



# NCEA Review

Findings from the public engagement  
on the future of NCEA



**Kōrero Mātauranga**  
Me kōrero tātou

**Have your say about  
the future of education.**



# The NCEA Review

Findings from the public engagement  
on the future of NCEA

New Zealand Council for Educational Research

2018

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## He kupu whakataki nā te Minita

### Foreword from the Minister

When I launched the Education Conversation | Kōrero Mātauranga, I wanted New Zealanders to engage in a dialogue which tackles the big questions in our education system. What learning should young New Zealanders be accessing? What opportunities should they have access to? And most importantly—what do New Zealanders expect from the education system?

This report gives me confidence that New Zealanders have been having these fundamental conversations, in this case, framed around their experiences with NCEA. The Ministry of Education has had over 16,000 points of engagement with New Zealanders on NCEA. I'm pleased that so many people—particularly young people, teachers, and school leaders—have had their voice heard.

It's clear to me that there's no one perspective on, or experience with NCEA. Perhaps unsurprisingly for a qualification known for its flexibility, this report speaks to the diverse journeys that young people have through NCEA, and the diverse ways that teachers, school leaders, whānau, tertiary providers, and employers interact with our major school-leaving qualification.

On one hand, this report tells me that parts of NCEA are working really well. In particular, NCEA's trademark flexibility helps young people navigate their way through senior secondary school along a range of different pathways. We've heard that that's empowering, and one of the best things about NCEA.

At the other end of the spectrum, it's clear that assessment is still driving too much of what happens in classrooms. A lot of practice is shaped by NCEA, rather than by the learning which young New Zealanders need to succeed. Supporting teachers and learners to refocus on the learning that matters is clearly one way we can strengthen NCEA.

This report provides invaluable insight into the diverse experiences that New Zealanders have had with NCEA, and their thoughts on how NCEA could be improved. I look forward to the opportunity to shape change to NCEA which reflects these experiences, and to testing a fulsome vision for NCEA's future with New Zealand in mid-2019.

**Hon Chris Hipkins**  
Minister of Education  
November 2018



## He karere nā te Ministerial Advisory Group me te Professional Advisory Group

### A message from the Ministerial Advisory Group and the Professional Advisory Group

This NZCER report represents a unique opportunity to understand how NCEA has impacted the lives of New Zealanders.

We were each asked to lead Advisory Groups – the Ministerial and Professional Advisory Groups – to support the Minister of Education to receive the best advice possible on the future of NCEA. These two groups were to ensure a voice for innovation and the diverse views of New Zealanders, and a voice for the teaching profession.

We are both lucky to lead incredibly capable groups who have brought their expertise, their deep thinking about our education system, and their lived experiences to the task of strengthening NCEA. But we're acutely aware that since 2002, hundreds of thousands of New Zealanders have experienced NCEA in their own ways – whether studying towards one, teaching it, employing NCEA graduates, or supporting young people through NCEA. What we've seen of NCEA makes up just a tiny fraction of the impact it has had on New Zealanders.

Those are the stories that this report tells: the stories of how NCEA has affected New Zealanders' lives. These are the stories we need to be familiar with as we consider our advice to the Minister on how we can make NCEA better.

It's clear to us both that the conversation on NCEA has moved leagues since the Ministerial Advisory Group released the Big Opportunities Discussion Document in May 2018. It's clear that those who responded to the NCEA review engagement want to keep NCEA's flexibility, but want to push NCEA to be more coherent; to offer stronger, more diverse pathways; and to be simpler and easier to navigate.

We are immensely grateful to all those who contributed to this review: by attending workshops, submitting survey responses, being in focus groups, making submissions, or by contributing to the Make Your Mark competition. In response, we commit to considering carefully your perspectives and your experiences as our groups shape advice to the Minister on the future of NCEA – and we hope that you will be able to see your kōrero and your mahi reflected in NCEA as it evolves over the years to come.

**Jeremy Baker and Roger Moses**





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# 1. He kōrero mō te arotake i te NCEA

## Introducing the NCEA review

This report synthesises what people said about the National Certificates of Educational Achievement (NCEA) during the public engagement phase of the review. The public engagement took place between May and October 2018. The report describes people's experiences of NCEA and what they think about the six Big Opportunities. The six Big Opportunities were suggested by a Ministerial Advisory Group as ways to strengthen NCEA. New Zealanders were given a wide range of options for providing feedback on NCEA. People could respond online to a quick survey or a survey about the Big Opportunities, or make a submission. Some people also had the opportunity to attend a workshop or focus group.

This report is written by an independent educational research organisation—the New Zealand Council for Educational Research (NZCER). NZCER was contracted by the Ministry of Education to analyse and report the findings from the public engagement about the future of NCEA. The engagement with diverse groups of stakeholders was facilitated by CORE Education, also on contract from the Ministry of Education.

Many thousands of people across New Zealand engaged with the review. Figure 1 shows the different ways that people could give their feedback.

FIGURE 1 Ways of engaging with the review



In addition to the feedback analysed in this report, a series of public debates on NCEA were held across Auckland, Canterbury, Wellington, and Otago. Minister Hipkins hosted a debate in Parliament between MPs and the New Zealand Schools' Debating Team.

The Make Your Mark competition sent out the challenge to young New Zealanders from 5-20 years old to share their vision of what education might look like in the future. About 240 students participated, with almost 100 entries.

## Why NCEA is being reviewed

Qualifications on the New Zealand Qualifications Framework need to be reviewed to check that they remain useful and relevant. NCEA has not been formally reviewed this way before. The Minister of Education launched the NCEA review as part of the national Education Conversation | Kōrero Mātauranga. A Ministerial Advisory Group was appointed in January 2018 to explore ideas for how to strengthen NCEA. The review was supported by three discussion documents: *Background to the NCEA Review*, *Big Opportunities*, and *Ākonga Māori*.<sup>1</sup> In June 2018, a Professional Advisory Group was appointed to work alongside the Ministerial Advisory Group to provide advice to the Minister and the Ministry on the NCEA review.<sup>2</sup>

In his foreword to the discussion document announcing the review, the Minister of Education highlighted the strengths of NCEA, including flexibility and inclusion. He also said that he wanted to address the challenges he hears about every day:

**Overassessment and teacher and student workload, the need for more space for teaching the critical skills and capabilities for lifelong learning, and ensuring each level of the NCEA fulfils a clear role in young people's educational pathways.**

The background document for the review identified five principles of a strong qualification:

1. Wellbeing: NCEA should promote the wellbeing of learners and teachers through effective and fair teaching and assessment practice.
2. Inclusion and equity: NCEA should facilitate high expectations for all learners and ensure that every learner has the opportunity to succeed.
3. Coherence: NCEA should ensure learners access the powerful knowledge, skills, capabilities, and attitudes identified in the National Curriculum.
4. Pathways: NCEA should make it easy for learners, their parents and whānau, and teachers to make informed choices to enable success in education and later life.
5. Credibility: NCEA should be readily understood, widely supported, and validly measure achievement.

The three discussion documents and the five principles of a strong qualification helped shape the questions in the surveys and submissions and at workshops and focus groups. The five principles also helped guide the analysis of people's feedback. Section 8 of this report discusses what the findings mean for these principles.

<sup>1</sup> The three discussion documents can be found at: <https://conversation.education.govt.nz/conversations/ncea-have-your-say/big-opportunities-he-aria-nui/discussion-documents/>

<sup>2</sup> Membership of the Ministerial Advisory Group and the Professional Advisory Group can be found here: <https://conversation.education.govt.nz/conversations/ncea-have-your-say/advisory-groups/>

## People engaged in many ways





People engaged in many ways, and in a variety of languages. Participants were able to read and give their responses to surveys, and make online submissions, in te reo Māori, New Zealand Sign Language, Samoan, Cook Islands Māori, Tongan, Niuean, Tokelauan, Simplified Chinese, Hindi, and Korean. Some workshops were also offered in te reo Māori.

We asked everyone who took part in the review to tell us a little about who they were so we could determine if particular groups had different perspectives. We asked about people's connection to education (e.g., as a student, teacher, principal, employer), and their age, gender, ethnicity, and the region they live in. This information is available in Appendix 1. Our report highlights the findings or themes that are common across different groups as well as those that are different between groups.

A strength of this review is that people had the opportunity to respond in different ways. Feedback ranged from an individual completing the Quick Survey to an organisation submitting a detailed submission. Many students were encouraged to engage with the review by their teachers and schools. The nature of analysis and synthesis means that the details of people's feedback are summarised, but all feedback—of whatever size—has contributed to the review findings.

NCEA is delivered in a range of contexts, including school, tertiary, and workplace settings. While many tertiary and other educators made submissions, and some took part in workshops or focus groups, comparatively fewer of them than teachers in school settings responded to the review. This means that the report talks more about NCEA in school settings.

## How this report is organised

The review asked three main questions, which form the basis of this report:

1. What are people's experiences of NCEA? This section reports what people say is working well for NCEA and what is not working well.
2. What are people's suggestions for strengthening NCEA? This section reports people's suggestions for improvements.
3. What are people's responses to the Big Opportunities? The Ministerial Advisory Group identified six Big Opportunities for NCEA. This section of the report looks at how much people agreed with the ideas in each Big Opportunity.

We highlight the perspectives of Māori, Pacific peoples, and other groups likely to have a distinctive perspective on NCEA. The report finishes with a section on the five principles of a strong qualification, followed by concluding thoughts. The appendices provide more information about the methodology or approach used in the engagement process and how we made sense of the information we received.

A short summary of this report is available separately.

Over  
**2,600**  
survey responses were from teachers. Many more attended workshops and/or made submissions.

Over  
**300**  
survey responses were from principals. Many more attended workshops and/or made submissions.

## 2. Ngā wheako o te tangata mō te NCEA

### People's experiences of NCEA

This section of the report is about people's experiences of NCEA. It is divided into two big sections: *What's working well?* and *What's not working well?* We have more data about these two questions than for any other part of the review. People gave their thoughts in response to questions in the surveys, workshops, focus groups, and submissions.

### People's thoughts about NCEA

The first set of questions in the Quick Survey was designed to gather people's thoughts about NCEA. The questions asked people to say how much they agreed with each of these five statements:

- I understand how NCEA works.
- I think NCEA is a valuable qualification.
- NCEA works well / worked well for me or for someone I know well.
- I think NCEA works well.
- I think NCEA helps good teaching and learning to happen.

People chose one of the following answers about each statement: strongly agree; agree; neutral; disagree; or strongly disagree. Figure 2 shows the percentage of people who agreed with each statement. It combines "strongly agree" and "agree", and "strongly disagree" and "disagree".

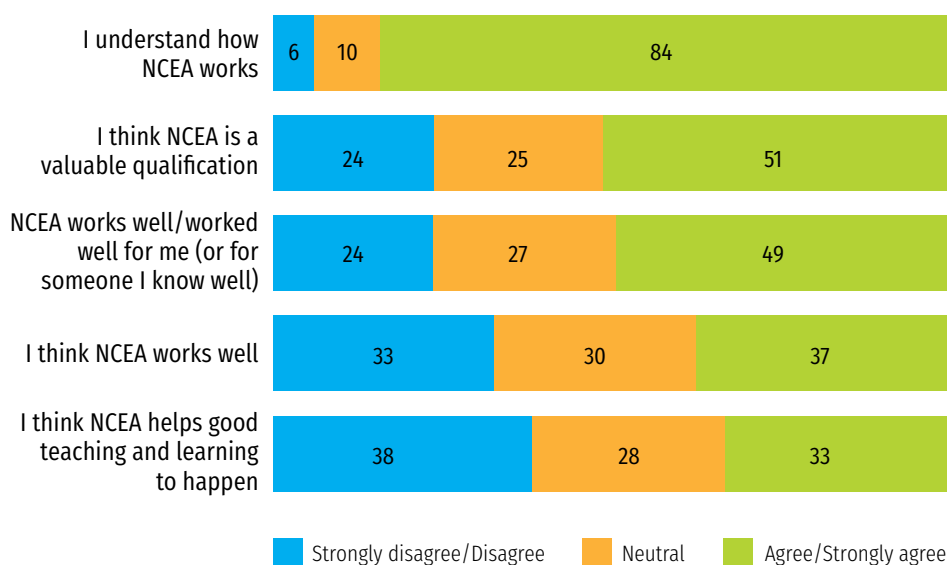
**84%**

of people agree they  
understand how  
NCEA works.  
(QUICK SURVEY)

**37%**

of people agree that  
NCEA works well.  
(QUICK SURVEY)

FIGURE 2 Overall responses to five statements about NCEA (%)



The responses tell us that although most people feel they understand how NCEA works, there are sizeable groups of people who are neutral about or disagree with its value, whether it works well, and whether it helps good teaching and learning to happen. People were more likely to say NCEA works well for them or for someone they know well than they were to say that NCEA works well in general.

- Around half the people (49%) who answered agreed that NCEA is a valuable qualification, and that it worked well for them or for someone they know well.
- Fewer people—around one-third—agreed that NCEA works well (37%) or that it helps good teaching and learning to happen (33%).

We also looked for any differences between groups:

- Teachers and principals were more likely to agree with all five statements.
- About a third of NCEA students, NCEA graduates, and parents agreed that NCEA works well. This is compared with around half of principals and teachers. Employers had one of the lowest rates of agreement (under 30%).
- Almost half of NCEA graduates and parents but only a third of employers thought NCEA worked well for them or for someone they know well.

Figures 3 and 4 show responses to the statement “I understand how NCEA works” by connection to education, and by ethnicity.

- Those who work in schools as teachers or principals, or have experienced NCEA (NCEA graduates), were more likely than other groups to agree that they understand how NCEA works.
- Māori, Pacific, and Asian people were less likely than other groups to agree that they understand how NCEA works.



FIGURE 3 Responses to “I understand how NCEA works” by connection to education (%)

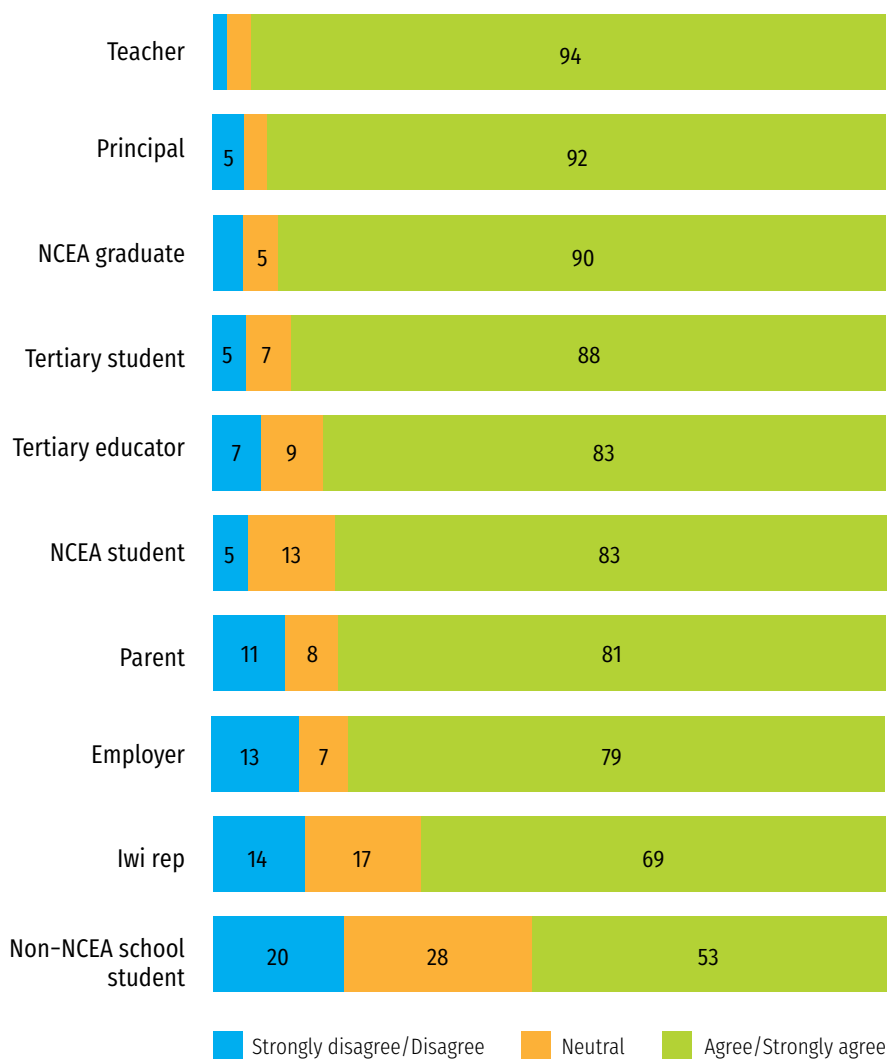
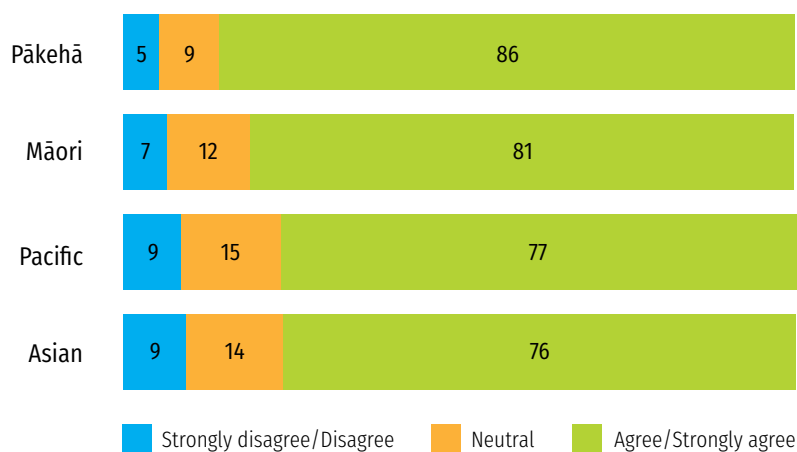


FIGURE 4 Responses to “I understand how NCEA works” by ethnicity (%)



## What's working well?

This section reports what people think is working well with NCEA. People gave their thoughts in response to questions in the surveys, workshops, focus groups, and submissions. Questions were worded slightly differently across these engagement channels (see list of questions on the right).

### What's working well: Key findings

1. NCEA's flexibility provides a range of benefits to learners.
2. Internal and external credits provide students with different ways to achieve.
3. The flexible standards-based approach works for students who might otherwise not experience success in education.
4. NCEA prepares students for further study, life, and work.
5. NCEA is valued as a qualification.

- What do you like about NCEA?
- What is the thing about NCEA you like the most?
- What are your experiences of NCEA?
- What is working well?

## FINDING 1: NCEA's flexibility provides a range of benefits to learners

Across all groups, the thing people like most about NCEA is its flexibility. This overarching theme intersects with many of the other things people like most about NCEA (see the other findings in this section). Specific benefits that people see include:

- NCEA enables schools to offer—and students to experience—a diverse curriculum. In some cases that could include cross-curricular and project-based learning.
- NCEA allows students to find success in areas of learning that match their interests and aspirations, and to track their progress via credit totals.
- NCEA enables students to tailor a personalised portfolio of learning, and to have a say in how their personal pathway is designed.

**I like NCEA. It's better than school cert. It seems relevant to students' intentions, and is flexible.** (TEACHER, SUBMISSION)

**It has the flexibility to allow for students to continue their NCEA even if they do not get the certificate in the year of their cohort. This is particularly good for students with well-being and mental health issues who need to minimise their workload for an extended period of time.** (SCHOOL, SUBMISSION)

# 77%

of people like that  
NCEA awards credits  
for many different  
subjects and skills.  
(BIG OPPORTUNITIES SURVEY)

Finding a subject that  
you really like—NCEA  
enables you to succeed  
through your passions.  
(STUDENTS WITH  
DISABILITIES, FOCUS GROUP)

## FINDING 2: Internal and external credits provide students with different ways to achieve

Many people like NCEA's mixture of external and internal credits, and the range of ways students can achieve credits. Specific things people like include:

- Credits can be achieved throughout the year, close to the time of learning.
- Assessments can be more authentic, particularly in subjects with a lot of practical components.
- Students build a record of what they can do that is more detailed than pass or fail.
- Success does not rely solely on students' ability to do well in end-of-year exams.

It works particularly well for subjects like art, music, drama, languages etc. where there are practical components. It feels like we can assess the strengths of our students within the subject. (TEACHER, SUBMISSION)

One thing I wouldn't change about NCEA is the internal external part. It gives you a chance to do assessments throughout the year. It doesn't just rely on the externals which for some can be lots of pressure. (STUDENTS WITH LOW VISION, FOCUS GROUP)

Students get a record of what they can do—it's what I've always liked about NCEA ... instead of saying you've failed this exam, you can look at the record and you can see a whole lot of things that they can do. (GUIDANCE COUNSELLORS, FOCUS GROUP)

The internals are really good. You know what is coming up ... you know what to study. (PACIFIC STUDENTS, FOCUS GROUP)

## FINDING 3: The standards-based approach works for students who might otherwise not experience success in education

The flexible standards-based approach of NCEA is seen as especially beneficial for students who would, under previous assessment regimes, have been less likely to have their learning recognised and to achieve a qualification. Some people commented that NCEA's standards-based approach is fairer and more equitable than the previous norm-referenced systems of School Certificate and Bursary. The standards-based approach reduces barriers for learners who face particular challenges in their learning or life circumstances, and makes it possible for as many students as possible to be successful.

