



Set up to succeed:

How well is NCEA Level 1 working
for our schools and students?





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Executive summary

Leaving school with a qualification leads to better life outcomes, so ensuring Aotearoa New Zealand's qualifications work well is essential for the success of our young people.

In 2024, changes to NCEA Level 1 were rolled out nationwide. ERO reviewed NCEA Level 1 to find out how fair and reliable it is, if it is helping students make good choices, how motivating and manageable it is for students, and the impacts of recent changes. We also explored how valued it is and how implementation has gone so far. This summary sets out what we looked at and how, and the key findings and recommendations.

Leaving school with higher qualifications leads to a range of more positive life outcomes, including higher incomes and better chances of employment. Young people who leave school with NCEA Level 1, compared to those who leave without NCEA Level 1 are more likely to have employment income and less likely to receive a benefit as adults.

What is NCEA?

The National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA) is Aotearoa New Zealand's main secondary school qualification. NCEA has three levels in which you can gain a qualification. NCEA Level 1 is usually offered in Year 11 when students are usually 15-16 years old, NCEA Level 2 is usually offered in Year 12, NCEA Level 3 is usually offered in Year 13.

Students earn credits by completing assessment in different subjects. A student needs 60 credits to achieve NCEA Level 1 and 20-credits in literacy or te reo matatini (reo Māori literacy) and numeracy or pāngarau (reo Māori numeracy).

What are the changes to NCEA Level 1?

Changes to NCEA Level 1 were brought in at the start of 2024. Key changes include:

- providing a range of assessment formats (including submitted reports)
- introducing new 20-credit co-requisite for literacy, numeracy, te reo matatini, and pāngarau
- fewer, larger standards through redeveloping subjects with four achievement standards – two internally assessed, two externally assessed – typically worth five credits each and 20 credits in total
- reducing the number of NCEA Level 1 subjects

- changing the requirements so 60 credits are required to pass NCEA Level 1 (plus the 20-credit co-requisite)
- building aspects of te ao Māori and mātauranga Māori in achievement standards and assessment materials and ensuring te ao Māori pathways are acknowledged and supported equally in NCEA (te reo Māori and te ao haka).

What we did

ERO was commissioned to undertake a review of NCEA Level 1 to look at how implementation is working and at the impacts on students and schools so far. We have used a mixed methods approach to deliver breadth and depth and drew on a range of data and analysis, including:

- a review of the international and New Zealand literature
- administrative data from NZQA, the Ministry of Education, and the IDI
- ERO's own data collection, including:
 - over **6,000** survey responses – across teachers, leaders, Year 11 students, parents and whānau of Year 11 students, and employers of school leavers
 - visits to **21** secondary schools – across regions and characteristics, including size, EQI, rural-urban
 - interviews with over **300** participants.

Key findings

From our evidence, we have identified 14 key findings across eight areas. These findings need to be set in context. Student achievement reflects not only their learning in Year 11 but also their learning in Years 1-10. While each NCEA level can be achieved independently, they can be thought of as a package. This puts focus on how the three levels build coherently and collectively to prepare students for future pathways. Changes to Levels 2 and 3 are planned but not yet implemented. The New Zealand National Curriculum is also being refreshed.

Area 1: Is NCEA Level 1 valued?

We looked at whether and why different groups, including teachers, students, their parents and whānau, and employers value NCEA Level 1.

Finding 1: NCEA Level 1 remains optional. An increasing number of schools, mainly schools in high socio-economic areas, are opting out of offering it.

Finding 2: Students and parents and whānau mainly value NCEA Level 1 as a stepping stone to NCEA Level 2. Employers value other skills and attributes over NCEA Level 1.

Area 2: Is NCEA Level 1 now a fair and reliable measure of knowledge and skills?

We looked at whether the new NCEA Level 1 allows students a fair chance to show what they know and can do, and whether accreditation accurately and consistently reflects student performance.

Finding 3: NCEA Level 1 difficulty still varies between subjects and schools due to the flexibility that remains.

Finding 4: Authenticity and integrity are more at risk due to the changes, and the biggest concern is about submitted reports.

Finding 5: NCEA Level 1 is not yet a reliable measure of knowledge and skills.

Area 3: Is NCEA Level 1 helping students make good choices and preparing them for their future?

High-quality qualifications support students to make good choices and prepare them with the knowledge and skills needed for their future. We looked at whether NCEA Level 1 is well understood and whether it prepares students with the knowledge and skills they need for Levels 2 and 3, and for their future beyond school.

Finding 6: NCEA Level 1 remains difficult to understand, and it can be difficult to make good choices.

Finding 7: NCEA Level 1 wasn't set up to, and so doesn't provide clear vocational pathways.

Finding 8: NCEA Level 1 isn't always preparing students with the knowledge they need for NCEA Level 2.

Area 4: Is NCEA Level 1 motivating and manageable for students?

We looked at the extent to which NCEA Level 1 motivates students to engage in learning throughout the year and to achieve as well as they can, and whether their overall assessment workloads are manageable.

Finding 9: NCEA Level 1 is not motivating all students to achieve as well as they can, and some students disengage early.

Finding 10: NCEA Level 1 is manageable, but not stretching the more academically able students.

Area 5: Is NCEA Level 1 working for all students?

All students should have the opportunity to achieve. We looked at how well NCEA Level 1 is working for a range of students.

Finding 11: Some aspects of NCEA Level 1 aren't working as well for Māori students, Pacific students, and students who qualify for Special Assessment Conditions (SACs).

Area 6: Is NCEA Level 1 manageable for schools?

We looked at whether teachers and leaders are finding NCEA Level 1 manageable, both in terms of preparing for and teaching the new achievement standards and administering assessments.

Finding 12: Schools are finding the new NCEA Level 1 unmanageable in its first year, and it is likely that some issues will remain after the initial change.

Area 7: What are the implications of the co-requisite?

From 2024, NCEA certification at any of the three levels, requires a 20-credit co-requisite. Currently, this can be achieved by participating in the co-requisite assessments, known as Common Assessment Activities (CAAs), or by gaining 10 literacy and 10 numeracy credits from a list of approved standards. We looked at how this change is being delivered and the impacts.

Finding 13: Schools value the standardisation introduced by the co-requisite, but administering the assessments is logistically challenging.

Area 8: What has and hasn't worked from implementation – what lessons have we learnt?

Change is always challenging. We looked at usefulness of resources and supports to help schools implement the changes to NCEA Level 1 and what can make it more manageable.

Finding 14: Implementation has not gone well.

Recommendations

Based on these key findings, ERO has identified four areas of recommendations:

Area 1: Quick changes

In order to improve the fairness and reliability of NCEA Level 1 and help schools to administer external assessments, ERO recommends the following quick changes.

Recommendation 1: Replace the submitted reports.

Recommendation 2: Resource schools for the additional external assessments.

Recommendation 3: Extend the transitional period for the literacy and numeracy requirements.

Recommendation 4: Rethink how external assessment is conducted for practical knowledge and skills.

Recommendation 5: Review achievement standards, where there's concern, so that credits are an equal amount of work and difficulty.

Recommendation 6: Revisit whether achievement standards for some subjects are too literacy-heavy.



Recommendation 7: Provide results more quickly for the co-requisite.

Recommendation 8: Provide schools with exemplars for the full range of assessment formats.

Recommendation 9: Provide resources that schools can use to help parents and whānau understand the requirements for NCEA Level 1.

In order to allow schools to make the right choices for their students in the short-term, NCEA Level 1 should remain optional.

Recommendation 10: Keep NCEA Level 1 optional for now.

Area 2: Reform

To improve the quality and credibility of the qualification longer term, ERO recommends reform.

Recommendation 11: Decide on the purpose of NCEA Level 1 and revise the model to fit the purpose. The three main options are:

- a) drop it entirely
- b) target it as a foundational qualification
- c) make NCEA Level 1 more challenging to better prepare students for NCEA Level 2 and stretch the most academically able.

Whichever model is adopted, to improve the reliability, fairness, and inclusivity, reform should also involve the following.

Recommendation 12: Reduce flexibility in the system.

Recommendation 13: Reduce variability between credits.

Recommendation 14: Retain fewer, larger standards to support deeper learning and reduce flexibility in the system but put more weight on assessments later in the year.

Recommendation 15: Strengthen vocational options and develop better vocational pathways.

Area 3: Implications for NCEA Levels 2 and 3

Some issues at NCEA Level 1 will also apply at NCEA Levels 2 and 3. ERO recommends changes at NCEA Levels 2 and 3.

Recommendation 16: Reduce flexibility in the system.

Recommendation 17: Decide on the model for NCEA across all three levels.

Area 4: Lessons for implementation of future changes

Implementation of NCEA Level 1 has lessons for implementing further changes.

Recommendation 18: Sequence changes and signpost earlier.

Recommendation 19: Provide information, supports, and resources to schools earlier.

Recommendation 20: Involve experts in the changes.

Recommendation 21: Coordinate information and resources better.

Conclusion

Qualifications are important to life outcomes. These findings tell us that NCEA Level 1 still isn't a fair and reliable measure of student knowledge and skills. Due to remaining flexibility in the system, the difficulty and the amount of work differ by school and learning area and students sometimes miss out on important subject knowledge. To improve the quality and credibility of NCEA, it is critically important to act on these findings and recommendations.



About this report

NCEA Level 1 changes came into effect in 2024. The Education Review Office (ERO), commissioned by the Minister of Education, wanted to know how the implementation is going, and lessons we can learn from the early stages of implementation, to inform future changes to NCEA Level 1, NCEA Level 2, and NCEA Level 3.

What we looked at

National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA) Level 1 is the first level of the three-level secondary school qualification. Each level of NCEA certification can be achieved independently of the others and all are optional, including NCEA Level 1.

A review of all three levels of the NCEA qualification was undertaken in 2018 and, from this, changes to all three levels were proposed. NCEA Level 1 is the first to undergo the proposed changes, which were piloted from 2021 to 2023 and were to be fully implemented at schools from the start of 2024.

ERO was commissioned to undertake a review of NCEA Level 1 to look at how implementation is working and the impact on students and schools so far. We set out to answer the following questions.

- 1) Is NCEA Level 1 valued?
- 2) Is NCEA Level 1 now a fair and reliable measure of knowledge and skills?
- 3) Is NCEA Level 1 helping students make good choices and providing them with the knowledge they need for their future?
- 4) Is NCEA Level 1 motivating and manageable for students?
- 5) What are the implications of the co-requisite?
- 6) How well NCEA level 1 is working for all students?
- 7) Is NCEA Level 1 manageable for schools?
- 8) What has and hasn't worked from implementation – lessons learnt?

What we did

The findings of our review are evidenced by a range of data and analysis

We have taken a robust, mixed methods approach to deliver breadth and depth, including:

Over 6,000 survey responses from:	→ 1,435 teachers → 255 leaders → 2,716 Year 11 students → 1,675 parents and whānau of Year 11 students → 105 employers of school leavers → 290 schools in follow up survey
Interviews and focus groups with over 300 participants including:	→ 106 teachers → 67 leaders → 119 Year 11 students → 10 parents and whānau of Year 11 students → eight subject associations → one employer (of school leavers) → three secondary tertiary providers → five school boards → five other expert informants
Site visits to:	→ 21 secondary schools across the country
Data from:	→ a review of the international and Aotearoa New Zealand literature → analysis of administrative data from NZQA, the Ministry of Education, and the Integrated Data Infrastructure (IDI)^a

Our data represents the diversity of schools and students in Aotearoa New Zealand.

We collected data in late Term 2, 2024, when schools offering NCEA Level 1 had completed internal assessments for at least one achievement standard in each subject and had experienced at least one Common Assessment Activities (CAAs) event for reading, writing, and numeracy. Teaching and learning for the externally assessed standards scheduled in Term 3 and 4 had most likely not begun.

^a The IDI is a large research database that holds de-identified microdata about people and households. The data is about life events, like education, income, benefits, migration, justice, and health. It comes from government agencies, Stats NZ surveys, and non-government organisations (NGOs). The data is linked together, or integrated to form the IDI.

For our school visits and surveys, we collected data across a range of English medium state and state-integrated, secondary, and composite schools, across key characteristics, including:

- major urban, large urban, minor urban, and rural
- school size – very large, large, medium, and small
- schools from low to high socio-economic communities.

Student and parent survey responses were collected to be representative of different ethnicities, genders and regions of Aotearoa New Zealand.

We examined teacher responses by the nine New Zealand Curriculum learning areas. We had sufficient data for robust comparisons between them, except for Te Reo Māori, which involves a smaller group of teachers.^b

- Arts
- English
- Health and Physical Education
- Learning Languages
- Mathematics and Statistics
- Science
- Social Sciences
- Te Reo Māori
- Technology

More information about our methodology can be found in Appendix 1. This includes details about the schools that responded to our surveys and participated in our in-depth case study visits. It also includes information about response rates and characteristics for all survey participant groups, including leaders, teachers, students, parents and whānau, and employers.

Report structure

This report is divided into 10 chapters.

Chapter 1 provides the **background to what matters for qualifications and what NCEA is**, including the context and timeline for the NCEA Level 1 changes. This chapter also provides the international evidence on why qualifications matter and what makes them high-quality.

Chapter 2 sets out the extent **schools are now offering NCEA Level 1 and why** following the implementation of the changes to NCEA Level 1.

Chapter 3 looks at **how fair and reliable a measure** of student knowledge and skills NCEA Level 1 is. Identifying the key issues and concerns raised about variability across schools, subjects, and forms of assessment.

^b Te Reo Māori is not a Learning Area in the New Zealand Curriculum. However, the Ministry of Education lists it separately to denote its importance and for consistency with the NCEA Level 1 subject list.

Chapter 4 looks at **how NCEA Level 1 is helping students make good choices** and preparing them for their future.

Chapter 5 describes **how motivating and manageable the NCEA Level 1 changes have been for students** and looks at the impact of the changes on students.

Chapter 6 describes the **literacy and numeracy NCEA co-requisite** in greater detail, the implementation of these common assessment activities administered by schools, and the achievement patterns so far.

Chapter 7 looks at **how well NCEA Level 1 is working across learners**, looking at how it is working for Māori students, Pacific students, and students who qualify for Special Assessment Conditions (SACs), as well as transient students.

Chapter 8 describes **how manageable NCEA Level 1 has been for schools** so far. In particular, it reports on the administrative capacity and staff capability in schools to undertake the full implementation.

Chapter 9 looks at **what has and what hasn't worked with the implementation** of NCEA Level 1 so far, with a focus on resources and support from the Ministry of Education (the Ministry), NZQA, and subject associations.

Chapter 10 sets out our **key findings and recommendations** for the ongoing implementation of NCEA Level 1 and informs the updates to NCEA Level 2 and NCEA Level 3.





Chapter 1: Background – what matters for qualifications and what is NCEA?

Qualifications usually lead to a range of positive life outcomes, but it is important that they are of high quality. A high-quality qualification should be fair and reliable, motivating and manageable, and meet the needs of a diverse range of students. It should also support future pathways.

In this chapter we describe why qualifications are important, why NCEA is changing, what makes a strong qualification, and how different jurisdictions approach qualifications at age 16.

What we looked at

It is important that our main secondary school qualification in Aotearoa New Zealand is working the way that it should. Our main secondary school qualification, introduced in 2002, is the National Certificate of Educational Achievement, or NCEA. We looked at the important elements of qualifications, the background of NCEA, and the recent changes that are being implemented.

This chapter sets out findings on:

- 1) why qualifications matter
- 2) what makes a high-quality qualification
- 3) NCEA and recent changes
- 4) what makes NCEA unique to Aotearoa New Zealand.

1) Why qualifications matter

Leaving school with higher qualifications leads to a range of more positive life outcomes. This includes higher incomes and better chances of employment.¹

Young people who leave school with NCEA Level 1 and do not go on to achieve any further qualifications, compared to those who leave without NCEA Level 1 and never achieve a qualification, are:

- 1.2 times more likely to have employment income at age 29-34 (72 percent compared to 58 percent)
- 0.9 times as likely (or one-tenth less likely) to receive a main benefit since leaving school (72 percent compared to 83 percent)

- 0.8 times as likely (or one-fifth less likely) to have committed an offence (48 percent compared to 58 percent)
- 0.4 times as likely (or three-fifths less likely) to have served a custodial sentence (6 percent compared to what 14 percent).^c

2) What makes a high-quality qualification?

A high-quality qualification should be valued both by teachers and students, and by those who rely on the qualification to make decisions (e.g., employers and further education providers). They should also hold international credibility to support potential future pathways. Evidence shows qualifications are valued when they do the following, set out below.

Are fair and reliable

- Are a fair and reliable measure of a student's knowledge and skills of the curriculum. Assessment should allow students a fair chance to show what they know and can do, and qualifications should accurately and consistently reflect student performance.

Support future pathways

- Support students to make good choices and prepare them with the knowledge and skills needed for their future. This is more likely when qualifications are coherent and cumulative – which means what is being assessed promotes learning of key knowledge and skills for each subject – which should build sequentially so students don't experience gaps and jumps between levels.

Motivate students and provide choice

- Are motivating and manageable for students – students are motivated to engage in learning and achieve as well as they can, and to make the right choices for them in terms of their preferred pathways and career. Also, the workload for learning and assessments should be realistic and not unreasonably stressful.

Meet the needs of diverse students

- Meet the needs of a diverse range of students – the learning and assessments should be both accessible to all students and challenging enough to stretch the most able students.

Manageable for schools

- Are deliverable for schools – teachers and leaders should find delivering the qualification manageable, both in terms of preparing students for and administering assessments.

This review looked at whether the changes to NCEA Level 1 were implemented in a way that strengthened the qualification in line with the above criteria.

^c These findings are based on analysis of the Integrated Data Infrastructure (IDI) by the Social Investment Agency (SIA) for the purpose of this review. The IDI is a large research database that holds de-identified microdata about people and households.

What is the purpose of a school qualification at age 16?

Secondary education qualifications should support students to further develop their knowledge and skills for further learning and the labour market. Qualifications can act as a key tool to secure good quality and meaningful teaching and learning for all students.²

A common feature among many OECD countries with high graduation rates from school is that they have an upper secondary qualification which serves as a common minimum requirement for further study or employment.³

Depending on the country and system, national qualifications at age 16 can serve a combination of the following purposes:

- to support active learning – recognising the role assessment can play in the learning process
- to provide a record of learning to support students onto their next pathway (this is particularly important for students who choose to leave school at 16)
- to assess if students have a broad foundational knowledge, preparing students for further qualifications
- to provide a benchmark in key areas such as literacy/te reo matatini and numeracy/pāngarau
- for school accountability purposes, to measure student outcomes and school performance
- to provide students and parents and whānau with insights into learning that supports informed decisions about future pathways.

What do qualifications look like across OECD countries?

Different jurisdictions take a varied approach to national qualifications. Table 1 summarises how a selection of countries approach qualifications at age 16.

Table 1: *International comparison of qualifications at age 16*

	Aotearoa New Zealand ⁴	England (UK) ⁵	Ireland ⁶	Singapore ⁷	British Columbia ⁸	Australia (NSW) ⁹
Qualification at age 15/16	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗
Three years of qualifications	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
Compulsory school age	16	18 ^d	16	15	16	17

^d While students can leave school at age 16 in England, it is compulsory to stay in some form of education or training until the age of 18.

	Aotearoa New Zealand ⁴	England (UK) ⁵	Ireland ⁶	Singapore ⁷	British Columbia ⁸	Australia (NSW) ⁹
Characteristics of qualification						
Standards-based grading	✓	✗	✗	✗	✓	✓
Higher proportion of non-exam assessment	✓	✗	✓	✗	✓	✓
Externally marked assessments for majority of subjects	✗	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓
Flexible course design	✓	✗	✗	✗	✓	✓
Specific literacy/ numeracy requirement	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Note: Where jurisdictions do not have qualifications at 16, the table includes characteristics of the broader qualification system.

3) NCEA and recent changes

What is NCEA?

The National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA) is Aotearoa New Zealand's main secondary school qualification. The Ministry of Education is responsible for the design of NCEA. The New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA) administers NCEA.

NCEA Levels

NCEA has three levels in which you can gain a qualification certificate in:

- NCEA Level 1 – usually in Year 11
- NCEA Level 2 – usually in Year 12
- NCEA Level 3 – usually in Year 13

Courses, subjects, and standards for NCEA Level 1

Students will usually take five or six courses across the school year, which consist of several 'achievement standards' that are graded (Achieved, Merit, Excellence) and/or 'unit standards' that are typically assessed as either Achieved or Not Achieved. There are two types of assessments.

- Internal Assessments – assessments that takes place throughout the year, assessed by teachers in school.
- External Assessments – national examinations or the submission of a portfolio of work completed at school or with the school and a tertiary organisation, assessed by NZQA.

For NCEA Level 1, achievement standards are typically worth five credits. Unit standards are typically smaller and are worth varying credit values.

Subjects each have four achievement standards, including two that are internally assessed and two that are externally assessed. Schools often design courses around subjects, but they don't have to. Schools can mix achievement and unit standards from across a range of subjects.

Credits and grading

To achieve an NCEA qualification, a student needs 60 credits at the relevant level or above. Additionally, students require a 20-credit literacy (or te reo matatini) and numeracy (or pāngarau) co-requisite, which can be awarded any level of NCEA (this is separate to credits earned in the subjects of Maths and English and the co-requisite is Achieved/Not Achieved).

The co-requisite is a one-off requirement. Up until the end of 2027, while NCEA is transitioning to its new form, students will also be able to achieve the NCEA co-requisite through an approved list of literacy and numeracy-rich achievement standards.

Each NCEA level certificate can be endorsed with Merit or Excellence. Certificate endorsements require 50 credits from the relevant grade or higher from any standards completed at the right level within one school year. For example, a student may have 75 total credits, 45 at Merit level, 20 at Excellence level, and 10 at Achieved level, and because they have 65 credits at the Merit level or higher, they will obtain NCEA Level 1 endorsed with Merit.

A student may also receive endorsement in a subject by obtaining at least 14 credits from standards in that subject at the relevant level or higher.

Why was NCEA introduced?

NCEA was introduced between 2002 and 2004 (Level 1 – Level 3), replacing the New Zealand School Certificate. NCEA was introduced to:

- provide a fuller picture of a student's knowledge and skills through continuous assessment throughout the year – any student who demonstrates the required knowledge and skills of a standard achieves the NCEA credit

- recognise vocational knowledge and skills previously not recognised
- allow more students to gain qualifications – since NCEA was introduced, more students are leaving school with qualifications.

NCEA was designed to be flexible and inclusive so that it recognises and caters to the diverse needs of students and their different learning pathways.

Why is NCEA changing?

A review of NCEA was launched in 2018.¹⁰ The aim of this review was to ensure that NCEA is a robust qualification that is valued by students, their parents and whānau, employers, tertiary education organisations, iwi, and communities. More about this review can found at Appendix 2.

What changes have been implemented to NCEA Level 1?

The NCEA Change Programme made seven changes to NCEA Level 1, set out in the table below.

Table 2: *Changes to NCEA Level 1*

Aim	Previous	Changes made
1) Make NCEA more accessible By reducing financial barriers and barriers for learners with disabilities and learning support needs.	Students with unpaid NCEA fees (\$76.70 per year) did not receive formal recognition of their achievement. The process of applying for Special Assessment Conditions (SACs) could be difficult.	Zero fees introduced. Providing a range of assessments formats. Simplifying the application and evaluation process for Special assessment conditions.
2) Giving equal status for mātauranga Māori in NCEA By developing new ways to recognise mātauranga Māori, building teacher capability, and improving resourcing and support for Māori learners and te ao Māori pathways.	Knowledge of te ao Māori and mātauranga Māori did not have equal status with other bodies of knowledge.	Building aspects of te ao Māori and mātauranga Māori in achievement standards and assessment materials, where appropriate. Make sure that te ao Māori pathways are acknowledged and supported equally in NCEA (te reo Māori and te ao haka).

