



# NCEA CoLab

The third NCEA CoLab event was held at Westpac Stadium in Wellington on 5/6 December.

Over 200 of NCEA's users attended from across the country.

Discussions were structured across ten topics and key insights and themes are summarised in this document.

## Themes aligning

Overall the discussions at CoLab were consistent with insights gathered during previous engagement activity and the findings of the NZCER report. Some themes are starting to come together clearly:

- Refocusing assessment onto the most important things, including more relevant, real-world content
- Increasing the status of Mātauranga Māori and Pacific worldviews in the qualification
- Building cultural competency and capability in the education workforce to work with diverse communities including Pacific and Asian communities
- Providing more support for teachers and kaiako to practice effective and inclusive assessment
- Maintaining flexible qualification pathways, but ensuring these were all high quality and had a clear purpose.

However, there were diverse views on many other issues, particularly about the “how”. For example some attendees rejected suggestions of a ‘common core’, while others stressed the fundamental importance of functional literacy, or emphasised the importance of key skills and competencies including Mātauranga Māori and digital literacy for all learners.

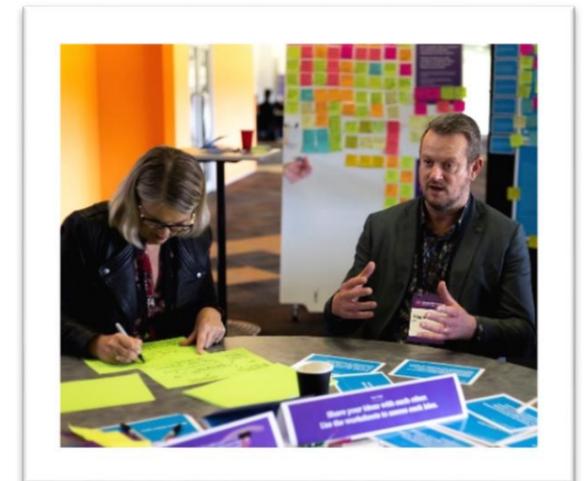
## In general

In general, when discussing solutions, participants tended to focus either on:

- various small (but significant) reductions in the current flexibility of NCEA - for example, the idea of fewer, larger standards
- creating supports for users to benefit more consistently from existing flexibility - for example, the idea of holistic reporting of quality teaching and learning.

Discussion of better outcomes within existing NCEA flexibility often touched on a more consistent understanding of NCEA's potential, and/or more consistent implementation of NCEA across settings and learner groups.

A strong recurring theme was better resourcing and outcomes for Māori and Pacific learners.



## How can the design and implementation of NCEA support Ākonga Māori to succeed as Māori.

### Insights:

Participants at this station reiterated that NCEA needs to work for all learners and that students' wellbeing is paramount. They also strongly reinforced that there needs to be a culture shift to recognise and validate Mātauranga Māori appropriately. People also called for Field Māori to be accredited via achievement standards as well as unit standards.

There was wide agreement that streaming practices need to stop, particularly for ākonga Maori in English-medium settings who are sometimes channeled into non-academic pathways. There was also widespread agreement that learning for students who follow a Mātauranga Māori pathway needs to be validated.

Adequate resourcing and teacher capability are ongoing and persistent issues that need to be urgently prioritised to achieve equitable outcomes for ākonga Māori. Similarly, teachers of students in English-medium settings need ongoing support to truly understand the culture, identity and values of their ākonga Māori for them to thrive and succeed.

### Emergent themes at this station:

#### Recognition and validation of Mātauranga Māori

- NCEA does not adequately recognise Mātauranga Māori.
- There are significant areas of Mātauranga Māori that are not appropriately credentialed as other learning areas. While many ākonga Māori excel in Mātauranga Māori, aspects of this learning are not fully valued.

#### Workload

- Many kaiako and teachers working within an ākonga Māori context are required to go beyond the call of duty to provide quality outcomes for their students and school community. In conjunction with NCEA responsibilities the workload is phenomenal.
- Moderation system does not cater well for ākonga Māori settings. Kaiako work hard to innovate and adapt their programmes to suit the context of their kura and learners, but are getting slammed by external moderators.
- Smaller, isolated kura face major challenges around the internal moderation process which equate to higher workload issues.
- With no senior secondary text books for maths or the sciences in te reo Māori, many kaiako are required to create their own resources.

#### Building capability

- Kura and schools are severely under-resourced in both teacher capability and capacity.
- In MM context there are not enough quality te reo Māori speakers who specialise in maths and the sciences. Likewise in EM settings there is a need for more teachers who can teach te reo Māori and other Mātauranga Māori areas of learning.
- There is a major need to build cultural capability in EM context to better meet the needs of ākonga Māori.
- Kaiako and teachers simply do not have enough time to meet the many demands of their positions.
- PLD is not targeted to adequately meet the needs of ākonga Māori in both MM and EM settings.

#### Bias

- Design and implementation bias disadvantages equitable outcomes for ākonga Māori.

#### Resourcing

- There is an acute lack of resourcing for kura and schools to practically implement the curriculum ie Te Marautanga o Aotearoa, the New Zealand Curriculum, and Te Aho Matua.

#### Meaningful pathways

- Ākonga Māori should have the option of following a full Mātauranga Māori pathway that allows them to need to have the same status as academic pathways, and be valued. UE requirements are a barrier for ākonga Māori who wish to follow a full Mātauranga Māori pathway

