

30 September 2020

J Robinson
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Tēnā koe J Robinson

Official Information Act Request

Thank you for your request of 2 September, under the Official Information Act 1982, for the following information:

...all documents about the provisions and procedures set out to

- 1. Decide if external examinations are to go ahead*
- 2. Ensure the social distancing and limitations of alert levels for these exams are followed*
- 3. What then happens if these externals are to be cancelled.*

NZQA has interpreted the request as finalised provisions and procedures for external examinations in 2020. I attach copies of the following information covered by your request:

Document	Audience and intention
COVID-19 Examination Options	A paper for NZQA's Strategic Management Team on 8 September 2020 advising them on examinations options (based on the conditions for alert levels as at 8 September).
Examination Readiness email	Email sent to all schools on 18 September providing clarity on external examinations under each COVID-19 Alert Level.
COVID-19 Alert Levels examination centre checklist	Checklist (<i>attached to Examination Readiness email</i>) for schools that have examination centres to assess readiness and develop a plan for managing NCEA and NZ Scholarship examinations under COVID-19 Alert Level 1, 2 and 3.
Requirements for examination centres at Alert Level 3	Information for schools that have examination centres to notify them of requirements for running examinations under COVID-19 Alert Level 3 (<i>attached to Examination Readiness Email</i>).

Please be advised that there has been a change of position in the circumstances under which COVID-19 alert level NZQA would hold examinations between that advised in the 8 September paper *COVID-19 Examination Options* to NZQA's Strategic Management Team and our subsequent position.

The initial advice, which informed the 8 September paper, was based on the Alert Level 3 conditions at that date. Following continued engagement with the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Health and WorkSafe New Zealand, and identifying specific conditions and precautions to ensure health and safety, NZQA subsequently received notification from the Ministry of Health that all examinations could proceed under a future Alert Level 3.

As part of the commitment to open and transparent government, NZQA is proactively releasing responses to Official Information Act requests which are of public interest. NZQA intends to publish

its response to this request on its website as part of its next quarterly release of documents. Your name and contact details will be removed before publication.

If you require further assistance or believe we have misinterpreted your request, please contact ministerials@nzqa.govt.nz.

If you are dissatisfied with our response, you have the right, under section 28(3) of the Official Information Act 1982, to lodge a complaint with the Office of the Ombudsman at www.ombudsman.parliament.nz. You can also telephone 0800 802 502 or write to the Ombudsman at PO Box 10152, Wellington, 6143.

Nāku nā



Dr Grant Klinkum
Pouwhakahaere/Chief Executive

Planning to manage NCEA and NZ Scholarship exams under COVID-19 Alert Level 1, 2 and 3.

Schools (who have exam centres) need to plan for managing exams to Ministry of Health requirements in the event they are under Alert Level 1, 2 or 3 during the examination period.

Use the following table to help assess your readiness and develop a plan (in conversation with your Examination Centre Manager where possible).

Schools, like workplaces, are not considered to be gatherings so exams can go ahead. While there are no restrictions on the number of students attending an exam in a single venue (such as the school hall), schools must maintain enough distance between students, so they aren't touching or breathing directly on each other and exam conditions are met.

A minimum gap of 1.5 metres between students in all directions is required (head to head or seat to seat). See the 18 August Bulletin from the Ministry of Education <https://mailchi.mp/education/covid-19-update-18-august> and the document *Requirements for Exam Centres at Alert Level 3* for more detail.

Categories	Action required	By who	By when	Status ✓
Appropriate Physical distancing				
Identify rooms suitable for hosting examination sessions where <ul style="list-style-type: none"> students can be spaced at 1.5 metres in all directions windows and doors can be open to ensure good ventilation of fresh air. 				
Calculate the number of rooms required to allow necessary physical distancing for candidates and supervisors. Base this on entries in your largest exam session (including any students from other schools sitting at your exam centre).				
Check that rooms for SAC candidates remain suitable				
Check that rooms for Digital examinations remain suitable				

