

Consultation on proposal to replace NCEA - FAQs

This document provides answers to common questions about the proposal to replace NCEA with a new national qualification pathway. It will be updated over time, as we receive more questions.

(You can find more information and a detailed summary of what's being proposed, in our [Discussion document](#).)

To help you find what you're looking for, these FAQs have been divided into sections:

- General questions
- Proposal-specific questions
- Implementation and transition
- Equity and inclusion
- Credibility and comparability
- Integrated Vocational Education and Training (VET)
- Proposed Foundational Award – additional detail
- Proposed change to a subject approach
- Assessment, grading and endorsements

General questions

1. Why is the Government proposing to replace NCEA?

While NCEA has delivered positive outcomes for many students, it hasn't worked equally well for all and has resulted in differences between subjects and between schools in the learning and assessment that students experience.

For students to be set up for success in life after school, they need a clear pathway to future work or education, along with a trusted qualification that accurately represents their knowledge and skills. Consideration is being given to the need for a qualification pathway that is easier to understand, more robust, and more credible, so that all young people can confidently transition into future education, training, and work.

Strengthening our National Curriculum is also crucial so that we have a consistent, knowledge-rich curriculum grounded in the science of learning. A knowledge-rich curriculum clearly specifies what students are expected to know, and be able to do, for every learning area and wāhanga ako and at every year level. It supports mastery over time by providing content that is carefully selected,

sequenced, and coherent to make sure students build deep, transferable understanding.

For a more detailed explanation, please see Part 1: The case for change' on page 13 of the consultation Discussion document.

2. What's wrong with the current system?

The flexibility of NCEA has made it difficult to ensure students have access to deep learning opportunities that provide them with the knowledge and skills they need once they leave school. Students can achieve qualifications through unrelated standards, and many do not complete external assessments. This undermines the credibility of the qualification and affects post-school outcomes.

For more information, see page 9 of the Discussion document.

3. What about students still on an NCEA pathway?

NCEA is still a good qualification, but evidence shows there are ways the qualifications pathway can be improved to provide school leavers with more credible, consistent recognition of their skills and knowledge.

4. What would these proposals mean for the refreshed National Curriculum?

The proposed new qualifications would build on the work that has already been done to strengthen the National Curriculum.

Decisions will be focused on quality implementation, and making sure that teachers have resources and supports to make these changes confidently.

Resources and supports will be designed using the feedback received through this consultation.

5. It sounds like you've already made up your minds about the changes you want. How are you actually going to use the feedback you receive?

The proposals won't be finalised until all feedback has been worked through. Consultation is happening now to make sure final decisions are informed by feedback. If the proposals are confirmed, work would be done between now and 2028 to identify what implementation should look like.

6. What data backs up the decision to propose change?

Data and information from a range of sources was used to inform the development of these proposals.

ERO's findings

- In its 2024 report *Set up to succeed*, ERO found that NCEA Level 1 is not a fair or reliable measure of what students know and can do.
- Only 32% of schools typically offer all four achievement standards in a subject, meaning students have different amounts of work and different chances of achieving.
- ERO recommended reducing flexibility to improve consistency and credibility and noted that three years of high-stakes assessment is not internationally comparable.
- ERO also found that 71% of employers don't think NCEA Level 1 is a reliable measure of student knowledge, and 90% don't think it reflects a student's attitude to hard work.

NZQA (New Zealand Qualifications Authority) findings in 2024:

- 25% of students didn't attempt the external assessments they were entered for. At Level 3, this rose to 34%.
- Excellence rates were higher for internal assessments (25%) than for external ones (12%), raising concerns about consistency.
- There were over 250,000 instances where students skipped external exams—often because they already had enough credits.
- 54% of Year 12 students who achieved NCEA Level 2 did so with three or more full subjects (defined as 14+ credits per subject). For Year 13 students at Level 3, this was 65%.