## What we learned

### Affirmations

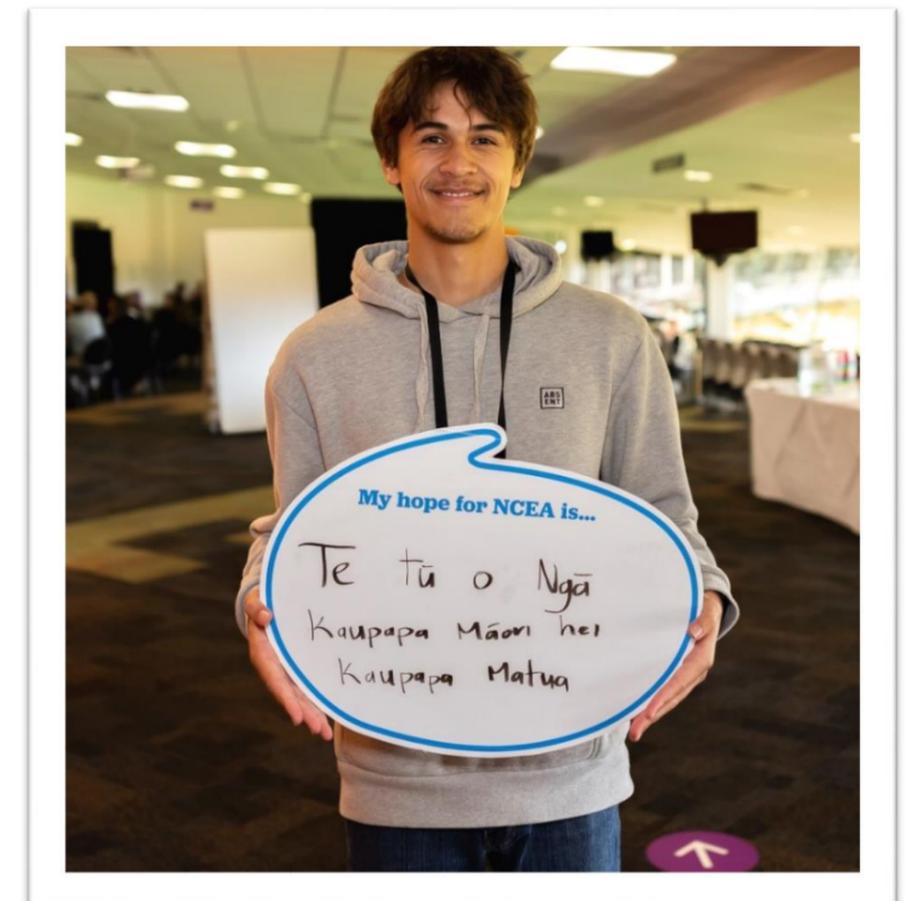
- That what we have heard from the wider engagement in terms of key issues for the ākonga Māori space, are indeed the priority focuses for change ie. validation and recognition of Mātauranga Māori, building capability, bias, and resourcing.
- Any changes must not have a negative impact on ākonga Māori for whom the qualification is currently working.
- That explicit consideration needs to be given to the unique contexts within which ākonga Māori are educated, and the diversity that lies within those contexts ie. Māori-medium (Ngā Kura-a Iwi, Te Aho Matua, rural/urban, small/large/composite) English-medium (mainstream, special character, bilingual/immersion units).

### Challenges

- Challenged by the attendees that all of the ideas are 'must dos' if we are talking about equitable outcomes for ākonga Māori.
- Whilst some of the key issues identified are not necessarily a direct result of the qualification, they have a profound impact on ākonga Māori achieving success as Māori within the qualification and must be addressed.

### Surprises

- There were no surprises at this station – all the discussion validated the findings of the public engagement phase and the ideas presented in the NZCER Report.



## How can the design and implementation of NCEA be inclusive of, and equitable for the success of Pacific learners?

### Insights:

---

“Pacific students often condition themselves to be able to fit in so they can succeed but not necessarily as a Pacific person.”

Participants at this station strongly reiterated that it is critical for the education system to support Pacific students both in New Zealand, and in Niue and the Cook Islands, to succeed as Pacific learners in NCEA. There was a wide agreement that a significant shift in the system is required to ameliorate the barriers Pacific learners face in NCEA and in the wider education system.

Participants also agreed that initiatives over two decades in response to the challenges Pacific learners face have not been sufficient to indicate a meaningful commitment from the education sector to Pacific success in education. Some Pacific teachers shared that the current challenges are the same they encountered 10-20 years ago.

This station focused heavily on the inequities Pacific learners face in regard to NCEA which were believed to be largely shaped by deep rooted bias within the wider education system. A common theme that emerged was that Pacific learners did not see themselves in the content they were learning and that the flexibility of the qualification was not being utilized appropriately to provide relevant content and contexts for learning and assessment. There was strong agreement among the group that the flexibility of NCEA is a strength as it should allow schools to design learning tailored to the perceived needs of students. However, the common experience of Pacific learners is that the delivery of NCEA and the choice of standards used, often limit the opportunities for Pacific students to engage in a variety of academically challenging pathways. Pacific teachers shared that while they were able to successfully contextualise learning for Pacific students, this was because they understood the context as Pacific peoples. They acknowledged that this would be a challenge for teachers with different worldviews, and support and resourcing is required to support non Pacific teachers to build their cultural capabilities.

The participants from Cook Islands pointed out that NCEA was working well in their context as they were able to utilise the flexibility of the qualification to the advantage of each student. They noted that the absence of competition between schools was a significant difference between the New Zealand and island contexts. Cook Island schools are clear on their priorities when designing learning programmes centred on the needs of the student and their family. Schools willingly share information and resources to ensure student needs are met. Niuean participants highlighted the challenge of the limited subject options available to students due to teacher capability and noted that this would vary from year to year depending on staffing. Both groups of participants noted an acute lack of resources particularly around internet access and culturally appropriate resources and support for both teachers and students.

There was strong agreement that streaming practices disproportionately disadvantage Pacific students.

## Emergent themes at this station:

**“Equity is the floor, not the ceiling” - Equity is not the goal but rather the foundation on which NCEA should be designed and implemented.**

- The solutions required to raise Pacific achievement are largely system shifts and will take time and resourcing.
- Anticipation of pushback and resistance from school leaders and some teachers
- “The system is not designed for us (Pacific) to succeed”, “Structural bias still exists”

**Acknowledge, understand, address where bias exists in NCEA**

- We need to know how to identify where bias exists within the system in order to know how to ameliorate the problem.
- Competition between schools plays a significant role in promoting inequitable practices such as streaming that disadvantage Pacific students.

**Recognition and valuing of Pacific epistemologies in education through the design and implementation of NCEA**

- Pacific learners do not see themselves reflected in what is being taught.
- NCEA design should affirm that indigenous Pacific epistemologies are relevant and useful to the societies and people to whom they belong as well as to wider New Zealand society

**Understand and acknowledge the diversity of Pacific communities, cultures, identities, and languages**

- Needs are diverse across the different Pacific communities and will inform how teachers/educators engage with Pacific students and communities
- Experience of “Pacificness” varies and there needs to be a balance between acknowledge and utilizing cultural context and pigeon-holing whole groups of students
- Involve Pacific communities and families in their young person’s learning and education. Pacific parents trust schools and teachers to make the best decision for their child.