Readers/Writers (Exam Assistants)				
Discuss with all Exam Assistants their availability and/or willingness to work under Alert Levels 1, 2 and 3 and provide your ECM with list of those available				
Identify examination sessions where supplementary Exam Assistants are required to cover for those unavailable to work under Alert Level 1, 2 and 3 requirements				
Recruit and arrange training for supplementary Exam Assistants employed by the school				
Discuss with ECM training for supplementary Exam Assistants employed by NZQA				
Monitoring student health and wellbeing				
Establish protocols for managing students who arrive at an examination session in an unwell state				
Link this to the school's process for handling Derived Grade applications				
Covid Tracing				
Communicate your system for recording visitors to your ECM				
Communicate your system for recording visitors to the PN of schools with students sitting at your exam centre				
Washing and drying hands				
Make a supply of hand sanitiser available at the entrance to each examination room				
Provide soap, water and the ability to dry hands in toilets				
Establish a process to monitor that these are being used				
Cleaning processes				
Establish a cleaning regime where high use surfaces such as door handles in and around each examination room will be cleaned before each session.				
Disinfect and clean all shared computers between exam sessions.				
Require school contracted cleaners to disinfect and clean all surfaces daily in each examination room and common areas used by examination candidates (between exam sessions at Alert Level 3)				
Establish a process to monitor that cleaning protocols are being followed				

HE MANATU/MEMORANDUM

RĀ/DATE: 8 September 2020

KI/TO: Strategic Management Team

KAITUKU/FROM: Kristine Kilkelly, DCE Assessment (Alan Bailey, Manager Operations and Logistics)

KAUPAPA/SUBJECT: Running examinations at COVID-19 Alert Levels 1 - 4

Te Takuna/Intent

1. This paper outlines the planning for running NCEA and NZ Scholarship examinations at COVID-19 Alert Levels 1 and 2, and for running NZ Scholarship examinations if New Zealand, or some regions, are at Alert Level 3.

Te Taunaki/Recommendation(s)

2. It is recommended that the Strategic Management Team:
 - a. **note** that a detailed plan for each examination centre is being developed and documented by Operations and Logistics (OAL) for holding examinations under Alert Levels 1 or 2; each plan will be finalised by the end of October, once all schools have submitted their final examination entries files to NZQA.
 - b. **note** that it is not logistically possible to run NCEA examinations at Alert Level 3, but OAL is working with the Ministries of Education and of Health to enable NZ Scholarship examinations to go ahead at this level.
 - c. **note** business continuity planning to ensure that NZQA can manage running NCEA examinations in other regions of New Zealand if Wellington is at Alert Level 3 or 4 is at an advanced stage and will be completed by mid-September.
 - d. **note** if any regions are at Alert Level 4 in November or December, NCEA and NZ Scholarship examinations would not be logistically possible in the impacted regions.

Te Horopaki/Situation

Background

3. It is possible that New Zealand, or regions within New Zealand, will fluctuate between COVID-19 Alert Levels 1 to 4 between now and the end of the 2020 examination cycle.
4. The restrictions in place under Alert Levels 1 and 2 allow for a full examination process to be run, as long as appropriate health and safety measures are in place at examination centres and any venues used for the sorting and marking of examination material.
5. The current physical distancing requirements and gathering limits at Alert Level 3 make it logistically unmanageable to run examination sessions with more than around 100 candidates, meaning that NCEA examinations would not be able to proceed in any region under Alert Level 3.

Examinations at Alert Levels 1 and 2

6. All examination centres are in the process of providing NZQA with an assurance that they have enough rooms available to meet physical distancing recommendations and have the necessary health measures in place to safely run the examinations.
7. All examination supervision staff are confirming their willingness to work under these alert levels – note that 30 percent of supervision staff are in their seventies or older. Usually Examination Centre Managers recruit their Centre's staff, but this year a national recruitment campaign is being run to mitigate the risk of examination centres being unable to find enough people through the usual channels.
8. A detailed plan for the day-to-day running of examinations at each examination centre will be completed and documented by the OAL team by the end of October, once all schools have submitted their final examination entries files to NZQA.
9. This plan will be similar to that submitted by examination centres every year, but will be enhanced by requiring each centre to include:
 - clearly documented processes to meet the added COVID-19 related health requirements, and
 - a staff replacement contingency plan to ensure there is cover for staff who fall ill or need to self-isolate. Regionally based NZQA staff and/or teachers are being prepared, in case they are needed at any time to assist with examination supervision.