International data also shows that young adults in New Zealand have below average literacy and numeracy levels, despite many of them having an NCEA qualification.

For more information, please see page 9, and the Endnotes at page 37 of the consultation Discussion document.

7. Why propose change now, while schools and kura are in the middle of the other NCEA changes?

The proposed new qualifications are intended to build on the foundational work that has been done to strengthen the National Curriculum.

As schools and kura prepare to implement the Curriculum, understanding how learning aligns to assessment and qualifications is critical.

8. Why is it being proposed that any changes would be phased?

It is important that teachers, leaders, and students are well-prepared for any change. It is also critical that changes to the National Curriculum and the qualification pathway are aligned – so that students are being taught and assessed under either the current curriculum and NCEA, or the updated curriculum and proposed qualification pathway.

For this reason, the Government is proposing the senior secondary curriculum and qualification changes be phased. Under the proposal:

- NCEA Level 1 would no longer be available from 2028, and a new Foundational Award would be introduced.
- The New Zealand Certificate of Education (for Year 12) would be introduced in 2029, replacing NCEA Level 2.
- The New Zealand Advanced Certificate of Education (for Year 13) would be introduced in 2030, replacing NCEA Level 3.

Final decisions on the timeline and phasing will be informed by feedback from public consultation.

See pages 11 and 12 of the consultation Discussion document for more information.

Whatever final decisions are made, there would be a focus on quality implementation, and making sure that teachers have resources and supports to make these changes confidently. The Ministry would work on developing supports for schools and kura, and the feedback received through this consultation would inform the approach.

9. What does this mean for the NCEA changes that are currently underway?

It is proposed that the current NCEA Level 1 would be available until the end of 2027, Level 2 until the end of 2028, and Level 3 until the end of 2029. This would align any changes with the implementation of the new curriculum, so students would be taught and assessed under either the current curriculum and NCEA, or the updated curriculum and new qualification pathway.

10. Who was consulted?

The proposals were developed in collaboration with a Professional Advisory Group (PAG). The PAG is made up of experienced principals from across New Zealand. Their insights helped shape the proposed changes to ensure they are practical and beneficial for students, educators, and employers.

11. How would this proposed change affect students, teachers, and parents?

The proposals have been designed so that:

- Students would benefit from a clearer, more structured qualification pathway that would better prepare them for life after school, and
- Parents would find the new system easier to understand, enabling them to better support their children.

Change can be challenging. Whatever the final design and decisions, teachers would receive support and resources to implement the changes confidently.

12. How much would this cost?

If the proposal is confirmed, costs would be managed through phased implementation and education budgets.

13. How can the public have a say?

Public consultation is open until 15 September. Further information, including the Discussion document, is available on [this website](#). Feedback will inform final decisions.

14. When can we expect a final decision on the proposed changes to be made?

The Minister intends to have final decisions with Cabinet before the end of 2025.

To meet this timeframe, feedback through submissions will be analysed once consultation closes.

It is important to make sure that people's voices are heard, and that the Ministry and NZQA have time to consider all the possible impacts of the proposed change, including what tools, resources, and time might be needed for teachers and leaders to confidently implement the change.

Proposal-specific questions

Please see pages 24 –27 of the consultation Discussion document for more information.

15. What is the proposed Foundational Award?

The proposed Foundational Award is a standalone recognition of literacy and numeracy or te reo matatini and pāngarau skills. If the proposal is confirmed, it would replace the current co-requisite and could be achieved from Year 9 to Year 13, with most students completing it in Year 11. It could also be used as a standalone award that demonstrates literacy and numeracy skills to future employers and educators.

16. Why are you proposing to remove NCEA Level 1?

Removing NCEA Level 1 would allow students to focus on deep learning in Year 11, without the pressure of high-stakes assessment. If confirmed, the reduced assessment load at Year 11 would let students stay focused on the valuable curriculum learning happening in the classroom – and give teachers more opportunities to focus their time and effort where it's needed most. It would align with international best practice and ensure students are better prepared for Years 12 and 13.