Aim	Previous	Changes made
3) Strengthen literacy and numeracy requirements and assessments By ensuring students have functional literacy and numeracy skills that will prepare them to transition into tertiary education or the workplace.	Students need to achieve 20 credits worth of ‘literacy- and-numeracy-rich’ standards.	New 20-credit co-requisite has been introduced for literacy, numeracy, te reo matatini, and pāngarau. Students have until their final year in secondary school to achieve the co-requisite. The assessments for co-requisite are offered twice a year, and students can have multiple attempts over several years.
4) Fewer, larger standards By developing new achievement standards and resources, replacing existing standards and ensuring the qualification achieved reflects the most significant learning in a learning area or subject.	Large numbers of standards were available for each NCEA subject. Standards had a range of credit values. In 2023, schools could offer 279 standards made up of 191 internals and 88 externals at Level 1. Schools choose any combination of standards to create a course.	Subjects have been re-developed with four achievement standards – two internally assessed, two externally assessed – typically worth five credits each and 20 credits in total. In 2024, the Level 1 offering was reduced to 136 standards with 68 internals and 68 externals. Schools can still choose different combinations of standards to create a course. In addition, the number of NCEA subjects reduced – in 2023, 43 subjects were offered a Level 1, this reduced to 34 subjects in 2024.
5) Simplify NCEA’s structure By reducing confusion about ‘carry over’ credits and reducing assessment workload for teachers and students.	Up to 20 credits from the previous NCEA level could be ‘carried over’ to contribute to the 80 credits required. There was a focus on accumulating credits and pressure to allow multiple resubmission opportunities.	Sixty credits are required to pass NCEA Level 1 (plus the 20-credit co-requisite). Credits can no longer be carried over to the next level. Resubmissions are only allowed where they take students from a ‘Not Achieved’ grade to an ‘Achieved’ grade.

Aim	Previous	Changes made
6) Clearer pathways to further education or work By ensuring that pathways to further education or work are clearer so students can make good decisions about their future.	Students did not always get access to clear, quality pathways, or the information to make good decisions about their future.	New 'graduate profile' for NCEA Level 1 to describe what a student awarded NCEA will know and can do.
7) Keep NCEA Level 1 optional Ensure Level 1 provides students with the broad, foundational knowledge needed to support specialisation at Levels 2 and 3.	NCEA Level 1 is optional.	No change made – NCEA Level 1 remains optional.

What is happening at NCEA Levels 2 and 3?

Further changes to NCEA, particularly for Levels 2 and 3, have been delayed by two years to ensure a curriculum review and refresh for Years 11-13 is completed first.¹¹ NCEA Level 2 changes will be implemented by 2028, not in 2026 as previously planned. NCEA Level 3 will be fully implemented by 2029, not in 2027.

4) What makes NCEA unique to Aotearoa New Zealand?

Table 1 shows how NCEA differs from the qualifications used in some of the other jurisdictions that we looked at. Key features of NCEA that set it apart are set out below.

- NCEA involves three years of distinct qualifications. This was unique from the countries we looked at which typically had one or two years of formal assessment throughout senior secondary.
- Schools and students can design their own courses, mixing achievement standards and unit standards from different subjects. This is unique from many other international qualifications where courses have a more standardised structure, and vocational and academic pathways are split or unavailable at this stage (such as GCSEs in the UK).
- NCEA achievement standards are assessed using internal and external modes of assessment and a wider variety of assessment methods are used, including research inquiry, portfolio, and examination.

- NCEA assessment formats place a higher degree of trust in schools and teachers as they involve strong school autonomy in implementing evaluation and assessment. For many assessments, the responsibility for overall judgements against internally assessed standards largely sits with teachers.
- Aotearoa New Zealand's approach to qualifications has been designed to reflect the Crown's obligations under Te Tiriti o Waitangi. NCEA Level 1 has been designed to give effect to mana ōrite mō te mātauranga Māori (mana ōrite) with achievement standards that allow students to use Māori knowledge as evidence where appropriate. Some other jurisdictions, such as British Columbia, also incorporate an indigenous-focused graduation requirement.

Conclusion

Qualifications are important for future life outcomes. Students who leave school with higher qualifications are more likely to be employed, earn more, spend less time receiving benefits, and are less likely to commit an offence.

NCEA is New Zealand's qualification in secondary schools. It is unique as it involves three years, schools can design their own courses and uses a wide range of assessment formats.

The next chapter sets out what schools are currently doing in Year 11, and how well NCEA Level 1 is delivering for students.



Chapter 2: Are schools now offering NCEA Level 1 and why?

NCEA Level 1 is voluntary and there is a lot of flexibility in how it is offered. An increasing number of schools aren't offering the full NCEA Level 1 qualification. Schools in high socio-economic communities are least likely to offer it. Schools in low to moderate socio-economic communities value it as an 'exit qualification'. Students and parents and whānau mainly value NCEA Level 1 as a stepping stone to NCEA Level 2. Employers often value other skills and attributes over NCEA Level 1 when recruiting school leavers.

In this chapter, we set out what schools are offering in Year 11, why some schools opt out of NCEA Level 1, and how many Year 11 students are attempting the co-requisite. We also look at how valued NCEA Level 1 is by students, parents and whānau, and employers.

What we looked at

We looked at what is happening at NCEA Level 1 following the changes, including the extent to which schools are offering the full qualification and what informs their decision. We examined what students are covering in their NCEA Level 1 courses and how they are being assessed. We also looked at the extent to which students are doing the co-requisite in Year 11.

We looked at how much and why schools, students, and parents and whānau value NCEA Level 1. Although the impacts of the changes haven't flowed through to the workplace yet, we also asked whether employers value NCEA Level 1 based on their experience of employees who have the qualification compared to those who don't.

This chapter sets out findings on:

- 1) the extent to which schools are offering NCEA Level 1 and why
- 2) the types of standards and assessments students are doing
- 3) the extent to which Year 11 students are doing the co-requisite
- 4) if NCEA Level 1 is valued by parents and whānau
- 5) if NCEA Level 1 is valued by students
- 6) if NCEA Level 1 is valued by employers.

What we found: an overview

NCEA Level 1 remains optional. An increasing number of schools, mainly schools in high socio-economic areas, are opting out of offering it.

- NCEA Level 1 remains voluntary. Most schools offer it, but there is a group of schools that don't. In 2024, one in eight schools (13 percent) aren't offering it (87 percent are). For 2025, more schools (17 percent) plan not to offer it, and 10 percent are still deciding (73 percent of schools do plan to offer it).
- Schools in high socio-economic communities with higher NCEA achievement are least likely to offer NCEA Level 1. Only three in five schools (60 percent) offered it in 2024. They are opting out to better prepare students for Years 12 and 13 and to reduce assessment burn-out. Schools in low to medium socio-economic communities are more likely to offer NCEA Level 1. They value it as an 'exit qualification' for students who leave at the end of Year 11. In 2023, 10 percent of students left at the end of Year 11, and one in five (21 percent) of these students had achieved NCEA Level 1.

Flexibility remains for schools to design their NCEA Level 1 courses, leading to variation in course content and assessment.

- There is variation in how schools are designing their courses – only one in three schools (32 percent) are typically offering all four subject achievement standards. Just over a third (68 percent) are typically offering three. Eighty-three percent of leaders report their school offers unit standards in at least one or more of their courses. Schools offering unit standards tend to serve lower socio-economic communities.
- Students are entered into more external assessments than before, but we don't know yet how entries will translate in completions. Historically, the non-completion rate for external assessments is 20 percent, compared to only 3 percent for internal assessments.

The co-requisite is mainly being offered to Year 10 students.

- Students at any year level can sit the co-requisite assessments, but most often students sit them in Year 10. This provides maximum opportunities for students to achieve the co-requisite but also risks disengaging students who repeatedly fail.

Students and parents and whānau mainly value NCEA Level 1 as a stepping stone to NCEA Level 2. Employers value other skills and attributes over NCEA Level 1.

- Students on an academic pathway, and their parents and whānau, value NCEA Level 1 as preparation for NCEA Level 2 because it provides study skills and exam experience, when many students haven't done exams before.
- Parents and whānau assume that employers value Level 1 as a recognised national qualification, but just over two in five employers (43 percent) don't consider it when making recruitment decisions.
- Based on their experience of the previous NCEA Level 1 qualification, just over seven in 10 employers (71 percent) don't think it is a reliable measure of student knowledge and skills, and nine in 10 (90 percent) don't think it's a reliable measure of attitude to hard work.
- In the following sections we look at each of these findings in more detail.

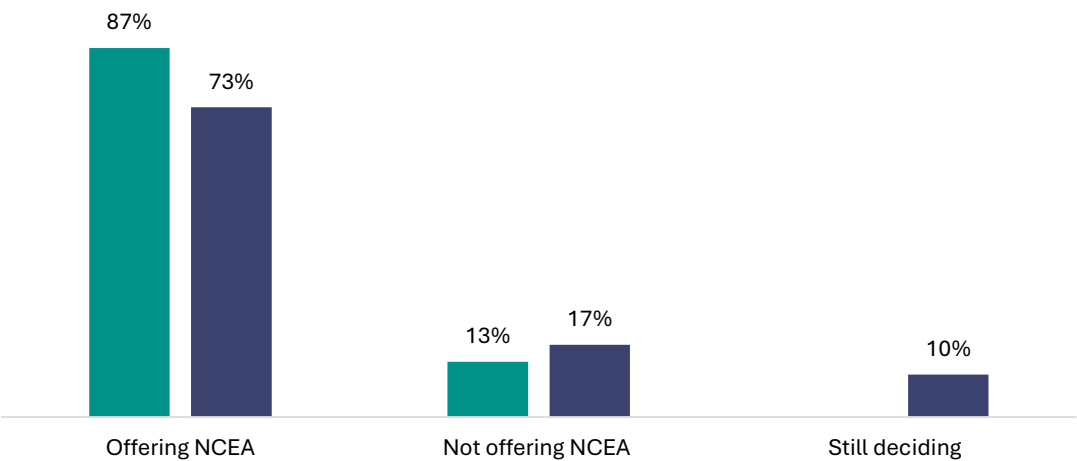
1) To what extent are schools offering NCEA Level 1 and why?

NCEA Level 1 is voluntary. Most schools offer it, but an increasing number don't.

Each level of NCEA certification can be achieved independently of the others. Schools can opt out of offering any level, but they are less likely to opt out of Level 2 due its role in helping students access vocational pathways^e; and less likely to opt out of Level 3 because it is needed for 'University Entrance'.^f

Most schools are offering NCEA Level 1 but some are opting out of offering it. In 2024, almost one in eight of the schools we surveyed (13 percent) reported that they aren't offering the full NCEA Level 1 qualification (87 percent of schools are). In 2025 we expect this to rise to two in 10 schools or more, with just under 17 percent reporting they are planning not to offer it, and another one in 10 schools (10 percent) still considering their options.

Figure 1: *Proportion of leaders who report their schools are offering NCEA Level 1 in 2024 and 2025.*

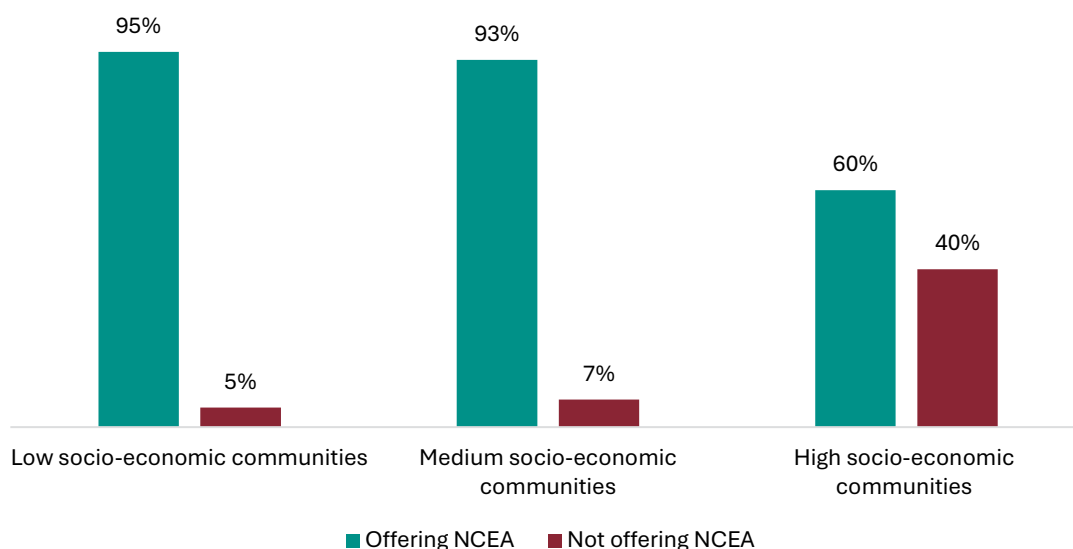


Schools in low to medium socio-economic communities are more likely to offer NCEA Level 1 and schools in high socio-economic communities less likely.

Most schools in low and medium socio-economic communities offered NCEA Level 1 this year (2024) (95 percent and 93 percent, respectively). Only three in five schools in high socio-economic communities (60 percent) offered it this year, and 40 percent opted not to.

^e There is a Vocational Pathways Award that can be achieved alongside NCEA Level 2, and NCEA Level 2 helps young people gain entry level jobs and apprenticeships.
^f University Entrance (UE) is the minimum requirement to go from school to a New Zealand university. Being awarded University Entrance also opens doors to tertiary study in other countries. Students need NCEA Level 3, including 14 credits at Level 3 in each of three approved subjects, and the co-requisite.

Figure 2: *Proportion of schools offering NCEA Level 1 in 2024, by socio-economic communities.*

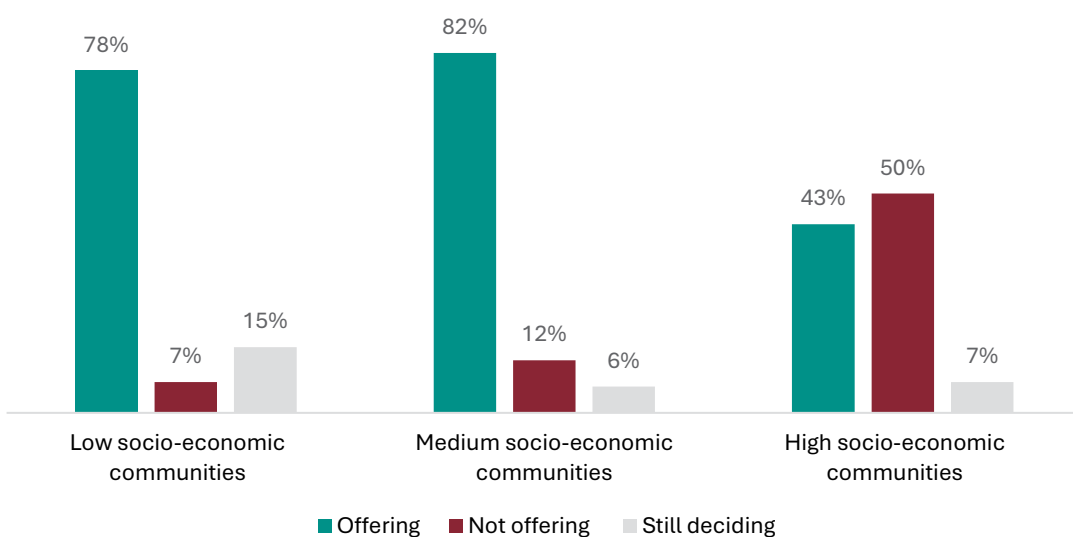


The pattern looks to be repeated in the coming year. Based on ERO's survey at the end of Term 3 in 2024, just under four in five schools (78 percent) in low socio-economic communities plan to offer NCEA Level 1 in 2025, and 7 percent don't plan to offer it. About one in six schools (15 percent) are still deciding.

Similarly, just over four in five schools (82 percent) in moderate socio-economic communities plan to offer Level 1 in 2025 and just over one in 10 (12 percent) don't plan to offer it. Six percent of schools are still deciding.

By comparison, only two in five schools (43 percent) in high socio-economic communities plan to offer NCEA Level 1 in 2025, half (50 percent) don't plan to offer it, and 7 percent are still deciding.

Figure 3: *Proportion of leaders offering NCEA Level 1 qualification in 2025, by socio-economic community.*



Schools in low to moderate socio-economic communities mainly value NCEA Level 1 as an ‘exit qualification’ for students who will leave at the end of Year 11.

We heard from schools in low to moderate socio-economic communities, where students are more likely to choose employment after Year 11 or 12, that they were offering NCEA Level 1 because it could be the only qualification that some of their students will get.

“Some of our students leave school and NCEA Level 1 is their only qualification. So, if we take NCEA Level 1 away, that could be problematic for some of them.”

TEACHER

These schools also tend to be offering other courses aligning with the main industries of the areas to prepare their students for work. For example, a school in an area where farming is the main sector has been offering agriculture as one of their courses to cater for students wanting to work immediately after leaving school.

In 2023, 9 percent of all school leavers achieved NCEA Level 1 as their highest qualification. Another 16 percent of school leavers left with no qualification. Further, 10 percent of Year 11 students left school at the end of the year. Just over one in five (21 percent) of these Year 11 school leavers achieved NCEA Level 1 as their highest qualification, and most (75 percent) left with no qualifications.

We heard that some schools value NCEA Level 1 for its preparation for NCEA Level 2. NCEA Level 1 introduces students to digital exams, and give students experience with formal assessments and workload management.

“[NCEA Level 1] provides a training ground for our students in Year 11, particularly in learning the language of NCEA, being comfortable in an examination environment, understanding internal and external assessments.”

LEADER

Schools are opting out of NCEA Level 1 to better prepare students for Level 2 and Level 3, reduce over-assessment, and offer other assessments.

We heard that many schools who are opting out of offering NCEA Level 1, are doing so because they have concerns about over-assessment. Schools believe three years of high-stakes national assessments is stressful for students and impacts their achievement in Level 2 and Level 3. By the time students reach Year 13 they can feel burnt out and may be less motivated or able to perform as well as they are able.

“Eighty percent of our students stay until the end of Year 13. By the time they got to the end of their journey, they are well over-assessed.”

LEADER

Some schools that are opting out of NCEA Level 1 have different strategies for their Year 11 students. We heard that some schools are offering their own Year 11 diploma or certificate, which recognises a broader range of achievements. For example, in addition to academic excellence, Year 11 accreditation will reward things like attendance, leadership, and service. Alternatively, some schools only offer the co-requisite CAAs and use Year 11 as the first of a two-year preparation for NCEA Level 2.

“We want to really focus on Year 9 to 11 as more of a cohesive, foundational learning time to set them up for the high stakes qualifications at NCEA Levels 2 and 3.”

LEADER

Schools in major urban, high socio-economic communities are also less likely to offer NCEA Level 1 is because their community wants a different qualification, such as the International Baccalaureate or Cambridge Assessment International Examinations.

“[Our students] look at the world as their next place to get education. They’re looking at the States, they’re looking at Europe. We’ve got to really open our eyes to all of that as well and offer other qualifications.”

LEADER

We heard some parents value these international qualifications more highly than NCEA for being more rigorous. Both the International Baccalaureate and the Cambridge Assessment are more structured than NCEA. Cambridge is the most highly structured, offering fewer elective subjects, and all examinations are externally assessed. On this basis, some parents think these international qualifications will prepare their children better for tertiary pathways and, in particular, will help their children access universities overseas, where these qualifications are well-recognised.

“More and more parents around me are moving their children to a school that offer International Baccalaureate. This is perceived as a better qualification. The issue is that in Wellington only private schools provide this option.”

PARENT AND WHĀNAU

Some schools are ‘waiting to see’ before deciding on NCEA Level 1.

Another key reason for schools not offering NCEA Level 1 this year (and possibly next) is because they are using a ‘wait and see’ approach to see how the Level 1 changes are going in other schools, and while the uncertainty with curriculum changes and NCEA Levels 2 and 3 are resolved. While schools are largely supportive of the delay in rolling out NCEA Levels 2 and 3 changes, this extends the period of uncertainty.

“We wanted a Level 1 that backed directly into the new Level 2, but the timeline given to us about the changes between Level 1 and Level 2 is too fuzzy. [...] Pausing and waiting would have been the best way.”

LEADER

2) What types of standards and assessments are students doing?

Most schools aren’t offering all four subject achievement standards.

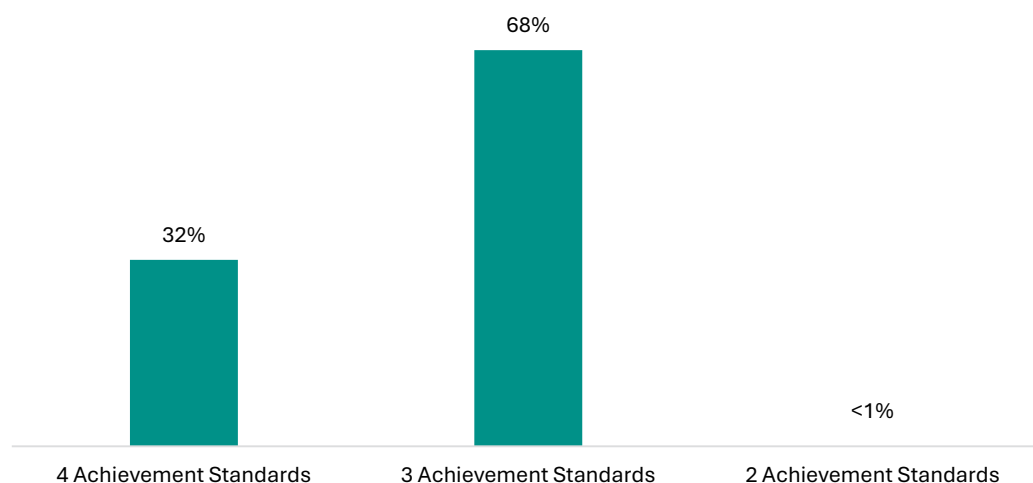
Subjects have been designed with four achievement standards, including two that are internally assessed and two that are externally assessed (see more detail on this in Appendix 3). In implementing this design, it was intended that students would experience an equal amount of internal and external assessment, but this depends on how schools are designing courses.

Schools can choose if they want to offer all four standards and which standards to offer. This has resulted in significant variation among schools.

For schools offering the NCEA Level 1 qualification, just under a third (32 percent) are offering four achievements standards in their NCEA Level 1 courses. Just over two-thirds (68 percent) are offering three achievement standards in their courses.

Chapter 3 sets out why schools aren’t offering all four achievement standards.

Figure 4: *Proportion of schools offering 2, 3, or 4 achievement standards.*



Students are still doing more internal assessment but are entered into more external assessment than before.