Examinations at Alert Level 3 or 4

10. The most recent Alert Level 3 restrictions allowed for bubbles of 20 Year 12 or 13 students to attend school, as long as they stayed together in their bubble.
11. Applying these bubbles to an examination would allow no more than 20 candidates to be in the same room, or bubbles of 20 candidates arranged so that they are physically separated from one another in a hall. The usual supervisor to candidate ratio is 1:35, and these restrictions would require at least a 1:20 ratio meaning NZQA would need to increase the number of supervisors by at least 30%.
12. Should these restrictions, or similar, remain in place for any region/s at Alert Level 3 in future, it is not logistically manageable to run the national NCEA examinations in any region that is at Alert Level 3 due to the high numbers of NCEA candidates at a significant number of examination centres.
13. It may be possible to run NZ Scholarship examinations in a region that is at Alert Level 3. The OAL team is working with the Ministries of Education and of Health to ensure that the requirements for running NZ Scholarship examinations at Alert Level 3 are clearly understood and documented so that they can be incorporated into any future Health Order for Alert Level 3 and communicated to the sector if and when required.
14. To ensure schools are prepared for the running of NZ Scholarship examinations at Alert Level 3, every examination centre that has NZ Scholarship examination entries is including an Alert Level 3 NZ Scholarship examination plan as an appendix to their overall Examination Centre plan by the end of October.
15. Special arrangements are being developed to manage NZ Scholarship subjects requiring performances or speeches that need to be recorded.
16. It is not logistically possible to hold NCEA or NZ Scholarship examinations in any region that is at Alert Level 4 because schools are required to be closed on site at this level. The Assessment Division is investigating options for possibly rescheduling NZ Scholarship examinations if any region/s with a significant number of entries is at Alert Level 4 during the examination period.

Examination Management if the Wellington Region is at Alert Level 3 or 4

17. A detailed business continuity plan (BCP) is being developed by the Assessment Division to ensure that NZQA can manage NCEA and NZ Scholarship examinations should the Wellington Region be at Alert Level 3 or 4 while other regions are at Alert Levels 1, 2 or 3, and that those regions are able to continue with their examinations.
18. This Alert Level 3 or 4 BCP will include details and/or contingencies for all key processes required to prepare, run and mark examinations as well as the processes around the releasing of results and management of reviews and reconsiderations. This BCP is on track to be completed by mid-September.

Impacts/Risks

19. As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the likelihood of examinations not being able to proceed on a day-to-day or session-by-session basis is much higher this year than usual if there are new outbreaks of the disease; last minute cancellations could be possible nationally, regionally or school-by-school. This risk will be mitigated through the invoking of an Unexpected Event process, if any examination session is not able to proceed.
20. There is a risk that there may be delays to the examination booklets sorting and distribution processes should any region, but particularly the Wellington region, be at Alert Level 3 or 4 during or soon after the examination period. This could have an impact on marking timelines, potentially causing marking to continue past Christmas, which would put the results release date at risk. Where and as possible, NCEA Level 3 and 2 marking and results processing would be prioritised to minimise impacts on learners progressing on to tertiary studies and employment.

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Tēnā kōrua Principal and Principal's Nominee

Readiness for end of year examinations

This message provides clarity on plans around offering end of year examinations under each COVID-19 Alert Level.

Managing examinations

For any region at Alert Level 1, 2 to 3

- NCEA and New Zealand Scholarship exams will proceed.
- Schools are not considered gatherings so there are no restrictions on the number of students attending an examination in a single venue (such as the school hall). In all exam rooms ensure there is a gap of 1.5 metres between students in all directions. This provides enough distance between students, so they aren't touching or breathing directly on each other and enables supervisors to walk safely between desks.
- At Alert Level 3 additional requirements for exams to proceed have been agreed by the Ministry of Health. These are detailed in the attached document [Requirements for exam centres at Alert Level 3](#).

