



**Te Tāhuhu o  
te Mātauranga**  
Ministry of Education

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# **Quick Guide to Safer Technologies for Schools (ST4S)**

## Supplier handbook

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**Te Kāwanatanga  
o Aotearoa**  
New Zealand Government

## About this guide

This guide is intended to be a basic introduction to ST4S for suppliers in the New Zealand market.

It is aimed at education technology businesses who want to know more about the ST4S initiative and assessment process.

This guide does not replace the [Safer Technologies for Schools Assessment: Vendor Guide](#), which goes into more detail and is more targeted at a company's technical and product ownership audience, who would typically be involved in the end-to-end assessment process.



## Overview

### What is ST4S

ST4S is a standardised approach to evaluating digital products and services, used by schools across Australia and New Zealand.

It is a trans-Tasman initiative that is facilitated by Education Services Australia (ESA) and overseen by the Ministry of Education New Zealand, alongside Australian counterparts.

ST4S assesses products against a nationally consistent security and privacy control framework to produce an assessment report, which contains product information, a risk rating and key risk mitigations.

Assessment results and reports are available to Australian and New Zealand schools via the ST4S Catalogue.

### Benefits to your business

As cyber threats continue to rise, so does the need for education technology businesses to prioritise cyber security.

Schools are increasingly selecting products that can demonstrate this commitment – those which are ST4S assessed not only demonstrate this commitment, but also that they meet key privacy, security, and online safety standards.

ST4S is a practical way to:

- › ensure your product is meeting current privacy and security standards
- › demonstrate your commitment to protecting school data
- › build trust and credibility with potential customers
- › undergo independent verification
- › help you respond to compliance questions
- › gain a clear competitive advantage
- › ease entry into international markets, especially Australia
  - NOTE - Many Australian states now require an ST4S assessment for all EdTech products used in schools.

ST4S also offers a valuable structure to support ongoing product improvement and innovation.