[NCEA] makes education accessible for all students. I have a child with Down Syndrome who will be able to achieve credits and a pass in NCEA 1 and possibly 2 due to the structure. (PARENT, QUICK SURVEY)

# 77%

of people like that internal assessments help students gain credit throughout the year. (BIG OPPORTUNITIES SURVEY)

# 71%

of NCEA students and 72% of principals like that students can have more than one attempt at passing a standard. But only 46% of teachers, 48% of tertiary students, and 52% of parents like this aspect. (BIG OPPORTUNITIES SURVEY)

It is achievable for everyone.

(NCEA GRADUATE, QUICK SURVEY)

NCEA allows learners who previously would've had no chance at leaving school with a qualification to do so. This has been extremely positive for learners with disabilities and learning and behaviour difficulties.

(TEACHER, QUICK SURVEY)

## FINDING 4: NCEA prepares students for further study, life, and work

People say NCEA prepares students for further study, life, and work in at least two ways:

1. Students can learn things as part of their NCEA programmes that provide clear pathways into further education, training, and employment.
2. The nature of NCEA assessment tasks helps students to build useful capabilities such as time management skills and working consistently through the year.

**Many kura provide excellent guidance to their ākonga in terms of course/subject options that lead to meaningful pathways.** (KAIAKO/TUMUAKI, MĀORI-MEDIUM HUI)

**Food tech set me up perfectly for my job in making coffee ... I did my barista course through MIT, thanks to my school ... now I'm working in hospitality.** (LGBTQIA+, FOCUS GROUP)

**I teach hundreds of first year university students in history, and the improvement in skills and research-readiness in students since the new curriculum was introduced has been noticeable. I think history teachers are doing a great job with their NCEA students and I think the freedom given to them by such an "open" curriculum contributes to engagement and quality (of students and teachers).** (TERTIARY EDUCATOR, QUICK SURVEY)

**NCEA prepares people well for further study at a higher level. I think this is true because NCEA is very strict and competitive—this allows a person to work more, to put pressure more on themselves to achieve higher—to achieve something really big.** (REFUGEE FAMILIES, FOCUS GROUP)

**When I did NCEA I enjoyed the various internal assessments, and I found the process of gathering, curating, and analysing information aligned with university and post-uni job expectations.** (PACIFIC STUDENT, QUICK SURVEY)

## FINDING 5: NCEA is valued as a qualification

Many people value NCEA. They say it is a credible qualification that is recognised nationally and internationally. Some people also commented that the Merit and Excellence endorsements add to the quality of NCEA. Some people noted that although they think NCEA is a good qualification, this depends on how well the qualification is implemented in practice. Students who are trying to overcome difficult circumstances (e.g., in the youth justice system) talked about the value of NCEA providing them with hope for a better future.

**I love that my children understand a framework and set goals for themselves.** (COOK ISLAND MĀORI PARENT, QUICK SURVEY)

This is the best system ever—one of the best systems in the world I would say.

(REFUGEE FAMILIES, FOCUS GROUP)

**67%**

of people agree that Merit and Excellence grades show where students have done well. (BIG OPPORTUNITIES SURVEY)

We think it works well for the majority of students. The more organised and hardworking they are, the better they will do, which is not necessarily the case for students who only do an examination-based qualification.

(SCHOOL, SUBMISSION)

## What's not working well?

In this section of the report we look at what people think is not working well in NCEA. People gave their thoughts in response to questions in the surveys, workshops, focus groups, and submissions (see list of questions on the right). Because of the nature of people's experiences with NCEA, some of the findings in this section represent "the other side of the coin" from findings in the previous section about "What's working well?"

### What's not working well: Key findings

1. Assessment, not learning, tends to be the focus of the senior secondary school.
2. The focus on accumulating credits gets in the way of learning.
3. NCEA creates workload issues for students and teachers.
4. NCEA does not prepare all school leavers for their future.
5. Many people think that the way NCEA is implemented creates credibility issues.

- What is one thing you would like to change about NCEA?
- What don't you like about NCEA?
- What is not working well?
- Who does NCEA work for and who doesn't it work for?

### FINDING 1: Assessment, not learning, tends to be the focus of the senior secondary school

The focus on assessment rather than learning is a strong theme in people's feedback about what's not working well with NCEA. Feedback falls into two main areas:

1. Teachers tend to create courses that serve assessment rather than the curriculum. This means that meaningful learning within and across subject areas is often inhibited. The focus on achievement or unit standard "chunks", rather than the content and skills of the National Curriculum, may result in gaps in students' knowledge.
2. Students often choose what they see as easier pathways. This can mean that their learning is disjointed and lacks real purpose, or fails to prepare them for a future pathway. They "learn" to pass an assessment rather than approaching learning as something that is enjoyable and continues to expand and inform.

**The focus in class is often on the assessment, how we can meet the criteria of the standard and achieve the best grade.** (STUDENT, SUBMISSION)

**The achievement standards have become the virtual curriculum.** (EDUCATOR, SUBMISSION)

# 83%

of people dislike that assessment rather than learning can become the focus of the senior secondary school. (BIG OPPORTUNITIES SURVEY)

The year feels broken into disconnected, unrelated "chunks" of assessment, rather than a cohesive learning journey. (LGBTQIA+, FOCUS GROUP)

## FINDING 2: The focus on accumulating credits gets in the way of learning

The second finding is related to the first. Many people commented on issues related to credits, with many people using the words “credit” and “assessment” interchangeably. People consider that credits attached to standards have become the default curriculum, and student fixation on credits appears to be driving their approach to learning. Some students take a pragmatic approach, working the system to their advantage. Many people refer to this as “gaming” (see box on p. 13). One theme in the feedback relates to students’ attitudes towards accumulating credits:

- Many students focus on accumulating credits (sometimes referred to as credit farming or credit capture). This can result in study and learning which is disjointed and does not lead to effective ongoing learning.
- Other students stop studying and learning as soon as they have “enough” or minimum required credits.
- Students tell teachers they are only interested in something if it’s “worth credits”.

**Often students will “opt out” if they don’t think they need the credits and as a result can miss whole units of teaching and learning.** (TEACHERS, SUBMISSION)

A second theme concerns the value of standards and credits and the balance of internal and external credits within the overall system:

- There is widespread perceived inequality in credits attached to standards across and within subjects.
- There is concern about the balance of internal and external credits, although there is not a consistent view about this. For example, some people think that NCEA should only have end-of-year external examinations and others think that all work should be internally assessed.

**My year 12 daughter recently completed a 2 day first-aid course and received 5 credits for that. It takes a whole term to get that many credits in English, when English is a more difficult subject.** (PARENT, QUICK SURVEY)



# 83%

of people dislike that students focus on credit counting rather than a learning pathway.

(BIG OPPORTUNITIES SURVEY)

# 78%

of people dislike that some students stop studying once they have “enough” credits.

(BIG OPPORTUNITIES SURVEY)

# 72%

of people dislike the perceived unfairness between credit values.

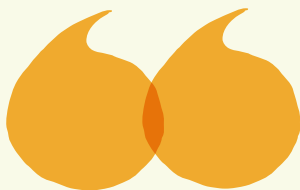
(BIG OPPORTUNITIES SURVEY)

Many who have their qualification do not bother to turn up for the externals that they are entered into in November because they do not need the credits.

(PARENTS, SUBMISSION)

Too many students are happy just to do enough to pass, and do not aim for merit or excellence.

(KAI AKO/TUMUAKI, MĀORI-MEDIUM HUI)



## Gaming the system

[I like] the feeling of racking up them credits. It's like a video game.

(NCEA STUDENT, QUICK SURVEY)

NCEA is well enough understood that schools, teachers and students know how to game the system to inflate the statistics and make themselves look good. This undermines the usefulness of the qualification. (TEACHER, QUICK SURVEY)

The kids game the system. There is no incentive to do more than the points needed and too many teachers I know despair of capable students not wanting to attain an Excellence or keep trying for one, once they have attained Achieved. (PARENT, QUICK SURVEY)

Rather than lifelong learners, we are implicitly encouraging students to be short-term clients. By Year 12 and 13 students are increasingly cynical ... They avoid exams or standards in which they are unlikely to get their desired grade ... None of this is a criticism of our students; they are simply gaming the system we have created and framed for them in the most effective ways they can. (TEACHER, SUBMISSION)

A lot of the internals varied in hardness and varied in credits drastically. I had some very easy internals for 6 credits and some very hard internals that were 2 credits. So I wouldn't try very hard for the 2 credit ones, but try hard for the 6 credit ones because they came up as 6 E credits. I felt like it was a game where I played the easy number for E credits rather than trying things that would have mattered more in the long term.

(RECENT SCHOOL LEAVERS, FOCUS GROUP)



Kaiako are overloaded with the need to prepare their own resources, deliver, and assess.

(KAIAKO/TUMUAKI, MĀORI-MEDIUM HUI)

The workload for teachers is immense—this needs to change somehow.

(TEACHER, QUICK SURVEY)

## FINDING 3: NCEA creates workload issues for students and teachers

Across the review feedback, overassessment is seen as one of the main problems with the way NCEA is being implemented. This has created major workload issues for students and teachers.

- **Student workload:** Overassessment has led to high levels of stress and anxiety among students. Students often feel powerless to manage workloads or prioritise learning when there are repeated demands throughout the year for three years in a row.
- **Teacher workload:** Assessments, resubmissions, ongoing marking, and moderation lead to teacher burn-out and discontent. Many people commenting on this aspect of NCEA consider quality teaching is compromised by demands of assessment.

Learning occurs best in a stress-free, comfortable environment, but my NCEA years were some of the most stressful of my life.

(TERTIARY STUDENT, SUBMISSION)



## FINDING 4: NCEA does not prepare all school leavers for their future

Despite the original intentions of NCEA—to offer a qualification that is fit for purpose for all school leavers—some people consider students are not well placed to move on to further study or work. Two main types of reasons are given:

1. Courses are disjointed because of the standards teachers make available, school and timetable constraints, and the choices students make. The consequence is that some students do not have clear and useful pathways to be able to make good decisions about their future. They may have made restrictive choices too early, or schools may not have been able to offer them the options they needed.
2. The atomised nature of standards and the push to gain credits at all costs has impacted on deep learning and students knowing how to learn independently. Many employers, and tertiary educators across a range of tertiary settings, consider that school leavers have to be taught how to learn.

**The whole system is too different from university, so transition is difficult. It does not work for Pacific peoples in the long term—the system allows for students to enter university but does not prepare them for the way the university system works.**  
(PACIFIC NCEA GRADUATE, SUBMISSION)

Many schools are now being encouraged to reduce the amount of assessment, particularly external assessment. For chemistry, this results in students missing large chunks of the background knowledge/content needed as a foundation for tertiary study ... As a consequence, under-prepared students are required to take an extra course before being able to proceed with their chemistry studies.

(UNIVERSITIES, SUBMISSION)

## FINDING 5: Many people think that the way NCEA is implemented creates credibility issues

The complexity of NCEA makes it hard to understand and confusing for some students, parents, and employers. The way NCEA is implemented by schools and by agencies also creates credibility issues. Specifically, there are concerns about validity of marking and moderation (especially of internal assessments) with seemingly different decisions being made at the subject and school level.

**The feedback on external moderation is woefully inadequate. How can one short sentence or paragraph give teachers enough detail on what they need to improve on or change?** (TEACHER, SUBMISSION)

Be taught how to learn, rather than how to sit a test.

(UNIVERSITY STUDENTS, FOCUS GROUP)

**There is so much variation in how it is implemented across the country. The variation between schools is vast.** (TEACHER, SUBMISSION)

NCEA worked great for me as a student at my particular high school, but did very little to prepare me for university. For those of us at university, there is a huge leap from NCEA.

(NCEA GRADUATE, QUICK SURVEY)



## Is NCEA working in the way it was designed to work?

A number of people who engaged with the NCEA review regret that NCEA is not working in the way it was intended to work. They feel that the way NCEA is implemented causes many of the issues people have identified in the review. All the five key findings in the “What’s not working well?” section provide examples where the way NCEA has been implemented has led to unintended consequences. Some people suggest that these have been the result of competition between schools, fuelled by media reporting of league tables. Others consider poor communication, lack of resourcing, and lack of professional development for teachers have impacted on NCEA.

The review wanted to find out if NCEA works better for some people than others and if there are particular contexts where NCEA works better than others. People’s experiences of NCEA are varied. Sections 4-6 of this report discuss the perspectives of some specific groups.

It’s not NCEA that needs changing—it’s how schools are using it. The emphasis should be on support to use NCEA well rather than bringing in another new system. NCEA can do just what we want it to—we just need to use it better.

(PRINCIPALS, SUBMISSION)



# 3. Ngā marohi mō te whakapakari i te NCEA

## Suggestions for strengthening NCEA

In this section we look at people's ideas for strengthening NCEA. People gave their thoughts in response to questions in the Quick Survey, workshops, focus groups, and submissions (see list of questions on the right).

### How NCEA can be strengthened: Key findings

1. NCEA could encourage students to engage in richer learning.
2. The way NCEA is assessed could be changed.
3. The structure of NCEA could be changed.
4. There could be more support around NCEA.

### Do people want changes to NCEA?

There is a large appetite for change. An overwhelming majority of people told us about aspects of NCEA they think could be strengthened, with only very small numbers commenting that they wouldn't change anything. However, some people, including NCEA graduates and teachers, caution against "throwing the baby out with the bathwater" by making changes for change's sake. They advise that any changes need to be carefully considered, thoroughly researched, and implemented gradually.

**Taking time is key—gentle step-by-step improvement which is confidence-building and clearly backed by evidence.** (TEACHER, SUBMISSION)

The improvements that people want fall into four main categories: changes to the emphasis NCEA places on learning; changes to assessments; changes to the structure of NCEA; and changes to the amount of support that is available around

- If you could change one thing about NCEA, what would you change?
- What could be improved?
- What have been the unintended consequences and how might these be addressed?

NCEA. These areas overlap. For example, one way of strengthening the focus on learning is by making changes to the amount of assessment. Similarly, improving support around NCEA for teachers might lead to an increased focus on learning.

## FINDING 1: NCEA could encourage students to engage in richer learning

Many people who took part in the review told us they would like NCEA to encourage students to engage in rich, deep learning. This was a strong theme across all groups of participants, including teachers, students, whānau, principals, and employers.

### Reduce the focus on assessment and credit counting

As this report has already said, many people feel that the current NCEA system encourages teachers to “teach to the test” and students to focus on gathering credits. Assessment has become the de facto curriculum, leading to a “tick box” mentality rather than a genuine love of learning. This recommendation for change could be summed up by the phrase “quality [of learning] not quantity [of credits]”.

The focus on assessment and accumulation of credits means that many students stop working once they reach the minimum number of credits, and so do not achieve to their full potential. Parents talked about students settling for “mediocrity”. As discussed in the previous section, other students are “credit harvesting”, gathering large numbers of credits, and some play the system to look for standards that will offer the greatest number of credits for the least amount of work.

People’s suggestions for moving away from this situation and strengthening NCEA’s focus on learning include the following:

- Create space for deep, relevant, connected learning by refocusing on content.
- Teach skills and attitudes for lifelong learning by helping students develop knowledge of how to seek out answers, find valid and appropriate information, and innovate to solve problems.
- Reduce the number of credits at Level 1, get rid of Level 1 entirely, or re-vision it as a broad foundation that includes both study and life skills (see comments about this on page 22). Many of these ideas align with the focus of Big Opportunity 1.

**We support the proposal to reduce the number of credits at Level 1, so that we can shift the balance of learning towards activities that are not for credits and reduce student preoccupation with accumulating credits at Level 1.** (TEACHER, SUBMISSION)

- Encourage the love of learning through “passion projects” or relevant, real-life programmes of work.
- Build incentives for students to work to their full potential: for example, by awarding extra credits for Merit and Excellence grades.

**Get every student to stretch rather than just pass.** (PARENT, QUICK SURVEY)

Encourage teachers to teach to inspire rather than to the test all the time.

(PARENT, QUICK SURVEY)

More focus on content and less on assessment. Bring back the joy!

(WORKSHOP)

A lot of the time in assessments (especially physics and chemistry) I feel like there is stuff that we should be learning—so that we have a better grasp of a topic as well as being able to make connections between areas of learning—that we aren’t because it isn’t being assessed.

(STUDENT, QUICK SURVEY)

## Include more relevant, real-world learning

There is a desire among some groups, including students and employers, for more learning to focus on authentic, real-world contexts. Students talked about wanting to see the relevance of learning to their own lives and to the world beyond the school. Many real-world contexts or problems bring together learning from a variety of subject areas, so focusing on such contexts was seen as one way of encouraging integrated approaches.

One student talked about his difficulties understanding mathematics and wondered why it could not be taught in the context of a real-world application such as plumbing (a career he was interested in). He felt that “learning is easier when it is related to real-world skills” (STUDENT, QUICK SURVEY). One submission, from a student group, suggested “in mathematics, instead of calculating heights, lengths and angles of random shapes, students could make the same calculations but in a real-life context like designing a building, or other structures which would help them engage more with the topic”. A related theme was the call for literacy and numeracy to be integrated further into all subject areas.

Many of the student comments implied that the *future relevance* of learning was not necessarily clear to them. This is primarily a teaching and learning issue and it is not clear if NCEA was seen as the cause, or if students simply took the opportunity to ask for change more generally.

There’s nothing on making the tests more on real-life situations. It’s all about the stuff that you’re not going to use in life.

(STUDENTS WITH DYSLLEXIA, FOCUS GROUP)

Make it so that some of the subjects that we actually learn are based around what we want to do in our career path.

(MĀORI AND PASIFIKA TRADES TRAINING, FOCUS GROUP)

## FINDING 2: The way NCEA is assessed could be changed

Most people agree there needs to be less assessment in NCEA. Many people also feel that the way credits are allocated to standards should be reviewed. Some people also want changes to the grading system.

### Reduce the volume of assessment

Many people commented about the constant cycle of assessment in NCEA, and the effects of this on student learning and on student, teacher, and whānau wellbeing. They suggested reducing the amount of assessment to help create space for deep learning, critical thinking, and engagement with content.

Reducing student assessment would also help to relieve teacher workload. Teachers feel that a lower marking workload, as well as fewer opportunities for reassessment, would open up space for creativity and innovation in their teaching.

People’s specific ideas for reducing assessment follow. Some of these are things that schools are already free to do if they so choose, and others require system-level changes.

- Reduce the number of credits required for each level of NCEA: for example, from 80 to 60.
- Limit the number of credits that each student can be enrolled in over a year. As one teacher submission noted, “Students do not need over 120 credits to pass L1”.
- Cap the number of standards/credits a student can be enrolled in for each subject area. One teacher submission suggested a maximum of 15 credits per subject.

Reduce the relentless assessment. Give kids more space to try and fail without the failure being judged, so they begin to take risks with their work.

(PARENT, QUICK SURVEY)

Less marking, more creativity.

(WORKSHOP)



- Tie credits to the completion of a subject or course, rather than to the completion of individual standards.
- Create standards that cover larger chunks of content, with more credits attached.
- Introduce more holistic assessment: for example, through project-based work that is assessed over several standards.
- Space out assessments so there is time for students to recharge in between, and make sure holidays and weekends are not filled up with assessment and revision.
- Introduce more “tech-enabled” ways of assessing and moderating.

Reducing assessment was a particularly strong theme from students with learning needs such as dyslexia. Because these students need more time to process material, back-to-back assessments and competing deadlines from different subject areas take an extra toll. External assessments, such as exams, can be particularly stressful.

### Improve the balance between internal and external assessment

There are polarised views about changes to internal and external assessments. Some people would like more internal assessment and others would like more external assessment.

Many students are in favour of reducing external assessment and relying more on internal assessment. They commented about “cramming” for exams, which they think results in superficial learning that isn’t relevant to real life.

**Externals are a kind of memory test, learn things to memorise.**

(PACIFIC YOUTH, FOCUS GROUP)

Other people, including some teachers and employers, told us they would prefer more external assessment as a means of ensuring reliability and consistency of results across settings.

**Most subjects should still have an exam and there shouldn’t be the opportunity to “pass” the paper before sitting exams.**

(EMPLOYER, QUICK SURVEY)

Some teachers think more external assessment could reduce the pressure that comes with constant internal assessment.

Other people suggest a balance between internal and external assessments, to cater for individual preferences—some students do better in externals and others do better in internals. A number of university educators pointed out that it is important to retain externals because students who are going on to university need to have experience with examinations. Another suggestion was to have only English and maths as externals, with other courses assessed through internals.

**Some sort of minimum requirements of balance between internals and externals to ensure that students learn the skills of coping under pressure.**

(WORKSHOP)

**Give students the option of doing internals or externals - different ways suit different students.**

(PACIFIC STUDENTS, FOCUS GROUP)

Get rid of credits for standards? [Make it so you] can’t get credits unless you complete the whole course.

(WORKSHOP)

Achievement Standards should be bigger “chunks” of teaching worth more credits that allow students to get a comprehensive understanding of the subject and what it entails.

(TEACHER, QUICK SURVEY)

It’s important that the curriculum doesn’t become so difficult and so demanding that people have to give up all their other interests.