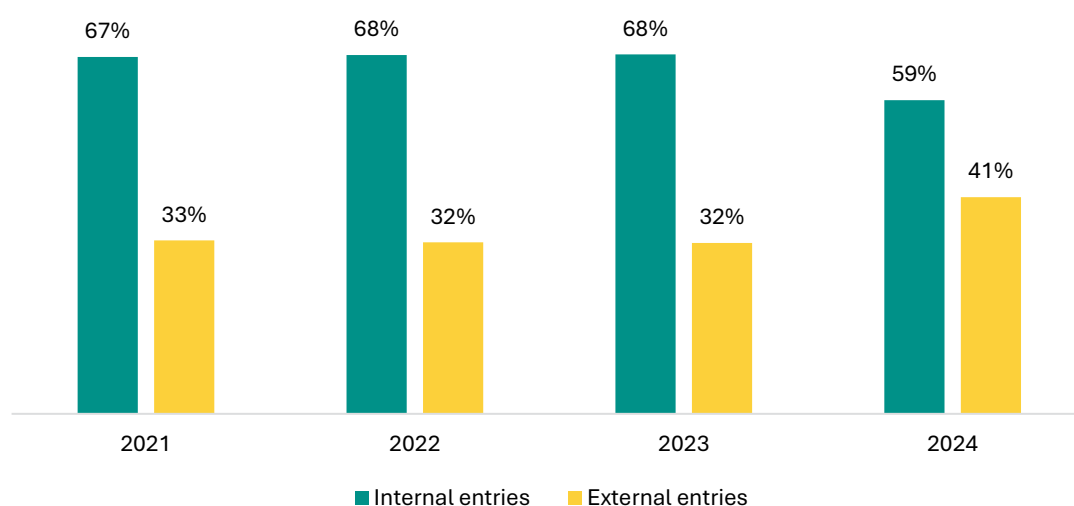
As part of the changes, NCEA Level 1 was designed to have subjects assessed with half internal and half external assessment. However, this has not been achieved as most often the external standards are being dropped when a course is not using all four standards.

Whilst the split between internal and external assessment is not yet fifty-fifty, students are entered into more external assessment in 2024 than were in the previous three years. In 2021, 67 percent of Year 11 entries were internal standards and 33 percent were external standards. In 2024, 59 percent of Year 11 entries were internals and 41 percent were externals.^g

However, it is important to note that students don't always complete every assessment they are entered for, so it won't be clear until the end of the year how many external assessments were completed. The non-completion rate for external credits increased from 15 percent in 2019 to 23 percent in 2021 and 2022, and was 22 percent in 2023.^h

Entries may not translate into completions for lots of reasons, including student sickness or student choice. For example, students may decide they already have enough credits and so don't turn up for exams on the day, or decide only to complete one of the assessments scheduled.

Figure 5: *Proportion of Year 11 student entries into internal and external assessments, by time*



^g Data source: NZQA.

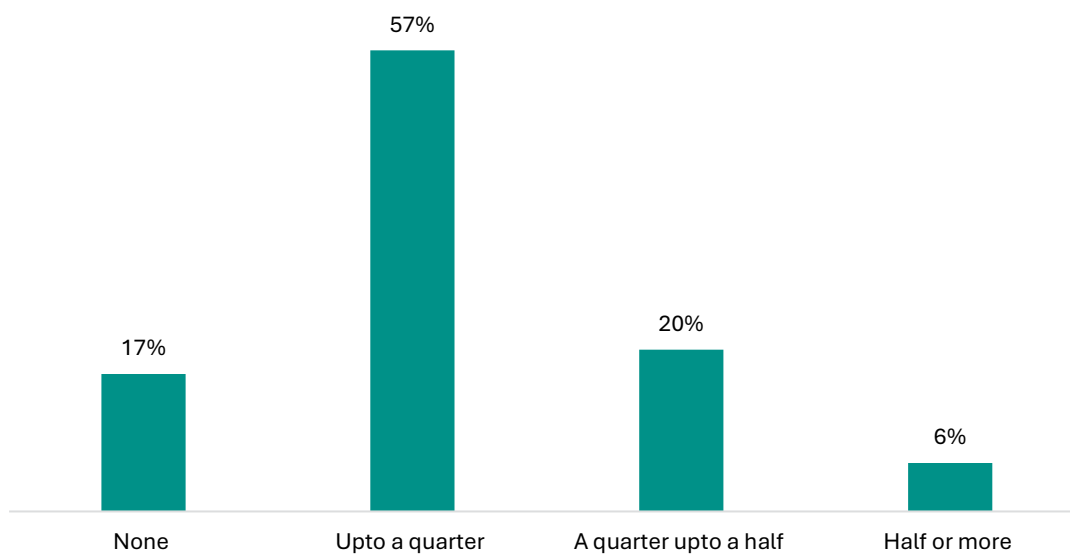
^h Data source: NZQA.

Schools are still using unit standards.

NCEA uses unit standards and achievement standards. With achievement standards students can obtain Achieved, Achieved with Merit, Achieved with Excellence, or Not Achieved. With unit standards, students can usually obtain only Achieved or Not Achieved. Unit standards are used for assessing practical knowledge a student either knows or doesn't know, skills they can or can't do.

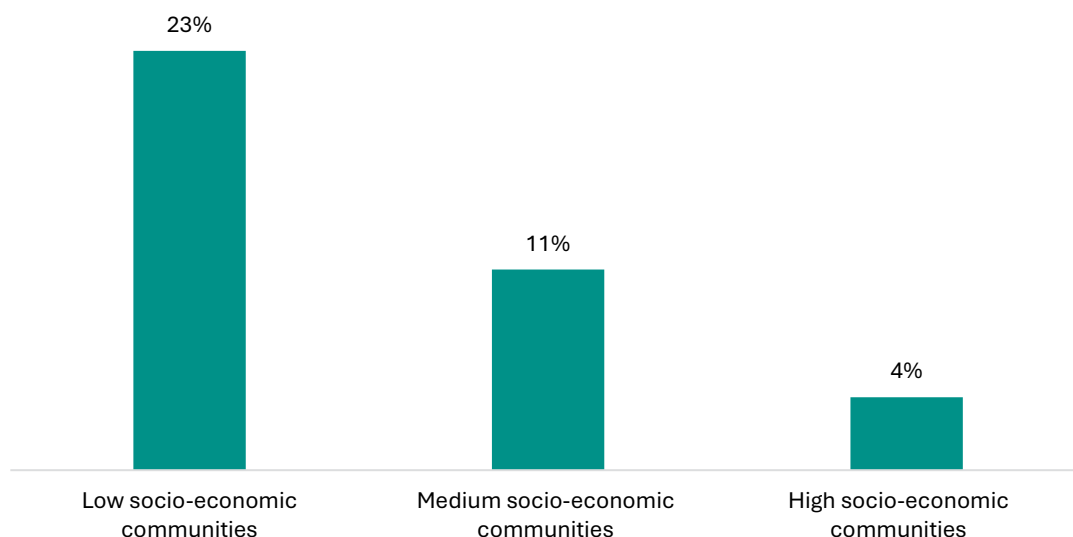
Schools continue to have the flexibility to include unit standards in any of their NCEA Level 1 courses. Seventeen percent of schools do not use unit standards at all, but 83 percent of schools do use them to some extent.

Figure 6: *Proportions of leaders reporting the percentage of NCEA Level 1 courses including unit standards.*



Schools offering unit standards tend to be in lower socio-economic communities. Twenty-three percent of schools in lower socio-economic communities and 11 percent of those in mid socio-economic communities have unit standards in a quarter or more of their courses, while only 4 percent of those high socio-economic communities have unit standards in a quarter or more of their courses.

Figure 7: *Proportion of schools offering unit standards in a quarter or more of their NCEA Level 1 courses, by socio-economic communities.*



3) To what extent are Year 11 students doing the co-requisite?

From 2024, NCEA Levels 1 requires 60 credits plus the 20-credit co-requisite for literacy or te reo matatini (reo Māori literacy), and maths or pāngarau (reo Māori numeracy). This includes 10 credits for literacy (five credits each for reading and writing) and 10 credits for numeracy.

During the transition period, between 2024 and 2027, the co-requisite can be achieved by participating in the co-requisite standards, also known as common assessment activities (CAAs) or by gaining 10 literacy and 10 numeracy credits from a list of approved standards. From 2027, the co-requisite can only be achieved by participating in the CAAs.

About half of students sitting the co-requisite CAA are in Year 10.

Students at any level can sit the co-requisite assessments at any time up to twice per year, but most often it is Year 10s and 11s who are offered these. The co-requisite assessments are set at curriculum Level 4-5, which is below NCEA Level 1, so it is appropriate for students to engage prior to Level 1 if they are ready.

In 2024, across both co-requisite assessment events, 90 percent of all schools participated and 98 percent of state and state-integrated English Medium schools participated. Ninety-one percent of Year 11 students participated in at least one co-requisite assessment and 79 percent participated in all three (reading, writing, and numeracy).ⁱ

Just over half (53 percent) of all students participating in at least one assessment were in Year 10 and just over a third (35 percent) were in Year 11.

ⁱ Data and analysis are provided by NZQA. The results exclude students who engage in Te Reo Matatini me te Pāngarau co-requisite assessments. These would add complexity to the analysis and the numbers participating in 2024 were small.

Schools told us there are two main reasons schools have students sit the co-requisite assessments in Year 10. One is to provide maximum opportunities for students to achieve them – if they aren't successful in Year 10, they can resit in Year 11.

Another reason is, even for students who may not achieve them in Year 10, they get to experience the digital platform, which is not straightforward and especially challenging for students with lower digital literacy.

a) Literacy co-requisite assessment

More Year 10s than Year 11s sat the literacy assessments in the first co-requisite event of this year.

Almost two in five (37 percent) of the students who sat the *reading* co-requisite assessments in May/June 2024 were in Year 11 and just over two in five (41 percent) of the students who sat the *writing* co-requisite were in Year 11.

Figure 8: *Students who sat the literacy co-requisite by Year group as a proportion of all students who sat them in May/June 2024.*

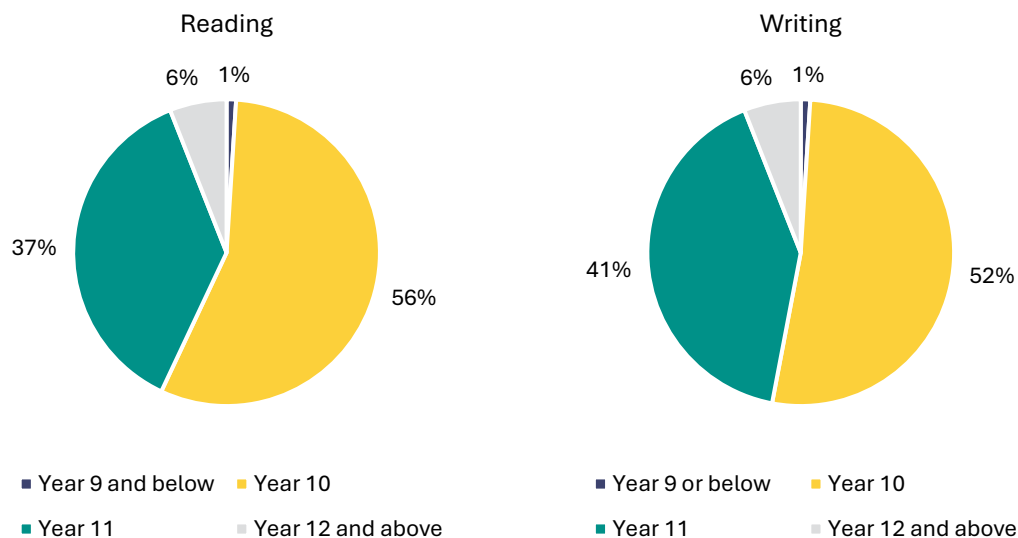
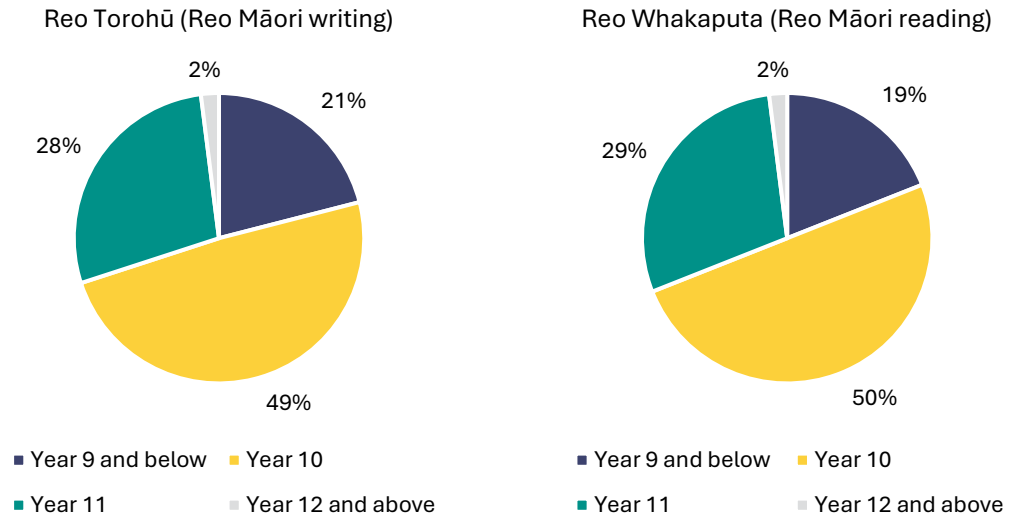


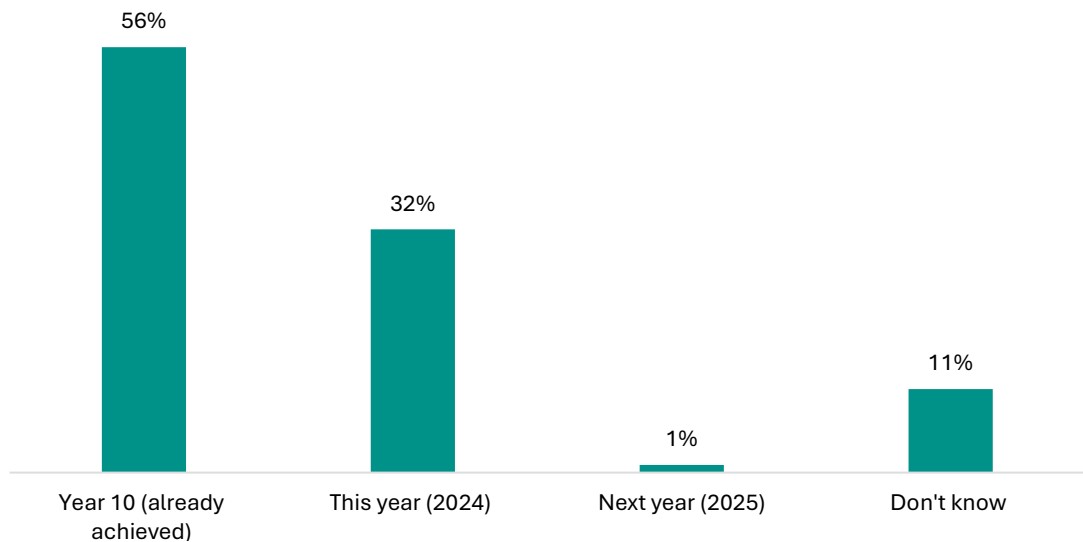
Figure 9: *Students who sat the te reo matatini co-requisite by Year group as a proportion of all students who sat them in May/June 2024.*



We also asked Year 11 students if they had already achieved their literacy co-requisite in Year 10, and if they hadn't, when they were planning to achieve them. Just under three in five (56 percent) reported they achieved their literacy co-requisite in Year 10 and just under a third (32 percent) are planning to achieve it this year. A further 1 percent of Year 11 students plan to achieve it next year, and 11 percent don't know when they will achieve it.

The students who are planning to achieve the literacy co-requisite this year, next year, or don't know when they will achieve them, are more likely to be finding NCEA Level 1 difficult.

Figure 10: *Proportion of students responding to ERO's survey on when they plan to achieve their literacy or te reo matatini co-requisite.*

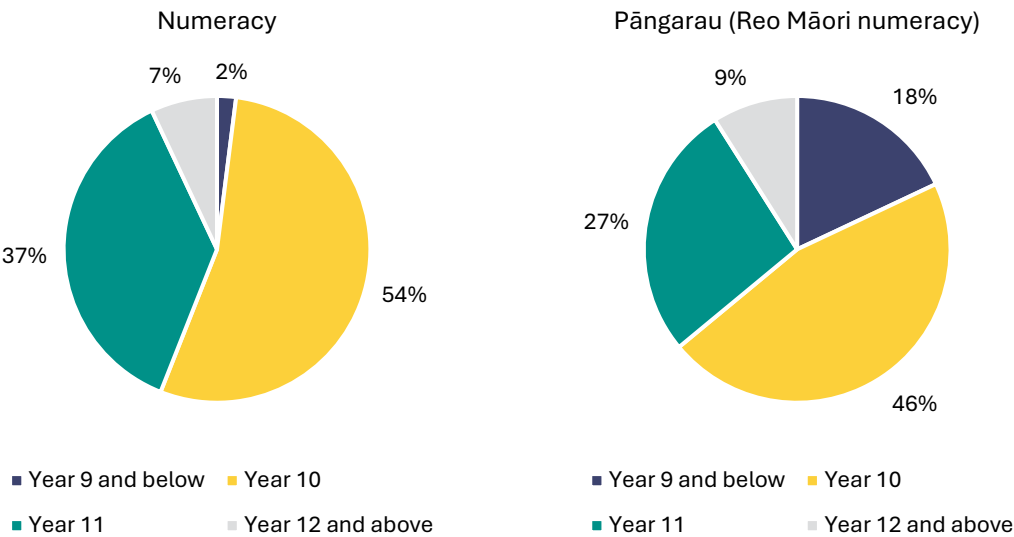


b) Numeracy co-requisite assessment

More Year 10s than Year 11s sat the numeracy assessment in the first co-requisite event of this year.

Almost two in five (37 percent) of the students who sat the numeracy co-requisite assessment in May/June 2024 were in Year 11 and just over a quarter (27 percent) of the students who sat pāngarau were in Year 11.

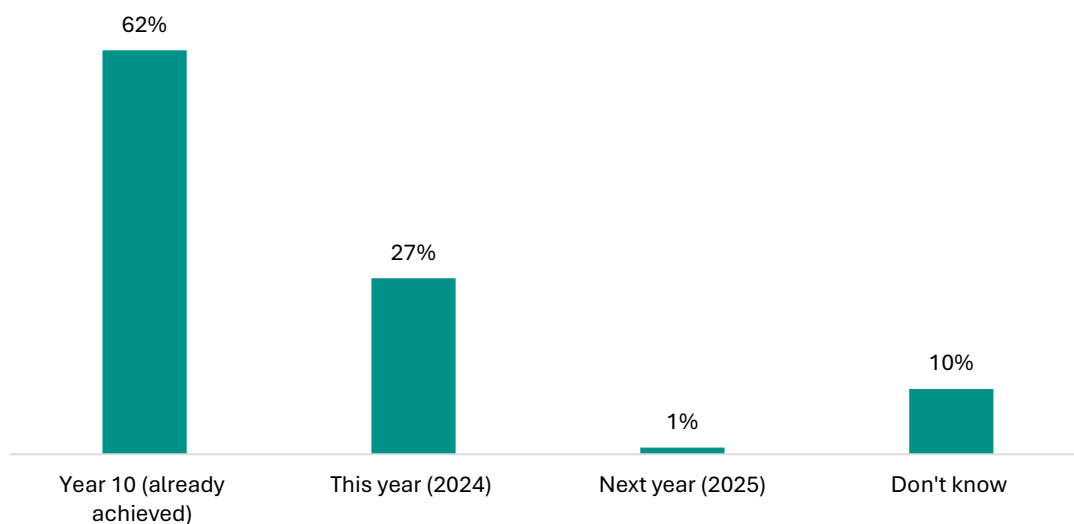
Figure 11: Students who sat the numeracy and pāngarau co-requisite by year group as a proportion of all students who sat them in May/June 2024.



We also asked Year 11 students if they had already achieved their numeracy co-requisite in Year 10, and if they hadn't, when they were planning to achieve it. Just over three in five students (62 percent) reported they achieved their numeracy co-requisite in Year 10, just over a quarter (27 percent) plan to achieve it this year, and the rest either don't know when they will achieve it (10 percent) or plan to achieve it next year (1 percent).

As with the literacy co-requisite, students who are planning to achieve the numeracy co-requisite this year, next year, or don't know when they will achieve it, are more likely to be finding NCEA Level 1 difficult.

Figure 12: *Proportion of students responding to ERO's survey on when they plan to achieve their numeracy or pāngarau co-requisite.*



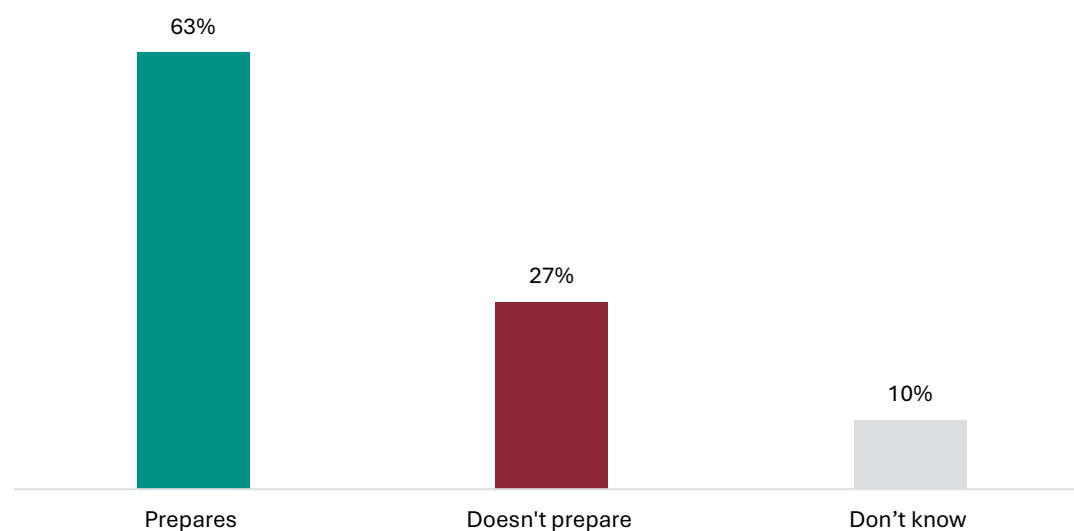
4) Is NCEA Level 1 valued by parents and whānau?

Parents value NCEA level 1 as a stepping stone to NCEA Levels 2 and 3.

For parents and whānau who have a child planning to study at university, they believe NCEA Level 1 is a valuable building block, preparing their child with the knowledge and study skills for Levels 2 and 3. However, as a standalone qualification, they think that NCEA Level 1 isn't of much value to their child.

As detailed in Chapter 4, most parents and whānau – just over three in five (63 percent) – say NCEA Level 1 prepares their child for Levels 2 and 3, with just over a quarter (27 percent) reporting that it doesn't (10 percent of parents and whānau aren't sure).

Figure 13: *Parents and whānau views on whether NCEA Level 1 is preparing their child for Levels 2 and 3.*



For parents and whānau who have a child who is planning to go onto vocational pathways or straight into work, they believe employers will value NCEA Level 1 as a nationally recognised qualification. They also think NCEA Level 1 confirms their child's read and writing skills. However, they want NCEA Level 1 to prepare their children with more knowledge and skills relevant to their child's specific pathway, including their intended job.

“NCEA Level 1 is a national system, when employers know what kids have learned. And so that's where the value sits.”

PARENT AND WHĀNAU

Some parents and whānau want to keep options open for their children in Year 11 and see NCEA Level 1 as a year to get used to managing assessment workload, building examination skills, and getting the foundational knowledge needed in subjects for NCEA Level 2.

5) Is NCEA Level 1 valued by students?

Students mainly value NCEA Level 1 as a stepping stone to NCEA Level 2.

Students consistently told us that NCEA Level 1 is not valuable on its own. Like their parents and whānau, students mainly value NCEA Level 1 as a stepping stone to Level 2. Most trade apprenticeships require NCEA Level 2. Most schools offer the gateway programmes and vocational pathways like trade academies in Year 12. Students study NCEA Level 1 in Year 11 to prepare for these pathways.

