

TEACH Bulletin

Thorough Education Achieved in a Caring Home

Number 4

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National Qualifications Framework

“Monstrous lurch forward into chasms of confusion”

“Of all the changes which have surged through New Zealand education in the last two decades... unrelenting, tumultuous, exhausting though these have been in a grievously battered profession, they are mere flash floods compared with the framework’s silent swelling tsunami force.”

So declared a *North & South* magazine article of late last year by Jenny Chamberlain. And the “monstrous lurch” quote is from Auckland Grammar headmaster John Morris. As currently envisaged, the Framework is intended to centralise, standardise and entirely re-write that which constitutes *every* qualification in NZ — from brain surgeon to history professor to plumber to school leaver. National examinations will be out — unit standards will be in (more on unit standards later).

There has apparently been little public debate about it, even though it has been in the development and lately trialling stage since instituted by an act of Parliament in 1990, because educators, politicians and public alike do not understand it. “Without exception, every one of the specialists in educational assessment in our universities is critical of the framework,” says Warwick Ellery, professor of education at the University of Canterbury until 1995. The big flaw of the system is trying to treat academic subjects in the same way as technical or vocational courses, which work reasonably well under the unit standards assessment scheme. A unit standard is a piece of manageable

and logically organised material from any subject. This unit is taught and the student assessed (tested). The student must pass all the material in the unit or sit the assessment again...and again...and again if necessary. There is no grade or percentage mark, just a note of achievement or non-achievement. Two or three points are awarded for each unit standard achieved, and these points go onto the individual learner’s Record Of Learning in a central database. Units Standards can be gained at any time in any way at any place (good news for home schoolers...the process is known as “Recognition of Prior Learning”), as long as you achieve the assessment from recognised assessors. If you don’t like one assessor, you can always go find another, more sympathetic one. These Unit Standards can then be mixed and matched at any time on the database into whatever degree or qualification you desire, assuming you have achieved the requisite ones.

It sounds really good in some ways, but Professor Ellery believes that in this system excellence will be ignored. “People will focus on trivia — the things that can be reduced to unit standards — and ignore important objectives like problem-solving skills, critical and original thinking and creative writing.” New Zealand seems to be the first country to introduce the unit standard idea in academic subjects. It doesn’t seem to be catching worldwide. Other countries to go this route are South Africa, Namibia, the Maldives, Scotland and Viet-

nam. With no mark to set the good student apart from one who struggles, there may be a lack of motivation to gain these dozens or scores or perhaps hundreds of unit standards. It is certainly hard to be motivated at the moment since the PPTA has stopped work on developing the standards, slow work at the best of times, and reportedly not very satisfactory outside of the vocational subjects. Some schools already refuse to have anything to do with them, and there are big problems brewing with universities giving up their degree systems for the Framework.

But pro-Framework people, like Rod McGowan (interim chairman of the Framework Coalition steering group set up to promote the Qualifications Framework and spokesman for industry training), although willing to accept that there is a debate to be had about the inability of standards-based assessment to recognise excellence and that university autonomy is also an issue which needs to be worked through, remain intoxicatingly optimistic. McGowan is quoted as saying that the issues at stake are relatively minor, “nothing that people of good will and vision could not solve in half an hour.” (“Framework Supporters Find Their Voice”, *LEARN*, No. 11, March 1997. Wellington: NZQA. p. 35.)

However, there do exist teachers who have actually trialled unit standards in NZ schools. And although they had to promise not to talk to the press, they have managed to let their views be known. The record-keeping and paperwork is monstrous. There is a temptation for teachers and schools to let standards down so more students pass. And one teacher said simply, “For employers, unit standards are useless.”

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TEACH Bulletin

is a monthly publication of TEACH Publications, and is concerned with those things which may impact on home educators. Articles will deal with political developments, statist and professional trends, correspondence with educationalists, and other items of general interest to home educators. There is also a regular opinion poll regarding educational issues of the day that may impact home schoolers.