**Cultural competence - teacher/school capability**

- Cultural awareness and competence is critical in order to achieve a truly culturally responsive learning environment
- Schools need to value and prioritize increasing cultural capability and understand what their level of cultural competence is in order to identify the appropriate interventions to raise their capability

**Flexibility**

- Flexibility can be a positive but needs to be balanced so that it can increase accessibility for all learners
- “Should be needs-based and flexible to allow moves up and down but not define you”

## What we learned

### Affirmations

- Cultural competency of teachers and schools is critical to the success of Pacific learners.
- Pacific epistemologies - ways of knowing, learning, and teaching - need to be valued in NCEA
- The design of NCEA, and its flexibility, has contributed to ongoing implementation issues

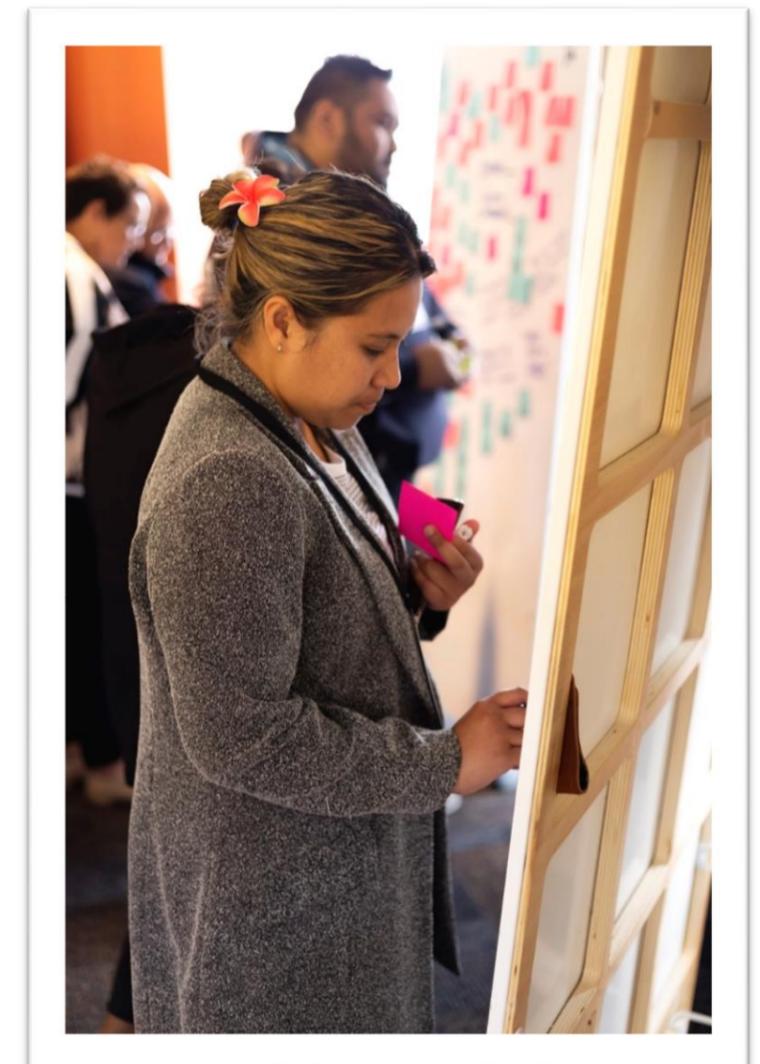


### Challenges

- Challenge as to whether the Pacific voice was strong enough across the discussion topics. Participants pointed out immediately that all the Pacific participants would be drawn to this station and the discussion would be one-sided because non-Pacific participants may not see the same value in attending this station i.e. there are more pressing issues to discuss
- All the key ideas for change were put into "must do". A lot of discussion that many of the "ideas" for change should or could already be in practice.
- There was a common theme among Pacific participants that there would be resistance from the sector, particularly around challenging what peoples cultural competency level are.

### Surprises

- No surprises emerged from the CoLab relating to Pacific learners.



## How can the way we arrange levels, courses and credits to help all students achieve their potential?

### Insights:

Many participants at this station agreed that NCEA could provide the opportunities and tools to assess the skills and capabilities developed through project-based learning (PBL). There was discussion about the risks and opportunities of using and assessing project work and the sort of standards needed to assess via a project, with general agreement that this should remain optional.

There was a strong appetite for reducing the number of credits required for an NCEA, and the number offered in courses, as a way to address overassessment and refocus on learning. There was also strong interest in multi-level and cross-curricular courses and the potential for NCEA's structure to enable this. Participants recognised the importance of retaining the key features of NCEA that make it so flexible but were keen to address some of the confounding behaviours and inequities that have resulted from its implementation.

### Emergent themes at this station:

#### Review structure and purpose of NCEA Levels 1,2,3

- Include an optional project component but keep Level 1 as a foundation level
- Remove literacy and numeracy credits from NCEA and improve the rigour - make Lit/Num a prerequisite

#### Review the achievement standards, both size and content

- Standards could be broader and capture a wider range of subject knowledge and skills - so assessment tasks would reflect the whole learning experience. This would mitigate fragmentation.

#### Create one leaving qualification over the secondary schooling years

- This would mitigate the effect of publishing league tables which contributes to competition between schools, in turn leading to the heavy focus on achievement at the cost of more meaningful learning and wellbeing. "A qualification is what you get when you leave, not three huge steps".

#### Redesign the record of achievement (Leaver Profile Statement) so that it recognises all learning, skills and competencies.

- Create an enduring digital profile.
- "A capabilities statement is of more value to a Y11 than an NCEA RoA - skills are the vital point". A statement of capabilities is more important for students who leave early, than a collection of disparate credits. The record of learning needs to function as a work-ready passport.

#### Consider balance of compulsory content and flexible content, and the balance of internal and external assessment.

- Externals are devalued by excessive internals.
- Bring in compulsory content for some subjects - balance flexibility with prescriptive content

#### Better support for cross-curriculum learning, both within and across NCEA Levels 1, 2:

- Quality control is vital for consistent assessment in project-based learning
- PBL work helps develop soft skills and capabilities for life and work