(RECENT SCHOOL LEAVERS, FOCUS GROUP)

## Encourage more variety in assessment

Many people commented on the need for a variety of methods, other than traditional written assessments, to demonstrate learning. Suggestions included interviews, video recordings, portfolios, or artwork. This was a particularly strong theme in focus groups with the following groups of students:

- students learning in prison or youth justice settings
- students with disabilities
- students with dyslexia
- students who are blind or who have low vision
- English-language learners
- refugees.

These students' recommendations for change include:

- Design NCEA assessments from an inclusive mindset: rather than thinking about removing barriers, design the assessment without barriers. Including students in the design process is one way of achieving this.
- Have a wide variety of assessment methods available for students to choose from: internal/external, online/paper-based, written/spoken/video. A focus group of young people with disabilities noted that this flexibility already happens in the tertiary sector.
- Consider modifications to assessments to meet the needs of diverse learners: for example, explanations of key words, questions available in simplified language, extended time allowances.
- Consider alternative standards for the disability sector (a suggestion from the students with low vision focus group).

## Review how NCEA credits are allocated and graded

Many people described inconsistencies in the way credits are allocated within and across subjects: for example, the same number of credits allocated to an "easy" and a "difficult" standard.

Suggestions for change include:

- Increase equity between standards, by making sure the number of credits fairly reflects the difficulty, time, effort, or skill involved.
- Introduce a grading system that gives finer-grained information about student performance. For example, different numbers of credits could be allocated to reflect level of performance: "one assessment could gain you either 3 credits (achieved); 5 credits (merit); 8 credits (excellence)" (NCEA STUDENTS, SUBMISSION).

**Students should be able to show they achieved an 'M5' or 'M6' grade, rather than limiting their grade to just 'M'.** (YOUTH ORGANISATION, SUBMISSION)

- Drop the requirement for external assessment in course endorsements, so that Merit or Excellence in a subject can be given on the basis of internal results.

If students have a lot of anxiety around doing speeches ... [they should] have a different type of assessment where they can write down what they'd say ... We need to be working with students, not against them.

(STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES, FOCUS GROUP)

If students can gain 10 credits towards their Level 2 certificate from doing a two-day course on Health and Safety (this is 1/6th of the credits they need to gain L2) then there is a bit of a problem.

(TEACHER, SUBMISSION)

I'll do 6 pieces of writing but only get 4 credits, whereas someone else will fill out a form and get 2 credits.

(STUDENTS IN HEALTH SCHOOL, FOCUS GROUP)

## FINDING 3: The structure of NCEA could be changed

Many people suggested changes to the structure of NCEA. The changes they suggest fall into two categories: changes to the number and content of NCEA levels, and changes to the pathways in NCEA.

### Change the number and content of NCEA levels

Some groups invested considerable effort in suggesting these types of changes. As one example, the box below explains the ideas of a student group for a pre-Level 1 Year 10 certificate, along with separate literacy and numeracy qualifications.

**Year 10 Project—Award/Certificate a level below NCEA. 20 credits can pass up to NCEA Level 1 the same way Level 2 starts with 20 credits from Level 1. For some students this project may carry on over 2 or more years.**

**Literacy—an independent qualification. (2 or 3 tiers. Academic Purposes / Employment Purposes or Achieved/Merit/Excellence)**

**Numeracy—an independent qualification. (2 or 3 tiers. Academic Purposes / Employment Purposes or Achieved/Merit/Excellence)**

**Student A: Wants to go to university and study English. He gains NCEA L3; Literacy for Academic Purposes; Numeracy for Employment Purposes.**

**Student B: Wants to go to university and study Maths. She gains NCEA L3, Literacy and Numeracy for Academic Purposes.**

**Student C: Wants to study hairdressing. He gains Year 10 Certificate, NCEA L1, Literacy and Numeracy for Employment Purposes.**

**Student D: Wants to go straight to the workforce. She gains Year 10 Certificate, NCEA L1/2, and Literacy and Numeracy for Employment Purposes.**

(NCEA STUDENTS, SUBMISSION)

Others linked the introduction of a certificate of proficiency in literacy and numeracy with the suggested removal of Level 1. Some people want changes to Level 1 rather than its removal. Ideas about these changes include:

- Reduce the number of credits required, to make room for a stronger focus on learning, to support transitions into the senior secondary school, and to ease the assessment load for students.
- Ensure curriculum breadth is maintained at Level 1. Ideas for inclusions variously covered study skills, life skills, “soft” skills, values, key competencies, and/or work experience.

**We would suggest that serious consideration be given to how students can experience a rich and varied curriculum at Level 1 which would provide the foundation for study at Levels 2 and 3. (UNIVERSITY, SUBMISSION)**

- One submission suggested introducing more compulsory subjects, or a minimum number of subjects. Ideas for compulsory subjects included a national language (English, Māori, or NZ Sign); mathematics; core science or agriculture or technology.

Students for whom this [Level 1] would be their highest, and only, qualification would be better served getting a certificate that verified they had the literacy and numeracy skills required to become a functioning adult in New Zealand society.

(TERTIARY EDUCATOR, SUBMISSION)

Reducing credits at Level 1 would ensure that the step up from Year 10 to 11 would be much more achievable and a little less daunting for the students.

(STUDENTS, SUBMISSION)

Should the number of subjects to get NCEA be defined nationally, say a minimum of 4 or 5 subjects ... achievable over a number of years?

(TEACHER, SUBMISSION)



Many students and NCEA graduates feel strongly that life skills should be a compulsory part of NCEA for all students. Topics they would like to learn about include the following (with specific examples from feedback listed in brackets):

- relationship skills (negotiation, collaboration)
- financial literacy (paying taxes, student loans, budgeting)
- entrepreneurship and business capability
- civics (how government works)
- practical life skills (cooking, dealing with health issues).

Some employers commented on the importance of including “soft skills”—such as communication, critical thinking, team work, self-management, and problem solving—as an integral part of NCEA. A focus group of Pacific business owners and employers had similar thoughts, adding that Polyfest offers the perfect opportunity to assess soft skills such as leadership. Members of the migrant community commented about the graduate profiles they had seen for tertiary-level courses, which include soft skills. They wondered whether similar graduate profiles could be made for Years 11, 12, and 13.

Some teachers and guidance counsellors feel that a focus on the key competencies of the New Zealand Curriculum, as well as values education, is important. A range of people suggested that credits could be given for out-of-school activities such as participation in sporting or community initiatives.

**It would be really cool if the new system of NCEA incorporated those other kinds of learning experiences outside of school like St John training ... Cambridge has creative arts in service and you have to do 50 hours for each and you do a presentation on it. So maybe that would be good, to get involved and do other things.** (RECENT SCHOOL LEAVERS, FOCUS GROUP)

Presuming that society and business want people who are enterprising, resourceful, self-motivated, reliable and resilient, then shouldn't these attributes be part of the teaching and learning in standards/ subjects/NCEA and be assessed?

(TEACHER, SUBMISSION)



## Change the learning pathways within NCEA

Many respondents, from all groups, want NCEA students to keep their options open for as long as possible. This could happen if there was more communication with students about what is needed for their pathway; more careers guidance; more guidance on appropriate NCEA profiles for different destinations; and an individualised, responsive, and inclusive pathway for each student.

Some groups want to see improvement in secondary–tertiary links to help make students' transitions smoother. They thought this could happen by encouraging schools to engage more with experts in the community or in higher education.

Many people agree that “it’s not all about uni”. They want to see strengthened employment-related pathways, with more opportunities for vocational or work-based learning. This theme was especially strong in focus groups with students or staff in prison or youth justice contexts.

On the other hand, some people, including a focus group of NCEA graduates, feel that more study skills courses are needed to prepare students for university. Some suggested a clearly defined dual pathway, split between academic and vocational options. These options would be certificated as such on students' records of achievement.

## FINDING 4: There could be more support around NCEA

Many teachers told us they would value more NCEA-related support, resources, and professional learning. This would enable them to implement NCEA in the way that was intended. One focus group of principals' nominees described a need for “going back to the basic tenets of NCEA, and actually talking with teachers about running a teaching and learning programme linked to the curriculum where the assessments kind of sit in the background. And it’s as basic as that.”

Teachers want up-to-date, timely New Zealand-based resources, to support their subject teaching and assessment and moderation of standards. This support could include:

- the reinstatement of subject advisers
- networking with others to develop and share resources
- multiple tasks and exemplars for all standards, as well as clear guidelines and clarifications
- free, readily available professional development, including on project-based, cross-curricular, integrated learning and assessment, and on catering for different students and their needs—dyslexia, prison-based, learning difficulties, Pacific people, and so forth.
- interactive, online NCEA training.

**A critical factor in being successful with NCEA is the way it is implemented by a school. Therefore quality implementation models need to be shared across the sector.** (KAIAKO/TUMUAKI, MĀORI-MEDIUM HUI)

Need a broader foundation—not restrict your options too early.

(RECENT SCHOOL LEAVERS, FOCUS GROUP)

More life skills qualifications and standards, e.g., farming, automotive engineering, Māori focus (kapa haka etc)—“have more hands-on practical things to do.”

(NCEA STUDENTS IN CORRECTIONAL FACILITIES, FOCUS GROUP)

NCEA is at the moment a Rolls-Royce system running on a Mini engine—most of its real and perceived problems result from under resourcing.

(TEACHER, QUICK SURVEY)

Whenever a standard is modified/updated there must be updated resources available asap ... it needs to be ready to go on release day.

(TEACHER, QUICK SURVEY)

Other people called for improved understanding of NCEA in the wider community. They thought clear communication and resources about NCEA were needed, because it “should not be up to schools to teach people this” (TEACHERS, SUBMISSION).

**Even though NCEA as it stands has existed for more than 15 years, there is still a lack of understanding of how it works in the public sphere.** (TEACHERS, SUBMISSION)

There needs to be a better flow-on from school to post-school study with universities and tertiary providers taking part in this conversation so that NCEA can work the way it has been designed. (TEACHERS, SUBMISSION)







## 4. Ngā tirohanga mai i te iwi Māori

### Perspectives from Māori

In this section we present the perspectives of Māori respondents in both Māori-medium and English-medium settings in relation to the questions *What's working? What's not working? How can NCEA be strengthened?* We looked across all forms of engagement to highlight these experiences of NCEA.

#### He aha ngā mea e oti pai ana?

#### What's working well?

For some kaiako, the flexibility of NCEA and the range of subjects available work well. NCEA is seen as being agile enough to support personalised learning and different learning styles. Learning can be undertaken in achievable chunks that can be adapted to context. Students get to specialise in areas they enjoy, and to build a qualification based on their strengths. This creates pathways that can lead to a wide variety of jobs or courses.

Some kaiako said they like having the ability to design programmes (with credits attached) for Māori learners. Examples included Māori performing arts programmes based on mātauranga Māori, and Māori approaches and pedagogies such as wānanga and noho.

Whānau and students find the credit system useful for motivating students to work towards clear goals. They also like that credits are “transportable”, so that when they move to a different school or tertiary provider the credits they have already attained are taken into account. They like being able to gain credits from year levels higher than their own, particularly of Māori-focused subject credits. This helps them get a head start at school.

Kaiako, whānau, and students say that internal assessments are good for students because not everything relies on a single end-of-year exam. There is less stress for students and more control over efforts and results. The mix of internal

Ko te tikanga, kei roto i te NCEA te maha o ngā huarahi hei whāinga mā ngā ākonga.  
(TUMUAKI, QUICK SURVEY)

It's worked well for our child. She has been able to bank credits from an early age. She's well ahead at Year 12. We're in talks with her school about what options she has.  
(WHĀNAU MĀORI, ENGLISH-MEDIUM FOCUS GROUP)

and external assessment provides for different learning styles and personalities, allows students to gain success with a variety of assessment tools, and places value on the learning they have done. Assessment can also prepare students for further learning at tertiary level.

## He aha ngā mea kāore i te oti pai?

### What's not working well?

Māori respondents shared the concerns of the wider group about faults with the credit system, the focus on assessment, workload issues for students and teachers, preparedness for the future, and NCEA being difficult to understand. They also had specific concerns around five clear themes. The first, third, and fourth themes are relevant to both Māori-medium and English-medium contexts. The second theme highlights an issue in some English-medium contexts. The fifth concerns the inequities between resourcing for Māori medium and English medium.

1. Māori respondents said that te reo Māori, tikanga Māori, identity, and mātauranga Māori (Māori knowledges) are not valued within NCEA. They are not seen as having the same status and support as English language, culture, and other subjects in the curriculum. Participants in one whānau focus group held the view that achievement standards gained in te reo are not seen to be as valuable as those gained in English. They questioned the assumptions that might underlie this view, noting that “grammatical skills are the same no matter what the language; literacy is the same”.
2. Māori respondents talked about teachers in English-medium contexts having low expectations for ākonga Māori and consequently not putting effort into supporting them to do well in NCEA. Like Pacific students, Māori students said they can be encouraged into less academically demanding pathways that do not serve them well.
3. Respondents shared a number of concerns related to te reo Māori and assessment in schools and kura, for example that:
  - Te reo Māori assessments are not well designed for learners with varied levels of proficiency in Māori medium and English medium.
  - Te reo Māori assessments do not focus on practical and useful language.
  - The use of iwi dialect is not supported in assessments.
  - NCEA assessments in te reo Māori are not clear enough about which skills or abilities are being tested.
4. Kaiako said they are not receiving the professional learning and development and resources they need to deliver NCEA and to strengthen their assessment practice. One whānau focus group said that better support with assessment and moderation would be a way to improve understanding and to build the ability to reflect Māori ways of assessing.
5. Māori respondents raised concerns about the inequities between resourcing for Māori medium and English medium. They talked about the heavy workloads that kaiako in kura kaupapa Māori and wharekura have in comparison with teachers in English-medium schools. One reason is that they cannot access a wide variety of quality resources and so have to create and translate their own. In contrast, “English medium have [the] advantage of a wealth of resources at their fingertips” (MĀORI-MEDIUM KAIKO AND WHĀNAU, FOCUS GROUP).

Kia whiwhi paerewa  
ngā ākonga mai i  
ngā mahi mō ngā  
aromatawai ā-roto  
me ngā aromatawai  
ā-waho. Mā ēnei  
momo aromatawai e  
rua ka whakaritea tika  
ngā kura i ngā ākonga  
kia rite pai mō ēnei  
momo āhuatanga  
aromatawai ki roto  
i ngā momo Whare  
Wānanga o te motu.  
(TUMUAKI, QUICK SURVEY)

Whakamanatia te  
maatauranga Māori,  
i teenei waa kaaore  
ahau i te kite i teenei  
tuuaahuatanga hei  
tauirā—UE—kei hea te  
mana o te Tuu Taua, o  
te Toi Whakaari?  
(PIA NŌ TE NCEA, QUICK  
SURVEY)

There are simply not  
enough teachers who  
are able to teach  
adequately in Māori  
in the wharekura.  
Smaller and more  
remote schools are  
disadvantaged by the  
staff they can appoint  
and have very little  
choice when they  
advertise jobs.  
(WHĀNAU, SUBMISSION)



This challenge is compounded by a shortage of teachers in specialist subject areas such as maths, science, and digital technology who can teach through the medium of Māori. One group of respondents warned that the “extreme workloads for kaiako in wharekura could become the demise of attracting teachers to kura kaupapa teaching.” (KURA KAUPAPA MĀORI, SUBMISSION)

## Ka whakapai i te aha?

### What could be strengthened?

Many of the suggestions people gave for strengthening NCEA often apply to strengthening secondary school learning more generally.

#### English medium

People commented that te reo Māori, Māori knowledge, and Māori ways of doing and learning are not widely valued in the curriculum and NCEA. They could be made more visible and accessible by:

- including kaupapa Māori, mātauranga Māori, and mahi Māori in the curriculum
- making te reo Māori a compulsory unit at Years 9 and 10, or Year 11
- promoting the benefits of learning two languages
- offering more Māori-medium classes within English-medium schools
- using culturally relevant contexts
- improving the cultural understanding of teachers.

#### Māori medium

In Māori medium, suggestions concerned improved resourcing, recognition of mātauranga Māori, improved moderation, and support for kaiako:

- increase government support for teaching resources for kura Māori
- resource Te Aho Matua curricula development, resources and professional development



Me maruru ake ngaa kaupapa Māori, me ngaa mahi Māori ki roto i ngaa mahi!! - Karanga, whaikoorero, karakia. Ki te peenei taatou, ka ora ake te reo, ngaa tikanga Māori anoo hoki ki waenga i ngaa rangatahi!!

(ĀKONGA NCEA, QUICK SURVEY)

We like NCEA but there are some disparities around equity and coherence.

(MĀORI-MEDIUM HUI).

Utua ngaa kaiako kia tae atu ki ngaa waananga; ngaa mea katoa maa te Kaiako; maarama kaha i ngaa aahuatanga katoa ki roto i te NCEA, te whakarite mahere ako, maaka mahi, ripoata, te tirohanga whakaata o te whare ako (department self-review), waananga kaahui kaupapa.

(KAIKO, QUICK SURVEY)

- develop field Māori credentials (for example for Tū Taua and Raranga) to Level 3 University Entrance
- develop more achievement standards for Māori-medium contexts
- develop more mātauranga Māori pathways
- form a Māori-medium moderation advisory group to ensure that mātauranga Māori is validated and recognised in a wharekura context
- ensure there are more moderators who can speak te reo Māori.

Suggestions to support kaiako were to:

- reduce the heavy workloads of kaiako
- provide professional learning and development and other incentives for teaching subjects such as science, maths, and technology in immersion settings through the medium of Māori
- pay kaiako to go on courses to learn all the skills they need for NCEA
- ensure kura kaupapa Māori teaching staff and principals have regular paid study leave.

## English medium and Māori medium

Suggestions to support kaiako in both English and Maori-medium contexts centre around providing appropriate professional learning and development, and increasing the teacher workforce.

People also spoke about the need for better and more consistent moderation. Some would like to see more appropriate te reo Māori assessments for learners with varied levels of Māori language proficiency, in both Māori-medium and English-medium settings.

There is not enough funding for PLD around Te Marautanga o Aotearoa (TMoA) NCEA. Kura struggle to understand TMoA NCEA and have no faith in the Ministry of Education because of the lack of resourcing.  
(MATUA, WHĀNAU, KAITIAKI, QUICK SURVEY)





# 5. Ngā tirohanga mai i ngā tāngata o te Moana-nui-a-Kiwa

## Perspectives from Pacific peoples

In this section we answer the same three questions from the perspectives of Pacific peoples living in New Zealand, and those studying and teaching in the Cook Islands and Niue. We looked across all forms of engagement to highlight these experiences of NCEA—*What's working well? What's not working well? How can NCEA be strengthened?*

### What's working well?

Some things Pacific people say are working well for them are the same as for the wider group. However, their comments focus on things that are especially important for them. For example, Pacific parents' and students' statements reflect Pacific people's high expectations for their children in education and the value they place on qualifications.

Pacific **students** say they like NCEA because:

- it is less stressful working for credits during the year than having one end-of-year exam
- accumulating credits motivates them to work all through the year
- being able to achieve with Merit and Excellence motivates them to produce quality work
- they can gain Level 1, 2, or 3 credits at any year, even prior to Year 11
- they can choose the standards/credits across subjects that meet their interest and ability

You get a chance to strive for your best to get excellences.

(PACIFIC STUDENT, QUICK SURVEY)

- internal assessments have clear criteria about what to expect in the assessment, and offer the opportunity to resubmit work—this makes them much easier to pass compared with external exams.

Pacific **parents** say they like NCEA because they value a formal qualification and this one is recognised internationally. They see all levels of NCEA, including Level 1, as valuable qualifications.

Pacific **employers** also highly value NCEA and see it as a pathway to jobs, not just to university. They say they like NCEA because:

- it allows Pacific students to have control over their own learning programme—students may change their pathway if they do not pass a required credit
- it helps students who move from school to school to fit in—teachers know what credits they already have, and students can carry on their learning pathway
- it acknowledges life skills—students can earn credits for obtaining a driver's licence and from Gateway programmes.

Pacific **teachers** value the flexibility of NCEA, which allows them to consider cultural perspectives in their teaching. They say they like NCEA because the choice of standards available for their students allows them to teach to their students' needs.

## What's not working well?

Pacific respondents said they put a lot of trust in teachers' guidance about choices and pathways. Unfortunately, this guidance does not always match with students' personal expectations or those of their Pacific family. A theme in the feedback is that some schools and teachers can have lower expectations for Pacific students, which impacts on their pathways. The following extended quote illustrates this.

NCEA worked for me, but that does not mean it works well for other students. When I was in Year 11 and was about to choose my NCEA subjects for the year, out of 45 Pasifika and Māori students in my form, only 10 were told we could take NCEA accredited subjects. I watched my teachers encourage many of my friends to not take NCEA subjects but instead sign up for classes at WelTec where they learnt how to make mocktails and coffee. Every single one of my friends who were encouraged not to take NCEA subjects left school and ended up taking NCEA accredited courses so they could gain entry to tertiary level study. Not only did my school have no faith and very low / no expectations of Pasifika, they were very careful of who they would let take these subjects in case they would fail the exams. Out of the 10 that were chosen to take NCEA subjects, every single one of us girls passed NCEA Levels 1, 2, 3. The following year our school boasted of having the highest Pasifika and Māori pass rates in [the ... region]. (PACIFIC TERTIARY STUDENT, QUICK SURVEY)

Māori and Pasifika students are being streamed out of academic subjects. (WORKSHOP)

Māori and Pasifika students are achieving a “different kind” of NCEA than students of other ethnicities. (WORKSHOP)

Once a student understands how the system works ... how they can make things work for them ... how they can build their portfolio of work ... it's a really good system.

