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Ministry of Education – Te Tāhuhu o te Mātauranga

# Position Paper on Assessment

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Tēnā koutou

In the ever-evolving landscape of education, the Ministry of Education – Te Tāhuhu o te Mātauranga recognises the importance of assessment in shaping the life-long learning of ākonga.

Te Tiriti o Waitangi and its principles underpin the Ministry's position on assessment. This paper explains how a refreshed approach to assessment will give effect to Te Tiriti and equip ākonga to thrive in a rapidly changing world.

Historically, assessment practices have often brought about and maintained privileges for people close to the centre of power, and have created and maintained inequities for many people, including Māori. The Ministry calls for assessment practices to pursue equity for the empowerment of all ākonga.

The educational landscape has transformed since the Ministry's last position paper was published more than a decade ago. This updated position builds on Aotearoa New Zealand's strong commitment to assessment for learning. It emphasises equity and highlights the importance of partnerships for learning and assessment.

Assessment is when we check in on learning so we can decide what needs to happen next. It is a meaning-making act that requires observing, listening, responding to others' voices, adjusting perspectives, and jointly constructing ways forward.

Effective assessment considers and promotes the well-being of ākonga, identifies their strengths and enhances their mana, both within and outside of school. Assessment practices must respect cultural identity and must work for ākonga who have varying learning characteristics.

The Ministry's assessment position acknowledges our place within the international context. It is influenced by and informs global understandings of assessment.

This position paper aims to inform all people involved in education including ākonga, kaiako, whānau, iwi, communities and the wider education sector.

The Ministry's position on assessment supports the progression-focused framework of the refreshed New Zealand Curriculum Te Mātaiaho and a coherent pathway for learning. However, assessment goes beyond schooling, bridging the gap between classroom, whānau and communities.

Everyone has a role to play in nurturing an assessment culture that values and supports lifelong learning. Ākonga, whānau and communities must have input into assessment with kaiako, schools and the wider education system. In assessment, we must be open to learn with and from each other.

## Te Tiriti o Waitangi

Our nation, including our education system, is founded on Te Tiriti o Waitangi. Therefore, Te Tiriti is also foundational to the Ministry of Education's policies and positions, including this position on assessment.

From this foundation, our position aligns with key principles of Te Tiriti, which intersect with the set of values carried through this paper. These values, which are explained further below, are mana mokopuna, whāia te iti kahurangi, pono, wānanga, and whanaungatanga.

The Tiriti principle of whakamarumarū (active protection) reminds us of our obligations to uphold tikanga Māori, to reinstate the mana of mātauranga Māori and te reo Māori in education, and to honour **mana mokopuna**.

The Tiriti principles of mana taurite (equity) and kōwhiringa (options) direct us to ensure fair and equitable access to educational options, and fair and equitable educational processes and outcomes for Māori. These principles reflect the notion of **whāia te iti kahurangi** and the concept of **pono**. Ultimately, they are about Māori achieving success as Māori.

The Tiriti principles of tino rangatiratanga (self-determination) and pātuitanga (partnership) make us mindful of the autonomy, agency and leadership that ākonga and their whānau, hapū and iwi bring to learning and assessment. It points to the necessity of **wānanga** and **whanaungatanga** as well as collaboration and co-design between education settings and whānau, hapū and iwi.

Our position is that fair and effective assessment practices are crucial to giving effect to Te Tiriti o Waitangi.

## Values

The following values are embedded in our position on assessment. They are defined here in relation to assessment, to provide a purpose for assessment and a guide for how it is designed and undertaken.

**Mana mokopuna** acknowledges the unlimited potential of tamariki to learn and develop. Mana mokopuna requires assessment practices that affirm mokopuna identities, strengths and potential. He taonga te mokopuna, kia whāngaia, kia tipu, kia rea.

**Pono** is to honour and respect ākonga, and to bring integrity and trustworthiness to assessment approaches that are fair and equitable. It is to fully commit to ākonga success.

**Whāia te iti kahurangi** is about pursuing distant horizons and looking ahead with broad thinking and open-mindedness. It is about noticing, recognising and responding to and with ākonga and whānau in regards to their aspirations and expectations.

**Wānanga** alludes to a holistic approach to ako - reciprocal learning and teaching that encapsulates cultural, spiritual and practical aspects of knowledge.