As detailed in Chapter 4, about four in five students (79 percent) say that NCEA Level 1 is preparing them for Levels 2 and 3, particularly if they are intending to go to university (82 percent compared to 74 percent of students on vocational pathways, and 67 percent on pathways direct to employment).

Students on an academic pathway (intending to go to university) also value NCEA Level 1 as preparing them with the study skills they will need for NCEA Level 2 because they usually haven't done exams before. Although students don't typically like exams, some recognise that they need the experience to do well at university.

“Level 1 is a good stepping stone for Level 2 and 3, if you want really higher qualifications for bigger jobs.”

STUDENT

“It's Level 2 that matters. I had a friend that left with Level 1. And it's been such a struggle for her to get to where she wants to do next.”

STUDENT

Students who see their family thriving in business without any qualifications are less likely to value NCEA, including NCEA Level 1. They also talked about having family connections that could help them land apprenticeship opportunities without NCEA Level 1.

“My father dropped out after Year 11. Didn’t even get his qualification. He’s running a business. I feel like it is a lot of extra stress considering [NCEA Level 1] doesn’t really matter that much.”

STUDENT

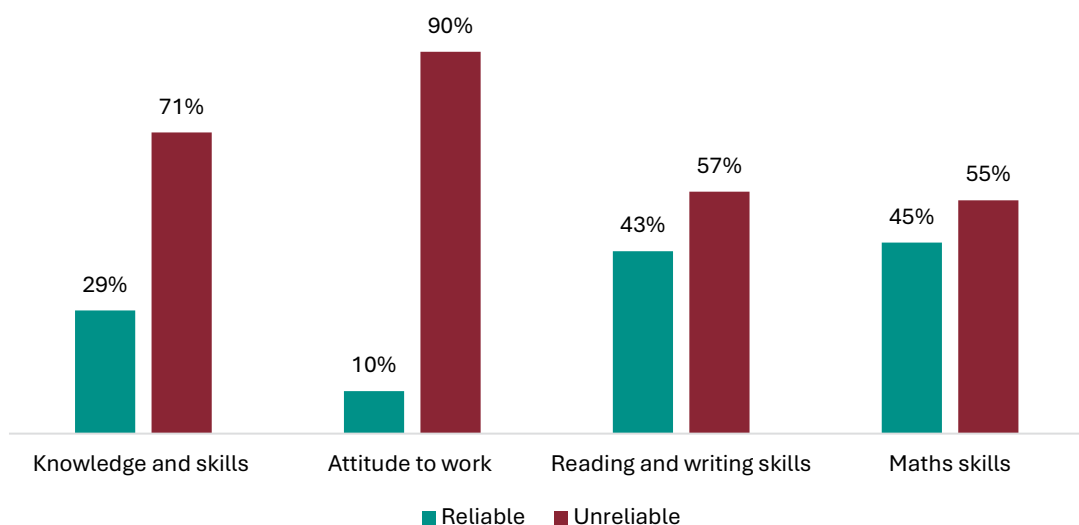
6) Is NCEA Level 1 valued by employers?

Employers don’t yet know the impacts of the changes to NCEA Level 1. They haven’t flowed through yet to the workplace because this is only the first year of implementation. We asked employers whether they value NCEA Level 1 to understand both as a baseline, and to understand what the implications may be.

Employers don’t value NCEA level 1 as they don’t see it as a reliable measure of knowledge and skills.

Just over seven in 10 employers (71 percent) don’t think NCEA Level 1 is a reliable measure of knowledge and skills (only 29 percent agree). In addition, nine in 10 employers (90 percent) don’t think it is a reliable measure of attitude to work (10 percent agree). Employers are slightly more positive about it being an indicator of reading and writing skills (43 percent agree, 57 percent disagree), and maths skills (45 percent agree, 55 percent disagree).

Figure 14: *Employer views on whether NCEA Level 1 is a reliable measure.*



Employers told us NCEA Level 1 is not a reliable measure of practical skills which are required for work, as it is more geared towards tertiary education.

“Being able to pass NCEA isn’t a measure of young people’s readiness to enter the workforce.”

EMPLOYER

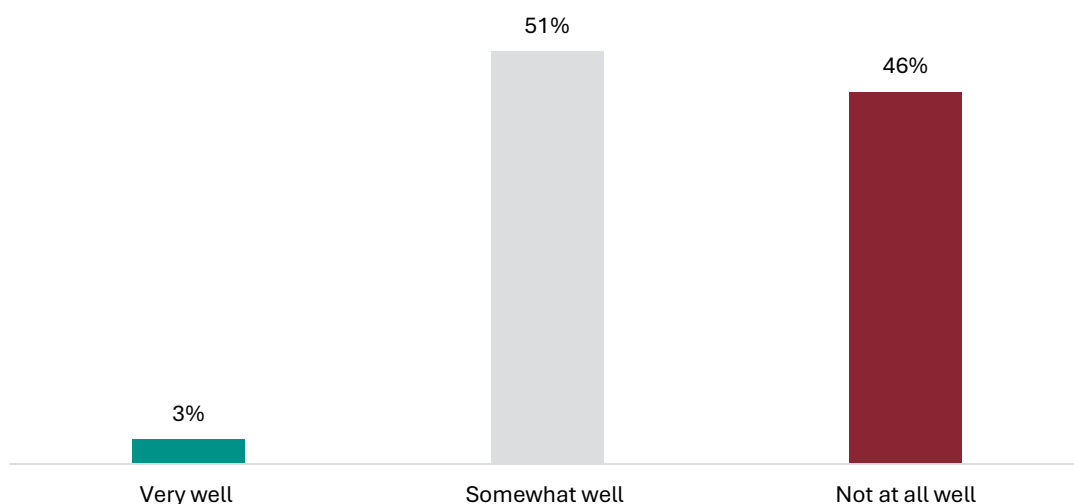
We heard employers value literacy and numeracy skills. However, they are concerned that the literacy and numeracy skills required for the co-requisite may not match the reading, writing, and math skills required in the workplace.

Employers often prioritise other skills and attributes over NCEA Level 1.

Almost four in five employers (78 percent) that recruit young people straight from schools say they understand enough about NCEA Level 1 qualification. However, less than three in five (57 percent) consider the NCEA Level 1 qualification when making decisions about who to employ (43 percent don’t), and less than half (46 percent) say they’re likely to employ someone with it over someone without it (51 percent say it makes no difference).

Almost half of employers (46 percent) report that NCEA level 1 doesn’t prepare young people for work. Just over half (51 percent) report it prepares young people somewhat well, and only 3 percent report it prepares them very well.

Figure 15: Employer views on whether NCEA Level 1 prepares young people for work.



More than qualifications, employers told us they look for traits such as good work ethics, self- presentation, or capacity to learn on the job.

“Employers are wanting to know the young people have the right personal attributes and transferable skills. So, for our region, employers will tell you [they want people who are] practical, hardworking, must have their driver’s license.”

EMPLOYER



Workplace skills such as driving, first aid, or health and safety are more likely to land students an interview than NCEA Level 1.

Employers told us in some industries (such as education/ social sciences, health, and community), the baseline for employment or apprenticeship would be NCEA Level 2, not NCEA Level 1. As a result, they are not likely to consider NCEA Level 1 when recruiting.

For industries that consider NCEA Level 1 qualification when they recruit, they value NCEA Level 1 for showing employers that students can learn, and potentially can learn on the job. For example, employers in design would value students with learning experiences in schools related to that industry (e.g., students doing DVC). Mechanics apprenticeship providers would look for a good level of maths.

“There’s a difference between someone leaving school not having had any previous experience in technology, and someone going into an apprenticeship on a building site. [The second person has] had a little bit of experience at school, understand the spaces, have the basics, and can learn on the job.”

EMPLOYER



Conclusion

In 2024, one in eight schools (13 percent) aren’t offering NCEA Level 1 (87 percent are), which is likely to increase to almost one in five schools (17 percent) in 2025 (10 percent are still deciding). Most schools aren’t offering all four subject achievement standards and there is a lot of variation between learning areas, which is likely to impact the fairness and reliability of NCEA, as we will go onto discuss.

Schools in low to moderate socio-economic communities mainly value NCEA Level 1 as an ‘exit qualification.’ Schools in high socio-economic communities are the most likely to opt out of offering NCEA Level 1, to focus on preparing students better for Levels 2 and 3 and to reduce assessment burn-out. Students, and parents and whānau mainly value NCEA Level 1 as a stepping stone to NCEA Level 2. This is more often reported when students are on an academic pathway. Employers often value other skills and attributes over NCEA Level 1 for school leavers

The next chapter sets out what we know about whether NCEA Level 1 is a fair and reliable measure of student ability.



Chapter 3: Is NCEA 1 a fair and reliable measure of student ability?

Qualifications should allow students a fair chance to show what they know and can do, and results should accurately and consistently reflect student performance. We looked at fairness and reliability of NCEA Level 1 overall, whether this has been affected by the recent changes, and why.

We found that NCEA Level 1 is not yet a fair and reliable measure of knowledge and skills because difficulty still varies between subjects and schools due to the flexibility that remains in the system. The co-requisite and the fewer, larger standards may help by standardising what students learn and how they are assessed.

What we looked at

We looked at the reliability of NCEA Level 1 overall, how it has changed, and the key issues affecting fairness and reliability. A reliable qualification is one that allows students a fair chance to show what they know and can do, and consistently measures their performance in the assessment.

Important context for this chapter is that NCEA Level 1 subjects have been re-designed with four achievement standards, including two internally assessed and two externally assessed. However, as detailed in Chapter 2, just less than a third of schools are typically offering four achievement standards in their courses, and some courses include unit standards. Courses can be designed with any number and type of standards, from a range of subjects.

This chapter also refers to credits, which are awarded to students for achieving a standard. One of the changes to NCEA Level 1 has been to provide more consistency between achievement standards, by making most worth five credits. Achievement standards are graded (Achieved, Merit, Excellence). Unit standards are worth a varying number of credits, and most can't be endorsed – they are simply Achieved or Not Achieved.

This chapter sets out findings on:

- 1) the overall reliability of NCEA Level 1
- 2) how fairness and reliability vary between schools and learning areas
- 3) how key changes impacted fairness and reliability.

What we found: an overview

NCEA Level 1 difficulty still varies between subjects and schools due to the flexibility that remains.

- Teachers can choose to offer any combination of standards, affecting course content, difficulty, and the amount of internal and external assessment.
- Nearly seven in 10 schools (68 percent), this year, offer only three of the four subject achievement standards in their courses, and schools are still using unit standards, which are less demanding. This means students have different amounts of work and different chances of achieving.
- Three-quarters of leaders (75 percent) and just over half of teachers (55 percent) report the credit values are not a reliable indicator of how much work is required.

Authenticity and integrity are more at risk due to the changes, and the biggest concern is about submitted reports.

- Almost one in three teachers (29 percent) report the new formats of assessment make NCEA Level 1 less reliable (53 percent see no real change). They are especially concerned about the submitted report, as it is an external assessment that is carried out over several sessions.
- Artificial Intelligence is a risk for many assessments but a particular risk for the submitted reports without a secure digital platform.
- Teachers are providing different levels of support for students' internal assessments and submitted reports.

NCEA Level 1 is not yet a reliable measure of knowledge and skills.

- Reliability is an essential element a high-quality qualification, but due to the remaining flexibility in the system, NCEA Level 1 is not yet a reliable measure.
- Three in five (60 percent) teachers and almost half of leaders (45 percent) report NCEA Level 1 is an unreliable measure of knowledge and skills.
- Almost half of teachers (47 percent) and just over a third of leaders (34 percent) report NCEA Level 1 as less reliable than before (only 18 percent of teachers and 26 percent of leaders say it is *more* reliable). Concerns are focused on how assessments are done and literacy-heavy assessments (e.g., in Technology) which are a barrier for some students demonstrating other skills.
- The co-requisite may help with reliability (see Finding 10) as it introduces standardised requirements for literacy and numeracy.

In the following sections we look at each of these findings in more detail.

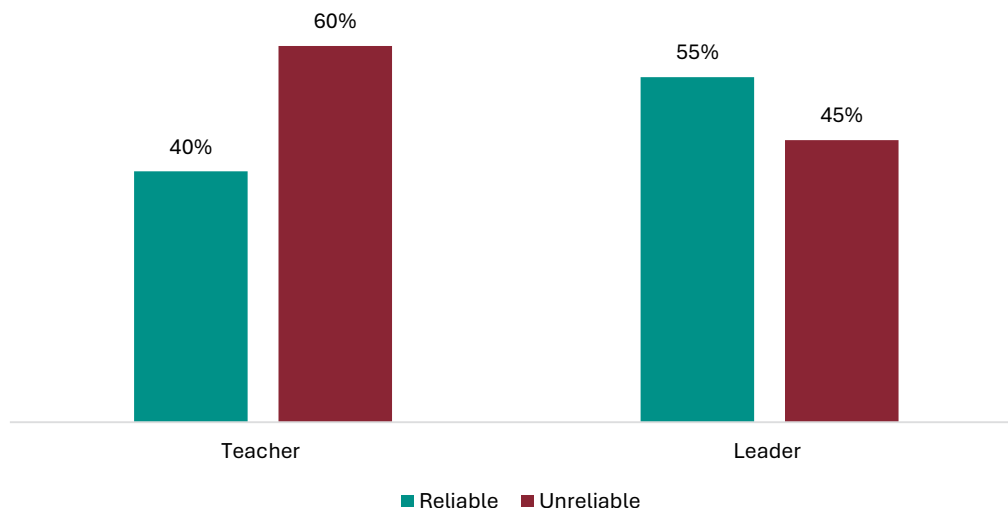
1) Overall reliability of NCEA Level 1

NCEA is not, yet, a fair and reliable measure of knowledge and skills.

Reliability is an essential element of a high-quality qualification, but due to the remaining flexibility in the system, NCEA Level 1 is not yet fair and reliable.

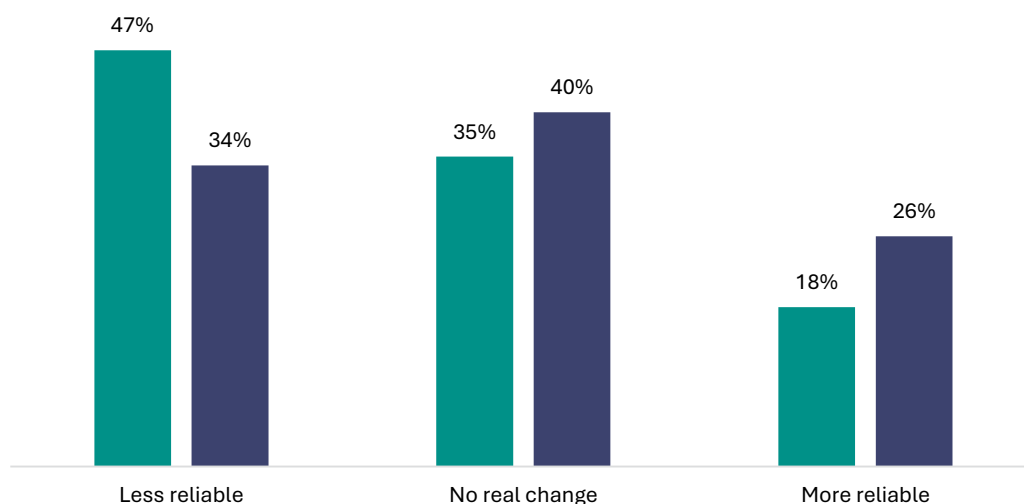
Three in five teachers (60 percent) report the new NCEA Level 1 qualification is an unreliable measure of student knowledge and skills (40 percent report it is reliable). Leaders are slightly less negative, but still almost half (45 percent) report the new NCEA Level 1 qualification is an unreliable measure.

Figure 16: *Teacher and leader views on whether NCEA Level 1 is a reliable measure of student knowledge and skills.*



The changes have not made the qualification more reliable. Almost half of teachers (47 percent) say NCEA Level 1 is a less reliable measure of student knowledge and skills than before the changes. Just over a third (35 percent) say there is no real change and less than a fifth of teachers (18 percent) say NCEA Level 1 is more reliable. Leaders are, again, slightly less negative, but still over a third (34 percent) say NCEA Level 1 is a less reliable measure. Forty percent say there is no real change and only a quarter (26 percent) of leaders say NCEA Level 1 is more reliable.

Figure 17: *Teacher and leader views on the impact of the changes regarding the reliability of the NCEA Level 1 qualification.*



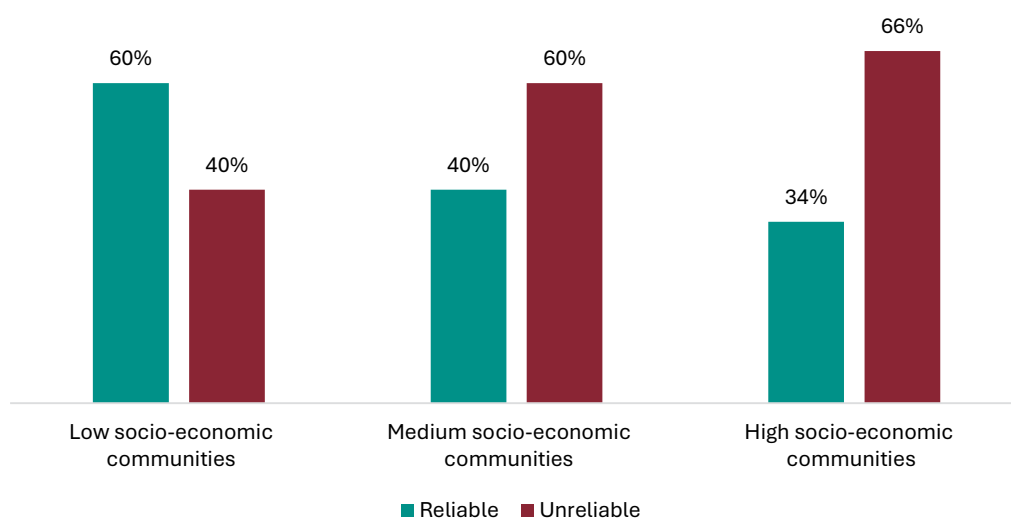
Students and parents and whānau are considerably more positive about the reliability of NCEA; but they have less experience with NCEA than teachers and leaders. Around a quarter of students (24 percent) report the NCEA Level 1 qualification isn't a reliable measure of their knowledge and skills (76 percent report it is reliable). Like students, a quarter of parents and whānau (25 percent) report the NCEA Level 1 qualification isn't a reliable measure of knowledge and skills. Almost two-thirds of parents and whānau (64 percent) report it is a reliable measure, and a further 11 percent don't know.

Schools in high socio-economic communities are more likely to report that NCEA Level 1 is unreliable.

NCEA Level 1 is not viewed as a reliable measure of student knowledge and skills because of inconsistencies in delivery and assessment across schools.

Teachers most likely to report that the NCEA Level 1 qualification is an unreliable measure of knowledge and skills are in schools in high socio-economic communities (66 percent) and teachers least likely to view it as an unreliable measure are in schools in low socio-economic communities (40 percent).

Figure 18: *Teacher views on whether NCEA Level 1 is a reliable measure of student knowledge and skills, by socio-economic community.*



“One of the greatest weaknesses of NCEA is the disparate practice from one school to another school, from one class and a teacher to another class and another teacher.”

LEADER

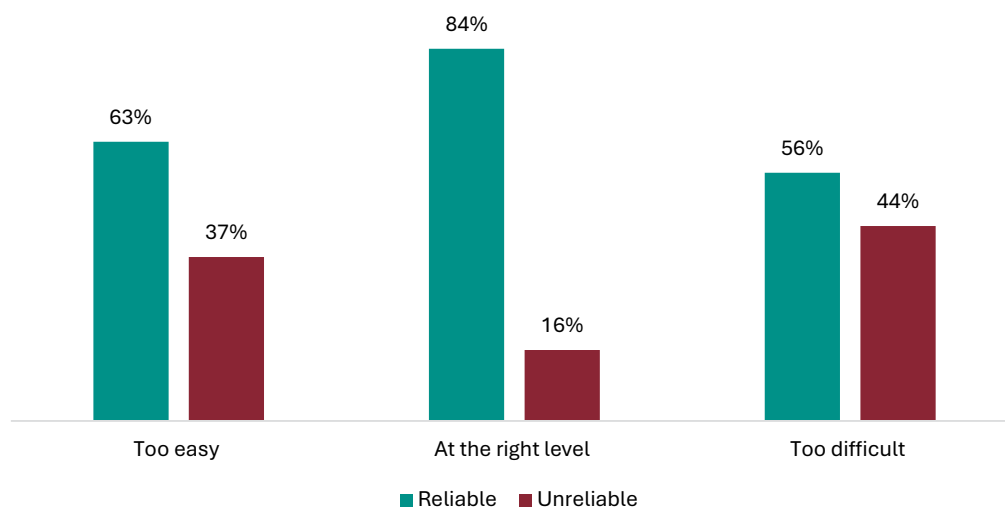
Teachers and leaders from schools in higher socio-economic communities told us there is a mix of achievement standards and, for some learning areas, unit standards are offered to higher and lower academic ability students. They also expressed concerns about reliability due to variation in courses, assessments, and ways of ensuring authenticity for some of the new assessments, such as the submitted report.

Students who are finding NCEA Level 1 too difficult, or too easy, are more likely to view NCEA Level 1 as an unreliable measure of their knowledge and skills.

Students who think NCEA Level 1 isn't the right level of difficulty are not convinced that it is reliably measuring their knowledge and skills because the assessments don't allow them to show what they can do and there is a lack of clarity on how to attain endorsements.

More than two in five (44 percent) students who find NCEA Level 1 too difficult report it's unreliable, compared to around one in six students (16 percent) who say it offers the right level of challenge. Those who are finding it too easy are also more likely to say it is unreliable (37 percent), compared to those who report the difficulty is just right (16 percent).

Figure 19: *Student views on whether NCEA Level 1 is a reliable measure of their knowledge and skills, by how difficult they are finding it.*



Students who find NCEA Level 1 too difficult often reported to us that it is not reliable because of the high literacy load required. Students are concerned they are being assessed on their reading and writing skills, and not subject knowledge.

“[Assessments] are too complicated in instructions. Instructions should be easy to understand and tell you what you are doing. I spend half the time in class wanting to know what I’m doing instead of finishing the work in 10 minutes.”

STUDENT

Alternatively, students who find NCEA Level 1 too easy are concerned that it isn't preparing them well enough for NCEA Levels 2 and 3, or university. They also find the distinction between different endorsement levels vague, and are unclear about how to attain them.

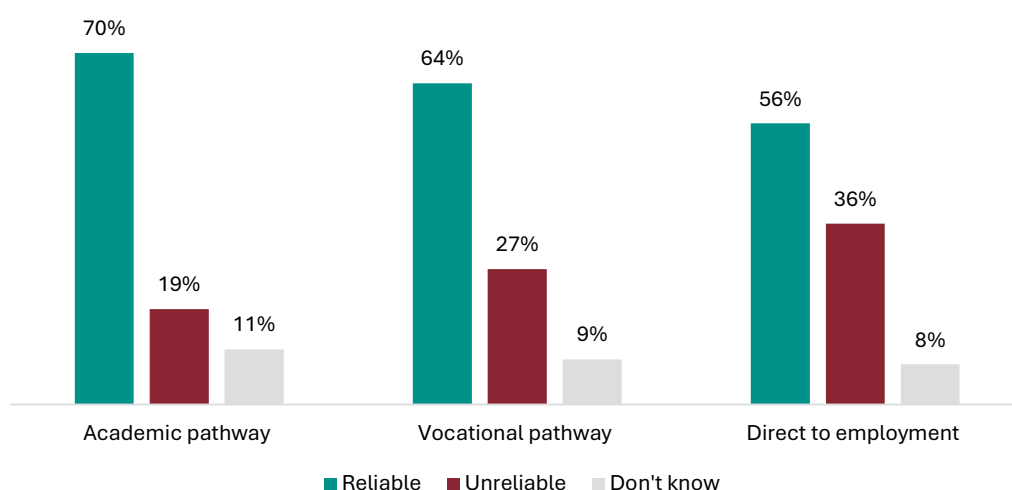
“Going into the assessments and exams I feel like we are not prepared enough. And we don’t have the knowledge of what is required to achieve Merit or Excellence in most of the subjects I have taken.”