## What we learned

### Affirmations

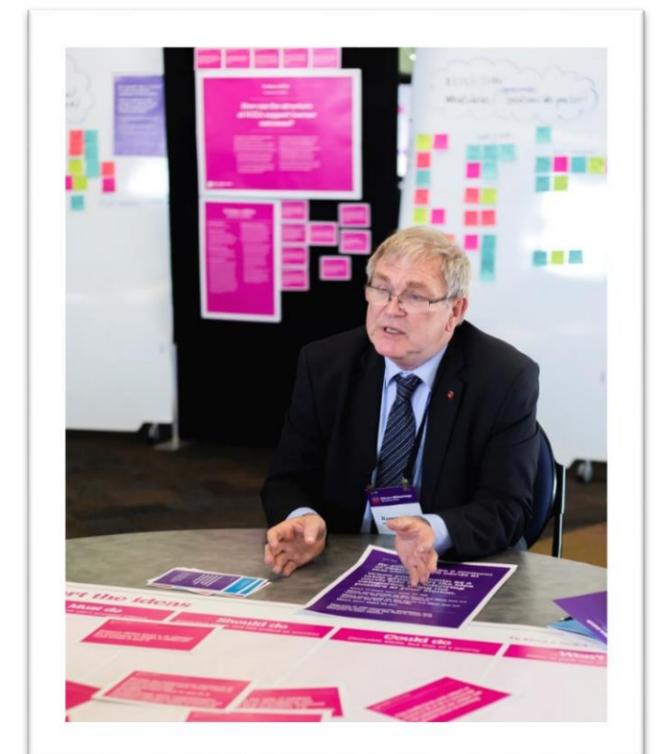
- People agree that Level 1 serves a distinctly different purpose to levels 2 and 3. The “foundation” idea recurred as did the possibility of some credits being gained via a project (which would be optional rather than compulsory). Not all students need to sit Level 1 and for many a multi-year journey to a quality Level 2 or 3 NCEA would be more suitable.
- Removing carry-over credits was unanimously agreed to reduce the complexity of NCEA.
- Many of the great ideas we heard about projects, cross-curricular courses and assessments are already in practice in NZ schools. We need to share exemplars of how it can work for learners and for teachers (for example, TKI’s Arts Online).

### Challenges

- Making room for rich courses of learning at Levels 2 and 3 would require universities to recognise courses from across domains for UE.
- An ākonga with real strengths in Mātauranga Māori cannot use the full breadth of their learning to gain UE and may have to study unrelated courses and standards to earn a place at university.
- Reducing the number of credits for a certificate was widely supported but may compromise NCEA’s status on the Qualifications Framework and undermine its credibility internationally.
- The timeframe of this review has raised questions in overseas countries - there’s a perception NCEA must be badly broken to need such a lengthy review process. Many schools count on attracting international students and this perception may threaten NCEA’s credibility.
- Any significant changes in structure of NCEA (such as a compulsory core or projects) will likely result in a dip in performance data while the system resets. The impact is most likely to affect our lower-achieving students.

### Surprises

- There was strong agreement that school leavers need more than just the NZQA Record of Achievement and a school testimonial to capture all their skills and capabilities - and much of the information already collected by schools could usefully form a comprehensive but concise, semi-structured learner profile of real value to employers and to tertiary providers.
- For ākonga in Māori-medium schools, the limited range of senior subjects means they may need to study subjects unrelated to their aspirations, just to gain UE. For example, an ākonga wanting to study Engineering takes Business Studies in order to gain UE because her school cannot offer Physics to Level 3.



## How do we determine the literacy and numeracy that young people need and how can NCEA ensure that young people attain this?

### Insights:

There was general agreement from participants that the status quo is not working. The range of standards that can be used to assess literacy and numeracy means that there is inconsistency in the level of literacy and numeracy that students demonstrate to achieve the NCEA requirements. In order to address this, there was a strong desire to agree on a common understanding of literacy and numeracy in the context of what NCEA benchmarks and measures.

This means that any changes to literacy and numeracy are likely to reduce the flexibility of the status quo. While this is needed for credibility, and to ensure that more learners receive the focus on literacy and numeracy that they need, we must also be conscious of avoiding creating unreasonable barriers to the NCEA qualification. The system more broadly must also adapt to ensure that learners can reach any new benchmarks, which could require a greater focus on literacy and numeracy teacher capability.

Conversations about what NCEA literacy and numeracy requirements should look like tended to focus on functional literacy. Participants discussed the need for students to know the most important “stuff” that relates to real life situations. This leaves open the extent to which academic literacy should be an additional focus to functional literacy in NCEA for particular disciplines. For example, in addition to a functional literacy assessment, consideration should be given to how Learning Areas/ Wāhanga Ako can enhance or emphasise disciplinary literacy.

A key focus of conversations at the station was to ensure that learning is contextual. This means that any streamlining in the assessment of literacy and numeracy cannot compromise learning in a culturally relevant context. This is critical given how important literacy and numeracy skills are. In addition, those with learning support needs should not be marginalised from achieving literacy and numeracy by the new standards and different learning styles would need to be accommodated.

### Emergent themes at this station:

- **The status quo is not credible as students can achieve the current requirements without demonstrating sufficient literacy and numeracy and not all students receive the learning focus that they need in this area.**
- **There needs to be better support for teachers to deliver literacy and numeracy.**
- **We need a common view of literacy and numeracy that should focus on the important “stuff” that prepares learners for their next step.**
- **Learners need to develop literacy and numeracy before NCEA.**
- **Learning must be relevant and contextual, including:**
  - Cultural contexts
  - Real life contexts
  - Inclusive of all abilities
  - Inclusive of bilingual learners.

## What we learned

### Affirmations

- There was broad agreement that there needs to be greater clarity and less flexibility in the way literacy and numeracy is assessed. This supports the Ministry's general view, but should also be considered in light of broader feedback across the CoLab that emphasised a desire to retain flexibility in the qualification design.
- Feedback on the station affirmed our view that we need a common understanding of literacy and numeracy before considering how to assess it.
- Literacy and numeracy must be taught in a way that is relevant and contextual to each learner. This affirmation is particularly important if any changes to literacy and numeracy assessment make the requirements more standardised. Any standardisation must still accommodate a variety of contexts.
- Discussion at the station affirmed our view that any new literacy and numeracy requirements must be implemented alongside support for teachers and kaiako to deliver effective teaching of literacy and numeracy. This view also affirms our thinking that benchmarking literacy and numeracy can risk creating a barrier to qualification attainment if adequate supports are not put in place.

### Challenges

- A number of groups (although not all) discussed the need for literacy and numeracy to be expanded to include financial literacy and digital literacy. This would mean that a conversation about literacy and numeracy might be shifted to consider core learning that should be included as part of an NCEA.

### Surprises

- Many discussions at the station focused on the importance of functional literacy and numeracy, as opposed to academic/disciplinary literacy and numeracy. New measures for NCEA to address literacy and numeracy could take into account this strong desire for learners to be functionally literate and numerate. When drafting policy interventions, separate consideration could then be given to how academic/disciplinary literacy can be strengthened within the broader range of Achievement Standards.