(PACIFIC EMPLOYERS, FOCUS GROUP)

Māori and Pacific people ... almost always choose their pathway for education much later than [their] counterparts.

(PACIFIC EMPLOYERS, FOCUS GROUP)

Tele aoga ma faiaoga e lē fautua lelei le fanau auā o mataupu e tatau na avea mo le NCEA e maua ai tusi pasi e ulufale ai i le iunivesite, pe maua ai ni galuega lelei. There are many schools and teachers who are not giving the children the right advice on subjects to study for NCEA, and how the qualifications lead to university entrance and employment.

(SAMOAN PARENT, QUICK SURVEY)

## What could be strengthened?

Some Pacific people said they see NCEA as being too lenient for students. They perceive student failure to achieve NCEA as lack of hard work and/or difficulty in passing exams. They suggest it could be strengthened by:

- not allowing students to make multiple submissions
- requiring stricter judgements of internally assessed work
- practising taking exams, or even beginning assessment earlier.

In line with other groups, Pacific people expressed concern about the variation in apparent “worth” of credits from different NCEA standards and the impact this has on pathways. Their suggestions for change include:

- making all the credits match the workload for all standards
- providing a choice of internal or external standards for each unit of work
- providing opportunities for students to change pathways without compromising their career choices
- providing more options that lead to an academic pathway.

A strong theme from Pacific respondents is that they would like to see Pacific ways of learning reflected in assessment. Their suggestions include:

- more practical assessment
- assessment that focuses on capabilities such as leadership
- assessment in pairs or groups
- assessment that recognises cultural knowledge/expertise/skills
- assessment that considers transferable skills
- assessment that focuses on life skills but not as an alternative to academic learning.

Pacific parents and students are aware that better understanding of NCEA will help them make better choices. They would like help from schools to help them develop this understanding.

**Oute fia mana’o e sui le folafola atu po’o le fa’amatala atu o le NCEA i tagata uma e le gata i tamaiti o lo’o i totonu o a’oga ae a’afia atu ai ma matua ma aiga. E tataua ona matua’i malamalama i tulaga itu ese’ese uma o le NCEA ina mafai ona maua ni tulaga lelei o e o lo’o a’oa’oina i totonu o a’oga. I want to change the way we explain NCEA to everyone, including students, parents, and families. We should be able to understand clearly what each NCEA level means in order for students to achieve good outcomes. (SAMOAN PARENT, QUICK SURVEY)**

**There is also a need for more “quality teachers who understand Pasifika”.**  
(PACIFIC EMPLOYERS, FOCUS GROUP).

**When we heard about NCEA credits for Polynesian Festival no-one ever sat to explain actually what they were doing. We just saw ma’imau le kaimi (it’s a waste of time), don’t go there cause you ain’t gonna get a good job when you come out with all your Polynesian Festival experience. It hasn’t been explained well.**  
(PACIFIC EMPLOYERS, FOCUS GROUP)

Achievement standards (internals) work well for Pacific Island students but external exams are not culturally responsive.  
(WORKSHOP)

## Perspectives from the Cook Islands and Niue

Students, teachers, leaders, and Ministry of Education staff participated in nine NCEA review workshops in the Cook Islands. Students, parents, and teachers participated in five NCEA review workshops in Niue. The boxes below highlight their experiences of NCEA.

### What's working well for students, teachers, and leaders in the Cook Islands?

- NCEA is a robust system for the Cook Islands.
- Moderation processes ensure validity.
- There is a good support network from the New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA) and parents can monitor student progress online (via the NZQA site).
- Endorsements are recognised by universities.
- Exemplars are offered online and the Te Kete Ipurangi (TKI) site provides some resources.
- Distance learning is available for some subjects.
- The Record of Achievement tells employers what a student can do.
- NCEA makes University Entrance (UE) achievable. If you fail one subject you can still meet the credit requirements through other subjects.
- The qualification is recognised internationally.
- Cook Islands reo Māori is a subject.
- Students can be educated in the Cook Islands and in the Pā enua (Outer Islands).

### What's not working well for students, teachers, and leaders in the Cook Islands?

- The moderation processes are slow.
- There are limited online resources. There is only one exemplar for each grade per standard.
- There are no Cook Islands Māori resources. Teachers need to make their own.
- New Zealand contexts are used for exams.
- External exams are set at the same time as in New Zealand without consideration of time differences.
- The transition from the Cook Islands curriculum to NCEA Level 1 is challenging.
- NCEA pathways don't always line up with tertiary courses in the Cook Islands.

### What could be strengthened?

There was a strong view across the workshops that teachers need a better understanding of NCEA. Professional development could be provided from New Zealand in the following ways:

- having an NZQA adviser appointed from New Zealand
- providing workshops for Cook Islands Māori
- secondment to New Zealand schools
- providing more online resources with clear criteria.

Most teachers, students, and NCEA administrators in the Cook Islands are concerned about the validity of moderation processes. They would like to see:

- improved consistency in assessment practices between schools
- moderation completed in the Cook Islands rather than being sent to New Zealand
- more detailed moderation feedback.

Some teachers and students say NCEA should be inclusive of Cook Islands culture. To do this they suggest:

- external exams in Cook Islands reo Māori
- support to produce Cook Islands reo Māori resources
- assessments with Cook Islands Māori contexts.

**What's working well in Niue?**

Niuean parents, grandparents, and caregivers say they like NCEA because:

- it allows students subject choice
- Vagahau Niue is offered as a subject
- it helps them understand the different pathways available e.g., academic and trades.

Niuean teachers and leaders say they like NCEA because:

- teachers can apply contexts to their teaching and modify assessments
- Level 1 is a good scaffold for students into Level 2 and Level 3.

Niuean students say they like:

- having subject choice, although they also say they are limited by having few specific subject teachers, which limits their choices and pathways
- having access to exemplars, and the opportunity to resubmit work
- having high achievement recognised through Merit and Excellent endorsements.

**What's not working well in Niue?**

Niuean parents, grandparents and caregivers say:

- they have difficulty accessing the NZQA parent portal
- the internet is expensive, which affects their children's distance learning and ability to complete research for assessments.
- NCEA does not acknowledge family, cultural and/or church commitments
- NCEA puts a lot of pressure on their children.

Niuean teachers and leaders say:

- NCEA lacks Niuean contexts
- Vagahau Niue standards are designed for second language speakers not native speakers
- Vagahau Niue as a unit standard is undervalued.

**What could be strengthened?**

Niuean parents, grandparents, and caregivers say they would like:

- to understand NCEA pathways better
- to have external exam instructions in Vagahau Niue
- a better teacher training and registration system to support teachers to stay in Niue
- the Niuean way of learning acknowledged.

Niuean teachers and leaders say they would like:

- NZQA to train Niue-based moderators so that moderation is done in Niue by people who understand the "island-context"
- a curriculum that recognises Niuean values and culture
- Vagahau Niue as an achievement standard.

Students say they would like better internet access, greater access to computers, and more resources including to support distance learning.





## 6. Ngā tirohanga mai i ngā rōpū kanorau

### Perspectives from diverse groups

This section of the report highlights the distinctive experiences of NCEA for particular groups of people. Many of these people said things about NCEA that were common across all the feedback, and that we have reported as key findings in the first half of this report. However, they also talked or wrote about experiences of NCEA that were more specific to their own context. This section draws on information from focus groups and submissions. Some of the focus groups involved only a small number of people, but their voices are important.

In the following pages, we highlight the views of the following groups:

- students of NCEA in diverse settings
- students and tutors in correctional facilities
- NCEA students who have learning support needs
- ethnic minority communities
- foundation tertiary and vocational education and training (VET) providers
- universities
- employers and Industry Training Organisations.



## Students of NCEA in diverse settings

These comments draw on focus group discussions with students studying NCEA in a range of settings: alternative education, foundation-level tertiary courses, teen parent units, health schools, and secondary–tertiary vocational education.

Overall, students are positive about the practical, vocationally oriented options available through NCEA. They appreciate NCEA's link to career pathways; the fact that learning and assessments can be delivered in real-world, authentic contexts; and the opportunity to learn important skills for life and work.

Students in alternative, non-school settings appreciate the flexibility of NCEA. They value the ability to focus on one topic at a time, rather than having to study several subjects at once.

**Sometimes [at school] it seems really disorganised, because every teacher does it differently and you don't really know what you're supposed to do.**

(STUDENTS IN SECONDARY–TERTIARY VOCATIONAL EDUCATION, FOCUS GROUP)

**In school, there is just way too much to do. Every teacher wants you to do stuff for your credits instead of letting us concentrate on getting one thing done at a time, so then we just do none of it.**

(STUDENTS IN SECONDARY–TERTIARY VOCATIONAL EDUCATION, FOCUS GROUP)

The students in these groups also value internal assessments, particularly the opportunity to resubmit. Dislike of external assessments such as exams was a strong theme in their feedback. Students would like to see less reliance on traditional written assessments and more choice of assessment format, including online or paper-based formats. Their suggestions for alternative, more relevant, and authentic methods of assessment include portfolios, conversations about learning, and video recordings of their practical work.

NCEA gives us qualifications, more opportunities and experiences. It gives us something to focus on.

(STUDENTS IN SECONDARY–TERTIARY VOCATIONAL EDUCATION, FOCUS GROUP)

In textiles, you can make an amazing garment, but if your paperwork isn't up to standard, you don't pass.

(STUDENTS IN HEALTH SCHOOL, FOCUS GROUP)

Learning can be disjointed as students are with us for varying periods of time.

(NCEA IN CORRECTIONAL FACILITIES, FOCUS GROUP)

## Students and tutors in correctional facilities

These comments draw on focus groups with people studying NCEA in correctional facilities such as youth justice centres or prisons, or with tutors who teach NCEA in these contexts. These students value NCEA because it provides opportunities for their future—achieving NCEA increases their chances of getting a job because employers know that they are literate, numerate, and reliable. They also like the structure of NCEA, where they can achieve success in discrete chunks of learning.

**[It] helps build your confidence in small steps when you achieve.**

(NCEA IN CORRECTIONAL FACILITIES, FOCUS GROUP)

These focus groups also highlighted significant and distinct challenges when studying NCEA in a correctional facility context: limited access to a wide range of courses; limited access to resources and technology; insufficient help for students with learning support needs and low levels of literacy and numeracy; payment of fees; and the challenge of continuity of learning and keeping track of progress as people move between facilities or are only there for a short time.

NCEA has given so many of our young men the opportunity to experience success, often for the first time in their life.

(NCEA IN CORRECTIONAL FACILITIES, FOCUS GROUP)

## NCEA students who have learning support needs

These comments draw on focus groups with students who have a range of learning support needs, including students with dyslexia, students with low vision, and students with disabilities. Overall, these students are positive about the flexibility of NCEA: they can choose subjects and/or standards that allow them to focus on their strengths and mitigate the impacts of their impairment. They also value opportunities for resubmission of internal assessment, and the support provided through digital technology (where this is available).

A strong theme in their feedback is the need to modify assessment formats for students with visual impairments and/or dyslexia. Examples of modifications are coloured background paper or computer screen, variations in font or type size, simplified language, and explanations of key vocabulary. Students accessing NCEA assessments via Braille commented that they are very tiring, with many inaccurate transcriptions.

**I tell my teachers but they automatically assume I can't see it when they could just increase the font so that's pretty annoying.**  
(STUDENTS WITH LOW VISION, FOCUS GROUP)

**My eyes get tired from looking at the screen all the time. I mean they could easily fix it by doing the background black instead of white.**  
(STUDENTS WITH DYSLEXIA, FOCUS GROUP)

Students in these groups feel there is a need for an inclusive mindset when designing assessments; for example, some standards are hard to complete if you have a physical disability. Including students in the design process is one suggestion for achieving this.



If you don't get it the first time then there's always another chance to regain those credits.  
(STUDENTS WITH LOW VISION, FOCUS GROUP)

We recorded what I said ... I got a computer for my exams ... that worked well for me.  
(STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES, FOCUS GROUP)

## Ethnic minority communities

These comments draw on focus groups with refugees, migrant communities, and ethnic minority communities. NCEA students and their families participated in these discussions. The groups were diverse culturally and linguistically, with some likely to be more recent migrants than others.

Like many people, parents from ethnic minority communities like NCEA because it is flexible and perceived to be fair. “Hard work” was a theme in the data. Some parents commented that the endorsement system allowed their children to be rewarded for their hard work. It was also acknowledged that some students have responsibilities at home that are challenging with the high workload from NCEA. Conversely, a few families wanted to make NCEA more challenging for students. A student commented on the importance of making their parents proud.

Parents of students where English is not their first language said that sometimes students need more time to complete exams and assessments.

**What would be good is if they can bring someone from ESOL department into the room. They don't have to speak our language, but they can explain the meaning of words we don't know. Students who have English as their first language know the words, so having someone to help us will make it equal.**

(ETHNIC MINORITY FAMILIES, FOCUS GROUP)

I think to achieve that during the year makes you really proud and it makes your parents really proud of you. I would like to push myself to achieve a really high standard in NCEA.

(REFUGEE FAMILIES, FOCUS GROUP)

When we are in our ESOL class it's easy, the teacher can come up to you and help you. During the test time it's not like that ... you have to find that word in your mind.

(ETHNIC MINORITY FAMILIES, FOCUS GROUP)

## Foundation tertiary and vocational education and training (VET) providers

These comments draw on workshops with and submissions from tertiary educators, including those from the polytechnic sector as well as wānanga and private training establishments. Many of these educators are delivering NCEA in tertiary settings. Overall, these educators appreciate the opportunity that NCEA provides for collaboration between secondary schools and tertiary education providers, especially through programmes such as Trades Academies. They also value NCEA's flexibility: programmes of learning can be broad, flexible, and transportable between education settings.

**NCEA is working. It needs time for the schools to become comfortable about the sharing of the Years 11–13 space with post-secondary providers and to adjust their curriculum to allow for tertiary programmes to be studied at an earlier age.**

(FOUNDATION-LEVEL TERTIARY EDUCATORS, WORKSHOP)

Introduce Vocational Entrance (VE) at Year 13 to include University Entrance (UE) and Trade Entrance (TE) ... Include alongside the New Zealand Curriculum an employer view on what they require of a school graduate.

(ITO, SUBMISSION)

A strong theme in the feedback is that the focus on credit gathering means some school students are not well prepared for tertiary study or employment. In particular, educators feel that literacy and numeracy requirements need to be more robust and consistent.

**Consistency in how literacy and numeracy is delivered in high schools is a key. The students arrive with mixed abilities—many lacking the fundamentals. I believe this is a result of the high schools interpreting NCEA assessments in a variety of creative ways.** (TERTIARY EDUCATOR, SURVEY)

Educators also commented that there is the potential for collaboration between schools and tertiary organisations to be strengthened through coherent programmes and more shared approaches to curriculum delivery. As part of this, they say students, families, and whānau need more information about NCEA pathways.

## Universities

These comments draw on feedback from a university perspective. This includes institutional responses; faculty responses; and responses taking a discipline perspective, which include the views of academics across more than one institution. Overall, respondents are positive about NCEA as a standards-based rather than norm-referenced system. They are also positive about it allowing students to create individualised programmes that are relevant in the 21st century.

A strong theme in submissions was the importance of disciplinary knowledge. Comments highlighted concerns about students not always having sufficient depth of knowledge in particular subjects, partly because of the choice about which standards to take. Some students have to fill gaps in their knowledge in their first year of university. Some submissions, particularly related to sciences, gave specific examples of how standards in their discipline could be improved. Others highlighted equity concerns, where it was acknowledged that some low decile and rural schools may find it hard to staff all subjects with specialists.

Another theme in university responses was preparation for degree-level study. Comments highlighted that some students need to learn to transfer and apply knowledge and skills across varied contexts, or to develop skills in academic writing.

**We observe that students embarking on first year courses expect to be able to “pick and choose” topics with no requirement for overall mastery. The student (and school) focus at NCEA level is on the number of credits or the number of endorsements which obscures important skills that universities and work places are concerned with, namely depth and breadth of content knowledge, an understanding of how to learn, and the ability to apply, use and communicate this learning.** (UNIVERSITIES, SUBMISSION)

The flexibility for NCEA to be the mechanism that allows for secondary–tertiary learning should not be altered and this is very important at Levels 1 and 2.

(FOUNDATION-LEVEL TERTIARY EDUCATORS, WORKSHOP)

We believe that NCEA has some strengths in problem solving and developing critical thinking compared to its predecessors.

(UNIVERSITIES, SUBMISSION)

[A] key university requirement of NCEA [is] that it supports the adequate preparation of students for university-level study, through ensuring appropriate levels of literacy, numeracy and core subject knowledge, and the flexibility and self-efficacy to cope with different learning and assessment approaches.

(UNIVERSITY, SUBMISSION)

## Employers and Industry Training Organisations

This section draws from a small number of submissions from employers or employer groups, and Industry Training Organisations (ITO) or groups representing ITO. Although these views are presented together, ITO are not employers: they are tertiary education organisations. However, the ITO role in developing industry qualifications and arranging training means they are also able to report on the views of employers. Like many others, these submissions are positive about the flexible design of NCEA. ITO are positive about the use of ITO-developed industry standards within NCEA. These submitters are positive about existing partnerships, and identify more opportunities to increase small-to-medium-sized employers' and ITO engagement with schools. Additional funding for ITO to work with schools on developing programmes would support this. These submitters also identify things that could be better, including:

- employer confidence in NCEA
- the relative status of vocational learning in comparison to academic learning, including the unfortunate association of the Vocational Pathways framework with at-risk students
- the focus on traditional forms of literacy rather than other literacies important for both work and wellbeing, such as digital, financial, and health
- school careers advisers' knowledge of careers that do not require university.

Businesses [need to be] recognised as a key stakeholder in the community ... [We imagine] proactively working across the education network ... to provide learning opportunities that individual schools may not have the capacity or capability to deliver.

(EMPLOYER ORGANISATION, SUBMISSION)

# 7. Ngā Whai Wāhitanga Nui e ono

## The six Big Opportunities

### About the Big Opportunities

The Minister of Education appointed a Ministerial Advisory Group to explore ideas for how to strengthen NCEA. The group developed six Big Opportunities. These Big Opportunities were intended to provoke, inspire, and encourage the kōrero on NCEA, rather than to be concrete recommendations to Government.

#### The six Big Opportunities

Big Opportunity 1: Creating space at NCEA Level 1 for powerful learning

Big Opportunity 2: Strengthening literacy and numeracy

Big Opportunity 3: Ensuring NCEA Levels 2 and 3 support good connections beyond schooling

Big Opportunity 4: Making it easier for teachers, schools, and kura to refocus on learning

Big Opportunity 5: Ensuring the Record of Achievement tells us about learners' capabilities

Big Opportunity 6: Dismantling barriers to NCEA

### How have people engaged with the Big Opportunities?

People were invited to discuss these Big Opportunities in their responses to the review. There were three ways people could tell us what they thought about the Big Opportunities:

- Through the survey on NCEA and the Big Opportunities. 920 people responded to this survey.



- At a regional workshop. Workshop attendees could choose which Big Opportunities they wanted to discuss, in small groups. Across the 20 workshops, 151 groups of people talked about a Big Opportunity.
- In a submission. There were 366 submissions; many reacted to at least one Big Opportunity.

In the Big Opportunities survey, people were asked two questions about each Big Opportunity:

- Do you agree with what this Big Opportunity is trying to achieve?
- Do you agree with how this Big Opportunity proposes to do this?

People responded on a 5-point scale from “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree”.

These questions give us quantitative data from 920 people. The largest groups of respondents to the Big Opportunities survey were those who might be having current or “on the ground” NCEA experiences: teachers (474), parents (211), and current NCEA students (168). Smaller numbers of respondents identified as NCEA graduates (82), tertiary students (74), principals (47), tertiary educators (36), employers (26), and non-NCEA students (17). Note that respondents could choose more than one connection to education.

After answering the two questions about level of agreement, people had the opportunity to provide reasons. We noticed that in many instances people indicate a reasonable level of agreement that is not borne out by their comments, which focus more on what they didn’t like about the idea, or with how it would be implemented. There was often a sense of “Yes, but ...”.

It was also clear that people were basing their level of agreement and feedback on different levels of engagement with the Big Opportunities. Some people may have only read the title and “in a nutshell” version, others had read the full discussion document, and those at regional workshops had watched a short video about the Big Opportunities. We have taken all these things into consideration as we’ve developed key findings about each Big Opportunity.