TEACH Bulletin is available for a suggested donation of \$16 per year for 11 issues (none in December), or by becoming a member of TEACH for a suggested donation of \$30. Some of the benefits of membership are:

- Discounts on Christian Home Schoolers of NZ National Family Conference fees.
- Discounts on TEACH National Leadership Conference fees.
- Coaching on how to participate in the Parliamentary process via letter writing, making submissions, lobbying MPs, etc.
- An annual free gift.
- Discounts on resources, books, T-Shirts, etc.
- Discounts on Sunshine Educational coach tours.
- An official TEACH tax-deductible receipt for your donation.

Your donation toward membership also helps to develop further services exclusively for home schoolers such as scholarships, summer schools, national tours by overseas experts, curriculum and home school resource fairs, national and international field trips.

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Hear, my son, your father's instruction, and reject not your mother's teaching.
— Proverbs 1:8

Implications for Home Schoolers

The first is how thankful we can be that our children are not in the system as it tears itself apart over this issue. But our children are still going to be part of that generation who may possibly have its opportunity for gaining meaningful qualifications totally denied to them. What do we do? Fortunately others have thought of this too. There are a growing number of organisations providing academic, externally moderated examinations, some with scholarships for top achievers. Here are some I was able to search out quickly:

PAT (NZ Progress & Achievement Test) — For grading against national norms, primary and secondary level. Available from:

- Peter Butler, 25 Harrisville Rd., Tuakau.
- Alan Curnow, 200 Hill St., Richmond, Nelson.
- Joan Kirby, NZCER, PO Box 3237, Wellington.

CAT (California Achievement Test) — For grading against national norms, primary and secondary. Available from:

- Home Education NZ, 17 Greta St., Hamilton.
- ACE Australia Ltd., PO Box 5470, Brendale M.D.C., Qld 4500, Australia.

Christian Education Qualifications Trust of NZ — 6th Form examinations. CEQTNZ, c/- Tynedale Park Christian School, Murphy's Rd., R.D. 2, Papatoetoe, Auckland.

NZ Education & Scholarship Trust — Tougher exams for 6th and 7th Form with Scholarship money awarded. PO Box 22012, Otahuhu, Auckland 6.

This is by no means an exhaustive list. If any readers would like to send in details of other exams they are aware of, please do, and we will reproduce them here for everyone's benefit.

It should already be well known that neither Universities or Polytechs in NZ require any specific

qualifications for entrance. However, you will probably be asked to produce a Curriculum Vitae, or collection of items documenting your progress in academic education, accomplishments, testimonials, examples of work, etc. Parents can issue their own Certificates of Attainment in whatever subject, drawn up on a friend's desktop publishing programme if need be. But parents should be regularly putting away items that would be good for a child's future CV. These could include video clips of parts taken in home school support group drama productions, photos of a birthday cake they baked and decorated, letter from the boss of the paper run they used to do, etc., as well as test scores and certificates of merit from outside clubs and organisations.

Parental Rights and Responsibilities Act (PRRA)

This is only proposed legislation in the USA at this stage, but is already causing storms of vehement protest from powerful lobby groups such as the National Education Association, National Organisation of Women, Planned Parenthood, National School Boards Association, American Association of School Administrators, National Abortion and Reproductive Rights Action League, etc. These groups do not believe it is right for parents to have the responsibility and privilege of fully raising their children without interference from the child or the state.

What motivates these groups to want to maintain the control they currently exercise over the nation's children via the public schools? Three philosophical beliefs.

First, those who oppose the PRRA believe that man is basically good and, therefore, children are basically good. If given the right environment of health, protection, and education, children cannot help but succeed. If children are only allowed to bring out the good inside them, they will soar beyond our

wildest dreams. Parental control is unnecessary. It only stifles the natural, good processes in children. Parental correction is not necessary because there is no evil in children to correct — there are only economic circumstances to correct. Children who are involved in crime and drop out of school do so because they are economically disadvantaged — not because they have a “sinful” nature.