## How can NCEA show students skills and capabilities as well as their knowledge?

### Insights:

There was wide agreement at this station, that there needed to be greater emphasis and focus on capabilities and skills, however over-assessment was also a concern. Discussions also centred around the need for learning to occur in authentic, real-world contexts.

The lack of time for a student to reflect on their own learning was raised as an issue, as was the question of a student's ability to both identify and articulate these at this stage of their development.

There was full agreement that there needed to be a much stronger emphasis on the front of the curriculum (key competencies / capabilities) however there was equal concern relating to the challenge of measuring / assessing / recording this learning. "If you could find a way to reliably measure and assess (this) it would be world leading, as no-one is doing this yet".

The participants deliberated on the right place to focus on the soft skills (key competencies) including at Level 1. However, they were mindful of the additional workload and felt there would need to be a trade-off.

Participants at this station believed University Entrance makes it difficult to design contextualised cross-curricula courses at senior secondary. They also felt that employers and universities value different things i.e. soft skills vs knowledge, and were concerned that this sends mixed messages to schools.

There was agreement between the participants that timetable and assessment expectations negatively impact student agency as they progress through secondary school as a result of less choice.

### Emergent themes at this station:

#### Recording and assessing key competencies and capabilities -

##### Record of Achievement

- We need to recognise the vast array of skills that students have and give them credit for that. Students could build a portfolio or CV over the course of their schooling to show their skill development - not just grades. This could include teacher references as well as subject results.
- Every student should leave with a statement of capabilities (front half of NZC) to accompany their academic record.

#### Connecting learning to Pathways

- There needs to be a greater connection between schools and their communities to solve authentic problems that matter to them.
- Challenge of getting students onto pathways that engage them and keep them open if they want change. Need to remove anxiety from making pathway choices.

#### Connecting learning to Pathways

- There needs to be a greater connection between schools and their communities to solve authentic problems that matter to them.
- Challenge of getting students onto pathways that engage them and keep them open if they want change. Need to remove anxiety from making pathway choices.

#### Inclusion of Te Ao Māori competencies

- Must validate Māori whakaaro Te Reo Māori in the learning - cultural skills need to be valued
- Kapa Haka includes many capabilities (KCs) and needs to be an Achievement Standard and valued.
- Treaty of Waitangi needs to form part of the NCEA.

# Learner skills and capabilities

## What we learned

### Affirmations

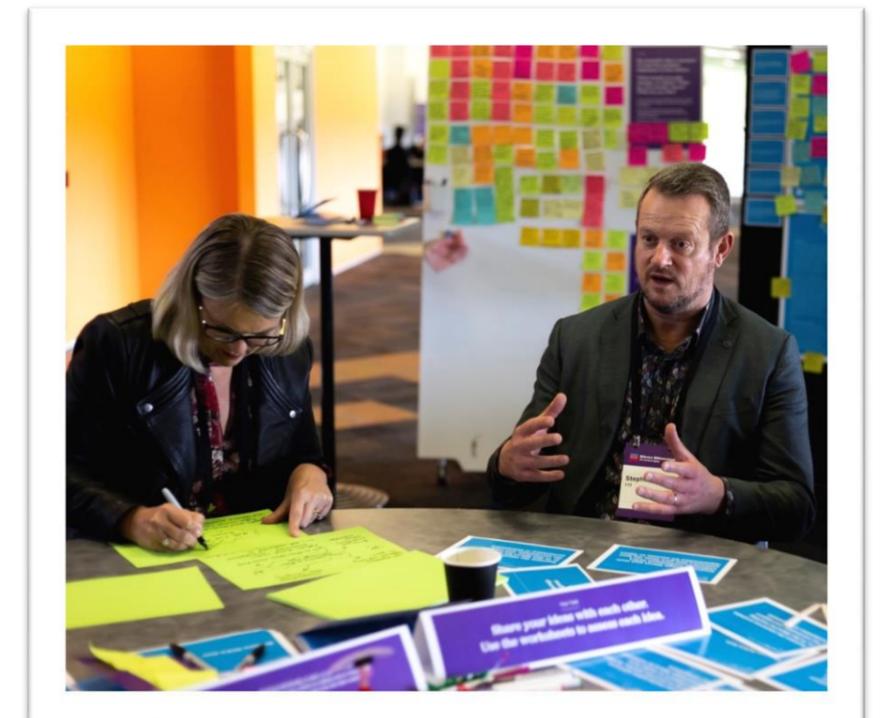
- There was strong support for recording and assessing key competencies / capabilities, possibly in a record of achievement (rather than assessed in isolation).
- This station supported changes to Level 1 - however preferred 'Improve Level 1 by including study skills, life skills, values, competencies, and/or work experience' as the opportunity.
- Inclusion of Te Ao Māori competencies. Cultural competencies and capabilities need to be valued
- We need to be more explicit about connecting learning to pathways. The CoLab attendees felt there needs to be a greater connection between schools and their communities to solve authentic problems that matter to them. The attendees proposed visits to workplaces in the community as a way to 'open the eyes of students' to the opportunities locally and to the work ethic expected by employers.

### Challenges

- In addition to assessment and moderation, there is a concern that assessment of key competencies could increase workload for teachers in particular. How do we track and measure naturally occurring evidence without an increase in teacher workload?
- How do we measure naturally occurring evidence in a Record of Achievement for key competencies / capabilities?
- The CoLab attendees at this station were concerned that the development of a graduate profile for each set of subject standards aligned to the National Curriculum that shows what a person awarded the qualification can do, be or know' would increase teacher workload and not be valued by students and may not be measurable.

### Surprises

- Youth representatives and students could not identify how key competencies could be valued, other than through project-based learning methodologies.



## How can we ensure that NCEA assessment practices are inclusive of all identities, cultures, and abilities?

### Insights:

Participants at the station challenged the question “How can NCEA assessment practices be inclusive of all identities, cultures and abilities?”. Participants had different views of what inclusion looked like and who this statement was considering, and thought this statement didn’t make all identities, cultures and abilities visible enough including learners who identify as LGBTQIA+. Many participants thought that the key issue was how to make teaching and learning practices inclusive, before assessment takes place.

There was much discussion on the school as an ecosystem - and the importance of behavioural changes to effect real change across the system. The group highlighted that the barriers to accessing SAC was significantly influenced by the non-inclusive and bias practices within schools, including the limiting of pathways options and support. Teacher and school-wide perceptions of students’ ability often determine whether or not these students participate in certain assessments and pursue different pathways.