There will be students who will be unable to attend should their region be at Alert Level 3 during exams. We will let you know shortly about the support options available for students in this situation.

For any region at Alert Level 4

It is not possible to hold NCEA or New Zealand Scholarship exams because school sites are required to be closed. The unexpected event grade process would be available for students prevented from sitting NCEA exams as a result of COVID-19 restrictions. Unexpected event grades are not available to New Zealand Scholarship candidates, as this is a competitive award.

What next

Irrespective of the Alert Level you may be in at exam time, your plan for delivering exams will need to meet Alert Level 3 conditions to ensure safety and continuity. NZQA will work with you to develop your site plan to these requirements.

The attached checklist, additional Ministry of Health requirements at alert level 3, and 18 August Bulletin from the Ministry of Education (<https://mailchi.mp/education/covid-19-update-18-august>) will help with this. We will also work with you on contingency plans, in case COVID-19 or other factors affect the availability of key examination staff such as your Exam Centre Manager or supervisors.

Support for students

All students working towards NCEA this year will have had their learning and assessment programme affected by COVID-19. In recognition of this, in June [modifications were made](#) to help ensure there is a fair opportunity for achievement to be recognised. With the recent re-emergence of COVID-19 community transmission, the Minister of Education has announced [additional support for NCEA](#) students whose teaching, learning and assessment has been further affected in Term 3.

There are also opportunities for schools to more flexibly assess student work without having an adverse impact on grade validity or teacher workload. The remote assessment matrices

provided in Term 2 (and available on our website's [NCEA subject pages](#)) provide guidance and advice on alternative internal assessment methods, particularly for those subjects such as Outdoor Education or Drama, where performance of knowledge or skills may have been impeded. Where external assessment requires practical components or use of equipment not accessible remotely, we have further advice available on the specific subject pages.

Ngā mihi

Kay Wilson
Manager
School Quality Assurance & Liaison

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Requirements for exam centres at Alert Level 3

If New Zealand or parts of New Zealand were at Alert Level 3 during an exam period, exams can still go ahead if certain conditions can be met. The following precautions must be in place to reduce potential risk.

At all alert levels:

- If a school is at the centre of or implicated in an outbreak or cluster and/or has been closed by the Medical Officer of Health, exams will not be able to take place until public health authorities give approval
- Anyone who is unwell must stay away
- Those students identified as close contacts of a confirmed case, cannot attend their exam(s)

At Alert Level 3

Before the Start of each exam, ensure:

- Desks in the exam room must be spaced so that exam candidates are at least 1.5 metres apart in all directions
- All surfaces like door handles, desks and chairs are disinfected and cleaned
- Hand sanitiser is available at the entrance to each exam room
- Hand washing must be possible in the toilets (running water, soap and the ability to dry hands)
- Exam candidates are observed by staff on arrival checking for symptoms and asking those presenting as unwell to make arrangements to go home
- For subjects where a calculator memory check is required, this is done in a way that keeps exam candidates 1 metre apart.
- Candidates will need to be at least 1 metre apart if they have to wait to enter the exam room prior to the start of the exam
- There is a system in place to manage congestion prior to the exam – for example someone to manage a queue to ensure there is appropriate distancing between candidates prior to entering the room
- Exam rooms have adequate ventilation

During each exam, ensure:

- The attendance roll is clearly marked – this is a requirement for all exams under normal conditions
- Exam supervisors position themselves in the exam room so that they have line of sight to all candidates and do not walk the aisles as they normally would

- Exam supervisors only approach candidates when they require assistance
- A roll is kept to record the times that any candidates leave the exam room for a toilet break – this is a requirement for all exams under normal conditions.

After each exam, ensure:

- Candidates leave the exam room in a way that maintains physical distancing
- All surfaces like door handles, desks and chairs are disinfected and cleaned
- Exam supervisors wash and dry their hands thoroughly (or use hand sanitiser) after handling exam papers and before setting up the exam room for the following exam session
- Encourage candidates to immediately return home after their exam (and not to mill around in groups, for example)

Face coverings

Face coverings are not required in an exam at Alert Level 3. They continue to be an option for both the exam candidate and the staff member supervising the exam.

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