17. What are the proposed New Zealand Certificate of Education and Advanced Certificate of Education?

These are new qualifications that, if confirmed, would replace NCEA Levels 2 and 3. They are designed to be more coherent, consistent, and internationally comparable. Like the current NCEA certificates, students could complete these earlier than Years 12 and 13, and Year 13 subjects could count towards the Year 12 qualification.

18. What would happen to students who leave before Year 12?

Under the proposal, students who leave before Year 12 would be able to leave school with the Foundational Award, however, we recognise that students who leave before Year 12 would likely leave without more comprehensive qualifications.

As part of consultation, feedback is being sought on how students can be supported to stay in school and complete Year 12.

19. What happens if students don't have the qualifications they need by the end of Year 13?

There are tertiary education providers that can support school leavers to bridge the gap between school and future study and training. Consideration is being given to how we continue to provide school leavers with these opportunities.

20. Would students be able to attempt the proposed qualifications earlier than expected (i.e., sitting the New Zealand Certificate of Education at Year 11)?

Yes, this would still be possible under the proposed new qualification.

21. How would the curriculum requirement that Year 12 and 13 students undertake a minimum of 5 subjects affect resourcing and timetabling?

It is common practice for students to study five subjects in Years 12 and 13. This provides students with a balance between curriculum depth and breadth, allowing them to specialise in particular disciplines while maintaining flexibility

over their future pathways into employment or further education and training. Teacher workload and school resourcing should not be affected by this proposal.

22. Passing four subjects is proposed as a requirement for achieving the proposed new qualifications. What would constitute a pass, and how has this been calculated to ensure students won't miss out on a qualification because of a bad class/subject?

The mark for a passing grade is still being decided. Most students would need to take at least five subjects under the proposed changes, meaning they wouldn't have to pass every subject they're studying to get the qualification.

The students would also have already benefitted from three to four years of a knowledge-rich curriculum to help prepare them for the achievement requirements.

23. Is there a chance that other requirements might be introduced to the new qualifications as a part of this consultation? If so, how would they be managed to ensure consistency, equity, and credibility?

Yes, as a part of the consultation, feedback is being sought on whether other requirements might be included in the proposed new Foundational Award to support a more credible, consistent qualifications pathway. If the proposal is confirmed, any additional requirements would be decided on carefully, to ensure the impact on students and teachers is considered.

24. What impact could the proposed changes have on how internationally comparable the qualifications are?

Most internationally comparable qualifications span less than three years, so the removal of Level 1 would bring our national qualification pathway closer to other countries' high-stakes assessments at senior-secondary level.

A subject approach, focused on deep understanding across a whole subject, is also common internationally.

More credibility and consistency would be likely to improve the international status of the qualification. Strengthening the achievement requirements and simplifying the grading system could improve overseas understanding of the qualification.

25. How would schools and kura that don't have access to specialist teachers be able to offer full subjects under the proposed changes?

Schools would still be able to allocate resources as appropriate, just like they can now.

26. How would the proposed changes impact on alternative education providers, who support students outside of a school setting to attain NCEA? Would these changes make it more difficult for students to achieve the new qualifications?

If the proposal is confirmed, providers would have to consider how their programmes align with the updated National Curriculum and the proposed assessment changes.

As is currently the case, some education providers might consider alternative qualifications for their learners, and they are trusted to make the right decisions for their students.

Implementation and transition

27. How long would it take for the proposed Foundational Award to be raised 'over time' to assessing at Year 11 of the National Curriculum, and how would kaiako be expected to manage those changes?

Consideration is being given to how best to raise the proposed Foundational Award from assessing at a Year 8 to Year 11 level. The focus is on making sure that schools, kura, students, and families would be well prepared to make the change, so that all young people are equipped with the skills and understanding to succeed.

28. How would teachers be supported?

If the proposal is confirmed, professional development, resources, and guidance would be provided to help teachers implement the changes confidently.