Students with disabilities are often clear on what their needs are but are disempowered when decisions are made on their behalf without consideration of the student and their whanau needs. Inclusive pedagogy and practices are critical in shifting the school culture and building teacher capability to respond to diverse student needs. Inclusive assessments needs to expand beyond how to support students to do assessments to what the assessment looks like and whether it is reflective of different contexts.

We heard from student participants that people assume that access to SAC will remove barriers to participating in assessments. They don’t understand the complexities of this in terms of the skill set required to use reader-writers, the time needed to build good relationships with the reader-writer and the social isolation that occurs by having to be in different rooms and times, separated from peers. They want to have others ways they can show their learning so that the need for SAC is reduced.

Participants noted the importance of and need for ongoing PLD, including on universal design for learning, and other ways to support teachers and kaiako to strengthen and change practice.

Improvements to the SAC process was a hot topic and the removal of NCEA fees was seen as a ‘no-brainer’.

### Emergent themes at this station:

#### Equity

- Removal of fees; accessibility of supports; interpretation of flexible assessment practices; and teacher bias and low expectations around capabilities and pathways.

#### Teacher and school-wide capability

- Inclusive pedagogies such as Universal Design for Learning; differentiation; assessment and exemplar guidance; cultural competence; understanding and responding to diversity, including neurodiversity; and communities of practice for collaboration.

#### Student-centred practice

- Student agency; diversity as a strength; ecological approach to planning and implementing meaningful learning and pathways for all learners.

#### Flexibility

- Pedagogical design and implementation, including assessment practices. Rather than removing barriers to assessment, create assessments without barriers.

## What we learned

### Affirmations

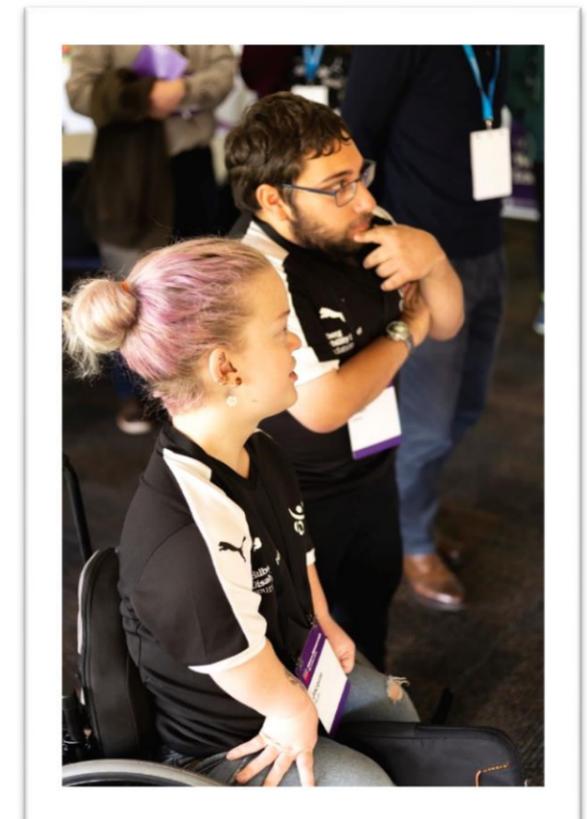
- The issues raised around equity of access to Special Assessment Conditions (SAC), bias in teacher/school-wide practices, bias in pathways options and supports was reinforced.
- There are removal of barriers that would make SAC more accessible to those who most need it.
- Young disabled people know what they need to be successful but often the power is taken away from them and decisions are made based on what adults think or what the system allows.
- NCEA is a qualification, it is not the curriculum or pedagogy.

### Challenges

- Inclusive pedagogy and practices is at the heart - the culture of the school, teachers confidence and competence to respond flexibly, entrenched attitudes and practices all have greater impact on equitable progress and achievement of all learners than NCEA itself. It's what our teachers and leaders do that will make the biggest difference.
- While having access to SAC is assumed to provide the support learners need to show their learning, it presents with a whole set of challenges for young people. They are separated from their peers; they don't always have a prior relationship with their reader/writer who knows their communication style, strengths and needs; their reader/writer may be unfamiliar with the learning area and therefore can find reading and recording difficult; and the young person is required to develop a particular skill set that enables them to generate and communicate ideas in ways that their peers wouldn't need to do.
- Inclusive assessments and practices is not just about the how, it is the what as well. Can young people see themselves in the contexts in which they are learning?

### Surprises

- Disabled learners felt they were at risk of being lost within the broad problem statement without explicit focus on them.
- The broader issues impacting on students' achieving NCEA - what skills and knowledge are they coming to secondary school with from primary. Wider systemic challenges to be addressed.
- Acknowledgement that ITE needs a stronger pedagogical focus - building capabilities for integrated teaching and learning.



## How can the design of NCEA enable meaningful learning?

### Insights:

We can learn a lot about meaningful learning design and assessment from other areas of schooling, in particular early childhood and trades academies, where overall teacher judgements, naturally occurring evidence, portfolio-style assessment and student-led learning are commonplace.

Teacher capability and capacity were recognised as crucial to the shift towards more meaningful learning. There was significant consensus that the current PLD model isn't working well to drive meaningful changes in practice.

The need for active stewardship from the Ministry and education agencies came through strongly. This included taking a more active role in providing explicit guidance and resources on:

- Volume and type of student evidence that should be collected and assessed
- Sharing good practice from other schools
- Exemplars that illustrate grade boundaries
- How to design authentic learning and assessment practices
- Adapting school structures and timetabling to support cross-curricular learning.

The explicit development of key competencies was considered central to meaningful learning practices. Practical ideas for how this could be done within the NCEA framework included project-based, inquiry and cross-curricular learning. There was recognition that we don't currently have the right tools to record and report on this.

The idea of making assessment "invisible" - or at least less of a driver - came up frequently in various forms. This included practices such as naturally occurring evidence, overall teacher judgements, portfolios and externally assessed but internally produced work.

There was agreement that most teachers want to use authentic learning contexts and assessment practices, however they are prevented from doing so by barriers that are on the edges of or outside the scope of NCEA.

How we moderate was seen as a significant barrier. This included the workload associated with internal moderation requirements as well as the lack of clarity around moderation judgements in general. Teachers were unwilling to risk assigning more authentic tasks if they thought NZQA would disagree with their judgements.

The rigidity of external assessment forms was also seen as a barrier to meaningful learning.