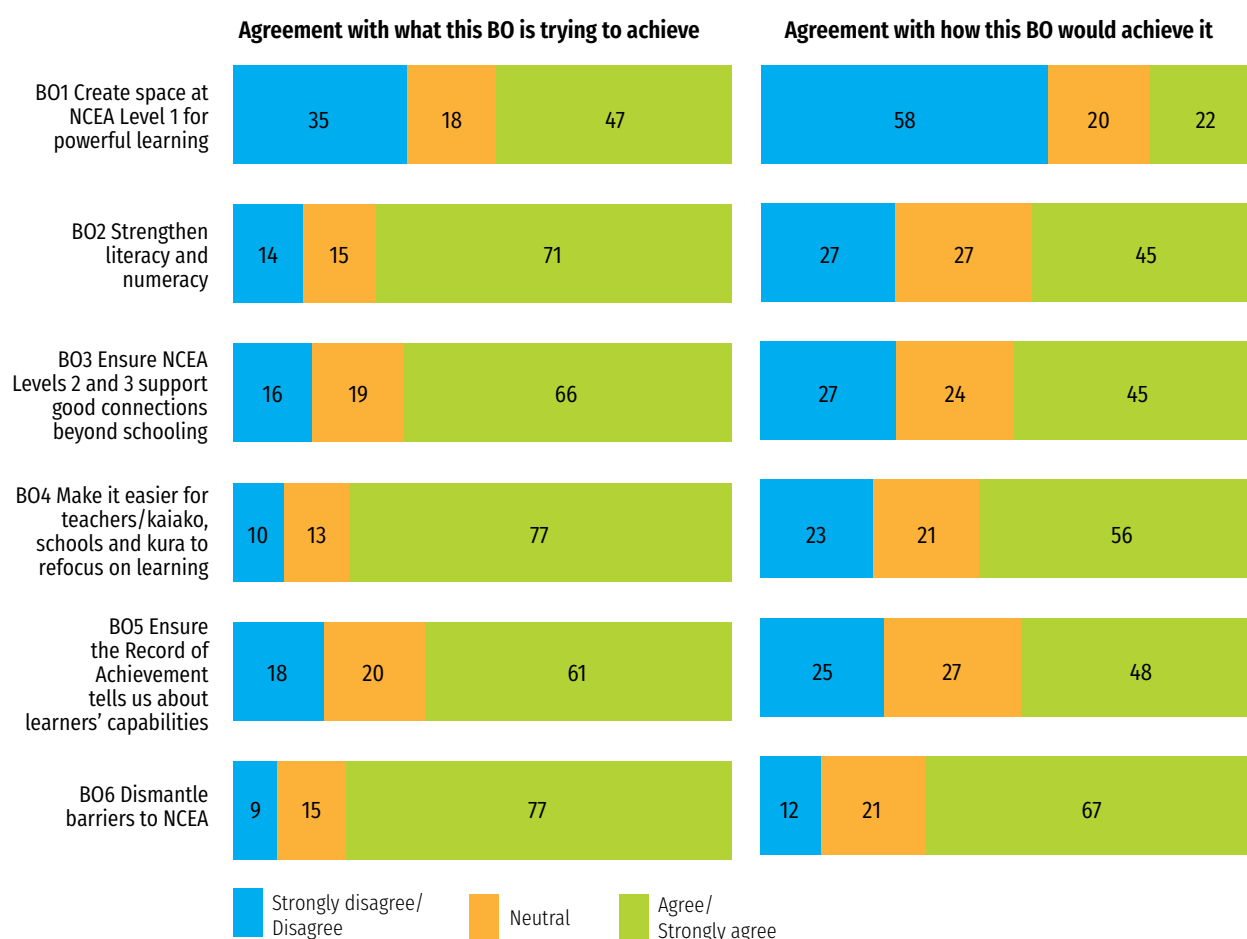


## What support is there for the Big Opportunities?

Figure 5 shows how strongly people agree or disagree with each Big Opportunity. The left-hand side of the figure shows agreement with what the Big Opportunity is trying to achieve. The right-hand side of the figure shows agreement with how it proposes to do it. We highlight the following things:

- Across all Big Opportunities there is more support for what the Big Opportunity is trying to achieve than for how it would do it.
- There is a sizeable “neutral” response to how the Big Opportunity would achieve its aim.
- There is most support for Big Opportunity 6: Dismantling barriers to NCEA, and least support for Big Opportunity 1: Creating space at Level 1 for powerful learning.

FIGURE 5 Level of agreement with each Big Opportunity (%)



This section of the report talks about each Big Opportunity. For each Big Opportunity, we considered three questions:

- Do people support this Big Opportunity and why?
- What could be the challenges and unintended consequences?
- What alternative ideas do people have for this Big Opportunity?

## BIG OPPORTUNITY 1: CREATING SPACE AT NCEA LEVEL 1 FOR POWERFUL LEARNING

### Big Opportunity 1: Key findings

1. A minority of people are positive about the project component and the opportunities it would bring to Level 1.
2. Many people believe students are not ready for a high-stakes project at Level 1.
3. There is confusion about the place of subjects in a potential rebuild of Level 1.
4. There is concern that a Level 1 project will benefit some students more than others.
5. There are questions about how projects would be assessed and moderated.
6. Organisational constraints would make it challenging to implement a project for all students.

**WHAT?** Rebuild Level 1 as a 40-credit qualification—20 for literacy and numeracy, and 20 for a project.

**WHY?** Reduces overall NCEA assessment workload, while giving learners a more engaging, relevant qualification, reflecting vital skills, knowledge, capabilities, and attitudes.

### What Big Opportunity 1 aims to do

Big Opportunity 1 is about making changes to NCEA Level 1. The discussion document suggests making Level 1 a 40-credit qualification, with two components—literacy and numeracy, and a project. Other things mentioned in the discussion document are revising achievement standards to be suitable for projects; getting rid of the need for external exams; and opening up opportunities for courses across the curriculum.

Nearly everyone focused on the project component when responding to this Big Opportunity. There was less discussion of making Level 1 a 40-credit qualification, or of the literacy and numeracy component. We assume that most people saved their thoughts on literacy and numeracy for discussion within Big Opportunity 2 (see page 48).

**913**

people responded to Big Opportunity 1 in the Big Opportunities survey.

### Overall reactions to Big Opportunity 1

Because most people focused on the project component of this Big Opportunity, this section mostly outlines what people thought about a project making up a significant part of a 40-credit NCEA Level 1 qualification. It identifies six key findings that highlight reasons why people support or do not support this idea.

**36**

groups of people talked about Big Opportunity 1 at a workshop.

## FINDING 1: A minority of people are positive about the project component and the opportunities it would bring to Level 1

A minority of people who engaged with Big Opportunity 1 support the project component. They are positive about the potential for projects to:

- foster learner agency and student voice
- allow students to follow a passion
- enhance community relationships and value what students already do in the community
- bring “real world” authentic learning to Level 1
- encourage creative thinking.

Others can see the benefit of project-based learning, but do not want it to be a compulsory or integral component of a Level 1 qualification. They emphasise that schools already have the option to use project-based learning if they wish to do so.

**I love project based learning ... [but] make it seem somehow compulsory for all and I think you would kill it.** (PRINCIPAL, SUBMISSION)

## FINDING 2: Many people believe students are not ready for a high-stakes project at Level 1

A strong theme in the responses is that students are not ready for a high-stakes project at Level 1. Some people who make this point think a project would work better at Level 2 or Level 3 (see Big Opportunity 4). Some made a maturity argument and some made a knowledge argument for why students are not ready for projects of this size at Level 1:

- The maturity argument focuses on 15-year-olds’ ability to select and develop a self-directed “passion project” and manage their time to complete it.
- The knowledge argument focuses on Year 11 students not having sufficient subject-specific content knowledge to undertake a successful project. People concerned about this highlight the importance of subject-based direct instruction to teach key concepts.

Some responses to Big Opportunity 4 made a similar knowledge argument in relation to cross-curricular courses. One submission drew on research evidence that “problem-based learning via projects is not really suitable for acquiring new knowledge” (ANONYMOUS, SUBMISSION). This submission goes on to say that projects may be suitable for assessment but that Big Opportunity 1 presents projects as pedagogical methods for teaching and learning, as well as for assessment.

**Students need sound base skills and content knowledge to enable them to complete a project successfully, and we think that Year 11 might not have given sufficient time for the development of those base skills.** (TEACHERS, SUBMISSION)

# 251

submissions wrote about Big Opportunity 1.

# 47%

of people responding to the survey agreed with creating space at NCEA Level 1 for powerful learning.

# 22%

of people agreed with how Big Opportunity 1 ideas would be implemented.

We see an opportunity here to recognise the incredible work that many young people do as volunteers in our organisations ... Having it completed through NCEA would provide additional structure to their work, that may enhance their learning and experience.

(LGBTQIA+ YOUTH, SUBMISSION)

### FINDING 3: There is confusion about the place of subjects in a potential rebuild of Level 1

The discussion document says that projects may be subject-based, and that “the rebuilt Level 1 wouldn’t replace the wide range of courses currently”. However, this message is not highlighted in the “nutshell” version of Big Opportunity 1. Clearly many people responding to this Big Opportunity are concerned about where subjects would fit into Level 1 if it was built around a project.

There are two aspects to this concern:

- Year 11 students will get a narrowed curriculum.
- Students will not develop disciplinary knowledge to prepare them for more advanced learning at Level 2 and beyond. This could have greater implications for some subjects than others. Some people also suggested that the changes proposed would exacerbate the jump to Level 2, increasing student pressure in Year 12.

This is a time of life when learners can explore and be exposed to many different areas. If they focus on one niche at this time they may limit their options and never discover what their “thing” is.

(PARENT, BIG OPPORTUNITIES SURVEY)

### FINDING 4: There is concern that a Level 1 project will benefit some students more than others

Many people raised concerns about equity in relation to this Big Opportunity. The discussion document itself suggests that equitable access to rich, high-quality projects will be a challenge. Responses to the review reiterate this and suggest this Big Opportunity could:

- exacerbate differences between high and low decile schools
- advantage students whose parents have financial resources and/or strong community connections to contribute to a project
- adversely affect transient students who move schools during the year
- be challenging for students who prefer structured learning (in this context, some respondents wondered if this sort of project would suit girls more than boys)
- work better for high achievers and students who have a high level of self-motivation.

Projects are dangerous because they distract from the sequential learning that is required for language learning. They don’t support language learning.

(TEACHERS, SUBMISSION)

### FINDING 5: There are questions about how projects would be assessed and moderated

Some people were concerned that a Level 1 qualification based on a project would reduce credibility. Two questions were posed: *How could projects be credibly assessed? How would rigorous moderation happen so that the process was fair across schools?*

Those without experience of project-based learning had questions about how projects could be credibly assessed. However, those already doing project-based learning in their schools suggested that a suite of standards could be created to assess inquiry, collaborative problem solving, and communication. These standards “could be used in a cross-curricular, authentic project for those schools that are well-placed to use such an approach”. (PRINCIPAL, SUBMISSION)

People also had questions about how rigorous moderation would happen so that the process was fair across schools.

The most at risk Level 1 students with the weakest academic skill set—literacy, numeracy and subject-based knowledge—would be better served by shoring up those foundations before being thrown into project work.

(UNIVERSITY, SUBMISSION)

## FINDING 6: Organisational constraints would make it challenging to implement a project for all students

As with all Big Opportunities, people identified constraints around how schools are currently organised that would make it challenging for changes to be implemented. In relation to students undertaking a project at Level 1, these include timetabling, class sizes, teacher capability, finding enough places for community-based projects, and the need for those working with young people to be cleared by police. These constraints are discussed again in relation to Big Opportunities 3 and 4.

### What alternative ideas do people have for Big Opportunity 1?

A supplementary option posed was for NCEA Level 1 to be removed altogether. This has already been discussed in Section 3. Those who chose to comment on this option in Big Opportunity 1 expressed differing views. Some people strongly support it, and others don't.

We also looked for alternative ideas that people had about creating space for meaningful learning at NCEA Level 1. These ideas can be grouped into three themes:

- Retain a focus on subject-based learning, with reduced credits.
- Strengthen connections between Year 10 and Year 11 by enabling more credits to be achieved in Year 10. Consider composite classes at Year 10 and Year 11.
- Strengthen connections between Year 11 and Year 12 by removing Level 1 and making Level 2 a 2-year qualification.

[Projects would need to] be in a form that would allow moderated assessment. Otherwise, the reputation and credibility of NCEA could be damaged.  
(UNIVERSITIES, SUBMISSION)

Working in one of the project schools [schools already doing project-based learning], I doubt there is sufficient expertise nationally to roll this out at scale.  
(TEACHER, BIG OPPORTUNITIES SURVEY)



It will require smaller class sizes so teachers can have more one-on-one time with students to closely monitor their progress and provide feedback ... On the surface, it looks like even more work for teachers.  
(TEACHER, BIG OPPORTUNITIES SURVEY)

## BIG OPPORTUNITY 2: STRENGTHENING LITERACY AND NUMERACY

### Big Opportunity 2: Key findings

1. Many people have a traditional view of literacy and numeracy as reading, writing, and mathematics.
2. The current cross-subject assessment approach is seen by some as a strength and by others as a weakness.
3. There are mixed views on how literacy and numeracy should be assessed.

### What Big Opportunity 2 aims to do

Big Opportunity 2 aims to clarify NCEA literacy and numeracy requirements across Levels 1–3; review how they are assessed; and consider the role of other literacies in NCEA, particularly digital literacy.

### Overall reactions to Big Opportunity 2

There is strong support for strengthening literacy and numeracy. However, fewer than half agree with the suggestions for how this should be done.

On the surface, this opportunity seems straightforward. However, people pointed out that this proposal requires an understanding of the levels of literacy and numeracy that students need to be able to progress to employment or to further education and training and to participate fully in their communities. It also requires an understanding of how to assess these skills. In light of this, respondents found the solutions in the review document too “light on detail” or too “vague” to enable them to comment fully. They also felt that the “devil will be in the detail” and as a result, they felt they did not have enough information to make a fully informed comment. Details that would benefit from clarification are outlined in the rest of this section.

**I agree in principle, but it is very vague on what “match the level needed for success in further learning and employment” means.** (TEACHER, BIG OPPORTUNITIES SURVEY)

### FINDING 1: Many people have a traditional view of literacy and numeracy as reading, writing, and mathematics

The majority of those who commented on this opportunity talk about literacy and numeracy in the traditional sense of reading, writing, and mathematics. Comments were made about spelling, grammar, sentence construction, reading text, and understanding ideas. Very few talked about literacy in a wider context in relation to oral language, about literacy in te reo Māori, or about other modes of literacy and numeracy.

**WHAT?** Benchmark literacy and numeracy at the level needed for success in further learning and employment.

**WHY?** Gives confidence that every learner with an NCEA has the literacy and numeracy they need to flourish.

**904**

people responded to Big Opportunity 2 in the Big Opportunities survey.

**30**

groups of people talked about Big Opportunity 2 at a workshop.

**229**

submissions wrote about Big Opportunity 2.



There is a clear consensus view that literacy and numeracy are important. However, there are currently no “benchmarks” for literacy and numeracy and a plethora of standards are used to award credits for them. This situation might be contributing to a lack of understanding of the complexity of literacy and numeracy. For example, one submission from a group of schools noted that “an understanding of literacy is complicated and it is reflected in the divided opinions even within our own staff. The definition of UE literacy is not widely understood and creates a misconception of what it is looking for”.

There is concern about how well the traditional aspects of literacy and numeracy are being developed in the pre-NCEA years. Many respondents said that current literacy and numeracy levels of students are low and/or declining. This is a problem because people argued/felt that students should be literate and numerate by the time they arrive at secondary school. Some teachers were also concerned that students are being awarded literacy and numeracy at Level 1 NCEA when in fact they do not have adequate skills for success at Levels 2 and 3, or subsequently at university. Some respondents wanted to see differentiation between the literacy and numeracy skills required for employment and those perceived to be the “higher requirements” needed for university study.

A small number of comments were made about digital literacy and even fewer about financial literacy. Those who made such comments had mixed views about the importance of these literacies, and how or whether they should be taught and assessed. Some respondents strongly supported the idea of broadening the scope of literacy and numeracy to include digital literacy. Others maintained that these literacies are not as important as the traditional ones. Some teachers acknowledged that other literacies are important, but not as important as literacy in English or te reo Māori. However, some students rated the acquisition of these literacies highly and would add civic literacies to the list of those that are very important for all students to acquire.

**We universally agreed that NCEA did not adequately assess digital, civic and financial literacy, which we think have equal or greater importance to current requirements.** (NCEA GRADUATES, SUBMISSION)

**We especially recognise the importance of civic literacy, including the racist, sexist and ableist power structures that inform and direct our society, and how this is harmful to rainbow young people, alongside many other communities and identities (e.g. young people from different ethnicities, with different abilities, refugees and migrants).** (LGBTQIA+ YOUTH, SUBMISSION)

There were some people who said that digital literacy is “naturally occurring” as a result of the technology that students use at school and in their daily lives, and that financial literacy can be included in numeracy. The few teachers, schools, or other organisations commenting on these specific literacies were concerned about curriculum and workload issues; the need to develop curriculum frameworks/standards to assess against; and the need to provide online resources and professional development to support teachers in these areas.

**We think that, if schools are expected to cover a wider range of literacies (even in an integrated manner) we may need to rethink what is realistic in terms of curriculum demands.** (SCHOOL, SUBMISSION)

# 70%

70% of people responding to the survey agreed with strengthening literacy and numeracy.

# 45%

of people agreed with how Big Opportunity 2 ideas would be implemented.

What of oral language, soft skills and critical analysis ... 3Rs is cool for school in 1950s but what of 2050 ... Where is the whakapapa, the whaikorero, the waiata? Change the olden days 3Rs for these 3Ws of the future.

(PARENT, BIG OPPORTUNITIES SURVEY)

I think literacy and numeracy should be the only focus of all education until such time as students have proved themselves to be able to read, write, and do arithmetic, without constant scaffolding and assistance from their teachers.

(TEACHER, BIG OPPORTUNITIES SURVEY)



## FINDING 2: The current across-subject approach is seen by some as a strength and by others as a weakness

Across the surveys and submissions there were mixed views about how literacy and numeracy should be assessed. The majority view was that the current cross-subject approach should be maintained. The rationale for this “embedded” approach was that it widens the range of opportunities for students to show what they can do, while providing them with relevant and relatively authentic contexts. There was also a sense that literacy and numeracy skills will inevitably be developed if the learning is demanding. One submission from a group of schools noted that “reading skills are things such as ‘reading between the lines’ in order to grasp the nuances of the type of text and critically analyse what has been read”, while “the writing requirement is to write an opinion/insight/point of view coherently and cohesively”. For this group it made “more sense to assume that if students take particular subjects they will inherently be wrestling with these literacy skills”.

Some teachers expressed concern that a stronger, explicit focus on literacy and numeracy would narrow the curriculum, with the result that fewer students would take their subjects, or they would have less time to spend on their subjects. They wanted to continue to be “teachers of subjects not teachers of literacy”. Continuing with the current system appeared to help reduce these fears.

While many people want the ways in which literacy and numeracy can be assessed to be kept broad, they acknowledge that there are issues with this approach. There is a perceived lack of consistency between subject areas/standards and this is attributed to the absence of literacy- and numeracy-specific criteria in the subject-based standards that can contribute towards literacy and numeracy credits. Some respondents noted differences in the demands of the unit standards and the achievement standards, and said that Level 1 credits are too easy to get.

Some groups argued for change that was not supported, or only partially supported, by other groups. For example, specific research-based evidence of the inconsistency and unreliability of the current approach was cited in one submission, and used to justify a preference for having literacy and numeracy assessed through only English and mathematics with much tighter criteria. Those who thought the credits should come just from English and mathematics justified this by saying this is where these skills are explicitly taught. They also thought this was the only way that employers and other education providers could be sure about students’ literacy and numeracy levels. The case was made by some teachers that at Levels 2 and 3 in particular these needed to be taught by specialists and that perhaps English needed to be compulsory at Level 2.

**UE literacy demands need to be returned to English departments—or, all literacy papers need to demand the same thing in terms of accuracy ... [This] seems to be the best option as it would force all teachers to consider how they are teaching writing or communication.** (TEACHER, BIG OPPORTUNITIES SURVEY)

Other teachers argued that focusing on only English and mathematics would narrow student options, lower pass rates, adversely affect students progressing onto Levels 2 and 3, and impact on students with dyslexia and those for whom English is a second language. A different argument is that keeping the

If numeracy and literacy credits are determined from other areas as well as English and maths, then this allows students a better opportunity to showcase and prove their literacy and numeracy skills within their chosen area/specialty subject.

(TERTIARY STUDENT, BIG OPPORTUNITIES SURVEY)

The current literacy standards are a hodgepodge and there is a lack of clarity around the different domains and methods to gain them. Not all current assessments should be worth literacy credits because not everything is marked in other subjects with literacy conventions in mind.

(SCHOOL, SUBMISSION)

current broader range of sources ensures that all teachers keep literacy and numeracy challenges in mind, regardless of their subject area. Some students also expressed concern about narrowing the approach and wanted to keep opportunities for assessment of literacy and numeracy open within subjects of greater interest to them.

Universities want to see higher levels of literacy and numeracy than they are currently seeing in NCEA graduates. As a result, some universities are setting their own benchmarks for literacy.

### FINDING 3: There are mixed views on how literacy and numeracy should be assessed

Ideas for strengthening the current cross-curricular approach to assessing literacy and numeracy include:

- adding specific literacy/numeracy criteria to the current achievement standards
- using internal processes such as a portfolio of evidence
- having these skills assessed solely externally.

A small number of respondents suggested using stand-alone literacy and numeracy assessments, using available tools that can currently do this, or that can be adapted to do this. For example, NZQA has trialled online assessments for reading and numeracy unit standards at Level 1 and there were suggestions that these could be used. There is also a tool called the Literacy and Numeracy for Adults Assessment Tool (LNAAT) that could be used as is, or be adapted. One potential problem with this suggestion would be determining how to translate test results into credits. A submission from a group of university educators proposed a solution: “In our view, the literacy and numeracy requirements should be non-credit-bearing ‘hurdle’ requirements for attaining any level of NCEA and assessed using an efficient and reliable approach involving minimal opportunity costs for students and teachers”.