**Whanaungatanga** refers to the strong relationships and connections, and the strong sense of belonging that is required for relevant, fair learning and assessment to occur.

## Notice, Recognise, Respond

‘Notice, Recognise, Respond’ is an assessment process that requires active, creative and deliberate design. It works best when kaiako skilfully create respectful opportunities for ākonga to share what they understand, know and can do.

Kaiako must recognise that what they are noticing is a reflection of ākonga learning and development. Without this understanding, important aspects of learning that have taken place may be misinterpreted or missed altogether.

Kaiako can then plan and enact responses for the benefit of ākonga. Any response may involve individual and/or groups of learners, and be carried out in partnership with, for example, other tamariki, whānau, hapū or iwi.

Understanding ākonga and whānau aspirations and expectations informs what kaiako notice and recognise, and how they respond to patterns and set priorities. Through whāia te iti kahurangi, they gain understandings of extended learning pathways - what is being learned and what future learning can be planned for over time. Kaiako use their understandings to disrupt the status quo, strengthen equity, deepen their knowledge of curriculum, and evolve practices that support every ākonga.

Effective assessment requires kaiako to notice, recognise and respond quickly as part of the immediate and ongoing inquiry process. Kaiako use their expertise and experience to see beneath the surface and to inquire further.

‘Notice, Recognise, Respond’ provides a basis for kaiako and ākonga to share achievements with whānau in a way that is clear and demonstrates learning that has taken place. This supports conversations about ākonga progress.

## Assessment as shared meaning-making and wānanga

Assessment founded on Te Tiriti o Waitangi and driven by a strong set of values requires us to develop new understandings about how we conceptualise and do assessment. One way to approach this is to develop a collective understanding of assessment as a shared process of meaning making and wānanga.

Shared meaning making and wānanga positions assessment as a collaborative and interpretive activity where context and whanaungatanga matter. Its objective is to co-construct a deeper, more holistic understanding of ākonga aspirations, progress, capabilities and needs.

Rather than a one-sided evaluation or judgement, assessment becomes a dynamic and on-going process that enhances understanding, builds on whanaungatanga and fosters deeper learning. The approach recognises that all the parties involved in assessment, especially ākonga, whānau and kaiako, have valuable perspectives and that assessment benefits when these perspectives are integrated.

Across the education system, assessment can be seen as wānanga when it involves ākonga, kaiako, whānau, iwi, government agencies and other stakeholders collaborating in respectful, culturally appropriate processes that include gathering, understanding, and interpreting evidence of learning for a range of purposes.

The prime purpose of assessment as shared meaning making and wānanga is to enable ākonga to flourish. By shifting the focus from a transactional view of assessment to a broader, more inclusive one, assessment upholds mana mokopuna by responding to the unique strengths, interests and aspirations of ākonga.

Assessment becomes important and meaningful to ākonga and is a catalyst for motivation and a source of pride and accomplishment. Understood in this way, assessment embodies whāia te iti kahurangi, the pursuit of distant horizons.

Assessment as a shared meaning making activity has four core elements.

## 1. Assessment capability

Carrying out assessment as a shared meaning making activity requires capable leaders, kaiako and ākonga who are committed to assessment for learning and who work together to notice, recognise and respond appropriately to evidence of learning.

A key part of being assessment capable involves having a range of cultural, social and emotional competencies that support self-regulation and social cooperation.

The list below identifies important notions associated with being assessment capable. Some of these are generic while others are more specifically targeted at kaiako, ākonga, whānau, school leaders and policy makers.

Assessment capability involves:

- believing assessment is holistic and strength-based and incorporates social, emotional and cognitive learning;
- using assessment to uphold mana mokopuna so ākonga develop positive identities as learners, and to build perseverance and resilience to overcome challenges and setbacks;
- understanding the characteristics of quality assessment (e.g., principles like fairness, dependability and manageability);
- using assessment information in ethical and pono ways, being alert to bias;
- knowing how to link appropriate assessment strategies and processes to particular purposes for assessment;
- knowing the curriculum and understanding progression;
- knowing how to use a range of assessment strategies in ways that are culturally and socially appropriate;
- generating rich assessment information, for example through wānanga, questioning, observation and knowing how and when to use formal assessment tools;
- understanding the meaning and limitations of assessment measures including those used in more formal assessments;
- critically reflecting on and interpreting assessment information to inform current and future learning;
- making accurate judgments against criteria using appropriate evidence and dependable processes;
- communicating assessment information in meaningful and accessible ways, and

- understanding the interdependence of multiple agencies and their roles, and the contribution they make to a quality assessment system.