STUDENT

Parents and whānau whose child is planning to go directly into employment after school view NCEA Level 1 as less reliable.

Just over a third (36 percent) of parents and whānau of children going directly to employment report it is unreliable compared to parents and whānau of those on an academic pathway (19 percent).

Figure 20: *Parents and whānau views on whether NCEA Level 1 is a reliable measure of student knowledge and skills, by child’s future pathway.*



Parents and whānau told us that schools are focused on academic courses and that NCEA Level 1 does not capture the knowledge and skills that are practical for future employment.

“[NCEA] is geared to tertiary education, especially universities. It seems to make it harder for students who are not traditionally academic to achieve ‘success’ in their high school qualifications.”

PARENT AND WHĀNAU

2) Fairness and reliability vary between schools and learning areas

a) Difficulty varies by school

Difficulty of NCEA Level 1 varies between schools due to the remaining flexibility in the system. Teachers can create courses with varying combinations of achievement and unit standards from different subjects, and can offer any mix of internal and external assessments, and even no external assessments at all.

Most schools aren't offering all four subject achievement standards, affecting the amount of content and types of assessment that are offered.

As detailed in Chapter 2, most schools aren't offering all four of the new subject achievement standards in their courses. When courses comprise fewer than four, teachers are typically dropping one or both external assessments. We heard one of the reasons for this was that teachers understood the requirements for externals less well. This was often because the specifications for externals had arrived late and/or changed throughout the year. Teachers don't want to teach achievement standards if they aren't clear how to help students achieve.

“We chose not to do any externals. And that's because information arrived too late. I hadn't seen anything. Feedback from pilot schools said, 'Don't touch them'. So, we didn't feel confident to offer them.”

SCIENCE TEACHER

For other schools, offering fewer than four achievement standards (two or three) is due to concerns that they can't get through all the learning content. Schools offering all four subject achievement standards are doing so to make sure their students have full coverage of knowledge and skills to prepare them for NCEA Level 2.

“We're going to be busy enough to get those three [achievement standards] done.”

TEACHER

“It's crazy if you do four achievement standards, because the breadth of the standards means there isn't enough time. But you need all four, so that students are ready for all of the possible options for Level 2, whether it be old or new.”

LEADER

Another reason that teachers are mainly dropping externals from their courses is because students tend to find externals more challenging and achieve less well, and teachers want to give their students the best chance of achieving. NZQA achievement data shows the chance of gaining an excellence grade is nearly double for an internal compared to an external assessment.¹²

Students who study fewer achievement standards at NCEA Level 1 may have greater opportunity to achieve well because they will have more time to cover less content. However, covering fewer standards may mean that students miss out on key knowledge and skills, meaning they will be less well prepared for Level 2, finding it a bigger jump and even impacting their Level 2 achievement. This issue is set out in more detail in Chapter 4.

“How do we make sure that even if we only offer three standards, that doesn’t preclude us from offering certain pathways to NCEA Level 2 or 3? That’s one of the big challenges about omitting one NCEA Level 1 standard.”

LEADER

Whatever the reason for offering fewer than four subject achievement standards, this affects the knowledge and skills that students can access as well as their workload and difficulty.

Unit standards are used by some schools to support vocational pathways, but they are smaller and often easier than achievement standards.

As covered in Chapter 2, schools are still making use of the existing unit standards to design NCEA Level 1 courses.

“We do have some courses that are unit standards, for the industry-based subjects such as food, technology, hospitality.”

LEADER

With a unit standard, students can usually only obtain Achieved or Not Achieved and, because they are more straightforward, unit standards tend to be easier and pass rates are higher. For example, in 2023, only 9 percent of unit standards weren’t achieved, compared to 15 percent of internally assessed achievement standards and 21 percent of externally assessed achievement standards.^j

The fact that some standards are easier to achieve than others undermines the fairness and reliability of NCEA Level 1. However, we heard that unit standards interest students in the subject areas they are offered and the smaller size means students can see their credits adding up, which is also motivating.

“[Offering unit standards] is about trying to hook students in, giving them some early success so they are more motivated. Whereas these bigger, longer standards aren’t going to achieve that.”

TEACHER

^j NZQA (2024). Annual Report: NCEA, University Entrance, and NZ Scholarship data and statistics 2023 <https://www2.nzqa.govt.nz/assets/NCEA/Secondary-school-and-NCEA/Annual-Reports-NCEA-Scholarship-Data/2023-Annual-Report-NCEA-UE-and-NZ-Scholarship-Data-and-Statistics.pdf>

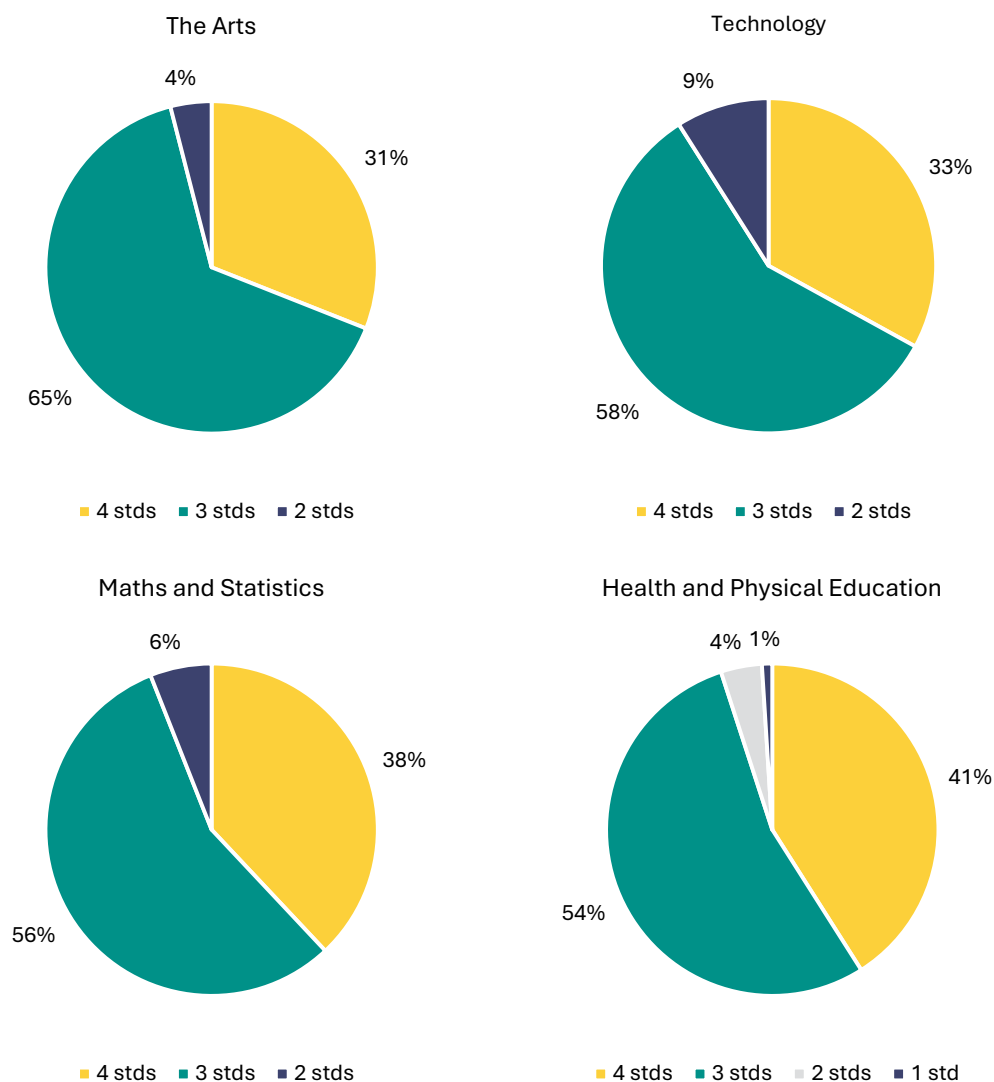
b) Difficulty varies by learning area

The number of achievement standards offered in courses differs by learning area.

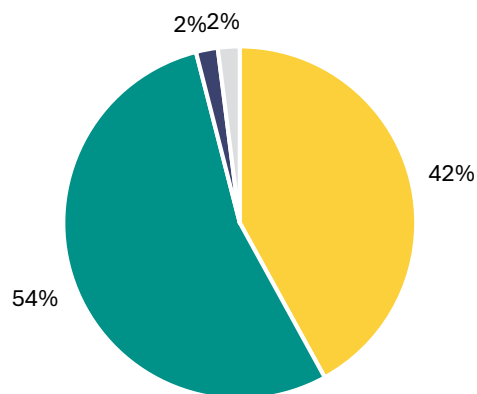
As noted above, each subject has been designed with four achievement standards, but teachers don't have to design their courses around subjects, and they don't have to offer all four achievement standards. This has resulted in not only variation between schools in how many achievement standards are offered, but also between learning areas.

Courses in the English and Science are most likely to be offering four achievement standards (45 percent of courses for both learning areas). While courses in the Arts and Technology learning areas are the least likely to offer four achievement standards (31 percent and 33 percent of courses in each learning area respectively). The variation means that the amount of work required varies significantly between learning areas.

Figure 21: School leaders reporting how many achievement standards are typically offered in their NCEA Level 1 courses, by learning area.

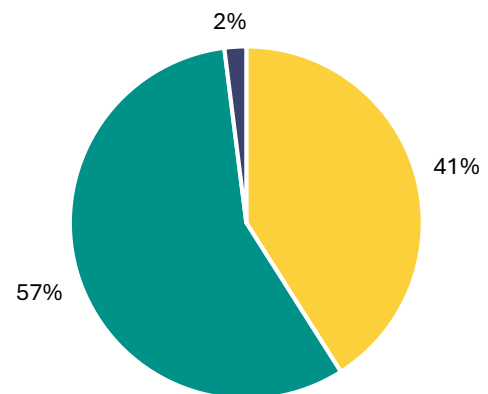


Learning Languages



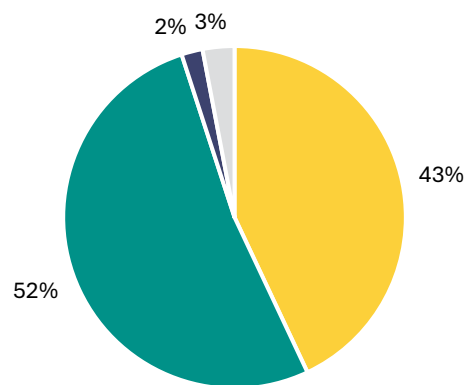
4 stds 3 stds 2 stds 1 std

Social Sciences



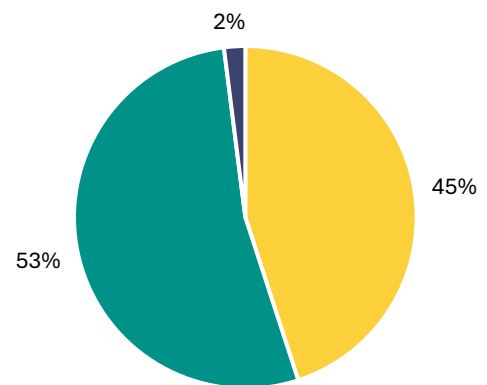
4 stds 3 stds 2 stds

Te Reo Māori



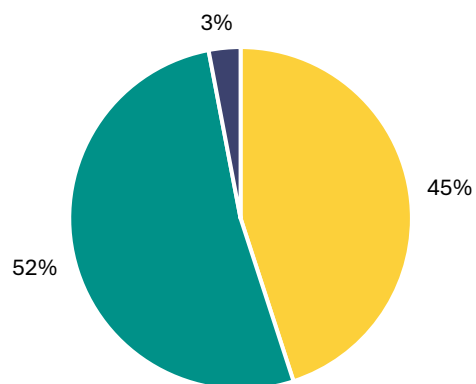
4 stds 3 stds 2 stds 1 std

English



4 stds 3 stds 2 stds

Science



4 stds 3 stds 2 stds

For the English and Science learning areas, we heard the motivation for offering all four standards was to ensure there are no gaps in knowledge when students move up to NCEA Level 2.

“Students would need enough of a link to build the skills [from this achievement standard to the next], and the students can see how the work they’ve done for this is going to contribute to this.”

ENGLISH TEACHER

In particular, Science teachers are worried that if they omit any of the subject standards, students will be disadvantaged at NCEA Level 2. Learning in Science is sequential, and students need a firm foundation to build on in NCEA Level 2.

Technology and Arts courses are more likely to drop one or both externals, due to concerns that the new formats of external assessment are unfair or logistically challenging for their subjects. For example, one of the challenging Drama externals requires students to act and interact with each other, using a range of drama techniques and scripts. The submitted evidence includes a three-to-four-minute video of the performance. Teachers are concerned that video does not capture facial expressions, voice, and tone well, which impacts grading. There are also logistical challenges of having the right technological tools for recording performances.

“The film does not pick up on the tone/mood of the piece. Facial expressions and voice are hard to hear. Surely this would impact the grade.”

DRAMA TEACHER

“Theories of how music works and all the elements and conventions, and not just relying on your ear or what you think sounds good. We don’t have any of that in NCEA Level 1. It means there’s no way students moving into Level 2 and Level 3 can take externals. And those students who might want to study music in university would be basically stuck at a level below.”

MUSIC TEACHER

Credit values are an unreliable indicator of difficulty and how much work is required.

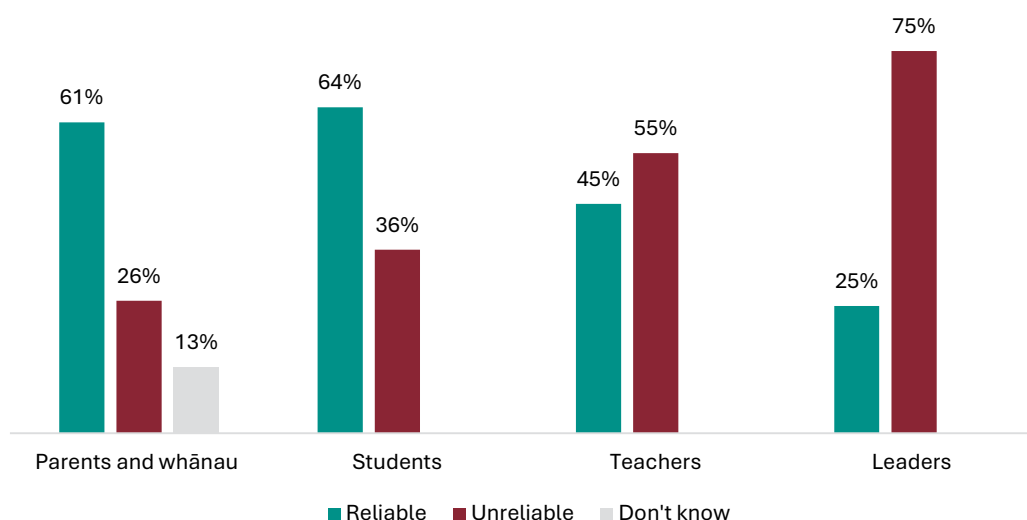
Standardising achievement standards so they are each worth five credits hasn’t yet resulted in credit values always reflecting the amount of work and difficulty involved.

Three quarters of leaders (75 percent) and over half of teachers (55 percent) report credit values are an unreliable indicator of how much work is required. Over a third of students (36 percent) report the same (64 percent of students report credit values are reliable).

Only about a quarter of parents and whānau (26 percent) report credit values are unreliable, but a further 13 percent just don't know (61 percent of parents and whānau report they are). 55 percent think they are unreliable now.

Teachers are more likely to report credit values are unreliable now than before the changes (43 percent reported they were unreliable before). 55 percent think they are unreliable now. About three in 10 leaders (32 percent) report credit values are more unreliable now, while another three in 10 (31 percent) report they are more reliable. Marginally more leaders think reliability is about the same (37 percent) as before.

Figure 22: *Leader, teacher, student, and parent and whānau views on whether the current credits values are a reliable indicator of the work involved.^k*



Variation between credit values for the new achievement standards may reduce over time as the process of review and revision takes place.

We heard the variation between credit values was greatest between achievement standards and unit standards.

Students compared notes on how unit standards took them just half a day to complete and involved them copying out content from a workbook. Comparatively, an achievement standard worth the same credit value took another student the whole term to learn the content, involved good study skills for revision, and a stressful exam at the end.

“Some hard topics and standards offer the littlest number of credits, while doing a unit standard could give you six credits.”

STUDENT

^k “Don't know” as a response option was only made available in the parent and whānau survey.

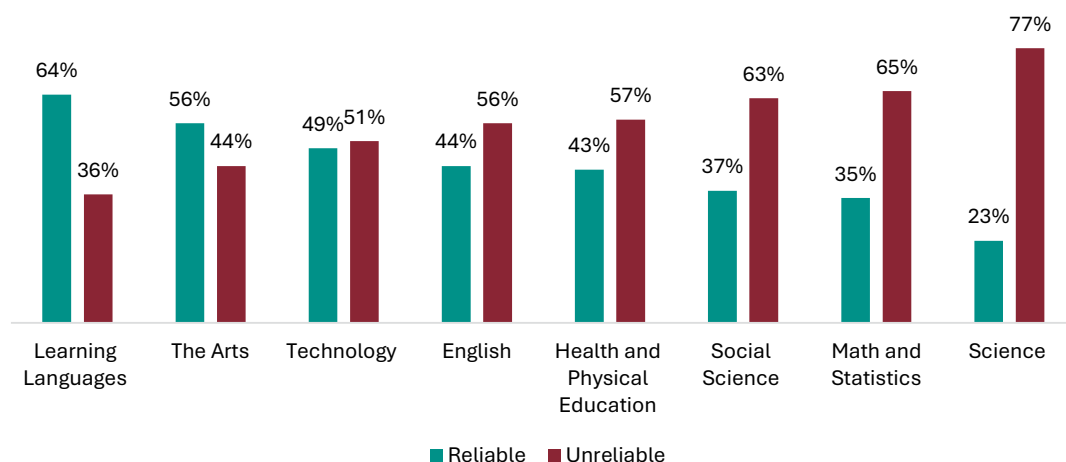
The reliability of credit values has implications for the fairness and reliability of the qualification of NCEA Level 1. Unreliability could mean that two students can achieve the same qualification despite only one having mastered the more difficult skills. This variability also drives ‘gaming’, whereby teachers or students choose easier credits, which may not always be in students’ best interests and may limit their pathways later on.

Science, Maths and Statistics, and Social Science teachers are most concerned that NCEA Level 1 is unreliable.

The way the new achievement standards and assessments have been designed, has resulted in teachers of some subjects finding NCEA Level 1 more unreliable than teachers in other subjects.

More than three-quarters of Science teachers (77 percent), and almost two-thirds of Maths and Statistics (65 percent) and Social Science teachers (63 percent) say NCEA Level 1 is an unreliable measure of student knowledge and skills, compared to only 36 percent of Language teachers. Around half of Arts (44 percent), Technology (51 percent), English (56 percent), and Health and Physical Education (57 percent) teachers report it is an unreliable measure.

Figure 23: *Teacher views on whether NCEA Level 1 is a reliable measure of student knowledge and skills, by learning area.*



The differences by learning area are largely due to experiences with the new achievement standards and assessments. For Maths and Statistics, we heard that the new achievement standards are literacy-heavy, which prevents students able at aspects of Maths from demonstrating what they know and can do. For Science, we heard the assessment has been too narrow compared to the content covered.

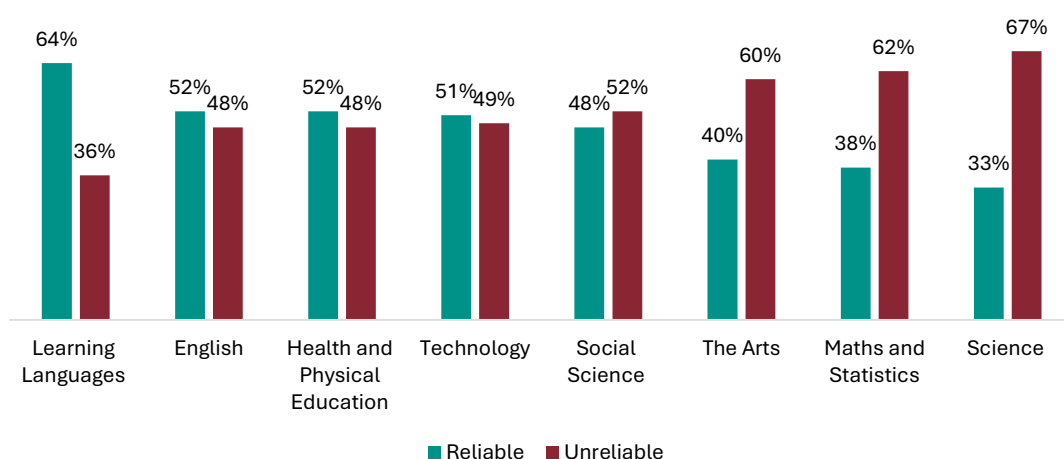
“Half the time it’s not because they can’t do the Maths. It’s because they can’t access the Maths because of the literacy.”

TEACHER

Reliability of credit values differs by learning area.

Two-thirds of Science teachers (67 percent) and just over three in five Maths and Statistics teachers (62 percent) say the credit values are unreliable, compared to just over a third of Language teachers (36 percent).

Figure 24: *Teacher views on whether the current NCEA Level 1 credits are a reliable indicator of how much work is needed by students, by learning area.*



“We used to do three standards in Maths, which we covered in a term and a half, and they were worth 10 credits. Now, we took these three standards and collapsed them into one standard which is worth five credits.”

MATHS TEACHER

Arts and Science teachers report the greatest decrease in reliability of credit values between the previous NCEA Level 1 and current NCEA Level 1. Only a quarter (25 percent) of Arts teachers thought the previous NCEA credit values were unreliable, whereas two in five (60 percent) report credit values are unreliable now. In Science, two in five (39 percent) report the previous credit values were unreliable, increasing to just over two-thirds (67 percent) now.

c) How key changes have impacted fairness and reliability

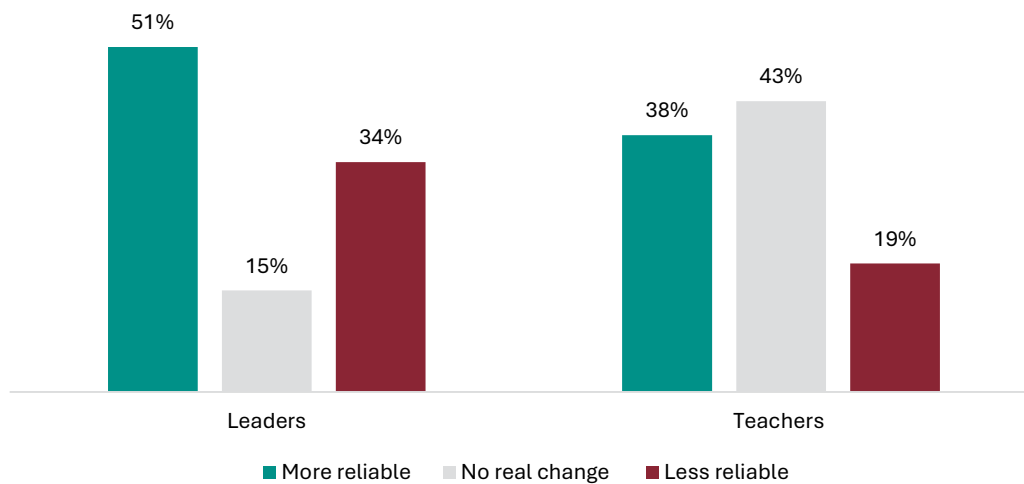
Individual changes to NCEA Level 1 have impacted differently on the reliability of the qualification. The addition of the co-requisite is the change that is helping to improve reliability the most.