The Ministry is seeking feedback on what support and resources would be most beneficial for teachers.

29. What would happen to students, mid-transition?

Under the proposal, students would either follow the current NCEA and curriculum or the proposed new qualifications and updated curriculum. Student would not experience a mix of both systems.

Transitional arrangements are yet to be decided for any students who start under the old system and don't finish before the new qualifications are introduced. For example, students who don't reach the full credit requirement under the current system but already meet some requirements.

Please see pages 24 – 27 of the consultation Discussion document for more information.

Equity and inclusion

30. How would equity be addressed?

The proposed new system is designed to be inclusive. Students would be able to complete qualifications over multiple years, and exceptional circumstances policies would ensure fairness.

Existing supports for learners would continue to be available.

31. What about disabled learners and those with disrupted learning?

Under the proposals, students would be able to complete qualifications over multiple years, and exceptional circumstances policies would provide additional support.

32. How would this work for students with identified needs that have a modified programme, e.g. health school, teen parent units, reduced attendance plans?

Students would still have the opportunity to complete the qualifications at their own pace, over more than one year, just like they can under the current NCEA.

33. Some of my students are struggling with their mental health and the proposed mix of higher achievement and more assessment requirements might make the pressure worse. How will these students be looked after?

The proposed changes are designed to make the qualification system easier for students and families to understand.

Removing Level 1 could help reduce student stress. By not needing to take time away for study leave in Term 4, Year 11 students could spend more time on developing their knowledge and skills, and preparing for their learning and assessments in Years 12 and 13. This could take the pressure off students who are anxious about an increased assessment load, and improve their assessment confidence in their final years of school.

Credibility and comparability

34. How do the proposed new qualifications stack up internationally?

They have been designed to be internationally comparable, aligning with best practices from other countries.

35. What do employers and tertiary providers think?

Initial feedback indicates strong support for a more coherent and credible qualification system.

36. Will this improve literacy and numeracy outcomes?

Yes, by making these skills a core focus through the proposed Foundational Award and the proposal to make English and Maths compulsory at Year 11. This proposal aligns with the introduction of structured literacy and numeracy in earlier years of the curriculum.

Integrated Vocational Education and Training (VET)

Please see pages 21 – 23 of the consultation Discussion document for more information on VET subjects.

37. How would the proposal strengthen vocational education and training?

If the proposal is confirmed, Industry Skills Boards (ISBs) would lead the design of Vocational Education and Training (VET) subjects, to make sure they align with the knowledge and skills needed in those industries. VET subjects would provide students with clear pathways to employment or further training.

If the proposal is confirmed, ISBs would begin to design VET subjects from 2026.

38. Why are you proposing Ministry-led and VET subjects remain part of the same qualification, rather than setting up two separate qualification pathways?

It's important that the national qualification system recognises the status and importance of vocational education and training, which open doors for students into valuable industry careers. Offering VET subjects would increase student engagement at school, allowing students to pursue their interests and learn valuable skills that would set them up for positive transitions out of school.

Maintaining a single qualification pathway provides students with choice, rather than forcing them down a general or vocational education and training pathway early on in their education.

39. How would you make sure that assessment designed by ISBs is pitched at the right level for secondary school students?

If the proposal is confirmed, the Ministry would work with the Industry Skills Boards to ensure that VET subjects are comparable in depth with general subjects.

For example, VET subjects could be required to have the same amount of total time expected for teaching, learning, and assessment as general subjects.

40. If the Ministry is working with ISBs to make VET subjects part of the national curriculum, does that mean we can expect more curriculum changes after 2027?

If the proposal is confirmed, the Industry Skills Boards could start to develop the skill standards for VET subjects from 2026, so that they are ready for use before schools and kura are required to implement any changes. VET subjects would be added to the curriculum over time, as they are finalised.

