



The NCEA Review

Summary of findings from public engagement on the future of NCEA

The NCEA review is part of the national Education Conversation | Kōrero Mātauranga. NCEA is New Zealand's main secondary school qualification. Students can also get NCEA in other settings, such as tertiary education institutions and through industry training.

The public engagement phase of the review took place between May and October 2018. It collected feedback from thousands of people across New Zealand on their experiences of NCEA. People responded to three questions:

- What's working?
- What's not working?
- How can NCEA be strengthened?

They also had the opportunity to give feedback on six Big Opportunities for NCEA suggested by a Ministerial Advisory Group.

This summary report presents key findings from the responses received. Responses show that much about NCEA is working well; however, many people made suggestions for change. A strength of this engagement process has been that people had the opportunity to respond in different ways. The nature of the analysis and synthesis means that the details of people's feedback are summarised. However, all feedback, of whatever size, has contributed to the review findings.

Quick Survey A 5-minute online survey about people's experiences of NCEA and what they would like to change.

Big Opportunities Survey A longer online survey about the six Big Opportunities, which asked about people's levels of agreement with each Big Opportunity, their reasons for this level of agreement, and their ideas for how the Big Opportunity could happen. People also considered lists of statements about NCEA, and chose the ones they agreed with.

Workshops Public events at locations across New Zealand where people took part in activities about their experiences of NCEA and shared their thoughts on the Big Opportunities.

Focus groups Discussions with groups who have important viewpoints on NCEA, such as migrant communities, students in youth justice facilities, and employers.

Submissions Individual, group, or organisational feedback about NCEA and the Big Opportunities.

This is a summary report based on the key findings of the review. A longer report and a series of infographic posters are also available.

People engaged in many ways



Ngā wheako o te tangata mō te NCEA

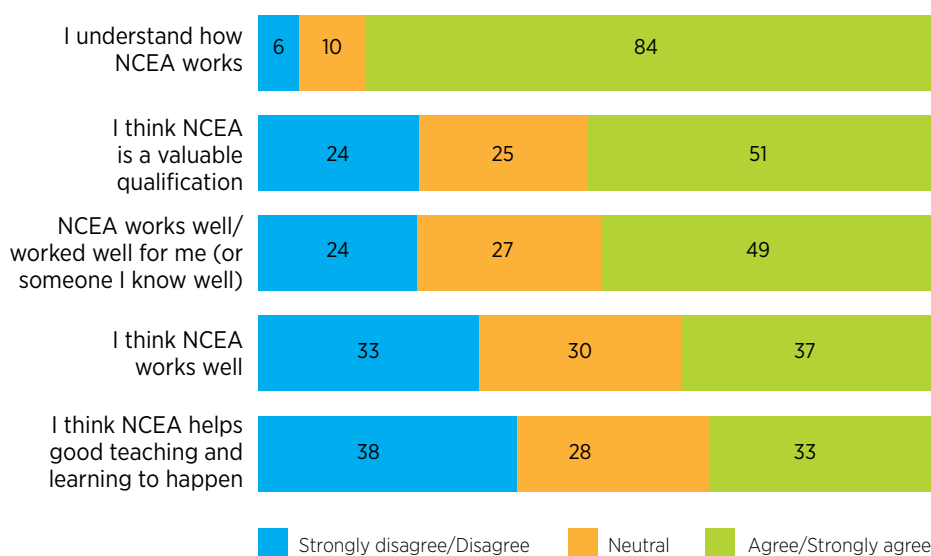
People’s experiences of NCEA

The first question in the Quick Survey asked people to say how much they agreed with five statements about NCEA. While most people feel they understand how NCEA works, sizable groups are neutral about or disagree with its value, whether it works well, and whether it helps good teaching and learning to happen. Teachers and principals were more likely to agree with all five statements.

84%
of people agree they understand how NCEA works. (QUICK SURVEY)

37%
of people agree that NCEA works well. (QUICK SURVEY)

FIGURE 1 Overall responses to five statements about NCEA



We looked across all the feedback received during the review to synthesise what people said was working well and not working well.

Key findings: What’s working well?

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

Key findings: What’s not working well?

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

Ngā marohi mō te whakapakari i te NCEA Suggestions for strengthening NCEA

Many people provided feedback on how NCEA could be strengthened.

Key findings: How NCEA can be strengthened?

- NCEA could encourage students to engage in richer learning.
 - Reduce the focus on assessment and credit counting.
 - Include more relevant, real-world learning.
- The way NCEA is assessed could be changed.
 - Reduce the volume of assessment.
 - Improve the balance between internal and external assessment.
 - Encourage more variety in assessment.
 - Review how NCEA credits are allocated and graded.
- The structure of NCEA could be changed.
 - Change the number and content of NCEA levels.
 - Change the learning pathways within NCEA.
- There could be more support around NCEA.