The literacy and numeracy co-requisite is increasing reliability.

The co-requisite was introduced to strengthen literacy and numeracy requirements and assessments. Having a standardised way of measuring these is helping to lift the reliability of the qualification.

Of all the changes to NCEA Level 1, leaders and teachers are most likely to say the introduction of the literacy and numeracy co-requisite is increasing reliability. Just over half of leaders (51 percent) and four in 10 teachers (38 percent) report the co-requisite makes the qualification more reliable. One in seven leaders (15 percent) and just over two in five teachers (43 percent) report it makes no real difference, and just over a third of leaders (34 percent) and a fifth of teachers (19 percent) report the co-requisite makes the qualification less reliable.

Figure 25: *Leader and teacher views on whether the introduction of the literacy and numeracy co-requisite has made NCEA Level 1 qualification more/less reliable.*



Leaders who report the changes to NCEA Level 1 make it a more reliable measure of knowledge and skills often attribute this to the introduction of the literacy and numeracy co-requisite, because it standardises literacy and numeracy achievement across students and schools. The co-requisite also informs an earlier focus on literacy and numeracy and leads to stronger integration of literacy and numeracy across subject areas. (See more on this in Chapter 6).

Fewer, larger standards offer the potential to increase reliability through greater standardisation, but not with the current level of flexibility in course design.

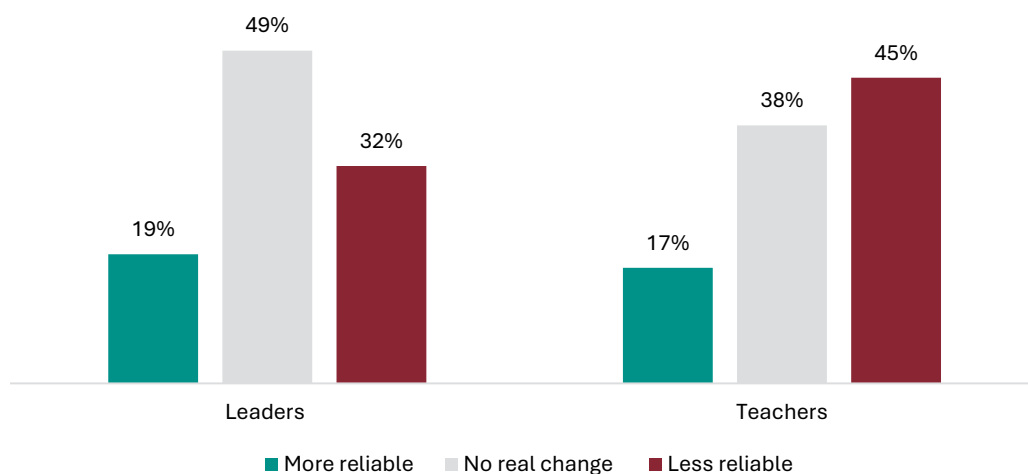
Fewer, larger standards were introduced to ensure the NCEA qualification credentials the most significant knowledge and skills in a subject. However, this only works when schools are offering all the standards available for a subject. We know this is not happening in the majority of schools.

Nearly half of leaders (49 percent) and just under two in five teachers (38 percent) report that fewer, larger standards make no real difference to reliability, but almost a third (32 percent) of leaders and half (45 percent) of teachers report that fewer, larger standards make NCEA Level 1 less reliable.

Leaders and teachers report the fewer, larger standards should make NCEA Level 1 a more reliable measure of student knowledge and skills, because having only four achievement standards per subject brings greater standardisation to learning

and assessment. But in reality, most schools are offering only three out of the four standards, which means the students doing less than four standards per course aren't studying as hard or as much as students doing four per course. Yet all students will achieve the same NCEA Level 1 qualification. This is possible because students typically do five or six courses, offering them many more credits than they need – students can be studying for up to 120 credits if they are doing six courses with four standards each but only need 60 credits for NCEA Level 1.

Figure 26: *Leader and teacher views on whether fewer, larger standards have increased/decreased the reliability of NCEA Level 1 qualification.*



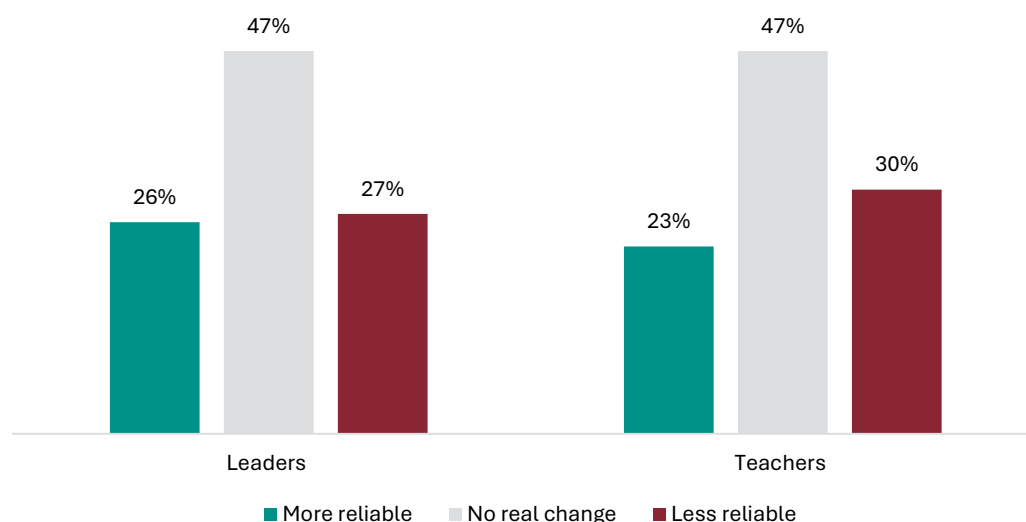
More external assessments have the potential to improve reliability.

More external assessments have been designed into NCEA Level 1 to help with reliability and credibility (see Appendix 3 for the balance of internal and external assessment across subjects). As noted above, the chance of gaining an Excellence grade is nearly double for an internal assessment compared to an external assessment. This difference undermines the credibility of the qualification and indicates an equal balance between the internal and external would improve credibility.

New types of external assessments have been introduced, including the submitted report. The submitted report is an external assessment undertaken by students across several sessions, under exam conditions, also referred to as an 'overtime assessment'. The submitted report is administered by schools rather than NZQA, and schools are responsible for authenticity.

Leaders and teachers are most likely to say the change of balance between internal and external assessment makes no real difference to the reliability of the NCEA Level 1 qualification – just under half (both 47 percent) say this. A quarter of leaders and teachers report it makes the qualification more reliable (26 percent and 23 percent respectively). Just over a quarter of leaders (27 percent) and almost a third of teachers (30 percent) report this change makes the qualification less reliable.

Figure 27: *Leader and teacher views on whether the balance of internal and external assessments has increased/decreased the reliability of NCEA Level 1 qualification.*



However, teachers are concerned about the reliability of externals for some types of knowledge and skills. Concerns of this kind are raised most often by teachers of practical subjects like Physical Education and the Performing Arts, who think assessments are ‘forced’ as externals.

“A lot of things that had historically been very successfully assessed internally have now been shoved in, and the intention of the entire learning has been changed in order to fit in with the requirement that it’s an external.”

DANCE TEACHER

Drama teachers are concerned that external assessors only see the final product, and not the process, which they believe will affect fair marking. For example, the marking of a short film may be overly affected by filming angles, even if this wasn’t the main skill being assessed.

“The major production [for Drama] which the teacher would mark and then have moderated is now an external standard. Someone else who does not know those kids is [going to mark it]. Can you see all those kids well enough to know what they’re doing? Whereas the teacher has seen them working and has seen not just the final point, but also other snapshots of it.”

DRAMA TEACHER

Integrity and authenticity are significant issues for the submitted report.

Generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) is a problem for authenticity across assessments but raises particular challenges for the 'submitted report', which is an 'over-time assessment' carried out over several sessions in exam conditions. In most schools, students are using their own devices and in spaces that aren't easy to invigilate, which makes it unrealistic for teachers to be responsible for authenticity. Authenticity could be monitored more easily in computer labs, but most schools are not set up for this on the scale required. Schools are looking at software options to help but secure digital platforms, like the one used by NZQA for digital exams, are expensive.

With the submitted report, there is also the simple risk that students work on their assessment between sessions, and even seek support from others that give them an unfair advantage.

“How are you stopping students from accessing their document outside of class? The system is certainly open for abuse.”

TEACHER

The authenticity of the submitted report is also put at risk if some teachers provide more support to their students than others. Teachers may do this knowingly but, more likely, this happens unknowingly – teachers consistently tell us they are unsure how much to scaffold assessments so their students will have the same level of support as students in other schools. They are concerned about their students having a fair chance to achieve, which can lead to teachers providing too much support. Schools are also worried about inconsistencies in marking.

“Unless every single teacher teaches exactly the same way and assesses the same way, I don't think it would be a proper measure of every student's potential at that stage.”

TEACHER

Variation in how much support teachers give to their students is a concern for internal assessments too. However, the submitted report re-introduces the same risks in the context of an 'external' assessment.

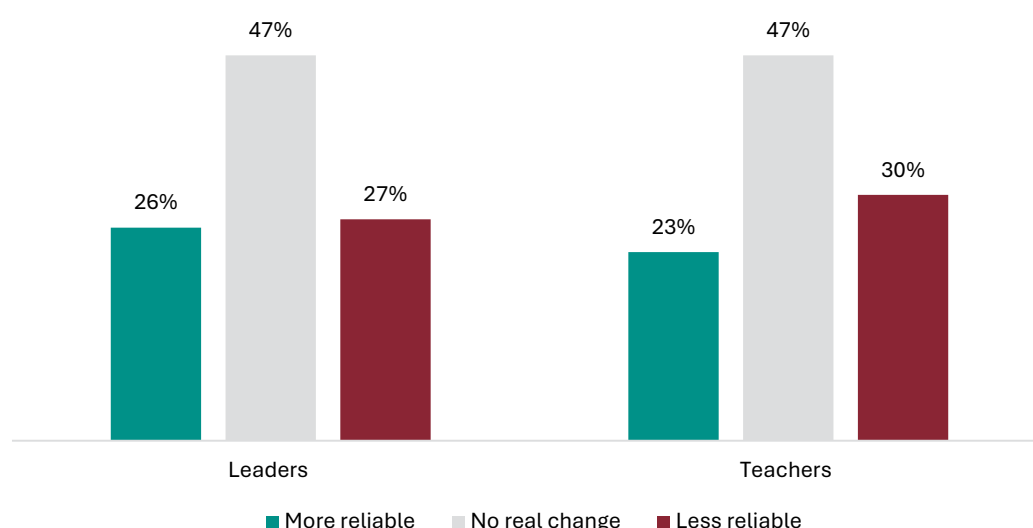
A greater range of assessment formats has the potential to be more inclusive, but less reliable without clear guidance on how to use them.

In addition to the new types of external assessment, new formats have been introduced, allowing students to submit alternatives to written assessments. These include audio or video recordings, slides, or a combination of these (See Appendix 3). When these new formats are offered for external assessments, teachers are required to submit these assessments to NZQA for marking, which means uploading the audio or video-recording to the NZQA system. These new forms of assessment allow students to show their learning in less traditional ways which can be more

inclusive to different types of students. However, the reliability of the qualification relies on teachers being familiar with, and competent to use, these formats which is not always the case without guidance.

Nearly a third of leaders (31 percent) and nearly one in five teachers (18 percent) report the use of different assessments formats makes NCEA Level 1 more reliable. Around half of leaders and teachers (50 percent and 53 percent) report this change makes no difference to the reliability of NCEA Level 1. One in five leaders (19 percent) and almost three in 10 teachers (29 percent) report this change makes the qualification less reliable.

Figure 28: *Leader and teacher views on whether different assessment formats have increased/decreased the reliability of NCEA Level 1 qualification.*



Teachers who are worried about fairness and reliability consistently told us they aren't feeling confident about using some of the new assessment formats due to the lack of exemplars and guidance.

Detailed guidance and exemplars are typically only available for the written format; and teachers don't know how to translate what an 800-word count looks like for a video recording, or what a merit or excellence endorsement looks like. For example, we heard that providing the oral presentation for English, and the video and written reports for Physical Education have been challenging, without clear guidance.

“We have been told we should be doing multimodal assessments. But we only get essays as our exemplars. So, we don't know how to be multimodal for our standard.”

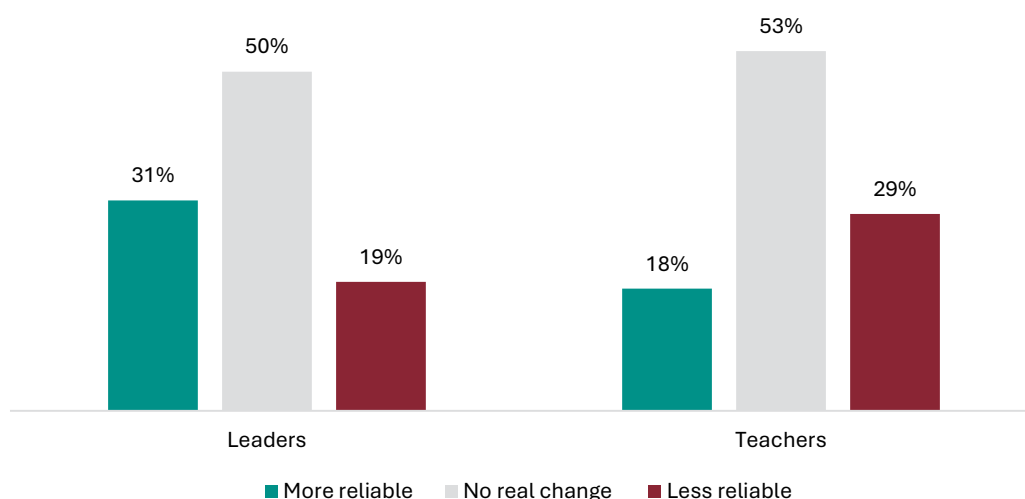
ENGLISH TEACHER

Including mātauranga Māori into the achievement standards is welcomed, but requirements may decrease reliability if not done authentically.

The inclusion of mātauranga Māori into achievement standards must be done authentically to have a positive impact. Without more support for schools and teachers there is a risk that this will not happen.

About one in seven leaders (15 percent) and about one in five teachers (21 percent) report that including mātauranga Māori into the new standards makes NCEA Level 1 less reliable. About a quarter of leaders and teachers (23 percent and 27 percent respectively) report that including mātauranga Māori into the new standards makes NCEA Level 1 more reliable. Just over three in five leaders (62 percent) and almost half of teachers (52 percent) report this makes no real difference.

Figure 29: *Leader and teacher views on whether the introduction of mātauranga Māori has increased/decreased the reliability of NCEA Level 1 qualification.*



We consistently heard that schools are making an effort to weave mātauranga Māori in to the Level 1 achievement standards and many are committed to mana ōrite. However, teachers and Māori parents and whānau raised concern about this being tokenistic for some of the new NCEA Level 1 achievement standards, more so in some learning areas than others. Teachers also need capacity to teach mātauranga Māori because getting it wrong is high-stakes.

“There is lack of confidence and lack of resources for mātauranga Māori. And the risk of doing it wrong and offending someone is a concern, for me.”

LEADER

As set out in Chapter 9, teachers want training that is more practical and classroom-based so they can ensure mātauranga Māori is integrated into the NCEA Level 1 teaching and learning authentically. Doing so sets all students up to achieve. Currently, teacher capability is unequal across schools, as detailed in Chapter 8.

Conclusion

NCEA Level 1 is not yet a fair and reliable measure of what students know and can do. There is too much flexibility regarding how courses can be designed, which results in substantial differences between subjects and between schools in the amount of work and difficulty students experience.

Some of the changes to assessments have increased the risk of authenticity and integrity issues for student work. The co-requisite has the potential to increase reliability the most because it standardises how literacy and numeracy is assessed. Fewer, larger standards can also increase standardisation but remaining flexibility in the system limits this. More external assessment has the potential to increase reliability if used appropriately. The changes have not yet improved how fair credit values are, although this may be addressed as the process of review and revision takes place.

The next chapter sets out whether NCEA 1 is helping students to make good choices and providing them with the knowledge they need for their future.



Chapter 4: Is NCEA Level 1 helping students make good choices and preparing them for their future?

High-quality qualifications support students to make good choices and prepare them with the knowledge and skills needed for their future. We found that NCEA Level 1 is still difficult to understand and can be difficult for students to make well-informed decisions. NCEA Level 1 also wasn't set up to, and so doesn't, provide clear vocational pathways for students. It isn't always preparing students up with the knowledge they need for NCEA Level 2, regardless of their pathway.

What we looked at

Understanding NCEA and selecting the right subjects and courses at NCEA Level 1 supports students to get the foundation in the learning areas they want to specialise in NCEA Levels 2 and 3. Regardless of the pathway they choose, it should prepare them with the knowledge and skills they need to succeed after school.

This chapter sets out findings on:

- 1) how well understood is NCEA Level 1
- 2) how well NCEA Level 1 helps students make good choices
- 3) how well NCEA Level 1 prepares students for NCEA Level 2
- 4) how well NCEA Level 1 prepares students on different pathways.

What we found: an overview

NCEA Level 1 remains difficult to understand, and it can be difficult to make good choices.

- NCEA is a complex qualification due to its flexible nature. NCEA needs to be well understood by students so they can make the right choices for their future.
 - Students mainly choose courses based on their interest in the content (60 percent) and their future goals for education or employment (56 percent) but they don't always understand enough to make informed choices:
 - Nearly two in five students (39 percent) report they didn't know enough about NCEA Level 1 when they make their course choices.

- Almost half of parents and whānau don't know what is required for the NCEA Level 1 qualification (46 percent) and feel unable to help their child make the right choices (48 percent).

NCEA Level 1 wasn't set up to and so doesn't provide clear vocational pathways.

- Vocational pathways aren't prioritised until NCEA Level 2, so students aren't able to specialise at NCEA Level 1 in vocational areas that interest them such as construction or creative industries. This prevents students specialising too early but means NCEA is working less well for students wishing to pursue vocational pathways.
- Almost half (45 percent) of students on vocational pathways report NCEA Level 1 isn't preparing them for their future and around a quarter (26 percent) report it isn't preparing them for NCEA Levels 2 and 3.
- Based on their experience of NCEA Level 1 before the changes, almost half of employers (46 percent) report it doesn't prepare young people for work – more than half report it doesn't give them good enough maths (55 percent) or reading and writing skills (57 percent). This may change with the introduction of the co-requisite.

NCEA Level 1 isn't always preparing students with the knowledge they need for NCEA Level 2.

- In the absence of a strongly defined national curriculum, assessment is driving what is taught in Year 11. This is a problem when courses don't cover all four subject achievement standards, and especially for subjects that build sequentially (e.g., Maths and Statistics, Science, and Music) or require a full range of skills (e.g., Languages).
- Seven in 10 leaders (71 percent) report NCEA Level 1 doesn't prepare students for the current NCEA Level 2 – this may be because NCEA Level 1 has changed and NCEA Level 2 hasn't.
- It was a jump between NCEA Level 1 and NCEA Level 2 before the recent changes, but teachers report the jump is now bigger for some subjects, which is due to the design of some of the new standards, the merging of subjects, and for schools teaching fewer than all four subject achievement standards.

In the following section we look at each of these findings in more detail.

1) How well understood is NCEA Level 1?

NCEA is complex due to its flexibility. This complexity can lead to 'chokepoints' where poor decisions can lead to negative consequences for students, including their performance and career options.¹³ Students could be aiming too low and choosing easier subjects, which may close off course options later. Or students and parents and whānau may not be planning a sequence through NCEA.

With this in mind, we asked parents and whānau and students if they understand enough about NCEA Level 1 to inform good choices. We also asked teachers, who understand NCEA the best, whether NCEA Level 1 is any easier to understand after the changes.

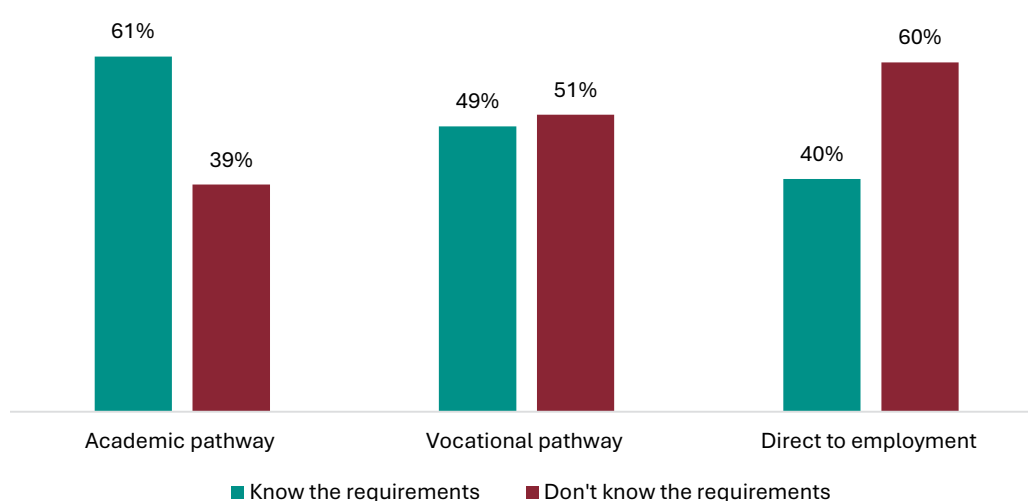
Parents and whānau still find NCEA Level 1 difficult to understand.

Previous research has found that parents and whānau struggle to understand how NCEA can work for their child, and this leaves students managing their own NCEA journeys.¹⁴

Our research confirms this is still the case. Almost half of parents and whānau (46 percent) do not know what is required for their child to get the full NCEA Level 1 qualification this year (54 percent do know). Parents and whānau understand the literacy and numeracy co-requisite more; however, almost two in five parents and whānau (38 percent) do not know what the literacy and numeracy requirements are for their child this year (62 percent do).

Parents and whānau with a child on a pathway direct to employment are least likely to know what is required to get the full NCEA Level 1 qualification (40 percent), followed by parents and whānau of a child on vocational pathways (49 percent). Parents and whānau of students on an academic pathway know most about the requirements, but still 39 percent tell us they don't know the requirements.

Figure 30: *Parents and whānau views on whether they know the requirements for a full NCEA Level 1 qualification, by pathway.*



Parents and whānau tell us NCEA Level 1 is difficult to understand for various reasons. One concern is that the language used to communicate to parents and whānau is too complicated. Even highly educated parents and whānau told us NCEA Level 1 is difficult to understand and explain to their child. We heard there is too much information and often it is too broad. Parents and whānau instead want the information to focus on what really matters, such as the marking criteria, types of assessment, the co-requisite, and more on what it will mean next year when there is a switch back to the old style for NCEA Level 2.

“I don’t understand the differentiation between ‘understanding’ (for Merit) and ‘comprehensive understanding’ (for Excellence) in the marking description.”

