formal ties, including Tonga and Fiji. During the 1970s, the New Zealand authorities responded to requests to create special South Pacific Options in the New Zealand School Certificate examination, and an alternative paper in English in the University Entrance examination. In due course, however, these papers were phased out. The push for abolition did not come so much from the smaller states as from New Zealand itself, when the system of examinations was under review and new approaches to qualifications were being

considered. During the 1990s, relationships changed again. With the establishment of the NZQA to replace the previous examination authorities came a new approach to partnership, through the development of new qualifications and different approaches to assessment.

In most of the small Pacific states, the journey which has been embarked upon will continue with further development of national and regional qualifications. For some countries, however, links with New Zealand will continue. The NZQA is able to provide certain services which the small states would be unable to secure by themselves; and the NZQA is pleased to continue to operate in partnership with countries with which New Zealand has longstanding ties and common interests.

Note: The views expressed in this paper are those of the authors, and do not necessarily represent the views of the New Zealand Government, the NZQA, or the SPBEA or its members.