It sounds like the focus on “literacy and numeracy” actually means we are intending to double down on English and Maths ... Many students may struggle with English, for example, when in fact they are perfectly literate and can demonstrate that when writing an essay about a history, economics, or biology topic.

(TEACHER, BIG OPPORTUNITIES SURVEY)

The University Entrance qualification should mean what it says on the tin: that students have the sophisticated literacy skills needed to succeed at university.

(TERTIARY EDUCATOR, SUBMISSION)



## What alternative ideas do people have for Big Opportunity 2?

We have already noted that people had difficulty responding to this opportunity, and that there were opposing views about whether assessment of literacy and numeracy should take place across the curriculum or be restricted to the subject areas of English / te reo Māori and mathematics. Nevertheless, some alternative ideas have been outlined above. These include:

- assessing literacy and numeracy as a non-credit requirement, outside of NCEA
- using the online LNAAT tool, which is efficient to administer and has “acceptable reliability” in terms of results.

Another idea was using a Common Assessment Task approach run by NZQA to assess writing. One group suggested that students should build a portfolio of evidence using a tool similar to the Progress and Consistency Tool (PaCT) that is used in Years 1–10 (curriculum levels 1–5). They noted that using such a tool would address both validity and reliability but would take more teacher time. Teachers would need to collect a range of student evidence and compare it to annotated exemplars. It would also take time and money to develop such a tool.

In light of the “vagueness”, some people thought there needed to be further consultation on what this Big Opportunity means before deciding how and where literacy and numeracy might be assessed. There were also comments that some sort of benchmarking needs to be done so that standards are assessed against a common framework.

We encourage NZQA to conduct a thorough review of the opinions of employers, whānau and teachers in order to establish a nationwide understanding of what the titles “numerate” and “literate” mean at Level 1. A consequence of this review may be to audit some of the standards currently available at Level 1 to ensure the qualification is meaningful.

(SCHOOL, SUBMISSION)

## BIG OPPORTUNITY 3: ENSURING NCEA LEVELS 2 AND 3 SUPPORT GOOD CONNECTIONS BEYOND SCHOOLING

### Big Opportunity 3: Key findings

1. A “pathways opportunity” might guide students who already know what they want to do.
2. A “pathways opportunity” might help undecided students find out what they want to do.
3. People are concerned about the possibility of creating rigid tracks for students.
4. Students’ wellbeing could be threatened by having to make choices before they are ready.
5. People are concerned that the demands on communities would not be feasible or equitable.
6. There is potential to worsen existing logistical and resource challenges faced by schools.
7. Some people say community-based experiences don’t belong in NCEA.

**WHAT?** Introduce pathways opportunities to NCEA Levels 2 and 3, giving every young person access to learning relevant to their pathway (e.g., from a community action project, work placement, research essay, or an advanced tertiary course).

**WHY?** Helps prepare learners for the transition to work or further education, regardless of their pathway.

### What Big Opportunity 3 aims to do

In this section, we present people’s responses to Big Opportunity 3’s proposal to ensure NCEA Levels 2 and 3 support good connections beyond schooling. The overarching issue driving Big Opportunity 3 is that, despite increasing demand for real-world, non-classroom learning that is fit for 21st century societies, NCEA may be not well enough designed or implemented to recognise such learning. Big Opportunity 3 therefore explores whether NCEA Levels 2 and 3 could include credits from a “pathways opportunity”, such as a research or community project, progress towards an out-of-school qualification, industry training, or a work placement.

### Overall reactions to Big Opportunity 3

Two-thirds of respondents (65%) agreed with Big Opportunity 3’s aim, with agreement dropping to under half for the proposed approach.

Big Opportunity 3 highlights a tension between a common, broad education and a tracked, differentiated education. It also raises the issue of when a student’s pathway through school should be more closely tied to a pathway or outcome beyond school. Reactions to Big Opportunity 3 picked up on these issues, often agreeing in general with the idea of showing how school was connected to life beyond school, but disagreeing with any ideas about students being divided into different streams or tracks.

# 905

people responded to the Big Opportunity 3 in the Big Opportunities survey.

# 25

groups of people talked about Big Opportunity 3 at a workshop.

# 219

submissions wrote about Big Opportunity 3.

## FINDING 1: A “pathways opportunity” might guide students who already know what they want to do

Many people understood good connections beyond school to be motivating for students and a useful preparation for life beyond school. There was support for connections to help students confidently pursue the careers or pathways on which they have already decided. These connections would allow such students to purposefully use their school experiences to build towards their post-school aspirations.

Some people thought that having good connections would help less academically-oriented students see the relevance of their schoolwork and help them develop a sense of purpose. However, other people saw value in providing *all* students with a range of experiences and pathway options. They argued against an interpretation of Big Opportunity 3, and current secondary-tertiary initiatives, as being only for disengaged or “non-academic” students.

**All students are on vocational pathways, whether they are aiming for medical school or automotive engineering or a career in hospitality ... We recommend that the Ministry abolish the current Vocational Pathways, and use the review of NCEA to embed a much broader concept of “pathways for all”.**

(EDUCATION ORGANISATION, SUBMISSION)

## FINDING 2: A “pathways opportunity” might help undecided students find out what they want to do

Some argue that Big Opportunity 3 would help students find a pathway that suits them. These students would be able to test out, and follow up on, areas that appeal or explore beyond their own world of experiences. The school could be positioned as independent of any tertiary institution or employer recruitment interests. People commented that this is important given the financial costs of tertiary study.

## FINDING 3: People are concerned about the possibility of creating rigid tracks for students

Many people saw pitfalls in students choosing pathways or careers too early in life. This could mean that an apparent opening up of choices (good connections) could actually lead to less choice by “locking” a student in to a life and work direction. A submission from a group of university educators with a focus on Māori students expressed concern that “Taura should not be pigeon holed into making career decisions at Year 9–10, but they do need to be aware of the impact of their and their school’s choices”. (UNIVERSITIES, SUBMISSION)

**Connecting 20 credits to a pathway opportunity could lock a student into a narrow area that turns out not to be right for them. Students’ courses should look more like braided rivers than narrow streams that take them in only one direction.**

(EDUCATION ORGANISATION, SUBMISSION)

# 65%

of people responding to the survey agreed with ensuring NCEA Levels 2 and 3 support good connections beyond school.

# 48%

of people agreed with how Big Opportunity 3 ideas would be implemented.

It is really hard to discover what you want to do at this age and believe that you can make a difference, so having some sort of system where students can take advanced courses and do things relevant to their goals makes me really excited!

(NCEA STUDENT, BIG OPPORTUNITIES SURVEY)

Young people are encouraged to complete qualifications, often with very high price tags. However, employment options and opportunities post study aren’t considered or discussed.

(NCEA GRADUATE, BIG OPPORTUNITIES SURVEY)



Some people also commented on existing issues in the practice of having explicit (“vocational”) and broader or non-specific (“academic”) pathways. They pointed out that these are often set up in schools as mutually exclusive, meaning students are effectively steered down one track.

Some people also commented that students might be being asked to do something that did not fit with what we know about the future directions for work and career. For example, it is now widely believed that people will have several different careers over a lifetime, and will need an ability to blend human creativity with forms of machine-led automation. Early pathway decisions might be misaligned with these trends.

#### **FINDING 4: Students’ wellbeing could be threatened by having to make choices before they are ready**

People were concerned that students would be put under excessive pressure to decide something before they are ready. Some thought that creating connections beyond school could translate into a message to students about needing to make choices early in order to get value from schooling. They thought that such a message could have negative wellbeing consequences for students, especially if they later found that their chosen pathway was not right for them.

**With current data telling us about the multiple career changes young people will have in their lives, too much talk about the “one right path” is just setting them up to fail.** (PRINCIPAL, BIG OPPORTUNITIES SURVEY)

One submission from a university pointed out that some students might see the need to have workplace or community links as putting at risk the academic aspects of their NCEA. They might not understand, or agree with, what is really a change to the nature of school work that can be assessed for NCEA: “[There’s] a danger that the requirement to include 20 Level 2 and 3 pathways credits will be interpreted by students as an *additional* requirement, rather than a substitute for an *existing* requirement.”



Students who attend such outside of the school learning can miss significant learning within the classroom which makes it difficult for them to be able to do these programmes alongside specialist academic courses. If these different pathways could work in synthesis, so that one doesn’t exclude the other, and with equitable outcomes and value, then this could become really powerful.

(SCHOOL, SUBMISSION)

[We have] a caution that pathways too early in school life can narrow down options. For example, future work can exist at the intersection of pathways—such as technology and creative [industries].

(TERTIARY EDUCATORS, FOCUS GROUP)



## FINDING 5: People are concerned that the demands on communities would not be feasible or equitable

A common reaction to Big Opportunity 3 was to express at least some support for the overall aim but raise questions about the feasibility of the proposed approach. For example, people questioned whether the community, including local employers and tertiary institutions, could reasonably be expected to manage lots of students involved in internships or work experience, or undertaking projects in their setting. Issues such as health and safety requirements would need to be considered, as would the impact on profitability.

Many people took a community-wide lens to Big Opportunity 3. They pointed out the potential to increase existing inequities across different communities (and their schools). There was concern that this suggestion might “benefit those with existing cultural capital” while entrenching deficits in other students’ opportunities.

One submission from a school suggested building a partnership approach between groups of schools and their local community. It also questioned the ability of any one community to satisfy the needs of all its local schools and students: “In areas where more than one secondary school exists, having enough community connections to go around may be problematic, as well as knowing how to access them to initiate these connections”.

There would simply not be enough workplaces, community projects, or industry placements available, especially but not exclusively in rural communities. This would introduce an extreme inequity, because students who could not find any kind of placement would simply be unable to achieve Level 2 or Level 3.

(EDUCATION ORGANISATION, SUBMISSION)

## FINDING 6: There is potential to worsen existing logistical and resource challenges faced by schools

There were many comments about the challenges schools would face to make Big Opportunity 3 work. They cited increases in teacher workload or questioned the capacity for teachers to even attempt the logistical work and network-building required. They also wondered how workable it could be in respect of other activities and priorities within the school. People raised issues such as keeping track of the students, ensuring health and safety requirements are being met, ensuring there is police vetting of people they’re placed with, and ensuring sustainability of the partnerships.

People also pointed out that good connections are already a feature in many schools via existing secondary–tertiary and workplace learning initiatives; what is really needed is more resourcing to make these work better for all parties involved.

This will make the classroom at Level 2 and 3 very challenging as pupils will be regularly absent to attend offsite courses.

(TEACHER, BIG OPPORTUNITIES SURVEY)

## FINDING 7: Some people say community-based experiences don’t belong in NCEA

Some people disagreed with the idea of Big Opportunity 3 on the grounds that it would send the wrong messages to students—that compulsory, community- or work-based activities only had value for their NCEA credits. Some argued that, although exploring life pathways is important, it is not something that makes sense as part of NCEA.

We already have fantastic systems such as Gateway, STAR, work experience and dual pathways. All of these are working well to provide students with advice and support. What is needed is better resourcing. Fund Careers Education. Fund extra careers advisers and Gateway staff.

(TEACHER, BIG OPPORTUNITIES SURVEY)

## What alternative ideas do people have for Big Opportunity 3?

Most people who provided “alternative ideas” actually redescribed Big Opportunity 3’s aims to support good connections beyond schooling. Some described initiatives that are already in place for most schools, such as work experience, careers tasters, Gateway, STAR, or Dual Pathways arrangements.

Some people pointed out that the alternative to Big Opportunity 3 is to recognise that schools are already able to, and actually do, create good connections beyond school through such arrangements. There were also a few suggestions about offering these connection options earlier, at Year 10 (they are currently Year 11 to Year 13 options).

I think it would be difficult to give credit value to every extracurricular activity a student did, and would quite frankly undermine the values of participation and dedication that we should be trying to instil in our students by establishing a rewards-based system rather than a system that fosters involvement in the wider community for reasons outside of academic achievement.

(NCEA STUDENT, BIG OPPORTUNITIES SURVEY)



## BIG OPPORTUNITY 4: MAKING IT EASIER FOR TEACHERS, SCHOOLS, AND KURA TO REFOCUS ON LEARNING

### Big Opportunity 4: Key findings

1. There is broad support for a focus on learning rather than accumulation of credits.
2. Many people said that shifting away from credit accumulation will improve student wellbeing.
3. There is some support for courses drawn from across the curriculum, but this change would not be easy to achieve.
4. People do not support the suggestion to develop a course approval process.
5. People reiterate that Big Opportunity 4 requires a significant culture change that will need considerably more thought.
6. Teachers see a tension between disciplinary knowledge and the delivery of cross-curricular courses.
7. The ideas in Big Opportunity 4 may not work for all students.

### What Big Opportunity 4 aims to do

Big Opportunity 4 is about making it easier for teachers, schools, and kura to refocus on learning. It includes ideas about shifting the culture away from achieving as many credits as possible, teachers co-designing courses with learners, and delivering courses drawn from across the curriculum.

### Overall reactions to Big Opportunity 4

Big Opportunity 4 has more support than most of the Big Opportunities. As for all the Big Opportunities, people have questions about how this Big Opportunity would happen, and there is less support for how the ideas would actually be implemented. Many people found the ideas vague or ill defined. As one submission from an education organisation noted, “[We] could hardly disagree with the basic idea of making it easier for teachers, schools, and kura to refocus on learning, but the devil is always in the detail, and the description here of this Big Opportunity is far from clear about that detail”.

**Not enough detail as to how this would happen and what resources will be made available to make it happen.** (PRINCIPAL, BIG OPPORTUNITIES SURVEY)

**WHAT?** Shift culture from achieving as many credits as possible to encouraging quality teaching and learning.

**WHY?** Prioritises courses with deep learning, which help learners develop powerful knowledge, skills and capabilities, and attitudes.

**901**

people responded to Big Opportunity 4 in the Big Opportunities survey.

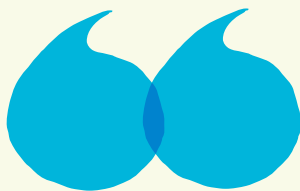
**24**

groups of people talked about Big Opportunity 4 at a workshop.

Others had a negative reaction to the language used in this Big Opportunity. Words such as “abstract”, “vague”, and “vacuous” were used to describe terms such as “deep learning” and “shift culture”. There was some suspicion that “deep learning” actually meant “project-based learning”.

## FINDING 1: There is broad support for a focus on learning rather than accumulation of credits

In Section 2 of this report we talked about what’s not working with NCEA. Two strong themes were that assessment, not learning, is the focus of the senior secondary school, and that the focus on credits gets in the way of learning. It’s not surprising, then, that many people agree with what Big Opportunity 4 aims to do: to make it easier for teachers and schools to refocus on learning. Many responses supported a shift away from achieving as many credits as possible. Here is the voice of a teacher who thought this change would make a difference to their teaching and students’ learning (see box).



### A teacher’s thoughts about how they could teach agriculture

The students could do more independent learning around topics of their own choosing, or they could pick some livestock they want to learn more about that we haven’t covered. We could look more at the ethics of farming such as indoor versus outdoor over winter. There is so much more that students could do that doesn’t ‘fit’ the standard but is learning.

It would be nice to just focus on 12 credits of learning in more depth. For ag that would be the three livestock standards, or two livestock internal standards and the environment internal standard: a nice programme that the students would enjoy and get a lot out of. The teacher (me) would enjoy teaching, and could really get stuck into it. There would be lots of tangents around the learning to go off onto (especially with mycoplasma bovis type news always happening).



Some submissions identified a need for resources that give examples of coherent, whole courses and that include ideas about ways to weave the “front end” of the curriculum into learning. Several submissions also gave feedback about reviewing the standards to support the development of more coherent courses, by making each standard worth more credits. We have not included that level of detail in this report, but highlight that any implementation of the ideas in Big Opportunity 4 would require these technical issues to be worked through.

# 220

submissions wrote about Big Opportunity 4.

# 75%

of people responding to the survey agreed with making it easier for teachers, schools, and kura to refocus on learning.

# 55%

of people agreed with how the ideas in Big Opportunity 4 would be implemented.

I have hated being interested in something we do for an internal, but the teacher can’t teach us because of the assessment.

(NCEA STUDENT, BIG OPPORTUNITIES SURVEY)

## FINDING 2: Many people said that shifting away from credit accumulation will improve student wellbeing

People are optimistic about the positive impact on student wellbeing if the culture shifts from achieving as many credits as possible.

## FINDING 3: There is some support for courses drawn from across the curriculum, but this change would not be easy to achieve

People are positive about the idea that “coherent courses [be] drawn from across the curriculum” because doing so would provide opportunities for authentic “real world” learning, opportunities for teachers to collaborate, and opportunities for community partnerships. However, as acknowledged in the discussion document, this would require professional learning and development for teachers, and cultural change. Those who queried the approach were concerned that the support and resourcing required would not be provided to ensure true culture shift could occur. A lot of people talked about these things in their responses to this Big Opportunity.

Teachers are also concerned that cross-curricular courses would increase their workload, as they worked together to build new courses and/or get to grips with any new standards that might need to be developed. Others gave suggestions about the types of resources needed to support this Big Opportunity—tools for designing coherent courses and for implementing school-wide changes such as timetabling. There is also a need for resources specifically for Māori-medium kura.

**Teachers have to be released to focus on this deeper learning, able to prioritise particular students and their needs.** (PARENT, BIG OPPORTUNITIES SURVEY)

This will not only improve the quality of the student's knowledge but their mental health.

(NCEA STUDENT AND TERTIARY STUDENT, BIG OPPORTUNITIES SURVEY)

The real world isn't compartmentalised.

(WORKSHOP)

## FINDING 4: People do not support the suggestion to develop a course approval process

A number of people made submissions against the suggestion that the New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA) or the Education Review Office (ERO) “sign off” courses (the discussion document suggests this could be a requirement or an available service). Several submissions believe this would increase schools' and teachers' workloads with “little apparent benefit to them” (EDUCATION AGENCY, SUBMISSION). Others suggest the provision of resources and support, and sharing of good practice across schools, will promote high-quality, coherent course design and be a better use of government funds.

**This would result in a more compliance model and stifle quality teaching through unnecessary reporting and regulation.** (EDUCATION ORGANISATION, SUBMISSION)



## FINDING 5: People reiterate that Big Opportunity 4 requires a significant culture change that will need considerably more thought

The discussion document acknowledges that “cultural change on this scale can be hard to achieve”. Responses to the review emphasised the level of cultural change, not just for teachers as discussed above, but also for students and whānau. There is concern that the ideas presented do not indicate how this cultural shift would be achieved. One submission noted that a “paradigm shift” would be needed because teaching in cross-subject teams requires “collaborative planning, compromise and conflict resolution” as well as “flexible timetables and planning”.

Alongside the cultural change, some people talked about other aspects of the education system that would be barriers to the ideas in Big Opportunity 4.

- As the discussion document acknowledges, University Entrance may require review to align with these changes. A number of people made this point. Other challenges they identified included entrance requirements from specific institutions, and requirements for university-administered scholarships.

**The university entrance requirements heavily dictate what schools do which is provide the best chance possible for their students to gain entrance into tertiary courses.** (TEACHER, BIG OPPORTUNITIES SURVEY)

- Teacher conditions including class sizes, pay, and teacher supply are also seen as barriers to the sorts of ideas posed in Big Opportunity 4.

We have pushed the credit numbers for years and parents and students have been taught to expect it.

(TEACHER, BIG OPPORTUNITIES SURVEY)

This is a long term idea, and will take a lot of funding and professional development to implement. I can't see it happening without restructuring schools, timetables, courses and mindsets, but it is exciting to think that we could get there with enough support.

(PRINCIPAL, BIG OPPORTUNITIES SURVEY)



The teacher crisis needs to be sorted out first before any of this can come to fruition.

(TEACHER, BIG OPPORTUNITIES SURVEY)



## FINDING 6: Teachers see a tension between disciplinary knowledge and the delivery of cross-curricular courses

In Big Opportunity 1, we discussed concerns about placing less emphasis on disciplinary knowledge delivered through subjects. These concerns also surfaced in Big Opportunity 4, where teachers talked about:

- maintaining the integrity of subjects when courses are designed and delivered across the curriculum
- students needing disciplinary knowledge to draw on in cross-curricular courses, with some doubts about where and how they could get this if not in more traditional courses
- concern that the design for coherent courses needs to be equitable across subject areas—as one anonymous submission noted, “We worry that this will become a way of pigeonholing maths as numeracy, English as literacy and everything else as the ‘fun’ project learning”.
- not all subjects “lending themselves” to cross-curricular courses.

## FINDING 7: The ideas in Big Opportunity 4 may not work for all students

Some people expressed concern that a focus on “deep learning” and “powerful knowledge” would not suit all students, with a particular concern that lower-achieving students would not be able to experience success.

The spiral nature of the science subjects makes it vital that certain topics and concepts are covered to ensure coherent and consecutive learning takes place.

(TEACHER, SUBMISSION)

[This] system is not conducive to language learning. Cross-curricular proponents don’t understand how language learning works and how these courses affect its teaching.

(TEACHERS, SUBMISSION)



Deeper learning is not always the focus for some students. Students who struggle now will not be any better off.