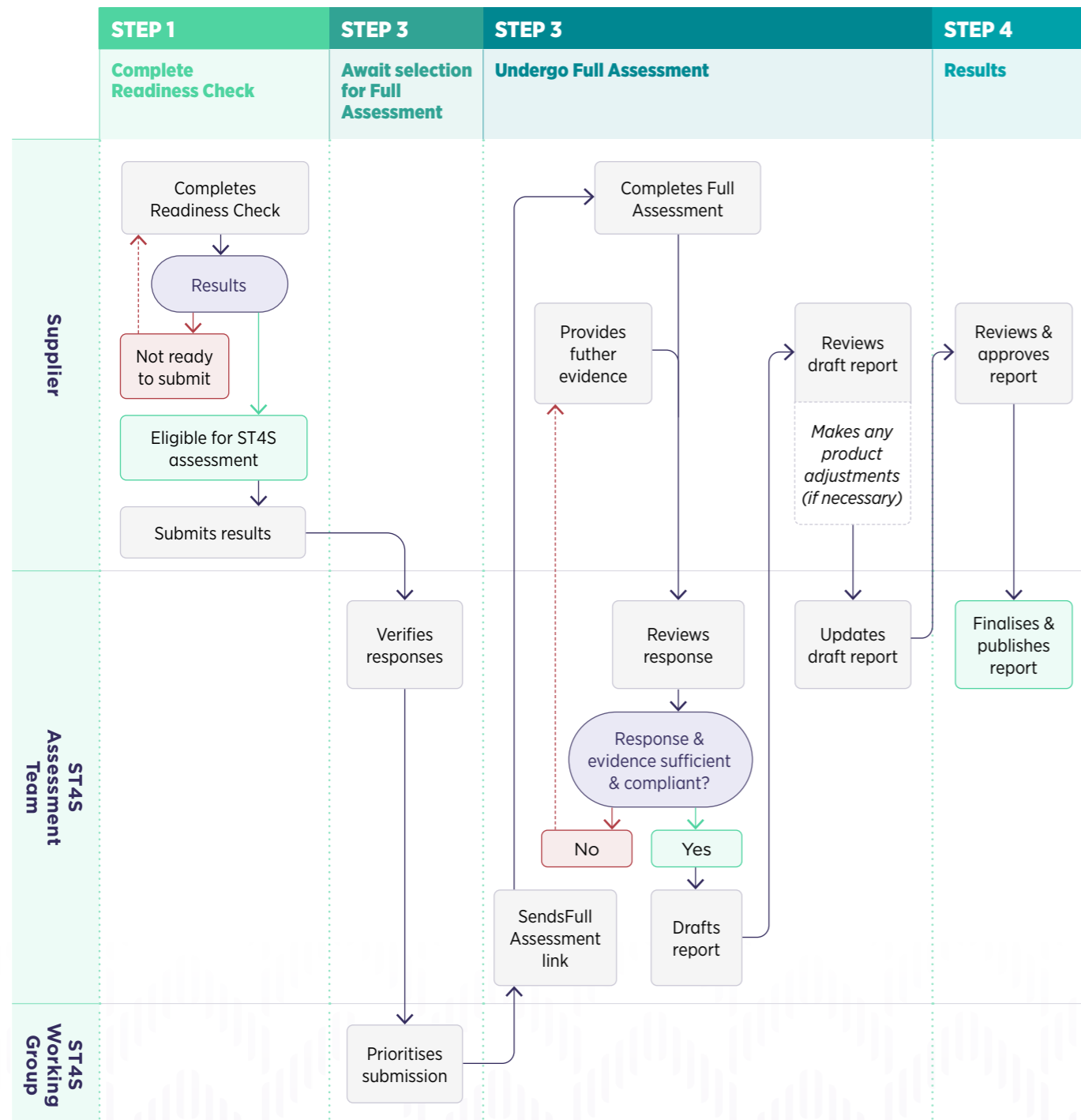


# Assessment process

The ST4S assessment is not an endorsement, recommendation, or approval of a product. Instead, it shows how a product aligns with specific security and privacy standards.

Support from the ST4S Team is available throughout the assessment process.

The following is visual overview of the ST4S process.



## Step by Step

Before beginning the process suppliers should check the exclusions **ST4S Excluded / High Risk List** to better understand if their product is suitable for assessment.

### STEP 1 – Complete Readiness Check

- › Before applying for the Full Assessment, an **ST4S Readiness Check** needs to be completed.
- › This is a self-assessment, designed to help suppliers prepare for the next steps and determine if a product is ready for the Full Assessment.
- › The questions within the Readiness Check cover critical ST4S assessment criteria and outline which standards must be met for a product to achieve a compliant outcome in the Full Assessment.
- › After completing the Readiness Check, suppliers receive automated results. These show the preliminary tier a product will be assessed against and one of two statuses: 'Not Ready to Submit' or 'Eligible for ST4S Assessment'.
- › If the Readiness Check shows a product is 'Not Ready to Submit' suppliers will need to make necessary adjustments, to address the gaps, before proceeding. The results show which, if any, questions the product does not meet the minimum required outcome for, as well as what's required to achieve a successful outcome.
- › If the Readiness Check shows a product is 'Eligible for ST4S Assessment' suppliers may formally submit their results.

### STEP 2 – Await selection for Full Assessment

- › Products submitted for Full Assessment are verified by the ST4S Assessment Team and then prioritised by the ST4S Working Group.
- › While awaiting selection the full **ST4S Vendor Guide - Safer Technologies 4 Schools** is a useful tool to help suppliers prepare for the Full Assessment.

### STEP 3 – Undergo Full Assessment

#### Submission

- › Suppliers that are invited to undergo the Full Assessment will be sent a link to a questionnaire which contains the full set of ST4S questions.
- › Suppliers should complete all questions by the specified due date.

#### Pre-check and evidence review

- › The ST4S Assessment Team review the questionnaire responses and any supporting documentation provided.

- › Should any additional information or clarifications be needed, the ST4S Assessment Team will get in touch with the supplier at this stage.

#### Report creation

- › The ST4S Assessment Team then drafts the Assessment Report and shares with the supplier for initial review.
- › At this stage, suppliers may be able to request time to make additional remediation to their product to further reduce the identified risks and improve the outcome of the assessment.