PARENT AND WHĀNAU

“I don’t think that parents probably understand the difference between the two externals.”

PARENT AND WHĀNAU

We also heard from some parents and whānau that schools share little information about NCEA with them, meaning most information comes to them from their child. In these situations, schools are not engaging parents and whānau in an authentic way that allows parents to seek and clarify information. There is a lack of face-to-face conversation that allows Q&A, and sometimes schools and teachers have not been responsive to parents and whānau queries or emails. Parents from overseas, especially those who achieved different qualifications (like School Certificate) and those with their first child doing NCEA, told us they find it harder to understand the changes.

“As a parent of a student who is doing NCEA for the first time, I don’t understand the system at all. We have tried and gone to sessions but at times it seems the people explaining are also confused.”

PARENT AND WHĀNAU

“There are big changes to subjects that I don’t think parents are 100 percent aware of. We know they’re going into the old Year 12, but I’m not sure parents understand the impact that has.”

PARENT AND WHĀNAU

Many teachers think the new NCEA Level 1 is more difficult to understand than before, but most students know what is required to achieve NCEA Level 1.

Nearly nine in 10 students (86 percent) report they know what is required for NCEA Level 1, and only 14 percent don’t.

However, teachers are much less confident about how well students understand what is required for the NCEA Level 1 qualification than students themselves. Nearly three in five teachers (59 percent) report that students don’t know what is required.

Figure 31: *Student and parent and whānau views on whether they know the requirements for the full NCEA Level 1 qualification.*

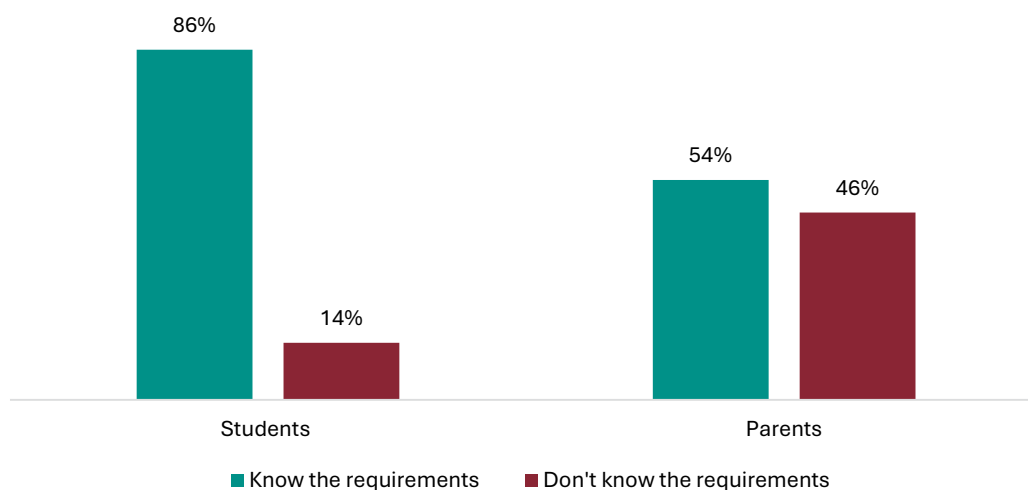
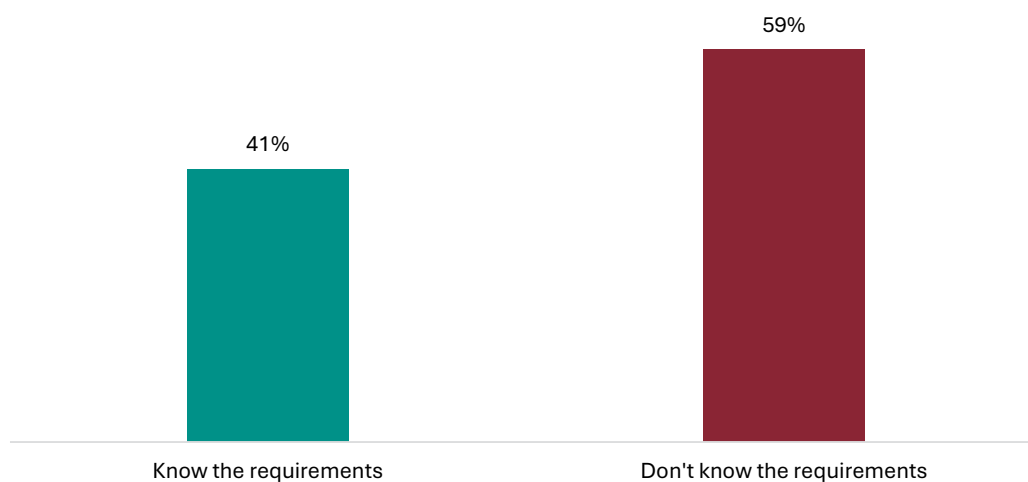


Figure 32: *Teachers' views on whether **students** know the requirements for NCEA Level 1 qualification.*



Students get their information about NCEA Level 1 from a range of sources. They mostly hear about it through their school: from their teachers (67 percent), in a school assembly (41 percent), and/or a school information evening (23 percent). Students are also informing each other about what is required, with a third (34 percent) of students saying they got information from their friends.

Concerningly, almost half (46 percent) of teachers report the new NCEA Level 1 qualification is less understandable than before (41 percent report there is no real change, 13 percent report it is more understandable).

Teachers report NCEA Level 1 is more difficult for students to understand now, in part, due to the merging of subjects, which means students might not have enough information about content before choosing courses.

“What I’m teaching now is so far removed from what we would normally do for Food. And my class sat there and actually told me, ‘But this is Health. We thought we were doing Food.’”

TEACHER

We also heard that teachers themselves are not confident with their understanding of the changes, and therefore, are less confident to communicate to students about the changes. Students told us when teachers are confused, or give conflicting messages, it directly impacts on their understanding and achievements.

“If I’m not sure what the assessment is asking of students, how can I communicate to my students for them to do the assessment?”

TEACHER

2) How well does NCEA Level 1 help students make good choices?

Not all students know enough about NCEA Level 1 to make good course choices, in particular girls and those going direct into employment.

Students are not all informed enough about NCEA Level 1 to make the right choices. This is particularly the case at schools that don’t have designated approaches to helping students think about their pathways.

Concerningly, nearly two in five students (39 percent) say they didn’t know enough about NCEA Level 1 to make the right choices for them when choosing their courses (61 percent did know enough). Boys were more likely (68 percent) to say they knew enough when making their courses choices compared to girls (57 percent).

Figure 33: Student views about whether they knew enough about NCEA Level 1 to make the right course choices.

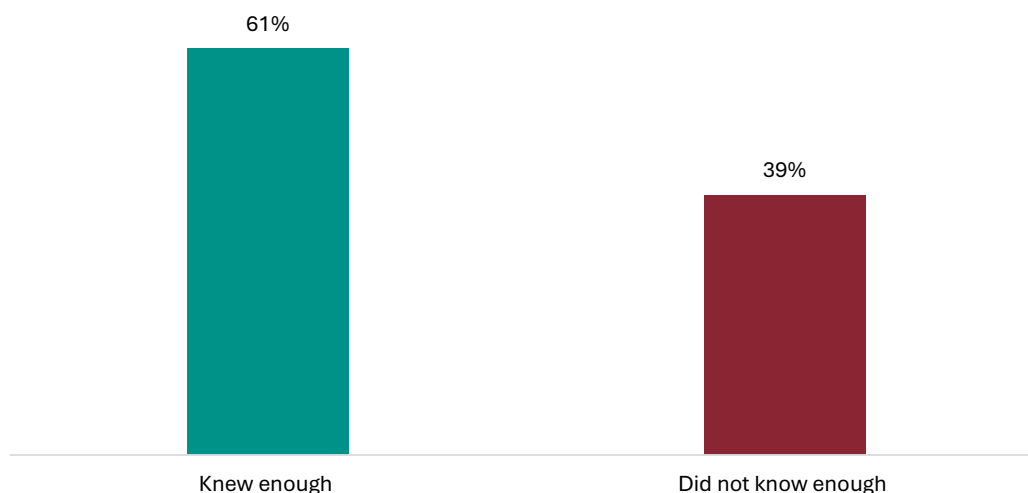
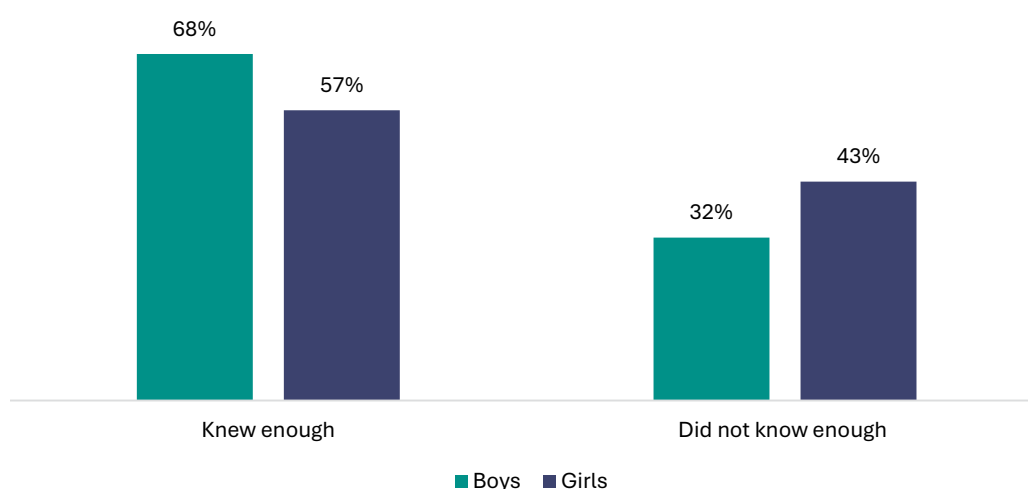


Figure 34: Student views about whether they knew enough about NCEA Level 1 to make the right course choices, by gender.



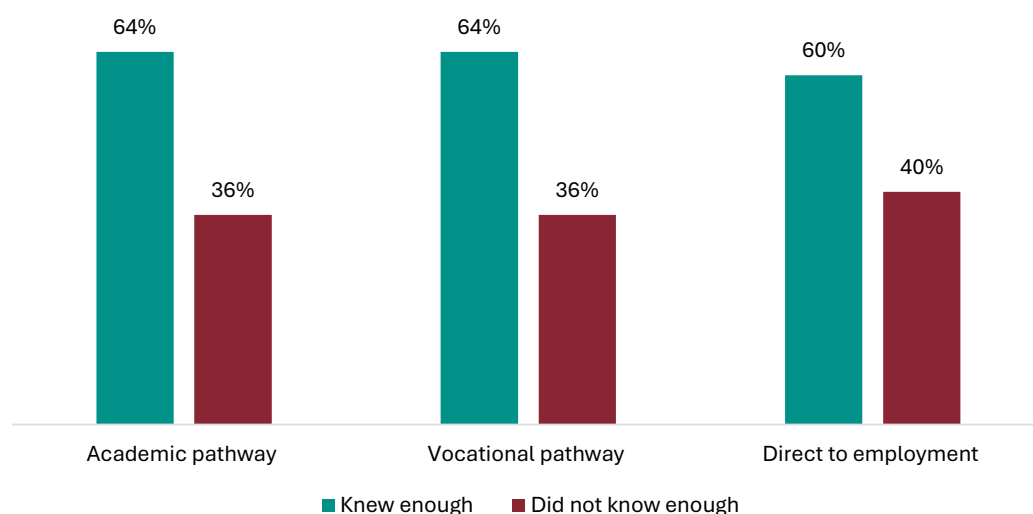
Overall, students told us they know NCEA Level 1 has changed and could name the changes. However, many did not know much more than this about NCEA Level 1 prior to choosing their course choices. We heard cases where the course content and assessment did not fit with the students' expectations from when they selected their courses.

“We knew the topics, but we didn’t know how it was going to be, what would be happening or how it’s going to be assessed.”

STUDENT

Students' knowledge about NCEA Level 1 to assist them making the right course decisions differs based on the pathway they intend to take when they leave school. Only 60 percent of those going direct to employment after school thought they knew enough when making their course choices, whereas 64 percent of those on academic or vocational pathways thought they knew enough.

Figure 35: *Student views on whether they knew enough about NCEA Level 1 to make the right subject choices, by pathway.*



Some students on academic or vocational pathways told us they had a career advisor or form teacher who would sit with them at the beginning of the year on an 'option day' to talk them through the subjects.

“Every year we have option days. The teachers will explain that subject to us and we choose which one suits us best in terms of academic achievement, as well as the way it helps us best learn.”

STUDENT

We also heard that some schools have had on-site academies, which offer a set of courses that are tailored for students on the trade/vocational pathways (e.g., automobile or construction), making course choices easier for these students.

Parents and whānau often don't understand NCEA Level 1 well enough to help their child make the right choices for them, particularly parents and whānau of children going directly into employment.

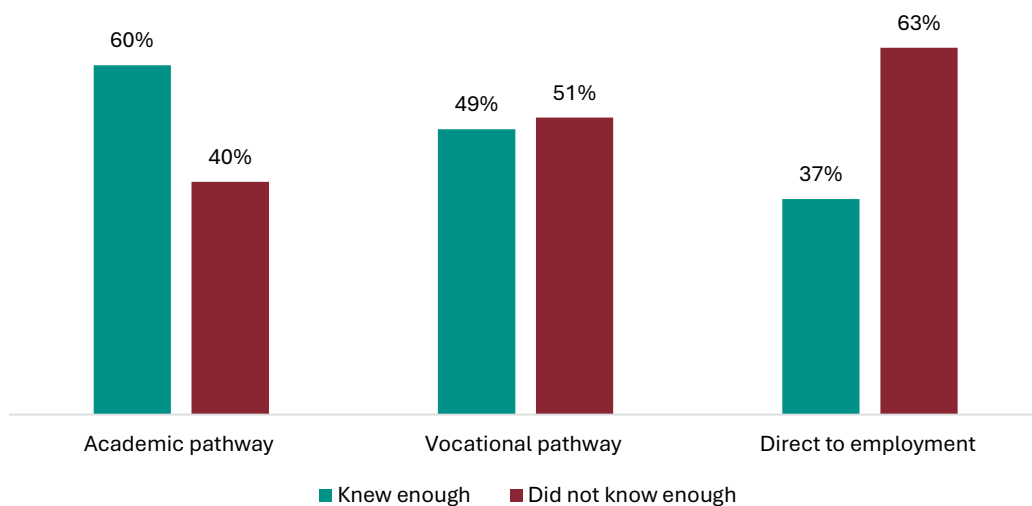
Unless parents and whānau proactively go looking for information about NCEA Level 1, they are often not informed enough to help their child make the right course decisions.

Parents and whānau were in a similar position to students. Almost half (48 percent) of parents and whānau didn't know enough about NCEA Level 1 to help their child make the right choices when their child was picking their courses (52 percent did). This matters because parental advice plays a role in decisions for nearly a quarter of students (24 percent, see below on students' reasons for subject choices).

Parent and whānau views on if they had enough information to help their child make the right course choices also differ depending on how difficult their child finds NCEA Level 1 and the pathway their child is planning to take. Only a third (34 percent) of parents and whānau with a child who is finding NCEA Level 1 too difficult report they had enough information to help their child make the right course choices, compared to 57 percent of parents and whānau with a child who is finding NCEA Level 1 about the right level or too easy.

Only 37 percent of parents and whānau with a child going straight into employment after school felt they knew enough to help their child make the right course decisions, whereas 49 percent of parents and whānau with a child on a vocational pathway and 60 percent of parents and whānau with a child on an academic pathway reported they knew enough to help their child.

Figure 36: *Parents and whānau views on whether they knew enough about NCEA to help their child make the right subject choices, by pathway.*



Parents and whānau who were more motivated to proactively seek information, (e.g., by attending information evenings, reading NCEA websites) know more about NCEA Level 1. However, a lack of information about subjects and career pathways linked to subjects also makes it hard for parents and whānau to help their child make the right course choices.

“The detailed information roll-out for schools was too slow. Subject content was not available [to us] when we selected subjects last year.”

PARENT AND WHĀNAU

“We need better access to teachers and information on how our child is doing, and what subject choices are required for career options. A careers fair where parents have an opportunity to attend with their child would be helpful.”

PARENT AND WHĀNAU



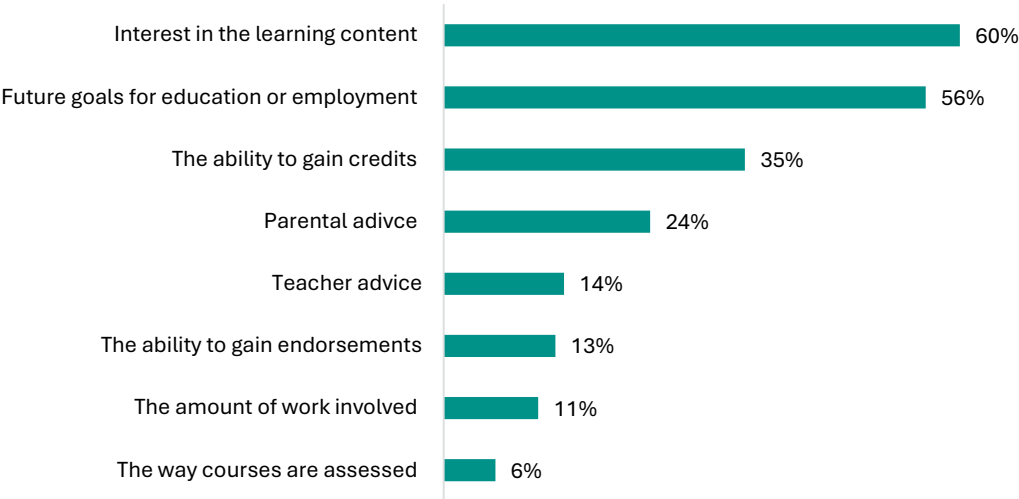
Students are most motivated by interest in content when choosing courses.

We heard about what motivates students when deciding what courses to take in NCEA Level 1. Students’ top three motivators when choosing courses are interest in the content (60 percent), future goals for education or employment (56 percent), and the ability to gain credits (35 percent).

Only 6 percent of students say the way courses are assessed, and 11 percent say the amount of work involved, informed their course choices. This is because students don’t typically know these things when making course choices. Although students tell us that they want to know more about these things to help them decide.

Parental advice plays a role in decisions for nearly a quarter of students (24 percent), teacher advice for 14 percent of students, and the ability to gain endorsements for 13 percent of students.

Figure 37: *Student views on the reasons for their subject choices.*



We heard that students who choose their courses due to interest and future goals usually have a clearer idea of what they want to do in the future (e.g., being an electrician, or a nurse).

“I picked Metal and Digital because I want to be a mechanical engineer.”

STUDENT



“I chose my subjects based on what I wanted to do. I chose Dance, Art and Music because I want to be in the acting area, the creative jobs.”

STUDENT

We also heard that some students would choose subjects that are more general or have a wider application (such as Maths) to keep their pathways more open.

3) How well does NCEA Level 1 prepare students for Level 2?

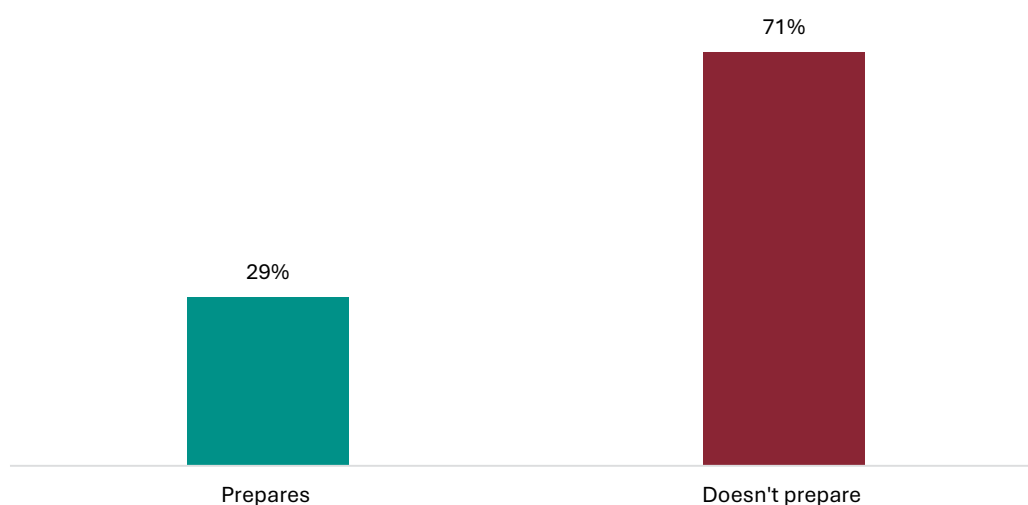
There has always been a jump in learning between NCEA Level 1 and 2¹⁵ but is important the jump isn't too big. A high-quality qualification will build coherently, with each level providing the knowledge students need for the next and without too big of a jump. For this reason, although proposed changes to NCEA Level 2 haven't taken place yet, we wanted to know how well NCEA Level 1 is preparing students for the current Level 2.

NCEA Level 1 isn't always preparing students with the knowledge they need for NCEA Level 2.

NCEA Level 1 doesn't prepare students well for NCEA Level 2 because the flexibility in course design leaves knowledge gaps.

About seven in 10 leaders (71 percent) report NCEA Level 1 doesn't prepare students for NCEA Level 2 (only 29 percent report it does prepare students).

Figure 38: *Leader views on whether NCEA Level 1 prepares students for the current NCEA Level 2.*



The shift between NCEA Level 1 and Level 2 is bigger than before. Students will have gaps in their subject knowledge when they move from Level 1 to Level 2 in schools that aren't offering all four subject achievement standards. This will be especially problematic for subjects that build sequentially like Maths, Science, and Music.

In some learning areas, reduced subject offerings at NCEA Level 1 will make NCEA Level 2 a bigger jump.

The redesign of the Level 1 achievement standards has reduced specialised subject options in some learning areas. This means students will be less prepared for the wider offering of subjects in these learning areas at Level 2. An example of this is the three science specialities that have been merged into fewer Science subjects at Level 1 (for example Chemistry and Biology are together in one subject now). This means students won't have the specialised knowledge for the individual sciences at Level 2, which leaders report may not be accounted for in the current design of NCEA Level 2.

“NCEA Level 1, especially Science, English, and Commerce, does not provide the foundation needed for Level 2 success. A lot more subject content needs to now be added to NCEA Level 1 to prepare students for Level 2.”

LEADER

“There are many core, basic concepts missing, which was considered the foundation of Science subjects. For example, in Chemistry, students no longer need to know about the atomic structure, the periodic table of the elements, formula of compounds or balancing of equations. Similarly, in Physics, they don't need any knowledge of mass or weight, speed time, terminal velocity, electromagnetism.”

