**Implementing the literacy unit standards for NCEA level 1**

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**The introduction of two literacy pathways for the National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA) level one signifies a major shift in the assessment of literacy at this level. This change could also be the catalyst for more effective cross-curricular literacy teaching in secondary schools.**

**The ‘old’ literacy pathway within an English programme**

Prior to this year, students could gain their literacy credits only through success in English achievement or unit standards, or through a small number of designated Communication Skills standards. This meant that English teachers were the ‘gatekeepers’ of literacy for qualifications.

**The ‘new’ literacy pathways within a programme of learning.**

From 2012 students must use one of two pathways to gain the required 10 literacy credits.

**Achievement standards**

Students gain literacy by meeting the criteria of specified standards across learning areas

**Unit standards**

26622 [writing]

26624 [reading]

26625 [oral]

**Students must gain all three standards.**

Students might work towards gaining literacy through both unit standards and achievement standards. However, if they gain literacy through achievement standards that literacy pathway will override the literacy unit standards pathway Refer to

<http://www.nzqa.govt.nz/about-us/our-role/legislation/nzqa-rules/secondary-schools-supporting-information/literacy-numeracy-2011/>

for further explanation, and a list of the achievement standards that earn literacy credits.

1. **The achievement standards pathway**

There are close to 160 achievement standards across 32 subjects that generate literacy credits.

This means that most students will gain literacy without any extra assessment, as they gain credits in a range of subjects throughout the year.

1. **The literacy unit standards pathway**

These standards were designed for use in secondary, tertiary and industry settings. They define literacy as: “*the written and oral language people use in their everyday life, learning and work. It includes reading, writing, speaking, and listening. Skills in this area are essential for good communication, active participation, critical thinking and problem solving*.” They are intended to attest to students’ ability to function in society. For this reason they are aligned to the **Learning Progressions for Adult Literacy** [koru/level 4].

<http://www.tec.govt.nz/Documents/Publications/Learning-progressions-literacy.pdf>

In a school setting these standards are intended for **three main groups of year 11 students**: those operating below level 6 of the curriculum; those who can work cognitively at level 6, but cannot yet gain achievement standards because of the language demands; those whose subject choices provide them with insufficient opportunities to achieve literacy through achievement standards.

**Planning and implementation – key issues identified by schools**

**Schools that started planning last year have generally managed the process better than those that did not.** The materials on the NZQA website [particularly the guidelines, decision making process and scenarios] are helpful resources.

<http://www.nzqa.govt.nz/qualifications-standards/qualifications/ncea/subjects/literacy-and-numeracy-level-1/information-and-resources-for-planning-and-implementation/>

1. **Gathering the evidence**

The evidence gathered should be ‘**naturally occurring’** i.e. collected from a range of **real** contexts and gathered over a **period of time**. The contexts could be learning experiences within and outside the classroom, or other aspects of students’ lives. The standards are intended to be **cross-curricular**, but this is not mandatory. Some schools have therefore opted to keep the assessment of these standards within English and ESOL programmes.

In the spirit of the standards other schools have gathered **evidence across learning areas** using one of three main approaches.

* All learning areas are involved.
* Students who probably need the literacy unit standards pathway were identified, and some or all of their teachers have been collecting evidence.
* Teachers/departments considered to be receptive have been shoulder tapped to be part of a trial this year.

Schools have sometimes struggled to collect this ‘**naturally occurring’** evidence from teachers across learning areas. There are several possible reasons for this.

* Some teachers do not recognise the **implicit literacy teaching and learning** that takes place in their classrooms.
* Teachers **do not have sufficient knowledge** of the intent of the standards, and therefore do not know what student work is appropriate.
* The evidence may occur naturally [e.g. carrying out instructions that show they have understood a text], but this **evidence is not formally collected**. This is particularly true for the oral interactions standard.

1. **Storage of evidence**

**Portfolios** are commonly used and held in one central storage place. Some schools are trialling the use of **electronic** systems, such as Moodle, to create a paperless system.

Gathering and storing evidence for the oral interaction standard has proved challenging. Many schools have found it easier to record evidence electronically, rather than keep written evidence. The NZQA website has optional observation sheets for recording written samples of evidence, but schools have generally found these difficult to use.

1. **Assessment and moderation**

As the work is assessed **holistically**, it makes no sense to assess each piece of work as it is gathered. However, portfolios need to be checked regularly for **quality and quantity of evidence**. In most cases schools are planning for a single person, or a small group, to do the summative assessment.