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)

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)

Shift the balance of learning towards activities that are not for credits and reduce student preoccupation with accumulating credits at Level 1.

(TEACHER, SUBMISSION)

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)

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

(WORKSHOP)

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)

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)

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)

Get every student to stretch rather than just pass.

(PARENT, QUICK SURVEY)

He tirohanga Māori Māori perspectives

For some kaiako, the flexibility of NCEA and the range of subjects available work well for ākonga Māori. Kaiako say they like having the ability to design programmes for Māori learners. Examples include Māori performing arts programmes based on mātauranga Māori, and Māori approaches and pedagogies such as wānanga and noho. Whānau and students say the credit system is useful for motivating students to work towards goals. They like being able to gain credits from year levels higher than their own, particularly Māori-focused subject credits.

In the responses to “What’s not working well?”, several themes were specific to Māori respondents:

- Te reo Māori, tikanga Māori, identity, and mātauranga Māori are not seen as having the same status and support as English language, culture, and other subjects in the curriculum.
- Some teachers in English-medium settings have low expectations for Māori students in NCEA.

- There are concerns about inequities between resourcing for Māori medium and English medium.
- There are concerns related to te reo Māori assessment.

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

In English medium, people commented that te reo Māori, iwi dialect, Māori knowledge, and Māori ways of doing and learning are not widely valued in the curriculum and NCEA. They gave examples of how this could be addressed, and these are included in the full report. In Māori medium, suggestions concerned adequate resourcing, recognition of mātauranga Māori, improved moderation, and support for kaiako.

Ngā tirohanga mai i te Moananui-a-Kiwa Perspectives from Pacific people

Pacific students say they like the mix of internal and external assessments, the flexibility to gain credits across NCEA levels, and being able to choose standards that interest them. Pacific students say they put a lot of trust in their teachers’ guidance about choices and pathways. Some say they can be encouraged into less academically demanding pathways that do not serve them well.

Pacific parents say they like NCEA because they value a formal qualification that is recognised internationally and gives their children a route to university. Some say that they do not have a good understanding of how NCEA works.

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 allows them to teach to their students’ needs.

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 ... where they learnt how to make mocktails and coffee ... 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.
(PACIFIC TERTIARY STUDENT, QUICK SURVEY)

A strong theme from Pacific respondents is that they would like to see Pacific ways of learning reflected in assessment. Their suggestions are included in the full report.

Ngā Whai Wāhitanga Nui e ono

The six Big Opportunities

The Ministerial Advisory Group developed six Big Opportunities, which explore ideas for strengthening NCEA. In the Big Opportunities Survey, people responded to 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*? Across all Big Opportunities there is more support for what the Big Opportunity is trying to achieve than for how it would do it. We also looked across all feedback for the main themes in people's comments on each Big Opportunity.

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

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

Big Opportunity 2: Strengthening literacy and numeracy

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Big Opportunity 6: Dismantling barriers to NCEA

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

What do people think about the 6 Big Opportunities?

Agree Neutral Disagree



Revisiting feedback through the lens of the five principles

The background document for the review identified five principles for a strong qualification. This section summarises the review findings in relation to each of the principles.

Wellbeing

NCEA can make positive contributions to wellbeing. Students say they feel good when they achieve credits and are building a qualification that will help them with their future. However, many people said that 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.

The call to reduce assessment workloads was a clear theme in ideas about what could be changed.

Credibility

Most people value NCEA and see it as a credible qualification that is recognised nationally and internationally. Some people see the need for improved understanding of NCEA in the wider community. There are mixed views about whether the Big Opportunities would increase credibility.

Coherence

Some people are concerned that dividing learning up into discrete subjects and NCEA standards, combined with a disproportionate focus on assessment rather than learning, undermines students' experiences of coherence in their learning. Some of the Big Opportunities address this concern.

Equity and inclusion

Many respondents recognised that NCEA is better for students who would not have achieved success under the previous qualification system. However, the way in which NCEA is implemented is creating inequities for some students. Māori respondents said that Māori ways of doing and learning are not widely valued. Some students with disabilities and learning support needs put forward suggestions for improving their experiences. Most people agree the "nil fees" proposed in Big Opportunity 6 would make NCEA more equitable.

Pathways

The flexibility of NCEA means that schools and students can create learning pathways suited to the needs and aspirations of diverse learners. Some still 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.