Practical considerations such as timetabling, school organisation structure and the competition created by the publication of league tables.

Interestingly, there was widespread agreement that scholarship exams and preparation were generally considered to be meaningful learning. Integrating scholarship skills and capabilities into core NCEA subjects would be one way to increase the occurrence of meaningful learning.

# Meaningful Learning

## Emergent themes at this station:

- Explicitly integrate the key competencies (front-half of NZC and values and principles of Te Marautanga o Aotearoa) in NCEA through practices such as project-based, inquiry and cross-curricular learning.
- Clear the barriers to meaningful learning.
- Active stewardship of teacher capability-building and sharing best practice.
- Meaningful learning is equitable learning.
- Making assessment “invisible”.
- All meaningful learning pathways should have equal esteem.

## What we learned:

### Affirmations

- Meaningful learning that develops the key competencies is already possible within the current design of NCEA.

### Challenges

- Many of the barriers to meaningful learning are outside the direct scope of the NCEA Review.
- Teacher PLD and school support is the key enabler BUT the current PLD model is not working for many.

### Surprises

- Education agencies have a significantly different view on how to solve this problem (and to what extent it is a problem) than do teachers and school leaders.
- The sector is looking to the Ministry for leadership on how to drive meaningful learning. They want experienced practitioners with recent school experience leading this work.



## How can clearer and more equitable guidance about NCEA pathways and transitions for every learner be effectively provided?

### Insights:

Many participants highlighted that the main issue around providing effective NCEA pathways and transitions was not only about providing ‘clearer’ guidance, but addressing the un(conscious) biases of teachers and educators in the provision of guidance about pathways through and beyond NCEA. The idea that station participants most engaged with was the question, ‘How do we equally value academic and vocational pathways?’.

Especially on day 1 of the CoLab many participants recognised the importance of retaining the inbuilt flexibility of NCEA to cater for a diversity of learner pathways.. Current vocational education interventions such as Gateway are generally supported, but there is concern about the stigma associated with these, and that current use of these interventions in our system reinforces disparity of esteem between pathways.

Concern was expressed about recent structural and policy changes to the career education system and uncertainty about what these will mean for schools. There was a sense that part of improving the capability of schools and teachers to provide clear unbiased support for a diversity of student pathways will depend on an effective career education policy package. Some participants highlighted the need to strengthen a focus on building student resilience, health and wellbeing.

Ākonga Māori, Pacific students and learning support perspectives at the station focused on providing parents, whānau and students with “more education” about NCEA (e.g. unit vs achievement standards) and its flexibility and potential to support pathways - this was the focus of one prototype.

- Akongā Māori voices highlighted how their lack of subject choice influenced their decisions about pathways and they feel they are often forced at a relatively early stage of secondary schooling to make decisions about subjects that will affect their future pathways.
- Ākonga Māori and Pacific students highlighted that the operating model of the secondary education system is often not supportive of their identity, language, culture, aspirations or circumstances.
- Learning support students highlighted that the education system’s engagement with them is too focused on providing them with a qualification, often to the expense of ensuring they have a sustainable, longer-term pathway.

Overall, most participants at the station did not propose fundamental policy or structural changes. Instead, the focus of the discussion focused on changing entrenched attitudes about non-academic forms of education through NCEA and building the capability of the education workforce to enable students to explore and pursue a diversity of pathways through the flexibility of NCEA qualifications.

# Pathways and transitions

## Emergent themes at this station:

- Parity of esteem between academic and vocational pathways.
- Preparing students for transitions.
- Community and industry engagement in student pathways.
- Teacher / educator bias in pathways and transitions guidance.
- Meaningful, sustainable pathways for Ākonga Māori, Pacific, and learning support students.
- School and education system capability in providing a diversity of pathways for students and guidance about these.
- Student agency in pathways decisions.

## What we learned:

### Affirmations

- Those present at the station supported with the Ministry's articulation of the 'problem definition' around pathways.

### Challenges

- Issue of the need to shift teacher and educator assumptions and biases about certain pathways and the abilities and the suitability of some students for different pathways repeatedly came up.

### Surprises

- The issue of limited student agency and choices around pathways and transitions was a prominent theme - one that resonated with students at the station.
- Over the two days of the CoLab participants did not support the idea of developing a Vocational Entrance Award at Year 13.



## How can we encourage more quality teaching and learning and less focus on credits?

### Insights:

The way NCEA is currently designed can allow teachers and students to ‘work the system’ at the expense of quality teaching and learning. Competition between schools and tertiary providers for students and funding is also contributing to how they deliver NCEA.

Discussion at the tables reflected a strong focus on league tables as a key driver of perverse incentives for schools to ‘game the system’. There was a perception that for Boards of Trustees, and others within the real estate industry and the media, a focus on league tables over-rides other markers of success, including wellbeing and the quality of teaching and learning. While there was a strong perception that league tables need to be censored to give more ability to focus on quality teaching and learning, there was also concern about what, in the absence of better measures, would replace league tables as a proxy for a school’s quality.

Some participants questioned whether ‘we’ know what quality teaching and learning is, how to consistently measure it, and how or by whom it would be measured or monitored within the existing system.

Discussion touched on the need to develop ‘holistic assessment and reporting’ to provide a richer picture of schools. It also covered the idea of ‘natural assessment’ where learning and assessment are more seamlessly intertwined. Participants raised the idea that learning and assessment do not have to sit in conflict, however where teaching quality is poorer there tends to be more emphasis on assessment, and, that moderation can inhibit innovation.

### Emergent themes at this station:

- Capability and support (teacher capability seen as key element).
- Perceived perverse incentives of league tables.
- Define and measure ‘Quality Learning’ i.e. what is quality and are we able to measure it.
- Natural assessment (multi modal and challenge the role of moderation).
- Wellbeing and holistic measures (both definition of and ability to monitor e.g. via ERO).

## What we learned

### Affirmations

- Participants valued notions of quality teaching and learning, holistic measurement, and wellbeing.
- Participants affirmed that measurement and learning do not have to sit in conflict.

### Challenges

- Strong perception among some that league tables sit in tension with quality teaching and learning
- Question as to whether 'we' can define, or measure, quality teaching consistently.

### Surprises

- The prioritisation put the idea of only reporting school leavers' data once they leave school at the top of the list and ahead of holistic reporting. The perception that league tables are corrosive to quality teaching and learning will be important to address in any communication with the sector in regard to this topic. However it will also be important to rigorously check the evidence, and potential unintended consequences, before progressing the suggested approach of only reporting school leaver data when students leave school..