(TEACHER, BIG OPPORTUNITIES SURVEY)

## What alternative ideas do people have for Big Opportunity 4?

Most people responded to the Big Opportunity “in a nutshell” or to the fuller commentary in the discussion document, rather than presenting “alternative ideas”. We group alternative ideas into two themes. The first theme is ideas about assessment. The second theme is ideas about who could support course delivery in the senior secondary school.

The ideas about assessment align with the Big Opportunity 4 ideas in the discussion document. They include frameworks being provided to support teachers to assess across the curriculum; more variety in the way subjects are assessed, beyond exams and written assessments; and a “bank” of assessments being available. One submission highlighted the need for “rich, complex, authentic, changing and challenging assessments that require breadth and depth of coverage of the curriculum rather than the current ‘painting by numbers’ approach” (UNIVERSITY, SUBMISSION). Another submission suggested that teachers stop assessing NCEA. Students could instead “put together portfolios to demonstrate their learning across the curriculum. These portfolios would be sent away as with the Technology and Art portfolios, for a national panel to assess” (EDUCATION ORGANISATION, SUBMISSION).

Some people suggested that a wider range of people be involved in course delivery at the senior secondary school. This would support teachers, as well as provide additional expertise for delivering coherent, cross-curricular courses. There were suggestions about greater use of subject-matter experts, retired people “with wisdom and experience in areas not limited by school subjects”, and stronger connections with hāpu and iwi.

## BIG OPPORTUNITY 5: ENSURING THE RECORD OF ACHIEVEMENT TELLS US ABOUT LEARNERS' CAPABILITIES

### Big Opportunity 5: Key findings

1. There is general agreement that the Record of Achievement does not convey all student capabilities.
2. Many people think that the solution proposed is not feasible.
3. Some people think changing the Record of Achievement could make it less trustworthy.
4. Some people think that the real problems are being missed, and put forward alternative ideas.

### What Big Opportunity 5 aims to do

In this section, we present people's responses to Big Opportunity 5's proposal to ensure the Record of Achievement tells us about learners' capabilities. As it currently stands, the Record of Achievement is NZQA's official transcript of all qualifications and standards achieved by a learner, including endorsements.

Big Opportunity 5 explores the idea of changing the Record of Achievement so that it acknowledges and values things like employment, community work, extracurricular activities, and cultural contributions. The idea is to involve students in signalling these things through a digital portfolio that they would "own". That portfolio could be arranged in a way that indicates a student's full range of achievements and activities, inside and outside school life.

Big Opportunity 5's aim has some alignment with the aim of Big Opportunity 3. Both Big Opportunities seek to create space within the NCEA framework to recognise achievements in, and capabilities developed through, things other than academic or classroom-based activities.

### Overall reactions to Big Opportunity 5

Over half (60%) of respondents to the survey agree with Big Opportunity 5's aim, and just under half agree with the proposed approach (46%).

**WHAT?** Enhance the Record of Achievement with better summary information and space for learners to detail achievements outside of NCEA.

**WHY?** Makes the Record of Achievement better at explaining what learners are capable of.

**895**

people responded to Big Opportunity 5 in the Big Opportunities survey.

**19**

groups of people talked about Big Opportunity 5 at a workshop

## FINDING 1: There is general agreement that the Record of Achievement does not convey all student capabilities

Many people addressed the idea that assessed standards may not reflect what someone is capable of, or who they are as a person. They expressed support for something that could provide a better picture of a student's potential for tertiary learning or employment.

**There is definitely more to a student than their academic achievement, so painting a better picture of their holistic achievement and progress ... not only creates a more meaningful document for future employers, but sends a powerful message that the system cares about the whole person, not just a few letters on a page.**  
(NCEA GRADUATE, BIG OPPORTUNITIES SURVEY)

Among different ethnic groups, Pacific people supported Big Opportunity 5 the most. One focus group considered the idea of reporting a more holistic view of achievement through the example of cultural activities such as Polyfest. They discussed the way this might already be assessed in terms of standards, but could also generate achievement reporting about the organising and planning “soft skills” that could be developed through these activities. However, a focus group discussion among Pacific employers also covered the possibility that students would need guidance in order for them to recognise this as an opportunity with relevance to employability.

## FINDING 2: Many people think that the solution proposed is not feasible

Many people do not think that Big Opportunity 5 is useful or feasible, regardless of whether or not they broadly agree with its starting point about wanting to capture a broader view of capabilities. Some noted that there is already a perfectly good and practical way to communicate capabilities—the curriculum vitae (CV).

Some teacher comments implied that including a wider range of achievements might obscure or downplay the traditional/familiar focus on “academic capabilities” and that educators would need to do more work for no good reason.

Some employers and tertiary providers across a range of settings worried that it would become impossible to “objectively” select if the Record of Achievement became too much like a CV because students could inflate their achievements. A somewhat contradictory concern was that the responsibility for creating an effective CV would shift, in effect, from the individual to the system, and students would not then be able to showcase their individuality.

# 207

submissions wrote about  
Big Opportunity 5.

# 60%

of people responding  
to the survey agreed  
with ensuring the  
Record of Achievement  
tells us about learners'  
capabilities.

# 46%

of people agreed with how  
Big Opportunity 5 ideas  
would be implemented.

What you need is something that is objectively showing an employer how to differentiate one from another, not a person's or their family's own view of their strengths.  
(EMPLOYER, BIG OPPORTUNITIES SURVEY)

### FINDING 3: Some people think that changing the Record of Achievement could make it less trustworthy

This finding is similar to Finding 2 but involves a specific objection to changing the status and purpose of a Record of Achievement, which is currently an official transcript, representing standards that have been formally assessed.

Some of those commenting made the point that Big Opportunity 5's proposal raised quality assurance issues. One teacher pointed to problematic practices in some private English language schools as a “huge cautionary message as to what could happen if NZQA was not in charge of the overall package”. Another objection was that implementing this change could trigger serious changes in the nature of the relationship between schools and NZQA, or between schools and parents.

### FINDING 4: Some people think the real problems are being missed, and put forward alternative ideas

In addition to suggestions that students simply continue the existing practice of creating CVs (see Finding 2), some people gave alternative views of the problem raised by Big Opportunity 5, or put forward other ideas of what a Record of Achievement could measure or report on.

- Some thought the real issues related to a lack of understanding of the NCEA qualification itself, rather than the Record of Achievement.
- Some thought that the Record of Achievement should simply become a more customised version of what it already is—an official transcript—but with better signposting around what was assessed and how.
- There was some implied comparison to previous practices. Several people said that the Record of Achievement privileges an idea of inclusiveness (showing a list of achieved standards) instead of providing a norm-referenced view of someone's achievements against those of their peers.

It is fallacious to think that the Record of Achievement, which is a quality assured document from NZQA that is created from their results database under strict protocols, could be used in this way.

(EDUCATION ORGANISATION, SUBMISSION)



- Some commented that the record should focus on progress rather than achievement per se.
- One group of secondary principals submitted that the New Zealand Curriculum key competencies could be used to structure the Record of Achievement “in order to deliver a holistic view of success”.
- One teacher suggested the Record of Achievement should reference what had not been achieved, so that it might become a type of discussion point on “grit” between student and employer.
- Another teacher argued that there was no possible written report that could provide the picture necessary to judge someone’s potential beyond school.

Finally, one submission suggested designing a different process that would provide an employability-specific record for those students who do not attain Level 2 NCEA. This submission, from a secondary school principal, suggested that these students should graduate with a personal “Statement of Capabilities, which ... would emerge from exploring the ‘soft skills’ from the front of the New Zealand Curriculum and be informed by input from the employer community ... Students would collate the evidence over their total secondary school journey and have it finalised on graduation ... for the 10–15% who currently leave without L2 it would have ... more value than a completed or partially completed L1”.

The problem with NCEA is that people don’t understand what the qualification is. The Record of Achievement does not need to be explained—instead NCEA does.

(PARENT, BIG OPPORTUNITIES SURVEY)

If I was an employer, I would spend the whole interview talking with them rather than focusing on what standards they passed at school.

(TEACHER, BIG OPPORTUNITIES SURVEY)



## BIG OPPORTUNITY 6: DISMANTLING BARRIERS TO NCEA

### Big Opportunity 6: Key findings

1. There is overwhelming support for the “nil fees” approach for NCEA.
2. Improving access to Special Assessment Conditions is contested by teachers, employers, and students without learning support needs.
3. Students with learning support needs want equal access to learning and assessment opportunities.
4. Few people put forward ideas for additional curriculum materials.

### What Big Opportunity 6 aims to do

Big Opportunity 6 aims to remove barriers to students achieving NCEA by removing financial barriers, improving and widening access to Special Assessment Conditions (SAC), and increasing curriculum materials.

### Overall reactions to Big Opportunity 6

There is strong support for the dismantling of barriers to NCEA, with 75% of people agreeing with it as an aim, and 64% agreeing with how it would be done.

### FINDING 1: There is overwhelming support for the “nil fees” approach for NCEA

There is overwhelming support for a “nil fees” approach for NCEA. This includes the fees for Scholarship Awards. Respondents support this approach because:

- it is more equitable for all students, particularly those from lower socio-economic homes
- it saves schools from wasting time chasing payments
- it ensures that cost does not act as a barrier to participation.

Although financial assistance is available, there are forms that need to be filled in which can challenge families for whom English is an additional language and those with low literacy. In summary, the overall impact of this removal of fees is reduced costs for families/whānau, and reduced costs (including transaction costs) for schools.

**It has always struck me as strange that secondary education is mandatory up to a point, but you don't get a qualification unless you pay for it.**  
(STUDENT, BIG OPPORTUNITIES SURVEY)

**Change the NCEA fees ... [make it] free.** (PACIFIC YOUTH, FOCUS GROUP)

**WHAT?** Make NCEA more equitable, starting with making it easier for learners to access Special Assessment Conditions and removing fees to enrol in NCEA.

**WHY?** Gives every learner access to NCEA, regardless of their learning support needs or socioeconomic status.

**895**

people responded to Big Opportunity 6 in the Big Opportunities survey.

**19**

groups of people talked about Big Opportunity 6 at a workshop.

**218**

submissions wrote about Big Opportunity 6.

**We were also unanimous in saying that NCEA and Scholarship fees should be abolished—they are unnecessary barriers for lower socio-economic students, and that although relatively small individually, snowballing “small” school fees like NCEA fees, donations and uniform accumulated to an expensive education.**  
(YOUTH COUNCIL, SUBMISSION)

A submission from a national organisation referred to their own research into students’ access to free education in New Zealand. They outlined the impact of fees on students and their families in lower-socioeconomic areas. Thousands of students had their qualifications withheld because fees had not been paid. Not having their learning successes credentialed impacted on these students’ access to further education and employment and placed added stress on their lives.

A few respondents mentioned the impact the reduction in fees would have on NZQA and that the money would need to come from “somewhere”.

## **FINDING 2: Improving access to Special Assessment Conditions is contested by teachers, employers, and students without learning support needs**

The response to the idea of making it easier to apply for SAC support for NCEA received a more mixed response than the removal of NCEA fees. Big Opportunity 6 proposes to make the application process easier to understand and allow accredited school leaders to determine SAC eligibility. It would also be widened to include support for second-language speakers where English was not part of the assessment.

Overall, as with the NCEA fees, access to SAC is acknowledged as an equity issue. Many respondents commented with concern that SAC is accessed by greater numbers of students in high-decile schools than low-decile schools, with those in the latter being less able to afford the testing fee.

**SAC is a can of worms. In my experience, students in more affluent areas are more likely to be able to get assessed by specialists and prove that they need SAC, whereas students in less affluent areas, who may well also be disadvantaged by literacy issues, are less likely to be able to access the service.**  
(TEACHER, BIG OPPORTUNITIES SURVEY)

Some teachers saw it as a “sensible change” given the time it takes them to put together the applications for SAC, the lack of opportunity they get to talk with the assessors of applications, and costs for students to get an assessment from an educational psychologist.

Many respondents wanted all students to have equal opportunity to gain qualifications and to reduce the stigma associated with applying for SAC. However, some others saw it as devaluing the qualification by awarding students qualifications that they were not capable of achieving on their own.

**I see too many cases of students being “supported” into passing who can never do this work by themselves. What good is a qualification which says you can work at Level 2 if, in reality, you cannot?** (TEACHER, BIG OPPORTUNITIES SURVEY)

# 75%

of people responding to the survey agreed with dismantling barriers to NCEA.

# 64%

of people agreed with how Big Opportunity 6 ideas would be implemented.

The process of applying for financial assistance is complicated, especially when there are a number of students in a family and even worse if they are across different schools. This raises equity of access issues, with some families simply failing to apply and either suffering financial duress as a result of coming up with the fees, or their children missing out on getting their results because the fees haven’t been paid.

(NATIONAL ORGANISATION, SUBMISSION)

**I am unsure about making it easier for learners to access special assessment conditions: in my experience it's not particularly difficult to get special assessment conditions as it is ... I would need to see strict regulations for how someone can go about getting extra time in an exam (for example) before I would agree that it was fair on everyone.** (STUDENT, BIG OPPORTUNITIES SURVEY)

These respondents (including teachers, employers, and students) also thought it did not set students up for the world of work nor did it give employers an indication of what they were capable of doing on their own.

Support for students who are English language learners was also contested. On the one hand, there were those who thought qualifications needed to show what students are able to do in English-speaking environments, particularly if they aspired to go on to tertiary study. On the other hand, migrant and former refugee students in focus groups talked about needing a bit more time to complete assessments and support with translating some of the technical vocabulary.

Some schools and professional bodies associated with them commented on the challenges associated with the removal of this barrier. They thought it would increase the workload in schools and impact on their resourcing in terms of the cost and time needed to conduct assessments for SAC support. Some felt there is not currently the expertise in schools to do this and it would require additional professional development for staff in schools to be able to conduct the assessments. It would also require training for the additional number of reader/writers and supervisors should the number of students requiring SAC increase. The increase in the number of students seeking SAC support would put pressure on spaces in schools during exam time.

There were also concerns that judgements would not be equitable across schools and that moderation would be required to ensure this. Overall, there was a sense from some that money would be better spent on professional development for teachers that would see them better placed to teach their students with learning differences.

### FINDING 3: Students with learning support needs want equal access to learning and assessment opportunities

Focus groups with students from migrant and former refugee backgrounds and those with learning support needs were unanimous in their desire for equal access to learning and assessment opportunities.

**It's also like understanding us knowing that we know what's going on. We know our vision. We know the education system ... Help us through that. Don't put up barriers for us.** (STUDENTS WITH LOW VISION, FOCUS GROUP)

An important way to help these students is through the learning materials that support them. As discussed in Sections 3 and 6, for those with sight impairments, it is about font size and acknowledging that computers are not the only solution. For dyslexic students, it can be a relatively simple solution in terms of font and paper colour. A submission from two NCEA graduates with physical impairments highlighted their exclusion from physical education for NCEA. Their submission suggested a system based on para sport could be adopted.

It is not possible for people to have a writer next to them in their receptionist job. Alternative qualifications that represent what a person can do on their own is the only fair way to assess students and the only fair way for employers to know what the potential employee is capable of.

(STUDENTS, SUBMISSION)

I have a problem with English—less skills to write things with limited time. Sometimes this isn't fair in assessments.

(REFUGEE FAMILIES, FOCUS GROUP)

Who is going to pay for this? Also who will compensate for the workload generated? As a school of 1360 we have nearly 200 boys with special assessment conditions. It is a nightmare to run for teachers and HOFs.

(TEACHER, BIG OPPORTUNITIES SURVEY)

I was awarded the highest sporting honour for our school in Year 13, yet I was unable to participate in physical education. I think it highlights major gaps in the NCEA assessment system, between what NCEA aims to provide and what actually happens. (STUDENTS, SUBMISSION)

## FINDING 4: Few people put forward ideas for additional curriculum materials

There were relatively few comments about curriculum support materials. The majority of these were general comments about the need for more support materials, updated exemplars, or for more templates that can be used to help teachers design assessments. Specific mention was made of the need for more resources to help better teach and meet the needs of students with learning support needs, the need for more engaging resources to support standards, and the need for more digital resources generally. However, concerns were expressed about who would develop the resources, who would moderate them, and how they might impact on teachers' freedom to design their own courses. If more digital resources were developed, students without access at home could be penalised.

I am somewhat concerned at the mention of curriculum support in a context of being centralised/standardised. I assume this does not remove the very freedoms for teachers to develop courses you mention above?

(TEACHER, BIG OPPORTUNITIES SURVEY)



## What alternative ideas do people have for Big Opportunity 6?

Apart from increasing support for students with learning support needs, few alternative ideas were put forward for this Big Opportunity.

A few respondents commented about the need for more use of technology: for example, the use of Te Kura resources for learning, and more online assessment, would be helpful. The latter was seen as being particularly helpful in alleviating some of the reading and writing issues faced by some students with learning difficulties. Another option was to make more use of internal assessment for these students.

Students in migrant and former refugee focus groups talked about the over reliance on writing in assessments and that there should be the opportunity for more practical or oral assessments.

**Rather than writing NCEA, what if someone actually interviews you. Instead of writing on the paper you can share your knowledge with the person. Some people don't get the words, but they get the actions.** (REFUGEE FAMILIES, FOCUS GROUP)

Some respondents talked about the need for more professional development for teachers so they were better able to understand and teach students with learning differences and/or disabilities.

**Teachers having ... training in how to talk to us and actually talking about our disability and working around it ... At school they asked me to mentor the kids that were in wheelchairs ... but a lot of the time it wasn't the kids that needed mentoring it was the adults around them.** (STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES, FOCUS GROUP)

More computer-assisted technology like screen readers etc would be my preferred approach, as students can use these in real life, whereas a reader-writer is not someone you can always have with you!

(TEACHER, BIG OPPORTUNITIES SURVEY)

## 8. Te titiro anō i ngā whakahokinga kōrero mai i te tirohanga o ngā mātāpono e rima

### Revisiting feedback through the lens of the five principles

In the first section we introduced five principles of a strong qualification that underpin the overall review process. In this section we summarise the review findings in the light of what each of the five principles seeks to achieve. Our discussion is based on what people said in answer to the main questions asked in the review:

- What's working?
- What's not working?
- How can NCEA be strengthened?
- What do people think about the Big Opportunities?



## Wellbeing

NCEA can make positive contributions to wellbeing. Students feel good when they achieve credits and are building a qualification that will help them with their future. They enjoy the recognition that comes from an endorsement of Merit or Excellence. A different type of positive contribution to wellbeing comes from students experiencing a broad curriculum that includes life skills. This will benefit students in their life beyond school or study and support them to participate as active citizens in their local community.

A focus on student wellbeing was implied (and in some cases explicit) in reasons given in support of various Big Opportunities. For example, Big Opportunity 4 has the potential to make a positive contribution to wellbeing if the culture shifts from achieving as many credits as possible. The “nil fees” and increased access to SAC proposed in Big Opportunity 6 would reduce the stress on students and families in lower-socioeconomic groups and those with learning support needs.

The wellbeing of both students and teachers is negatively impacted when they experience over assessment and other workload issues related to the way NCEA is implemented. This message came through clearly in comments about experiences of NCEA, especially those made by students, teachers, principals, and parents/whānau. The call to reduce assessment workloads was also clear in ideas about what could be changed. Reducing assessment would help reduce student and teacher workload, stress, and anxiety.

Potential wellbeing benefits and stresses will need to be carefully balanced as changes are considered. For example, Big Opportunity 1 proposes a reduction in credits awarded for a Level 1 NCEA qualification, with half of these credits coming from one high-stakes project. On the one hand, this proposal could have a positive effect on student wellbeing because students would experience fewer instances of high-stakes assessment. On the other hand, doing one big piece of work worth so many credits might increase stress for some students. Some people also suggested that the changes proposed would exacerbate the jump to Level 2, increasing student pressure in Year 12. In a similar vein, when responding to Big Opportunity 4, some respondents expressed concern that co-designing and delivering courses across the curriculum would add to teachers’ workloads.

Different concerns about students’ wellbeing were expressed in responses to Big Opportunity 3. Some people understood this idea to mean that students will need to make pathway choices before they are ready. This will be stressful and could limit a student’s potential by locking them in to one pathway. Respondents who seemed to see the pathways focus as *additional* to students’ usual courses perceived that this opportunity would increase workload, or the number of activities in which students are engaged.

In principle, NCEA promotes the wellbeing of young people and teachers through effective and fair teaching and assessment practices.

## Equity and inclusion

Many people recognise that the NCEA system is better for students who would not have achieved success under the previous qualification regime. The “nil fees” and increased access to SAC proposed in Big Opportunity 6 would level the playing field for all students. The idea of reporting on a greater range of capabilities, as proposed in Big Opportunity 5, is seen as having the potential to make a positive contribution to inclusion and equity, especially for students whose interests and strengths are not well matched with traditional schoolwork.

A stronger focus on literacy and numeracy—as proposed in Big Opportunity 2—also has the potential to increase equity and inclusion for all students over the longer term. Support will be needed to widen understandings of literacy and numeracy, and to ensure that both English and te reo Māori language contexts provide legitimate opportunities to demonstrate these broader capabilities.

The way in which NCEA is implemented is creating inequities for some students. Some respondents said that more inclusive practice is needed for students with specific learning support needs. Suggestions for changes to assessment practices include diversifying the ways in which evidence of learning can be presented, or making simple changes to the way in which online assessments are formatted.