41. Industry standards can change at any time. Should teachers and kaiako expect that industry-developed and aligned standards would change with them in the future?

Typically, industry-led assessments are carried out by tertiary organisations in partnership with schools and kura and are updated with any industry changes. That means that, if the proposal is confirmed, the majority of teachers and kaiako would be unlikely to experience an increased workload as a result of changes to assessments. Teachers and kaiako can also expect the Ministry to review and maintain the national curriculum and qualifications, so they remain up to date, relevant, and fit for purpose.

42. What would happen to existing unit and skills standards?

Under the proposal, students would only be able to use standards that are approved for use in a subject (including VET subjects) to have these standards count towards their qualification. In other words, any standard not approved for use would not count towards it.

Individual standards could still form part of a student's learning, contribute to other tertiary qualifications, and show up on their Record of Achievement.

43. NCEA Level 1 recently changed to have fewer, larger standards for each subject area. Would these industry-designed assessments be structured in a similar way, or should students in vocational education and training expect something different?

If the proposal is confirmed, the Ministry would work with the Industry Skills Boards to determine how much assessment is appropriate on a subject-by-subject basis. That includes making sure that any new assessments are comparable with general subjects.

Proposed Foundational Award – additional detail

44. How is the proposed Foundational Award different to the Co-requisite assessment?

Like the Co-requisite assessment, the proposed Foundational Award would represent students' skills and knowledge in literacy or te reo matatini and numeracy or pāngarau. This approach is consistent with an international focus on core literacy and numeracy skills, so that young people have the necessary skills to engage with work, education, training, and life after school.

While the Foundational Award would be required for students to attain the proposed new qualifications (like the Co-requisite for NCEA), it would also exist as a standalone award. This is a change that would give students the opportunity to leave with recognition of these important skills.

Currently, the Co-requisite assesses students at the level for a Year 8-9 student. Under the proposed change, the Foundational Award would start at the same level and be raised to a Year 11 level over time. This reflects the need for students to build stronger foundational skills, so that employers and tertiary organisations can rely on them being prepared for future work, education, and training.

45. 2023 achievement data for the Co-requisite shows that anywhere between roughly 30%-60% of students did not pass the assessment. What impact would raising the qualification's assessment from Year 8 to Year 11 have on students?

If confirmed, changes to the Foundational Award would be timed so that students would be taught using the updated National Curriculum before they would be expected to achieve at a higher level. This would give students the opportunity to strengthen their literacy, numeracy, te reo matatini, and pāngarau skills, so they would be well prepared to succeed in their Foundational Award.

46. Under the proposal, would students have to achieve the Foundational Award before they start the New Zealand Certificate of Education?

No – while students would need to achieve the proposed Foundational Award in order to achieve the NZCE or NZACE, students would still be able to start their other qualifications before they have achieved the Foundational Award. This might apply to students who have moved from overseas after Year 11, for example.

47. Would students be able to resit the proposed Foundational Award?

Yes. Like the current co-requisite, if a student did not achieve the proposed Foundational Award, they would be able to resit it.

48. With the proposed removal of NCEA Level 1, Year 11 students would get a full Term 4 of learning instead of study leave. What impact could this have on kaiako planning their learning programmes for the following year?

If confirmed, this proposal would reduce the assessment load at Year 11 – and give teachers more opportunities to focus their time and effort where it's needed most throughout the school year.

Proposed change to a subject approach

Please refer to page 28 of the consultation Discussion document for more detail.

49. What is the proposed structured subject approach?

Under the proposal, students would be assessed on whole subjects, rather than on a collection of unrelated standards. This means that students would be focused on whole-of-subject learning. It also provides consistency in learning and assessment across schools.

50. I teach a bespoke course that assesses against a mix of achievement standards, which I designed to cater specifically to the interests of my students. How would I run a programme like that in the proposed subject approach?

The improved credibility and coherence of the proposed qualifications would rely on them consistently reflecting students' knowledge and skills across entire subjects.