More specifically, in the classroom being assessment capable involves:

- both kaiako and ākonga generating and acting on feedback that is focused, specific and clear;
- activating and working with others as resources for learning (i.e., self and peer assessment);
- taking into account all the languages ākonga know to develop a full picture of what they know and can do, and
- being clear about what is being learned, and what success looks like. This includes using clear criteria, exemplification, modelling, demonstrations.

## 2. Whanaungatanga

Respectful, collaborative and trusting relationships are fundamental when assessment is seen as shared meaning making and wānanga. Assessment in classrooms is at its most potent when kaiako foster power-sharing, trusting relationships with ākonga and their whānau.

Similarly, strong trusting relationships between colleagues, schools, whānau, iwi, community organisations and government agencies support collaborative exchanges of information and support meaning making across the education system.

Whanaungatanga in assessment involves:

- forging robust, learning-focused relationships based on strong social emotional competencies;
- fostering a sense of shared responsibility and accountability for learning;
- establishing shared criteria for what all those involved value;
- valuing learning that occurs outside of school (e.g., on the marae, sports field, in performing arts);
- expressing learning in varied ways (e.g., portfolios, photographs, videos of performances or other evidence);
- developing understandings about achievement and progress and how these will be shared;
- creating regular opportunities for ākonga and whānau to participate as partners in assessing learning progress;
- setting goals and next steps collectively with a commitment to improvement, and
- respecting privacy and consent issues.



### 3. Communication and dialogue

Assessment based on shared meaning making and wānanga requires ongoing communication and dialogue between participants. Purposeful dialogue helps develop clarity, share understandings, co-create knowledge and build relationships.

Dialogue is vital to the feedback processes that allow assessment to make an important contribution to better learning and teaching. Creating the conditions for dialogue to flourish requires communication skills and cultural capabilities.

Focusing on dialogue in assessment includes:

- creating shared norms for communication;
- actively seeking others' perspectives;
- developing active listening skills;
- skilful questioning that promotes higher order thinking and generates reflection and insights;
- open mindedness and curiosity;
- being able to consider a range of perspectives;
- the ability to adapt questions or feedback based on the direction of a conversation;
- the ability to reflect on your own contributions to a conversation and a willingness to adapt or change perspectives when warranted, and
- provision of opportunities for non-verbal check-ins and sharing of understandings (e.g., whiteboard, gestures).

#### 4. Shared responsibility

Assessment is a shared enterprise. Those with a role in assessment include ākonga, kaiako, whānau, school leaders, the Ministry of Education, New Zealand Qualifications Authority and other educational agencies. We all have a part in creating the conditions that enable shared meaning making.

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##### *Ākonga*

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Ākonga are discoverers, explorers, inspirers, learners and creators of knowledge. When ākonga are involved and their mana is supported in assessment, they reflect on and deepen their learning, and have clear perceptions of themselves as learners to develop agency as self-regulated learners.

They become more skilful in assessing and improving the quality of their learning and the learning of their peers. They are also an important source of feedback information for kaiako.

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##### *Kaiako*

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Kaiako are orchestrators, encouragers, interpreters and mediators of learning. They need to support ākonga to use and value assessment as a powerful means of furthering their own learning.

As the experts in the learning partnership, kaiako need to show leadership in assessment in ways that encourage ākonga to become motivated, effective, self-regulating learners. To do this, kaiako need to be knowledgeable about the curriculum and teaching, require well developed assessment capabilities and the motivation to use these to forge learning partnerships with ākonga.

Kaiako need to gather and use assessment information. Through whanaungatanga, they can share this information in ways that are consistent with, and supportive of, ākonga learning.

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## *Whānau*

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Whānau are encouragers, nurturers, protectors and the first educators of their tamariki. Wānanga with whānau, ākongā, and kaiako enables a reciprocal flow of information among these key players.