The second philosophical underpinning is the conviction that parents do not know what is best for their children. This is an outgrowth of the belief that individuals do not know what is best for their lives. Those who oppose the PRRA believe that the intellectual and political elite know what is best for everyone, especially children. After all, as Hillary Clinton tells us, parents alone cannot raise a child, “it takes a village.” Parents should provide food and shelter for children, educators should teach children, and social workers should check up on everyone to make sure the best interests of the child are being served. Parents are one part of the system, but they should not try to control or override the other “essential” influences in their children’s lives.

For after all, and this is the third assumption, the child is the property of the state. When a mother gives birth, she is not just bringing her child into the world, she is bringing a new citizen into society. It is up to the government to make sure that child is raised to become a productive citizen. That might not sound so bad until you realise that government bureaucrats and educators are going to be the ones deciding what is required to teach your child to become a productive citizen. A government in control of child-rearing can, in theory, maintain its power forever. A free nation should never permit such a threat to liberty.

(From “The Enemies of Parental Rights Unite”, *The Home School Court Report*, Vol. 12, No. 4, July/Aug ‘96, Home School Legal Defense Association, Washington, D.C., pp. 5-7.)

New Zealand

Home Education Week

It has been proposed that the week of 20-26 October, 1997, be declared New Zealand Home Education Week. Home schoolers all over the country could use this as an opportunity to do something special to raise their profile locally and develop a bit of positive public relations. This could help in gaining the movement a bit more credibility, especially when applying for grants or discounts with resource suppliers, or for admission to tertiary institutions or gaining help and advice from schools and perhaps even the use of some of their resources. And of course the benefits would be examined by more people, thereby bringing more people into the home schooling movement and your local support group.

Last year the Manawatu Home Educators held a series of activities which really were successful. Start with these and add more ideas and use the ones that would suit your group the best:

- public debate
- coffee morning at public venue
- hold your weekly support group meeting at the local shopping centre’s open plaza area
- get a local DJ to interview a couple of you on their station as part of the week
- have a delegation of home schoolers present the mayor with some token of the week, a professional looking declaration, suitable for framing or some home baking done by home schooled children or some craft items done by the home schoolers
- have a contest among your home schooled children to write an essay or short story espousing the wonders of home education. Advertise this in the local papers so that the winner could be printed.
- Maybe throw the competition open to all school children! Get someone to offer a cash prize to really encourage captive school children to think along home schooling lines!
- Perhaps we could get the Min-

istry of Education to approve of the following Resolution, and each local support group who felt like taking part could make an appointment with their local MP and/or mayor to present them with a copy of the Resolution plus again some items produced by local home schoolers (a choral item, a framed photo of an earlier accomplishment by home schoolers, like a shot of children sitting on top of a mountain of klean sacks full of rubbish the home schoolers had collected from the local beach, park, reserve, or a formal invitation to your end-of-year Bar-B-Q so that that dignitary could make the award presentations for the year to the children and deliver the end-of-year speech), ensuring the press is there to take the photos and get the story for the papers.

- Brain storm among yourselves: then share your ideas through TEACH Bulletin and also what you think of the following Resolution:

Whereas home schooling is the fastest growing educational alternative in New Zealand; and

Whereas home schooling families contribute significantly to the cultural diversity important to a healthy society; and

Whereas NZ is a place where diversity and individualism are championed; and

Whereas parents who provide education for their children at home exemplify the independent NZ society; and

Whereas home school families tend to be strong, healthy families who contribute greatly to NZ society; and

Whereas the cost of educating children at home saves money from the government general fund; and

Whereas home school students are proving themselves by excelling in college and in the work force;

Be it Resolved the New Zealand Ministry of Education approves of home schooling as an important part of New Zealand’s educational infrastructure meriting ministerial sanction and protection; and be it

Further Resolved that the New

Zealand Ministry of Education supports the right of parents to choose home schooling as the educational alternative best suited for their children; and be it

Further Resolved that the Ministry of Education and district management areas are encouraged to cooperate with parents who are teaching their children at home; and be it

Further Resolved that the Minister of Education is respectfully requested to direct the Ministry of Education and its district area managers to take whatever steps are necessary to ensure that they do not unnecessarily interfere with parents exercising their right to home school their children; and be it

Further Resolved that the The Minister of Education establishes the week of October 20-26, 1997, as New Zealand Home Education Week.