## How can we ensure workloads in NCEA are purposeful for students and educators?

### Insights:

Participants identified various factors contributing to excessive workload, including the preference shown by students for gaining credits via internals. “There’s heaps of content but assessment drives workload”. They recognised that excess workload is not baked into the NCEA system. It comes from how it is used.

Level 1 is seen as a ‘prep year’, making sure that students are ‘assessment ready’, and while having Level 1 is better than nothing, it does result in three full years of assessment and a huge workload for both teachers and students. “Micro-failure is good for students, macro-failure is bad” - recognising the value of building resilience by providing opportunities to fail safely but the risk that overloading a student with continuous assessment that is detrimental to wellbeing.

Strategies were explored to reduce workload and the barriers/confounding factors for each were also discussed. For example, fewer credits means less work, but if the school down the road offers more credits, then everyone has to. The role of inter-school competition in driving workload was widely acknowledged. A cap on credits per course might lead to schools adding a further subject option to a learners programme, therefore increasing total workload. Participants recognise the importance of focusing the discussion on pedagogy and the desires of the students and the trade-off involved in any changes to this complex system. One simple fix identified is the need for one place where all standards, PLD, Ministry guidance, curriculum links, etc. are located (all present agreed to this).

### Emergent themes at this station:

#### Moderation is the key area where teachers feel that there is excessive workload for minimal added benefit

- Moderation rarely changes marks, and many see it as an unnecessary burden on teachers and a delay on feedback for students.
- Moderation at level 1 is often singled out as being superfluous. Level 1 has lots of standards, credits and students, and teachers are often required to do double the work in order to meet moderation requirements
- Moderation is often driven by the schools’ policy rather than government requirements. It is not clear how effective Ministry guidance will be if schools and/or parents insist on it.

#### Additional government guidance, support and resourcing would go a long way to helping teachers with workload issues

- Teachers, particularly those in small schools and/or in one-teacher subjects, often lack support that would cut down on workload.
- Standard, easily available support networks and resources would go a long way to reducing the extra work they have to do.
- Better and clearer exemplars, for example, could make marking easier and more fair, reducing the need for moderation and remarking.

#### Both teachers and students are being pressured by excessive assessment and unnecessary credit hunting

- Though people agree that students are sitting to many standards, there is no consensus as to how this could be rectified in a way that maintains NCEA’s flexibility. Students are already vastly exceeding NCEA’s requirements - lowering them is seen as unlikely to make a difference.
- Larger, fewer assessments have wide support and are expected to help with the endless stream of assessments. There are still many questions on how these could and should be implemented.

## What we learned

### Affirmations

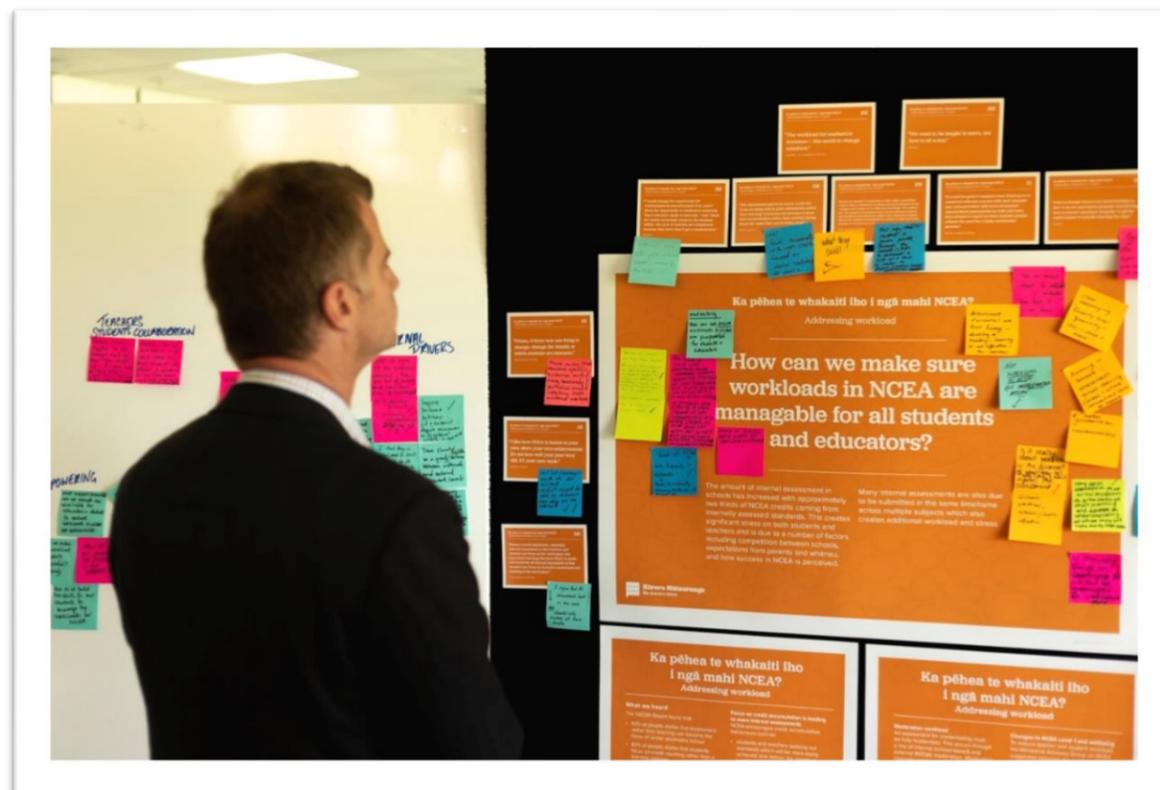
- Moderation is seen as one of the greatest sources of workload stress for teachers. It is also seen as one of the easiest to reduce, as attendees saw little value in moderation, particularly at level 1.
- Credit hunting (driven by students, teachers and parents) is driving workload to be much higher than it was envisaged.

### Challenges

- There is little to no agreement on the ideal state/use for level 1.
- Some saw value in keeping it as it is, arguing that it provides good practice for students who will go on to levels 2 and 3, and that for many students it is the only qualification they will ever receive.
- Others wanted it removed completely, arguing that it served no purpose for most students, while creating a huge amount of work for teachers.
- Support for a changed Level 1 (e.g. focused on self-directed projects) was mixed, and a level 1 that.

### Surprises

- There was clear opposition to the idea of a common core of subjects.



# NCEA CoLab - photos