Whānau share information to support the learning of their tamariki. They also receive quality information about where their tamariki are at, what progress they have made, and the priorities for further learning.-

Schools can encourage reciprocity by ensuring that the information they make available to whānau is clear, contextualised, not harmful to motivation, and by checking that whānau understand its meaning.

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## *School and early childhood education leaders*

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School and early childhood education leaders are navigators, facilitators and motivators. Whāia te iti kahurangi requires assessment capable leaders who establish goals and expectations, provide appropriate support and feedback about assessment for kaiako and plan assessment-related professional development.

Assessment capability helps school leaders to ensure kaiako have the resources and capabilities they need for their assessment programme and provide additional support for ākongā who need it.

Leaders are responsible for building collaboration around the interpretation and use of assessment information, for critiquing, synthesizing and communicating quality assessment information. Fostering dialogue with whānau and boards of trustees about their aspirations, what matters to them and what success looks like is another important role for school leaders.

Leaders need to address unethical and inappropriate assessment processes and manage tensions between varying purposes of assessment. Leaders do not have to have all the expertise, but it is important that they position themselves as contributors to the assessment process alongside their colleagues, and that they show by their actions and words that assessment matters.

School leaders need to understand how national and international assessment initiatives inform a robust and effective nationwide ensure national system. Taking part and contributing assessment information enhances national understanding of ākongā learning and progress. It also enriches decision making about learning and resourcing needs.

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*Ministry of Education*

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The Ministry of Education has a key role to play in creating conditions for effective assessment practices to occur across the education sector. Its key responsibility is to create an environment of collaborative dialogue to deepen trust, understanding and effective practices in assessment through developing sound assessment related policies.

Such policies will encourage sharing of knowledge and expertise on assessment between ākonga, kaiako and whānau, within and across schools and the wider community. Guidance and support in developing quality approaches to assessment require ongoing provision of professional learning and development for educators. There must be sufficient resourcing of time, collaborations and assessment tools to assist kaiako to notice, recognise and respond.

The Ministry of Education has a key responsibility to lead development of curriculum that provides clarity about what is important to learn when and how so that useful assessment can be aligned to inform learning, teaching and curriculum processes. The Ministry models the use of assessment information to inform and adjust learning, by responding to schools with resourcing to support schools improve learning and providing leadership on what is assessed, how and why.

Critical, too, is addressing unethical and inappropriate practices with assessment information, managing tensions between varying purposes of assessment, and to facilitate and support ākonga success.

The Ministry needs to ensure that assessment processes are used at national level to inform decision making and monitor outcomes. In doing this, it must be mindful of the impacts and consequences associated with any nationally based assessment programme. Assessment systems that are low stakes for ākonga, that are timely and that generate rich information for collaborative use have the greatest potential to support ākonga and kaiako.

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*New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA)*

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NZQA have an important role in assuring the public that qualifications such as the National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA) are based on accurate and high-quality assessment practices. As such, it is important that NZQA is up to date with contemporary thinking and practice regarding assessment.

As a national agency, it needs to actively seek out the views and needs of stakeholders throughout Aotearoa and internationally to inform how assessment is carried out. This includes understanding and incorporating Māori perspectives through Te Tiriti based partnership process. It also involves monitoring and being mindful of the impact that high stakes assessment processes have on individuals and their communities.

NZQA needs to ensure that all formal assessment processes are driven by robust assessment principles and the strong value commitments discussed in this paper. Encouraging and nurturing strong, growth-minded learning identities for those being assessed should be a fundamental driver for assessment design and quality assurance decisions.

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## National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA)

A lot of time and resource in the senior secondary school is given over to NCEA. This involves ākongā, kaiako and administrators in a wide range of assessment activities that shape how curriculum is enacted and experienced.

Assessment activities and processes for NCEA impact on the wellbeing of ākongā and kaiako. NCEA assessments are also important outside of school. The results are used by employers, tertiary organisations and other stakeholders to make decisions that affect life pathways.