Changes to Social Welfare Benefits

As of 1 April 1997, changes to the unemployment, domestic purposes and widows benefits have been introduced which could well affect some home schoolers. A toll-free hot-line has been set up to make enquiries:

phone 0800-100-800

The situation is that a parent whose youngest child is 14 or older and whose spouse is on the unemployment benefit is required to actively seek full-time work through the NZ Employment Service for at least 30 hours per week. In addition, those who receive either the DPB or widows' benefit and whose youngest child is 14 or older are required to seek part-time work of at least 15 hours a week or be involved in some kind of approved training programme. Three exemptions are immediately recognised:

- those caring for special needs children;
- those caring for a person who would otherwise be in hospital;
- and those who are themselves affected by serious health problems or disabilities.

For those on any of the above benefits, if your youngest child is be-

tween 7 and 13, you must attend a Yearly Planning Meeting with your Customer Service Officer. Beneficiaries are not required to do anything until they are contacted by letter from Income Support. Pat Houston, Income Support Area Manager, said in the Palmerston North *Tribune* of 13 April: "Each customer is different, with their own circumstances and attitudes. We want to make sure they know all possible opportunities and get the help they need to plan for the future." So do home schoolers get exemptions from this? Contact your Customer Service Officer.

Random Notes

At present when filling out applications for exemption certificates, there is no question about "Why" one has decided to home school. This is good and proper and as it should be. Some may be tempted to explain that anyway, as they are quite convinced about it and want as many to hear as will listen. Be strong and resist the temptation to explain "Why" on your exemption application. Such information could be used by the newer upcoming breed of educational bureaucrats (eager to make a name for themselves by their thoroughness) to harass home schoolers who choose to teach their children at home for "politically incorrect" reasons.

And the following quote from the September/October 1996 *Home School Court Report* of the Home School Legal Defense Association, Washington D.C., could have relevance to Kiwiland:

Most Massachusetts school districts have improved substantially in the last year or two, but no one can keep new personnel from coming in and wreaking havoc in an otherwise stable situation. HSLDA urges all home schoolers to join and actively support their local support groups and state organizations. Strong, unified responses to unwarranted acts can help to ensure that good districts won't go bad with a single personnel

change. We encourage home schoolers to work together to make sure that families considering home education get accurate information from local home schoolers (and not leave it up to the MOE or CAB to inform inquirers — Ed.) It is up to home schoolers to get that information out.

Back in February/March of 1996 many home schoolers were "randomly selected" by the MOE to voluntarily fill out an "anonymous" survey on various aspects of home schooling. The results are long since in, but not yet available for our perusal.

Other educational authorities have also been known to send out surveys. Faced with declining enrollments the Racine, Wisconsin (USA) Unified School District Board sent out a questionnaire to 163 home schooling families asking what the district could do differently to get them back. Only 16 families responded to the survey. Home School Legal Defense Association attorney Scott Somerville was quoted at length in the local paper, explaining that home schoolers "found it difficult to explain in a charming and tactful way" that they believe the public school system has reached a dead end. Somerville wrote the superintendent of schools, urging him to conduct a survey of families who were still in the public schools, to determine what they could do better to serve families who were thinking of leaving.

Thomas Sowell, nationally syndicated columnist, said the following in the *Washington Times* of August 13, 1996:

Home schooled children nationally score above average on standardized tests. Think what this means: With all the "expertise" claimed by the educational establishment, with all the highly touted "innovations" that spring up like mushrooms in schools across the country and with all the thousands of dollars per child poured into the system, parents do a better job in their own homes.

TEACH Bulletin Opinion Poll #2

In your opinion who should be responsible for the education of children?