### STEP 4 – Results

- › If the product passes the assessment, the draft report will be finished and sent to the supplier's nominated contact for final review and approval.
- › Once supplier's approval is received, the report is finalised and published.

# Other assessment information

## Assessment tiers

ST4S has 3 assessment tiers – Tier 1, 2 and 3.

The tier in which a product is assessed is determined by three factors:

<b>Data:</b>	The data stored or processed by the product.
<b>Functionality:</b>	The products functionality, including any permissions requests of a device.
<b>Reasonableness:</b>	The products display and communication of advertising or other materials which may cause offence.

Depending on which tier a product is categorised to, there will be variations in the assessment questions and the responses required for a compliant outcome. There will also be different possible assessment outcomes.

## Assessment outcomes

The possible assessment outcomes will depend on the tier of the product.

Tier 1 and Tier 2 products that complete the assessment will be assigned one of the following outcomes:

- › **Low risk**
- › **Medium risk**
- › **High risk**

And Tier 3 products will be assigned one of the following:

- › **Use with caution**
- › **Use responsibly**

Any product that does not meet one or more of the mandatory minimum standards will receive a 'non-compliant' outcome.

It should be noted that:

- › There will typically always be some risk when using a product or service in a school setting. A product could receive a medium or high risk rating simply because of the types of functionalities offered.
- › Risk ratings are intended to draw a users' attention to the fact that treatments need to be reviewed and implemented when using the particular product or service.
- › The most common outcome is a medium risk rating.

## Reassessment

Reassessment is typically required every 2 years – this is necessary to ensure products remain aligned with current best practise.

A reassessment may also be required if there are major changes introduced to an assessed product or a ST4S Working Group member or ESA request a reassessment.

Products which are registered to display an ST4S badge, are required to additionally complete the latest Readiness Check annually.

## Assessment reports

The assessment reports provide information about the product, an overall risk rating (Low, Medium, High), and detail on the key risks alongside recommended risk treatments.

The reports are designed to help schools easily understand the key issues and determine whether the product can be safely integrated into their digital environment.

Schools are encouraged to use this information to implement appropriate configurations or other treatments if they decide to proceed with using a product.

# How schools and kura access ST4S information

## ST4S Catalogue

Schools can access ST4S information via the **ST4S Catalogue**.

The Catalogue is a fast and easy way for schools to access, filter and search ST4S information. It includes assessed products, as well as those which are in progress, aren't participating or have withdrawn from the assessment process.

All educational staff in New Zealand state and state integrated schools can access the catalogue. Principals and delegated users, with the appropriate permissions, can also access the ST4S assessment reports.

## ST4S badge

Products that have a 'low' or 'medium' risk or a 'use responsibly' outcome can apply to display a ST4S badge on their website and/or marketing materials.



The badge is a visual symbol, that schools can easily identify, which signals a product has met key privacy, security, and safety standards.

A public register of all ST4S badged products is available: **Verify a Badge - Safer Technologies 4 Schools**

Further information about applying for a badge and guidelines around its usage are available at: **Badge Program - Safer Technologies 4 Schools**

# Resources and support

Throughout the ST4S assessment process, businesses have access to support from the ST4S Team. This support is available from when a business undertakes a Readiness Check right through to post-assessment improvements.

In addition, a range of resources are available to assist suppliers, including detailed guides on ST4S criteria, frequently asked questions, and examples of best practices in privacy, security, and safety.

The **ST4S website** also hosts a variety of materials to help suppliers prepare for assessment and improve a product's compliance with education-sector standards. The **document library** in particular is useful.

**The Aotearoa EdTech Data Privacy Pledge: Your gateway to ST4S - EdTechNZ** can also help suppliers prepare for their ST4S journey, as well as becoming part of a supportive community with likeminded vendors.

The Ministry also has a team available to help - contact the Ministry's ST4S Team via [digital.services@education.govt.nz](mailto:digital.services@education.govt.nz)



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He mea tārai e mātou te mātaurangakia rangatira  
ai, kia mana taurite ai ōna huanga.

We shape an education system that delivers  
equitable and excellent outcomes.

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