The Ministry's position is that the assessment that underpins NCEA strengthens learning and supports ākongā to flourish. This requires:

- mana ōrite mō te mātauranga Māori - equal status, support and resourcing for assessment of mātauranga Māori in NCEA, opening up greater opportunities for ākongā to access mātauranga Māori and the pathways that lead from it;
- that NCEA provides room for innovation and personalisation and recognises a broad range of achievement so that ākongā are able to record a wide range of accomplishments and capabilities as part of their NCEA transcripts;
- ākongā and whānau are supported to create and navigate pathways through NCEA that prepare them well for their futures and do not close off opportunities prematurely;
- standards clearly communicate what ākongā are expected to understand and know, and able to do when they achieve the standard;
- appropriate supports for kaiako are available to ensure assessments are dependable, including access to exemplar material and regular involvement in a community of practice;
- activities that involve ākongā themselves in selecting and collating the evidence needed to warrant an achievement claim, and
- assessment processes and arrangements that dovetail neatly with learning programmes and are aligned with curriculum principles and values.

All NCEA assessment, whether internal or external, should be designed so that ākongā with diverse learning characteristics have appropriate opportunity to show what they understand, know and can do.

## Assessment for coherent education pathways

Assessment is relevant throughout the lifespan – from infancy through to old age.

In early childhood, ākonga can be guided through early skills in self and peer assessment. With support, they take on increasingly challenging tasks.

The same is the case throughout schooling for primary through to secondary and tertiary, where ākonga are guided to become increasingly capable of reflecting on and adjusting their learning in relation to specified criteria or exemplars of more advanced learning.

As ākonga progress through schooling, demands for achievement increase (e.g., senior school assessments for qualifications like NCEA). Because these assessments can be perceived as high stakes where the results either open or close off pathways for ākonga, the focus is often tilted more towards optimising performance than optimising learning.

Yet, for continual enhancement of learning for life, use of assessment for learning knowledge and skills is vital. Accordingly, ākonga, whānau and kaiako need encouragement and support to keep a balanced approach to assessment.

This can be difficult particularly at times of transition – e.g., the move from early childhood to primary, moves into intermediate/middle and senior secondary schooling, moves from Kura Kaupapa Māori to English language learning environments and vice versa, or when transitioning to tertiary study or work.

Historically, these transitions marked steps towards more formalised and academic learning, and pathway decisions were usually based on a narrow range of information, predominantly assessment of learning (achievement data) provided by educators.

The Ministry as steward of education in Aotearoa New Zealand now has different expectations with respect to what information is provided, who provides the information, how and for what purposes:

- **What** – Te Tiriti o Waitangi obligates educational institutions to respect te ao Māori, Mātauranga Māori, and te reo Māori. In terms of assessment, this respect embodies Te Whare Tapa Whā, wherein the person is more than their cognitive capacities.

There are five dynamically interrelated dimensions of personhood (taha whānau family/social, taha wairua spiritual, taha whenua connection to the land/roots, taha hinengaro mental/emotional, and taha tinana physical). Information shared at transition needs to be broadened beyond cognitive/academic aspects.

- **Who** - The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child indicates the rights of parents/caregivers to provide appropriate information and influence on the direction of decisions affecting their child, and that the child has the right to impart information and express their views.

The implication is that ākongā and whānau, as partners in the learning journey, have a right to provide information, especially at transition points.

- **How** – Respectful relationships between educators, ākongā and whānau underpin the assessment sharing process, where dialogue guides the negotiation of pertinent information to be shared by all parties (with due consideration to privacy and consent issues).

This could be in the form of, for example, learning stories, portfolios, photographs, hyperlinks to performances and application of learning to practice.

- **Purposes** – the prime purpose is to enable ākongā to flourish, to be successful in who they are (cultural, family, spiritual beliefs, personality and unique combination of talents), which requires values of mutual respect, reciprocity, shared responsibility and relevance for all.



## Conclusion

Everyone has a role to play in nurturing our tamariki. For ākonga to flourish we need ongoing, coherent, mana enhancing assessment.

The five values which are embedded in the Ministry's position on assessment are mana mokopuna, whāia te iti kahurangi, pono, wānanga, and whanaungatanga.

Assessment values and supports lifelong learning and is based on partnership and dialogue. It is committed to equity and educational success. These goals will be achieved when ākonga, kaiako, whānau, iwi understand assessment's purpose and value and work together in this mahi.

Te Tiriti o Waitangi and its principles are at the heart of this refreshed Position Paper on Assessment. We invite everyone involved in education and beyond to absorb and enact the ideas of this position.

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