1. Should it be compulsory for children to receive some sort of pre-school instruction, such as that provided at kindergarten or play centre, either at home or at an institution?

- yes
- no
- don't know / not sure

2. Should it be compulsory for children to receive some sort of primary school-level instruction either at home or at an institution?

- yes — (go to question 2a.)
- no — (skip to question 3.)
- don't know / not sure — (skip to question 3.)

2a. If yes, at what age should this become compulsory?

- 4th birthday, 5th birthday
- 6th birthday 7th birthday 8th birthday

3. Should it be compulsory for children to receive some sort of secondary-level instruction, either at home or at an institution?

- yes — (go to question 3a.)
- no — (skip to question 4.)
- don't know / not sure — (skip to question 4.)

3a. If yes, until what age should it be compulsory?

- 15th birthday, 16th birthday
- 17th birthday 18th birthday 19th birthday

4. Should it be compulsory for young people to receive some sort of tertiary-level academic instruction for one or two years, either at home or at an institution?

- yes
- no
- don't know / not sure

5. Should it be compulsory for young people to receive some sort of tertiary-level vocational/technical instruction for one or two years, either at home or at an institution?

- yes
- no
- don't know / not sure

6. Should it be compulsory for young people to do a spell of compulsory military training or other national service?

- yes
- no
- don't know / not sure

7. Ideally whose responsibility should it be to see that children get an education?

- Parents and/or family
- the civil government; the state
- both equal
- both, but more so the parents
- both, but more so the state.

8. Ideally who should pay for the education of children (up through secondary level)?

- Parents and/or family (User pays.)
- the civil government; the state
- both equal
- both, but more so the parents
- both, but more so the state.

9. Universities in NZ are presently funded mainly by all of us taxpayers (just on 75%) and a bit by student fees (about 25%). How would you change this, if at all?

- No change
- The state (meaning the tax-payers) should cover all costs. Make it free to all students.
- The state should pay for none of it. Let the students pay the full costs. (User pays.)
- The state should pay more and the student less than at present.
- The state should pay less and the student more than at present.

The purpose of these opinion polls of home schoolers is to identify areas of major agreement or concern wherein we all may want to make a concerted and unified action of some kind. Please take a few moments to fill in your responses to these questions and post your finished questionnaire to:

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Stop Press

One day Home School Seminar in Auckland on Saturday 21 June 1997.

Time: 9am to 4:30pm

Venue: Windsor Park Baptist Church, 550 East Coast Rd., Mairangi Bay.

Cost: About \$25 per person or couple.

Many workshop sessions to choose from. More information next month.

Stop Press

I received a phone call Thursday 17 April from Mr Ron Burbery, Projects and Contracts Manager, Early Childhood and Schools Resourcing Division of the Ministry of Education. He is the one who pays out our home schooling allowances. In an effort to streamline the whole exercise he has come up with a new scheme and wanted some feedback from home schoolers. I'll describe the proposed changes and ask you to indicate how you feel about it, if you would please.

Instead of paying out on the anniversary of each child's exemption, as is done at present, so that you may get several during the year at odd times, the Ministry would like to pay all supervisory allowances twice a year: in July and in January. So you would get 1/2 the total annual amount in July, and 1/2 in January. On each occasion, you would receive a (most probably) totally redesigned form listing all the children you have currently on exemptions and a statutory declaration covering all of them. So that means two statutory declarations a year. If you have had 4 children on exemptions, you probably have had to sign four statutory declarations during the year. So the Ministry does the job only twice a year. We all receive the allowances at the same times each year, and we should be able to easily determine the amount for budgeting. Any children that start or finish home schooling within those periods would receive a pro-rata payment. They propose to start this July. And they would encourage all of us to supply bank account details so that they could make a direct deposit rather than post out cheques. (But that is optional.)

What is your reaction to this proposal?

I am happy about the proposed changes.

I am not happy about the proposed changes.

Why not? _____

I could go along with it if it were changed in the following way(s) _____