To date NZQA has provided a limited number of **annotated exemplars** to indicate where the not achieved/achieved boundaries lie. It is NZQA’s intention to publish more exemplar material, so schools will have more support in making assessment decisions in 2012.

Schools have not been required to send materials away for external moderation this year, but preparing materials for this will take time, and schools will find it difficult if they do not have **clear systems** for gathering, storing and assessing evidence.

1. **Identification of students**

At the start of the year many schools used a range of **data** to classify students into three groups: those who will definitely need the literacy standards pathway; those who may need them [at risk]; those who should gain the necessary credits through the achievement standards pathway**. Checkpoints** carried out at the end of term 2 and in term 3 to **monitor the progress** of students showed that predictions made at the start of the year were not always accurate. There is the potential for some students to fall through the gaps if adequate checks are not made. However, these checks will be accurate only if teachers are regularly uploading achievement data onto the school’s management system. Many teachers with pastoral roles have played a key role in identifying, monitoring and mentoring students using this pathway.

**Some approaches used to deal with these issues.**

* Flip cameras have been used extensively by teachers, and in some cases students, to collect electronic **evidence of oral interactions.**  Some schools have constructed their own templates to record examples of questions, comments etc from a group of students, and keep blank templates handy to use when opportunities arise. In one school where all year 11 students do a PE/health course, this department has taken responsibility for the oral interaction standard, as oral interactions were already a key component of their programmes. Each teacher in that department is gathering evidence for only 2 or 3 identified students in their classes.
* Early in term 3 one school identified students at risk of not gaining the necessary literacy credits and brought their teachers together for some **professional learning and development** around the intent and requirements of the standards. At the end of this session, these teachers indicated what work they already had that could be added to these students’ portfolios, and what work they would be able to provide before the end of term.
* The process of getting teachers from all learning areas to bring along **samples of student work** and consider these alongside the standards has several benefits. It helps teachers to realise that they do have ‘naturally occurring’ evidence that could be appropriate, and they gain a clearer understanding of literacy in cross curricular settings.
* In some schools **progress reports** were shared with students at the start of term 3. At this stage of the year students were more motivated to take some individual responsibility, and had a clearer understanding of what was required. These reports showed clearly what evidence the student had for each standard and what they still required. These reports were often shared with mentor/form teachers and parents.

**Implementing the standards – some positives**

* Learning and professional development has increased **teachers’ awareness of effective cross-curricular literacy pedagogy**
* **Language acquisition** takes time, and gathering evidence across the year acknowledges that English language learners may take longer, and need more support to develop appropriate literacy skills.

* Students involved in discussions with teachers about their portfolios and their next steps have been **empowered** and more **actively involved** in their own learning.
* Teachers of English classes where the majority of students are using this pathway believe that their **teaching and learning programme** is more **enjoyable**; there is less focus on assessment, and more on building skills and understandings across the year.
* Some students do not enjoy/engage in English programmes but produce competent work in other learning areas which can be used to **maximise their chances of success**.

* As the evidence for these standards is gathered over time, students who are absent for assessments may still have **sufficient evidence** across their subjects to attest to their literacy skills.
* There are students who will earn their literacy credits through the achievement standards pathway but still only gain 70+ credits. The literacy standards could provide **another 10 credits** for such students.

**Some further considerations**

* There are many benefits in having a **team** which includes staff with **academic** and **pastoral** roles. It is important for a designated person [preferably not the HOD English] to have **oversight**, but there should also be other staff involved with clearly defined roles. There is the obvious benefit of spreading the workload, but it would also **improve the teaching of literacy in cross-curricular settings** if more teachers looked at student work through a literacy lens.
* There is a need for staff **professional learning and development.** There are students who will struggle to achieve levels one and two unless their cross-curricular literacy skills and competencies are improved. It would be useful to include some PLD around literacy within the context of NCEA, not just the literacy US. This could support teachers to*:*
* *understand the diverse literacy understandings and skills of their students*
* *incorporate explicit literacy learning as part of their courses*
* *identify when they could include opportunities for gathering of evidence for US*
* *understand criteria and intent of the standards*
* *understand processes and roles for implementation*
* These standards are intended to be a ‘**success step’** to further learning and assessment. It is important to keep high expectations for students and to be sure there are future pathways for all students. Students’ learning needs, cultures, interests, and the NZC should be the starting points for programmes. These should **drive teaching and learning,** not the standards. The naturally occurring evidence will ‘fall out’ of the programme. The standards are not an end in themselves.

To access the literacy unit standards and support materials go to

<http://www.nzqa.govt.nz/qualifications-standards/qualifications/ncea/subjects/literacy-and-numeracy-level-1/>