Teachers will always be able to contextualise learning to their students and cater to their interests - and integrated curriculum approaches are still possible. However, with a curriculum driven approach, integrated curriculum programmes would need to be carefully planned in order to ensure the material in each subject is covered, and that students are fully prepared for assessments.

51. How would the proposed subject approach be different to something like School Certificate or University Bursary – qualifications which NCEA was developed to replace?

Like the current NCEA qualifications, the proposed new qualifications would use common standards for student achievement. Students will not be compared to their peers.

School Certificate was a different qualification pathway to the one we're proposing:

- Achievement in School Certificate was measured by how well students did in individual subjects, but – like the current NCEA – the new qualifications would still provide students with grades that reflect their overall achievement.
- School Certificate was mainly focused on exam-style assessments, and did not effectively support students interested in vocational education and training. The proposed qualifications would still provide a balance of internal and external assessments, as well as creating vocational-education subjects to support those pathways into future work and training.

Assessment, grading, and endorsements

See page 32 of the consultation Discussion document for more details.

52. If confirmed, how would overall grades be allocated? What scores would students need for different overall grades?

Each subject would have internal and external assessments that add up to a total of 100 points. For example, two internal assessments and two external assessments worth 25 points each. To achieve the new qualification, it is proposed that students would need to pass at least four subjects.

The total score of a student's best five subjects might also qualify them for an endorsement that recognises overall high achievement. The scores that might qualify students for those endorsements are still to be decided.

53. What are the proposed grading changes?

Under the proposal, students would receive letter grades (such as A-E) for their subjects, with an overall mark out of 100. While the thresholds for these grades have not yet been worked through, these grading changes would provide clearer information about student achievement and would replace the current Achieved/Merit/Excellence system.

54. Will endorsements still be available?

Yes, as above, students could earn a qualification endorsement based on their overall performance, motivating high achievement.

55. Are you proposing to use Artificial Intelligence for marking of assessments?

If the proposal is confirmed, NZQA would be responsible for making sure the marking of assessments contributing to new qualifications is done to a high standard. The Ministry would work with them to make sure that the qualification pathway stays credible and consistent.

56. Would all students have to sit exams?

The subject approach is intended to ensure students have opportunities for deep learning across the entire school year. What this would look like within a subject would depend on the area. For example, subjects like Art or with a large practical component might not have an external exam. The approach would be tailored to subjects, and this detail would be worked through only once consultation has closed and feedback has been received.

It's important that students stay engaged with their learning for the whole year, and external assessment helps with that.

57. Some students aren't able to show their learning as effectively in an exam setting. What will these changes mean for them?

As above, under the proposal, assessment will reflect the learning.

If confirmed, each subject would still include internal assessments, meaning students would have a balanced mix of assessments. There would also still be some non-exam external assessments where appropriate – like visual art portfolios.

Exams help with consistency in how students are assessed and showcase students' skills and knowledge in different ways to internal assessments. As with any form of assessment, students would need to study and practice – and we trust teachers to make sure that their learners are well prepared for what to expect in an exam setting.

58. The discussion document lists students being assessed against a common standard as something that 'could be strengthened or retained.' Does that mean there's a chance that students could be assessed against other students under the new qualifications?

No. Under the proposal, students would be graded against a common standard for each assessment, meaning that their grade would not change based on other students' performance.

59. Under the proposal, how would students take all externals and internals to achieve a subject, if factors happen beyond their control? Will they get a second chance to submit or sit an external/internal assessment?

Schools and kura have flexibility in how they time their internal assessments.

NZQA has a way to provide students with derived grades if students can't attend an examination or external assessment through extenuating circumstances, or where their performance has been negatively affected. If the proposal is

confirmed, the Ministry would make sure that careful considerations would be made for students who are unable to sit external assessments for genuine and unavoidable reasons.

How reassessments and resubmissions might work in the proposed qualifications is still being considered, and feedback is welcomed on this.