Many Māori and Pacific respondents expressed concerns about the lack of equitable opportunities for learning as well as for assessment. In relation to English-medium contexts, they talked about students being guided towards a limited set of pathways because their teachers have low expectations of what they can achieve. Māori respondents were concerned that they did not see te reo Māori, tikanga Māori, identity, and mātauranga Māori valued within the curriculum and NCEA in the same way that English language and culture are. They also raised concerns about the lack of resourcing available for kura, and the disadvantages wharekura face because there are not enough teachers who can teach through the medium of Māori. Kaiako in kura also have the additional burden of having to create and translate their own resources when they cannot access quality resources in te reo Māori.

**In principle, NCEA facilitates high expectations for all young people and ensures that every student has the opportunity to succeed.**



Inconsistencies in the numbers of credits awarded for different standards poses a different type of equity challenge. Some of the more detailed submissions asked for a review to ensure that the credits awarded reflect the effort, time, and skill involved in gaining each specific standard. This is seen as a way to increase equity within and across subjects.

Another type of equity challenge was raised in comments made about Big Opportunity 3. Implementing pathways for all students depends on the availability of community resources and willingness to collaborate and co-operate. Some respondents said that employers and community organisations are not necessarily in a position to do this. Existing inequalities and impracticalities in communities could disadvantage, or even prevent, some groups of students being able to gain Level 2 or Level 3 NCEA.

## Coherence

Some educators (both secondary and tertiary) are concerned that dividing learning up into discrete subjects and NCEA standards, combined with a disproportionate focus on assessment rather than learning, has the potential to undermine students' experiences of coherence in their learning. Many respondents thought that Big Opportunity 4 provided a chance to address this concern. The aim of fostering deep learning could help students and teachers make connections and engage deeply within and across subjects. Appropriate resources and support would be required for deep learning and greater curriculum coherence to be widely achieved.

Those who support project-based learning as a component of Level 1 are positive about the opportunity for integrated, cross-curricular learning with links in the community. However, there is a counterview that coherence within disciplinary knowledge will be compromised if credits are reduced at Level 1 and the project is implemented as proposed.

**In principle, NCEA enables young people to access the powerful knowledge, skills, and attitudes identified in the New Zealand Curriculum.**



Big Opportunity 3 has the potential to increase the coherence between what students do in school, what they do out of school, and what they might do after leaving school. One argument in support of this proposal was that students would leave school feeling much better prepared for what lies ahead in terms of employment and tertiary-level learning.

There are mixed views about the implications of Big Opportunity 5. People who support the proposal to convey a wider range of capabilities on the Record of Achievement say this could facilitate the telling of a more coherent story about a student. Conversely, people who don't support this idea might say that it has the potential to descend into incoherence by bringing together different, disconnected pieces of information, unless there is careful guidance and curation of what gets added to the Record of Achievement.

## Pathways

The flexibility of NCEA means that schools and students can potentially create learning pathways suited to the needs and aspirations of diverse learners. Those who supported Big Opportunity 3 said that it could help students discover the pathways that are right for them or more purposefully pursue the ones they have already decided on. Actively making these sorts of choices has the potential to provide a welcome sense of relevance for many students. By acknowledging a wider range of types of learning, Big Opportunity 5 also puts more value on connections and activities based in the community (including workplaces).

A reduction in financial barriers—as proposed in Big Opportunity 6—means that all students will have equitable access to the range of pathways to further education and/or employment. Similarly, a stronger focus on literacy and numeracy has the potential to improve students' access to a range of both vocational and academic pathways.

Some students, teachers, and schools seem to struggle to create meaningful pathways through NCEA and beyond into study and work. Many people commented on the importance of helping students to keep their subject options open for longer, by broadening the curriculum and supporting students as they make pathways decisions. There is concern about not narrowing the Level 1 curriculum, and maintaining a focus on disciplinary knowledge to transition to study at Level 2 and beyond. A clear theme in submissions from tertiary organisations is that many students are ill prepared for ongoing learning. This comment was most likely to be made in relation to STEM subjects (science, technology, engineering, mathematics).

**In principle, NCEA makes it easier for young people, their parents and whānau, and teachers to make informed choices to enable success in education and later life.**

## Credibility

Many people value NCEA and see it as a credible qualification that is recognised nationally and internationally. However, some employers and parents struggle to understand NCEA because of its complexity and a perceived lack of clear communication about what it is seeking to achieve and why. Some respondents said that increased resourcing and support is needed to help teachers implement NCEA in the way that was intended, and in ways that maximise its potential. Clear communication will help the wider community—including employers and parents—understand how NCEA works.

**In principle, NCEA is readily understood, widely supported, and validly measures achievement.**



There are mixed views about whether the opportunity for “real-world” integrated learning would improve the credibility of NCEA. Some said this type of change would increase credibility. Others are concerned that a robust assessment framework will still be needed, along with consistency of implementation of changes. For example, if a project was implemented as a component of Level 1 (Big Opportunity 1), questions about how this large piece of work could be assessed and moderated would need to be resolved. If there is a greater focus on deep learning across the curriculum (Big Opportunity 4), some respondents worry that there will be a loss of focus on disciplinary knowledge. For them, this would undermine the credibility of NCEA.

Big Opportunity 2 identifies a need for greater transparency about benchmarks for literacy and numeracy, and ways of assessing these that are valid and reliable. Some people saw these changes as an opportunity to improve perceptions about the quality of NCEA.

For some, Big Opportunity 3 is an opportunity to make students’ work towards NCEA more credible because of the broader scope of activities. For others, this wider scope may complicate NCEA, make it look more like a “grab bag” of credits, and mean it has less credibility.

If the Record of Achievement is to remain an official transcript, Big Opportunity 5 could compromise its status and credibility. If there is to be an online space for students to construct a picture of their capabilities—qualifications-related or not—credibility would be an ethical issue for students and an evaluative issue for anyone reading it (e.g., an employer).



## 9. He kōrero whakakapi

### Concluding comments

In this final section we look across all the feedback from the different sources to make some high-level observations. The report has described people's experiences of NCEA, their thoughts about what is working and what is not working, and their ideas for change. Much about NCEA is working well; however, many people made suggestions for change. The report also presents people's responses to the six Big Opportunities. There were differing levels of support for these ideas.

#### People's experiences of NCEA

There is widespread agreement about the strengths of NCEA, in particular the flexibility to provide different types of courses to meet different learning needs and aspirations, and to help all students experience success. Flexibility in assessment modes is also widely supported, although there are contrasting views about the balance between internal and external assessment. Many people who highlight strengths of NCEA also wanted to see aspects of NCEA improved. In particular, people want a greater emphasis on learning rather than assessment, and a reduction in the heavy workloads that both students and teachers report.

The mix of qualitative and quantitative information collected through the review highlighted that terms such as “flexibility” mean different things to different people. For example, in some contexts “flexibility” will mean freedom to design an innovative local curriculum. In others, it will mean that traditional courses can be offered with different timings and formats.

We noticed that many suggestions for change made by parents, employers, and students—and also by some teachers—are about the way NCEA is implemented in different school and classroom settings, rather than about problems with NCEA itself. This is to be expected, because people see NCEA through the lens of their own experience or the experience of people they know. Examples include the need for meaningful, engaging learning; the need to introduce certain subjects earlier (te reo Māori is an example); the provision of guidance for making sound pathways choices; and the need to control the numbers of credits offered for courses in different subjects. In these cases, there is no immediate need to change the structure of NCEA to achieve the desired change.



In the overall design of NCEA, credits are intended to provide a means of establishing the comparative time and effort needed to undertake the learning to be assessed by a specific standard. Over time, credits have come to carry much more meaning than this, until for some people gaining them seems to have become the main purpose of learning and the main measure of learning success. In a lot of feedback, the word “credits” appeared to be synonymous with “assessment”. When talking about credits, some people provided detailed feedback on problematic patterns of credit parity for different standards. Although this detail is not included in the report, it will be useful for people considering NCEA beyond this review.

## Responses to the Big Opportunities

The report also summarises people’s reactions to the six Big Opportunities identified by the Ministerial Advisory Group. Many people engaged with and discussed these ideas. It was clear that people were basing their level of agreement with the Big Opportunities on different levels of engagement with the information provided. Those who engaged deeply with the information still commented that the ideas lacked sufficient detail. Consistent with the appetite for change, there is a reasonable level of support for the aims of most of the Big Opportunities. There is less support for the specific ideas for implementation of each Big Opportunity.

## Acknowledgements

The NZCER team thanks our partner CORE Education for their design, administration, and collection of data from the regional workshops and focus groups.

We also thank every person who has contributed their thoughts to this review. Your participation across online surveys, submissions, focus groups, fono, hui, and workshops means a broad range of New Zealand voices have been heard on the future of NCEA.

# Āpitihanga 1: He whakarāpopototanga o ngā whakawhiti kōrero a ngā tāngata mō te arotake i te NCEA

Appendix 1: A summary of  
people's engagement with  
the NCEA review

## Engagement channels

A large number of people contributed to the NCEA review. The majority of these were individuals who completed an online survey. There were several ways that people could engage with the review during the period from 26 May to 19 October 2018.

### Quick Survey

This was a short online survey, designed to take 5 minutes. The Quick Survey comprised five closed questions where people were asked to choose from a 5-point agreement scale, and three opportunities for open responses:

- If you could change one thing about NCEA, what would you change?
- What is the thing about NCEA you like the most?
- Is there anything else you would like to say about NCEA or education in New Zealand?

## Big Opportunities Survey

This survey was mostly about the six Big Opportunities. For each Big Opportunity, people were asked four questions (two closed and two open):

- Do you agree with what this Big Opportunity is trying to achieve?
- Do you agree with how the Big Opportunity proposes to do this?
- What are your reasons?
- What are your ideas for how this Big Opportunity could happen?

People were also given a series of statements about NCEA and asked to tick those they agreed with.

## Workshops

Regional workshops were hosted around the country during the engagement period. Group activities produced information about people's experiences of NCEA, and their thoughts on the Big Opportunities.

## Focus groups

Focus groups were designed to reach important voices, such as Māori whānau and communities and Pacific families and communities, migrant communities, and students in youth justice facilities. Focus groups talked about what's working in NCEA, what's not working, and what could be strengthened. Table 1 shows the range of focus groups.

## Submissions

People had two ways to make a submission—by using an online form or by sending an open submission. People were asked if their submission was from them as an individual, from a group of people, or from an organisation. The length of submissions varied widely.

## Additional feedback

A range of additional workshops, fono, and hui were held around New Zealand during the review. The information from these activities was received in a variety of formats and has been included in the analysis. Information included the views of:

- tertiary educators across a range of contexts, including foundation-level and universities
- Pacific peoples, including in the Cook Islands and Niue
- schools
- Asian parents and students
- Te Kura
- teen parent units.

TABLE 1 Types and number of focus groups

Focus	Number held	Total number of participants
Students and tutors in correctional facilities	5	90
People not in employment, education, or training	1	8
Students with learning support needs, including dyslexia and low vision	3	18
Students with disabilities	2	9
Pacific peoples	5	70
Students in alternative education	2	13
Students in a teen parent unit	1	9
Students in a health school	1	12
Students learning at a distance	1	10
Students in rural settings	1	9
Recent school leavers in degree-level study	3	31
Recent school leavers in industry training and employment	1	6
Learners in foundation-level tertiary study	2	20
Learners in secondary–tertiary vocational education	3	22
Tertiary learners–Māori–medium	2	21
LGBTQIA+ youth	1	6
Refugee and migrant families and students	4	25
Ethnic minority families and students	1	7
Organisations that provide learning support	1	10
Tertiary educators	2	20
Employers–small business and Pasifika business network	1	5
Guidance counsellors and school health providers	2	8
Principals' nominee groups	2	12
Māori whānau and students–Māori medium	4	34
Māori whānau and students–English medium	3	18

## Data tables

The tables in this appendix show how many people contributed to the review using one of the channels of engagement. Table 2 shows the overall number of responses.

TABLE 2 Responses by data source

Data source	Number
Quick Survey	6,758
Big Opportunities Survey	920
Regional workshops	20 (476 people)
Focus groups	54 (493 people)
Submissions	366 (155 from individuals, 116 from groups, 95 on behalf of an organisation)
Workshops, fono, hui	8,000+ (people)

The following tables<sup>3</sup> give more information about the people who responded, by:

- connection to education
- ethnicity
- age
- gender
- region.

TABLE 3 Respondent connection to education by data source<sup>4</sup>

Role	Quick survey (n=6,758)	Big Opportunities survey (n=920)	Regional workshops (n=476)
	%	%	%
NCEA student	41.3	19.7	5.0
Teacher	31.3	55.6	47.9
Parent	18.9	24.7	43.5
NCEA graduate	11.4	9.6	4.4
Tertiary student	7.9	8.7	4.6
Non-NCEA school student	5.1	2.0	5.0
Another role	4.6	6.4	0.0
Principal	3.9	5.5	7.8
Tertiary educator	3.4	4.2	10.7
Employer	2.7	3.0	3.2
Iwi representative	0.4	0.0	1.7

<sup>3</sup> We do not show demographic data for people who made a submission. We have these data for individuals who made a submission, but not for groups of people, or organisations. We do not have demographic data for the additional workshops, fono, and hui organised by the Ministry of Education and other New Zealanders.

<sup>4</sup> We do not have connection to education data for focus group participants.

TABLE 4 Respondent ethnicity by data source

Ethnicity	Quick Survey (n=6,758)	Big Opportunities Survey (n=920)	Regional workshops (n=476)	Focus groups (n=369 <sup>5</sup> )
	%	%	%	%
NZ European/ Pākehā	79.1	80.4	72.7	48.8
Māori	13.0	8.4	18.3	32.5
Asian	8.2	6.0	8.0	6.9
Another ethnicity	7.0	7.3	9.0	6.2
Pacific peoples	4.7	3.0	10.5	31.7

TABLE 5 Respondent age by data source

Regions	Quick Survey (n=6,758)	Big Opportunities Survey (n=920)	Regional workshops (n=476)	Focus groups (n=369 <sup>5</sup> )
Age	%	%	%	%
12 or younger	0.1	0.0	0.0	0.0
13–18	44.6	20.9	5.3	59.9
19–24	6.6	4.7	2.5	13.8
25–34	7.8	14.0	9.7	4.6
35–44	11.2	16.8	20.8	4.9
45–54	16.4	23.2	36.3	9.2
55–64	8.9	15.2	20.0	6.8
65 or older	2.1	2.3	4.8	0.0
Prefer not to say	1.1	1.9	0.6	0.3
No response	1.2	1.1	0.0	0.3

5. We have demographic data for 369 of the 493 focus group participants.



TABLE 6 Respondent gender by data source

Regions	Quick Survey (n=6,758)	Big Opportunities Survey (n=920)	Regional workshops (n=476)	Focus groups (n=369 <sup>5</sup> )
	%	%	%	%
Female	65.0	60.7	64.5	57.7
Male	29.8	33.3	35.5	40.9
Gender diverse	1.5	0.6	0.0	0.5
Prefer not to say	2.4	2.8	0.0	0.1
No response	1.4	2.6	0.0	0.8

TABLE 7 Responses by region by data source

Region	Quick Survey (n=6,758)	Big Opportunities Survey (n=920)	Regional workshops (n=476)
	%	%	%
Tai Tokerau	2.5	2.2	7.6
Auckland	24.0	29.9	15.5
Waikato	8.8	14.6	6.5
Bay of Plenty/Rotorua/ Taupō	5.2	2.2	5.8
Gisborne/Hawke's Bay	4.0	3.3	8.8
Wellington	12.0	10.1	5.9
Taranaki/Manawatū/ Whanganui	8.4	8.6	14.7
Nelson/Marlborough/West Coast	12.3	2.9	11.1
Canterbury/Christchurch	13.5	11.2	15.8
Otago/Dunedin/Southland	7.5	5.7	8.2
Other	0.8	0.4	0.0
No response	1.2	9.0	0.0

## Āpitihanganga 2: Te āhua o te kohikohi me te tātari i ngā raraunga Appendix 2: Approach to the collection and analysis of data

The Ministry of Education contracted CORE Education and NZCER to support the NCEA review engagement process. CORE Education's role was to facilitate engagement with diverse groups of stakeholders through workshops and focus groups, while NZCER managed all aspects of data analysis and the reporting of findings.

The engagement period was from 26 May to 19 October 2018. People could complete a survey or make a submission up until 5pm on Friday 19 October. The engagement process was designed to provide a diverse range of people with a variety of opportunities to contribute their experiences of NCEA and ideas for NCEA.

### Three guiding questions

In April 2018, NZCER worked with the Ministry and CORE Education to develop three research questions to guide the data collection process:

1. What are people's experiences of NCEA?
2. What are people's ideas for improvement?
3. What are people's responses to the Big Opportunities and what alternatives do they suggest?

The key research questions and specific areas of interest under each of them were used to guide the development of data collection activities including the development of the two online surveys, activities for workshops, and questions for focus groups. Questions were also developed for people wanting a more structured option for responding with a submission. The process was guided by staff with expertise in working with diverse groups including Māori, Pacific people, and learners with additional educational needs or low literacy.

## Data sources

As described in Appendix 1, NZCER received data via the following main sources.

- Quick Survey
- Big Opportunities Survey
- regional workshops
- focus groups
- submissions
- workshops, fono, and hui.

### Opportunities to contribute in languages other than English

Both online surveys and the online submission form were available in multiple languages. The English language versions were developed first, and then translated into te reo Māori, New Zealand Sign Language, Samoan, Cook Islands Māori, Tongan, Niuean, Tokelauan, Simplified Chinese, Hindi, and Korean. Surveys and the online submission form were hosted on the Ministry of Education's Kōrero Mātauranga website and could be completed on a range of devices.

For the regional workshops, a Māori-language strand (with workshops run entirely in te reo Māori) was offered at 16 venues. However, there were only two occasions where whānau chose to take up this option. Many whānau chose to participate in the workshops run in English instead. In general, CORE Education facilitators used both English and te reo Māori when talking with whānau in workshops and focus groups. CORE Education and NZCER also developed He Tirohanga Māori which provides a framework for Māori and Ākonga Māori stakeholder engagement.

### Anonymity

All surveys were completed anonymously—people did not put their name on them. CORE Education knows who attended regional workshops and focus groups but no views from those events are attributed to an individual. Some people chose to put their name on their submission, or to name their school or organisation.

We do not use any names in this report, so all views presented, including direct quotes, are anonymous. We identify the connection that each person has to education (e.g., parent, teacher) and where the data came from.

## Data analysis

### Qualitative data analysis

To analyse the qualitative responses we applied a Critical Grounded Theory (CGT) approach.<sup>5</sup> We were mindful of the need to capture the voices of very diverse groups of people. This highly iterative process has enabled us to present an overview of responses to the NCEA review that is grounded in what diverse peoples of New Zealand say.

Our approach to understanding the data from many different data sources has been as follows:

- Develop a broad framework of coding categories for the Quick Survey, regional workshops, focus groups, and submissions. In line with CGT, subcategories evolved as new data came in and were coded.
- Test our initial coding framework against early survey data from young people, to ensure our coding would appropriately reflect young people's responses.
- Use the same broad coding categories to code information for data from the Big Opportunities Survey. This involved creating additional sub-categories and creating a framework that identified positive and negative responses to questions.
- Continue to refine the subcategories as we used the framework to code workshop, focus group, and submission responses.

## Coding

This resulted in the development of two coding frameworks: a coding framework for the Quick Survey, workshops, and focus groups; and a coding framework for the Big Opportunities Survey.

A dedicated coding team used the coding frameworks to code the data from the surveys, workshops, and focus groups. Coders regularly checked that they were consistent in their approach. Submissions were coded at a high level, to tag whether they included information about people's experiences of NCEA, what could be strengthened, and each of the Big Opportunities.

## Analysis and writing

Data were uploaded to the qualitative analysis package, NVivo. This enabled the team of writers to analyse the data through coding queries, text searches, and cross-tab queries. Writers looked for themes in qualitative responses and identified key findings for each section.

## Responses in different languages

Responses in languages other than English were translated back into English to enable these qualitative responses to be included in the analysis. Responses in te reo Māori were kept in te reo Māori, and were analysed by a fluent Māori speaker on the writing team.

## Quantitative data analysis

The data for this review were collected from multiple data sources, including online surveys that could be accessed by anyone in New Zealand. The respondents to the online surveys were therefore self-selected: the people we heard from were people motivated to respond to the review. We don't know how the views of these people may differ from those who chose not to respond. In addition, responses were anonymous and we cannot identify any responses that may have been made by the same person. These factors mean that statistical

6 See for example: Timonen, V., Foley, G. & Conlon, C. (2018). Challenges when using grounded theory: A pragmatic introduction to doing GT research. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 17: 1-10.

analysis of differences in response between subgroups (e.g., ethnicity, connection to education, region) is not appropriate. Differences between groups have been considered as percentage points only.

People could select more than one “connection to education” and ethnicity when giving information about themselves. This means we cannot make comparisons directly between groups, because the groups overlap. For example, we can’t compare responses made by parents and teachers, or responses from Māori and Pākehā (because many people told us they were both a parent and a teacher, or that they identified as both Māori and Pākehā). Instead, we compare the responses from teachers with responses from everyone who didn’t say they were a teacher, or responses from Māori with responses from everyone who did not identify as Māori.

The findings of the review cannot be said to represent the views of the entire New Zealand population; however, useful information has been gathered from thousands of people with different perspectives, knowledge, experiences, and expertise in NCEA.