SCIENCE TEACHER

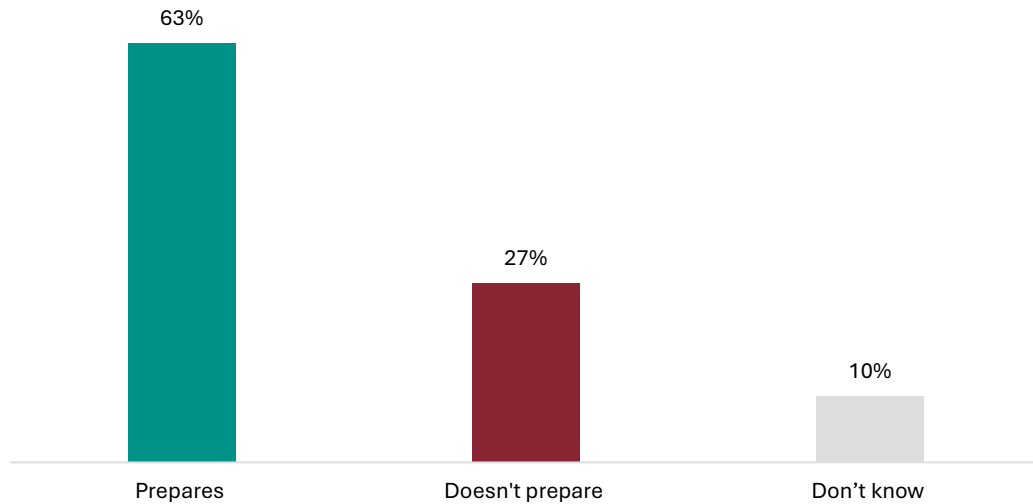
Commerce faces a similar issue. Teachers are concerned that the merging of Accounting, Economics, and Business Studies in Level 1 will make it harder for specialist courses at Level 2, currently. Teachers are similarly concerned about the Visual Arts. They believe the achievement standards at Level 1 are too broad to prepare students for the current Level 2, where Visual Arts becomes five specialist courses.

However, if the purpose of NCEA Level 1 is to provide a broad foundation of knowledge and skills, the problem may not be the recent changes to Level 1 that reduce specialisation, but rather how can the upcoming changes to Levels 2 and 3 support students to move from this broad foundation to specialisation without too much of a jump.

However, most parents and whānau report NCEA Level 1 is preparing their child with good study skills and habits.

Parents and whānau are more positive than leaders about NCEA Level 1 preparing their child for NCEA Levels 2 and 3. Just over three in five parents and whānau (63 percent) report that NCEA Level 1 prepares their child for their NCEA Levels 2 and 3, with just over a quarter (27 percent) reporting that it does not (10 percent of parents are not sure).

Figure 39: *Parent and whānau views on whether NCEA Level 1 is preparing their child for Levels 2 and 3.*



Parents and whānau who told us that NCEA Level 1 prepares their child well for NCEA Levels 2 and 3 told us their child is establishing good study skills and habits. These parents and whānau say their child is more engaged and puts more effort in, rather than 'just doing enough'. They also said that schools are setting expectations and demands for students, which parents and whānau feel will also prepare their child for the study and assessment load in NCEA Level 2 and Level 3.

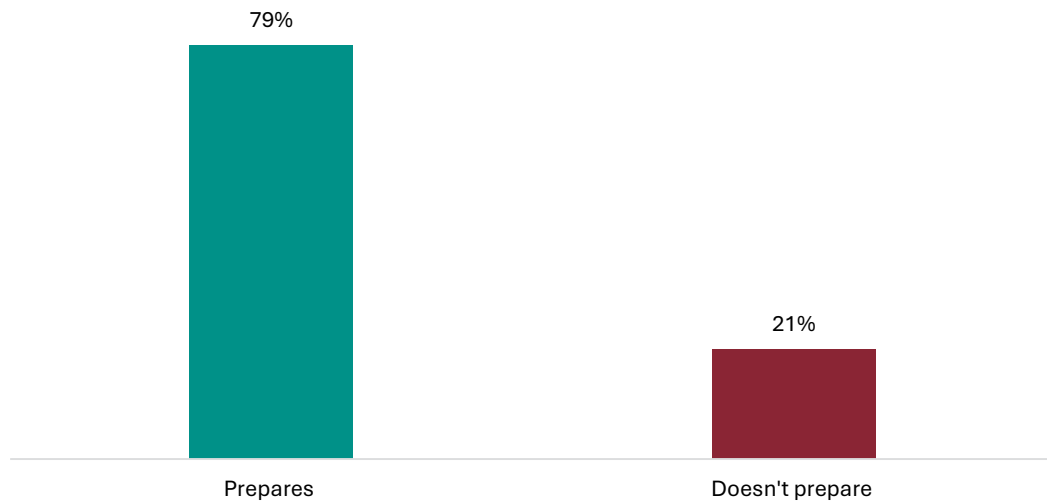
“[My son]’s assessment is actually pretty good to be honest. I find that in Year 11 he is much more engaged. It’s cranked up a notch here.”

PARENT AND WHĀNAU

Students similarly report Level 1 is preparing them with good study skills and habits.

Students are even more likely than their parents to report NCEA Level 1 is preparing them for Levels 2 and 3. Just under four in five students (79 percent) report this, while one in five students (21 percent) report they aren’t being prepared for NCEA Levels 2 and 3.

Figure 40: *Student views on whether NCEA Level 1 is preparing them for NCEA Levels 2 and 3.*



Like parents and whānau, students report NCEA Level 1 is preparing them for Levels 2 and 3 because they are gaining study skills, such as time management and prioritization (e.g., making priority checklists to manage multiple assessments), which they will need for the rest of their time at school. They also noted that they had gained revision skills, which will be necessary as they move to NCEA Level 2 and Level 3.

“I’ve definitely gotten better at making a list of priorities, and I can manage myself a lot better now.”

STUDENT

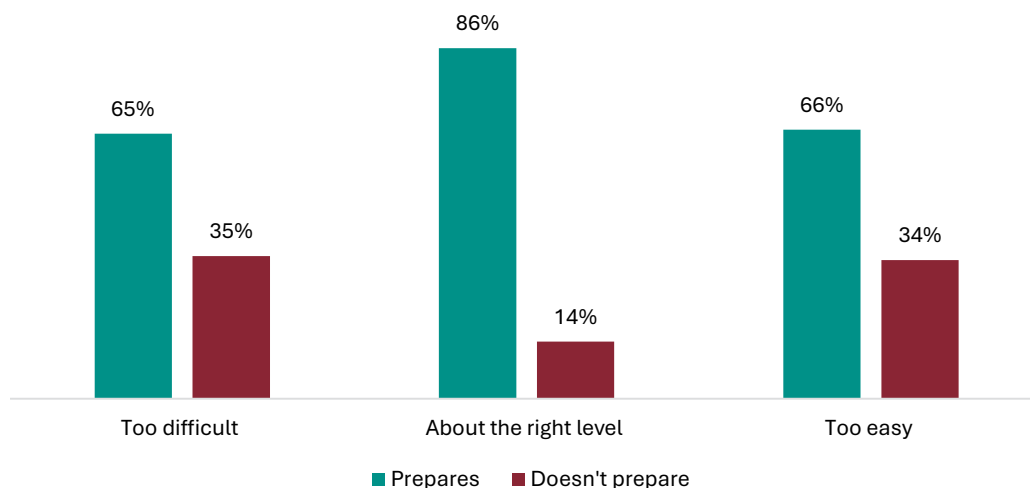
“I guess one of the things I do like about NCEA Level 1 is the fact that there are exams. [Exams at NCEA Level 1] build capability and capacity within those young people so that they aren’t freaked out by an exam and that they can know how to study for an exam and can sit an exam.”

LEADER

Students who find NCEA Level 1 too difficult, or too easy, more often report they are not being prepared for NCEA Levels 2 and 3.

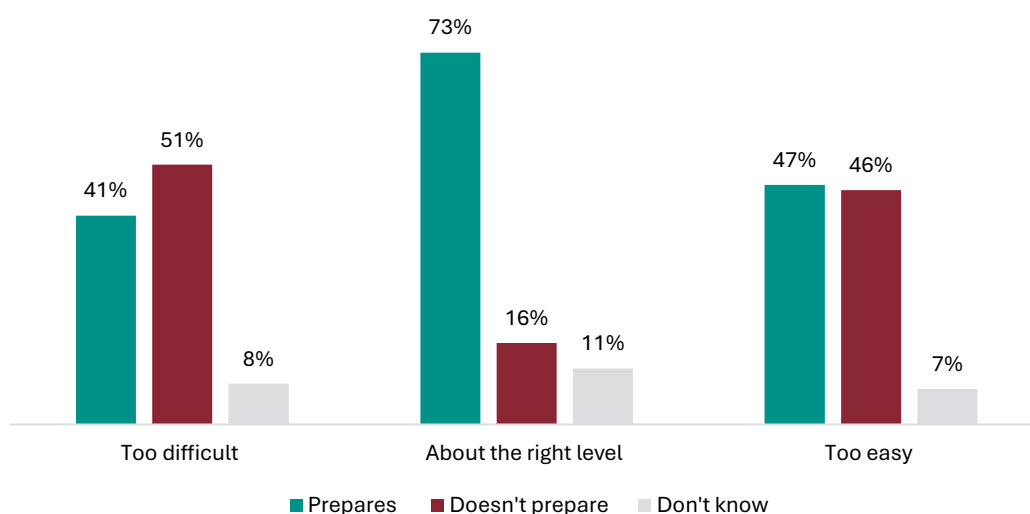
How prepared students feel for NCEA Levels 2 and 3 depends on how difficult students find NCEA Level 1. Students who report NCEA Level 1 is the right level for them are most likely to say NCEA Level 1 is preparing them for Levels 2 and 3 (86 percent). Students who are finding it too difficult or too easy are less likely to say it is preparing them for Levels 2 and 3 (65 percent and 66 percent respectively).

Figure 41: *Student views on whether NCEA Level 1 prepares them for Levels 2 and 3, by learning levels.*



Parent and whānau responses show the same pattern. Just under three-quarters (73 percent) of parents and whānau who report NCEA Level 1 is at the right level for their child, believe it is preparing them for Levels 2 and 3. Only 47 percent and 41 percent of parents and whānau who report NCEA Level 1 is too easy or too difficult, respectively, feel it is preparing their child for Levels 2 and 3.

Figure 42: *Parent and whānau views on whether NCEA Level 1 prepares their child for Levels 2 and 3, by learning levels.*



Students who find NCEA Level 1 too easy told us they are concerned they are not being prepared for Level 2 study. They are concerned it will be a big jump to Level 2.

“Since we’re getting the new and ‘easier’ level this year, for next year’s NCEA Level 2 it’ll be the original one and it’s a big jump from this year to next year.”

STUDENT

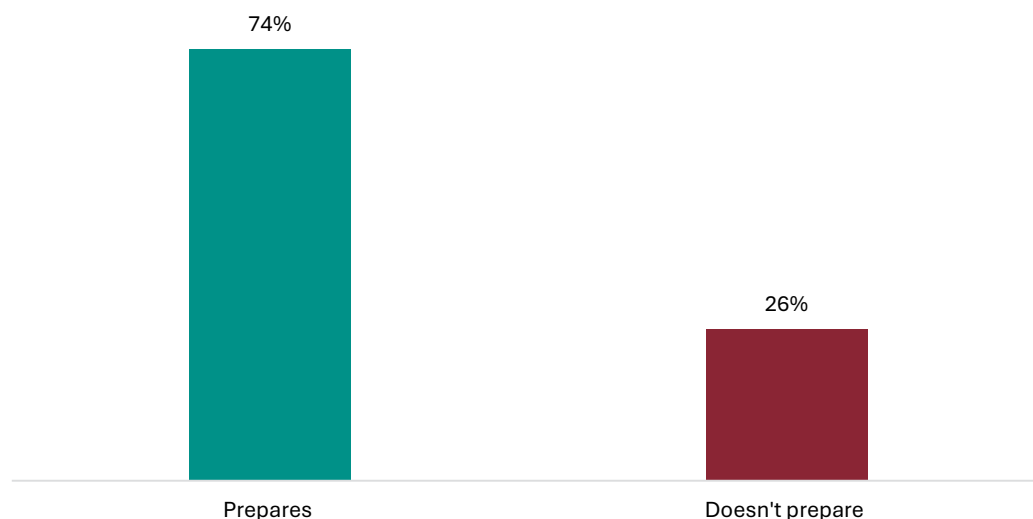
Alternatively, students who find NCEA Level 1 too difficult feel disengaged due to the prospect of not achieving enough credits and the co-requisite. This is similar to parents’ views. For example, we heard parents’ concerns that their child who finds NCEA Level 1 too easy and has achieved most of their credits is not motivated to learn later in the year.

4) How well does NCEA Level 1 prepare students on different pathways?

NCEA Level 1 wasn’t set up to, and so doesn’t, provide clear vocational pathways.

Students on vocational pathways report that NCEA Level 1 is not always preparing them for Levels 2 and 3. Just over a quarter (26 percent) of students report NCEA Level 1 isn’t preparing them for Levels 2 and 3 (74 percent report it is preparing them). Parents were similar. About a quarter (27 percent) of parents with child on a vocational pathway report NCEA Level 1 isn’t preparing their child for Levels 2 and 3 (65 percent report it is preparing them).

Figure 43: *Views of students on vocational pathways on whether NCEA Level 1 prepares them for Levels 2 and 3.*



Just under half of students (45 percent) on vocational pathways report NCEA Level 1 isn't preparing them for when they leave school (55 percent report it is preparing them). Parents again responded in a very similar way. Just over two in five parents and whānau with child on vocational pathways (41 percent) report NCEA Level 1 isn't preparing their child for when they leave school (46 percent report it is preparing them).

Figure 44: *Views of students on vocational pathways on whether NCEA Level 1 prepares them for when they leave school.*

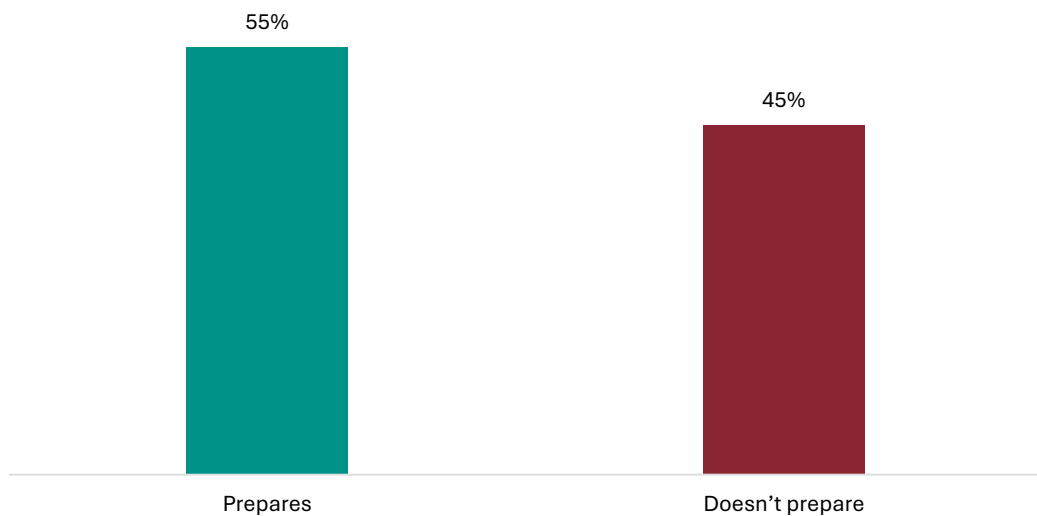
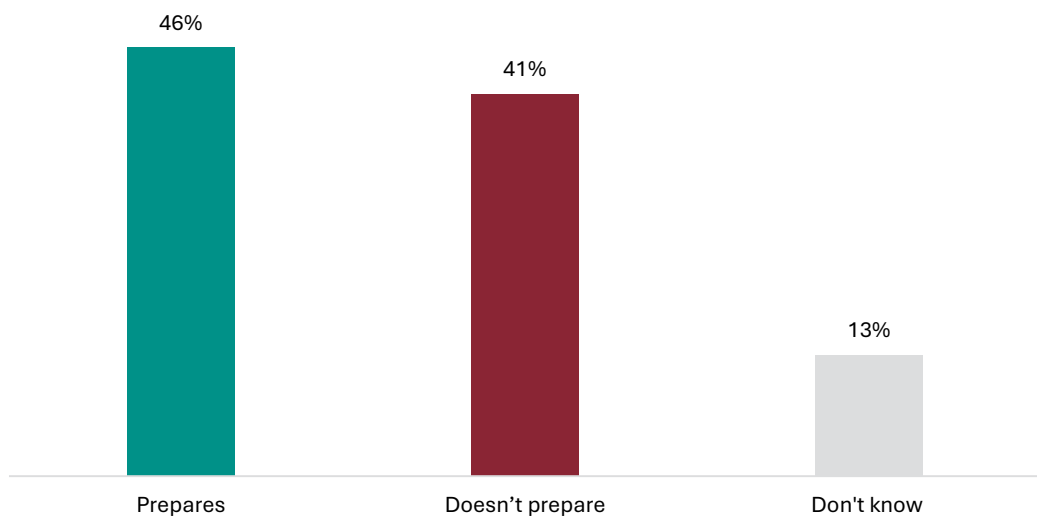


Figure 45: *Parent and whānau views on whether NCEA Level 1 prepares their child on a vocational pathway for when they leave school.*



Leaders and teachers are concerned about limited choices for students on vocational pathways to specialise, but this may help keep career options open later for longer.

Around half of leaders (48 percent) and a third of teachers (34 percent) report the ability to achieve has decreased for students on vocational pathways.

We heard this is due to reduced subject choices at NCEA Level 1, including subjects that are often chosen by students on vocational pathways. For example, the merging of several learning areas in Technology is seen as limiting for vocational pathways, as the overall number of standards offered has significantly reduced for Technology, compared to old NCEA Level 1.

“[NCEA Level 1 achievement standards] really limit [choices] as students have got to decide between food or textiles.”

TEACHER

However, specialising at NCEA Level 1 can limit pathways too early before students really know what they want to do. Therefore, the changes that make NCEA Level 1 a broader foundational qualification may turn out to be beneficial to students in the long term.

The recent changes to some subjects may need to be reviewed to make sure that students are making good choices for NCEA Level 1 and their longer-term pathway. We frequently heard about the changes to hospitality and catering – Hospitality remains assessed by unit standards, while Food is moved under Health Studies and assessed by achievement standards. In relation to these changes, we heard that students wanting to become a chef tend to choose Health Studies, because students tend to report achievement standards are of a higher status than unit standards, even though Hospitality is better aligned with their intended career.

Students planning to go directly into employment after school are least likely to report NCEA Level 1 is preparing them for Levels 2 and 3.

Two-thirds of students (67 percent) planning to go directly into employment after school report NCEA Level 1 is preparing them for Levels 2 and 3, and a third (33 percent) report NCEA Level 1 isn't preparing them.

Parents and whānau who told us NCEA Level 1 is not preparing their child for after they leave school consistently reported concerns that schools have been promoting more academic courses despite students wanting to take a creative course. Parents and whānau shared examples of their child being discouraged from taking certain courses and having to advocate for their child to maintain their preference.

“My daughter is quite creative, but the school didn't want to allow her to do Woodwork, because they thought that that would pull her away from that more academic stream.”

PARENT AND WHĀNAU

Students on an academic pathway are most likely to report NCEA Level 1 is preparing them for NCEA Levels 2 and 3, and beyond.

We looked at how students who are planning to go to university (academic pathway) view NCEA Level 1. We were interested in whether these students think Level 1 is preparing them for their *next years at school* (Levels 2 and 3), and also whether they think it's setting them up well with what they'll need *beyond school* (university).

We found that these students were more likely than their peers to report that NCEA Level 1 is preparing them for their next years at school. Just over four in five students (82 percent) on an academic pathway report NCEA Level 1 is preparing them for Levels 2 and 3. However, almost one in five of these students (18 percent) report it isn't preparing them. Some report they aren't learning enough at Level 1, or not learning in ways that prepare them for more challenging study at NCEA Level 2.

Most parents and whānau (70 percent) agree that NCEA Level 1 is preparing their child for Levels 2 and 3 if their child is on an academic pathway (22 percent report their child isn't being prepared).

Students who are on an academic pathway are also more likely than their peers to say NCEA Level 1 is preparing them for when they *leave school*. Just over two in five students (62 percent) on an academic pathway feel they are being prepared for when they leave school, and 58 percent of parents whose child is on an academic pathway report the same thing.

We heard from students and parents and whānau that NCEA Level 1 prepares students with the study skills necessary for university (academic pathway). This includes researching information, writing up reports (including adding quotes and referencing), and revising for exams. We also heard that NCEA Level 1 helps academically able students to be more invested in their learning, which can support them on their academic pathway.

“NCEA Level 1 has been helpful in that it has provided my children with a reason to learn, how to study, how to take a test, how to interpret instructions in an assessment task and how to answer test questions.”

PARENT AND WHĀNAU

However, we know that how well students are being prepared for Level 2 depends on how courses are designed at Level 1. Chapter 2 sets out the variation in how many standards are being covered and the variation in assessment types. Students who aren't offered all four subject standards may miss out on key knowledge and skills, making Level 2 a bigger jump. As discussed, reduced subject offerings in some learning areas may also make Level 2 a jump, even for the most academically able.

Employers report NCEA Level 1 doesn't prepare young people for work.

While employers are yet to receive any students who have used the new Level 1 qualification, it is useful to understand their opinions on NCEA Level 1 from their previous experiences with it.

Nearly half of employers (46 percent) report that NCEA Level 1 doesn't prepare young people for work. Very few (3 percent) report it prepares them very well, with 51 percent reporting it only prepares them somewhat well. More than half of employers report NCEA Level 1 is an unreliable indicator of students' maths or literacy skills (55 and 57 percent, respectively).

As set out in more detail in Chapter 2, employers report Level 1 doesn't prepare young people well for work when they are more interested in attitudes than a qualification. Employers told us they look for traits such as good work ethic, self-presentation, or capacity to learn on the job. Workplace skills such as driving, first aid, or health and safety are more likely to land students an interview than NCEA Level 1. Employers are not looking for the literacy and numeracy skills demonstrated in NCEA Level 1. They need students to be able to fill in the paperwork at work rather than writing essays.

Additionally, in some industries (such as health and construction), Level 1 is not enough. Employers told us NCEA Level 1 gives young people only a taste of a career they want to do, but usually there is further training or apprenticeship before young people are ready for work.

“What NCEA Level 1 can show employers, is probably an indication that these young people have got the ability to learn on the job. They can then learn further, to be a miner, an excavator operator, or to go into even larger roles around health and safety and so on.”

EMPLOYER

Conclusion

Students and parents find NCEA Level 1 difficult to understand and this means they can't make fully informed decisions about course selection. The new NCEA Level 1 is not preparing all students for the current Levels 2 and 3. Students on an academic pathway are more likely to report that NCEA Level 1 is preparing them for their future than students on vocational pathways and students planning to go directly into employment after school.

The next chapter sets out how motivating and manageable NCEA Level 1 is for students.



Chapter 5: Is NCEA Level 1 motivating and manageable for students?

NCEA Level 1 needs to be both motivating and manageable for students. We found that students are enjoying their learning, but NCEA Level 1 isn't motivating students to achieve or participate throughout the year as best as it could. We also found that NCEA Level 1 workload is manageable, but there are still issues with student stress levels.

In this chapter we set out how well NCEA Level 1 motivates students, including their enjoyment of learning and their motivation to achieve and participate in learning throughout the year, and highlight how this differs between learning areas. We also set out how manageable NCEA Level 1 is for students, looking at difficulty, workload, and stress levels.

What we looked at

Motivation and manageability of NCEA Level 1 for students is critical. Students need to be motivated to want to turn up at school and get the most out of their time and effort. Their work also needs to be manageable so that they can make meaningful progress and achieve their qualification.

This chapter sets out findings on:

- 1) how well NCEA Level 1 is motivating students
- 2) how manageable NCEA Level 1 is for students.

What we found: an overview

NCEA Level 1 is not motivating all students to achieve as well as they can, and some students disengage early.

- Qualifications need to motivate students to both achieve as well as they can in assessments and do participate in their learning throughout the year. But teachers are clear NCEA Level 1 does not do this.
 - Almost two-thirds of teachers (64 percent) report NCEA Level 1 doesn't motivate students to achieve.
- NCEA Level 1 is reducing engagement and participation in education for students who 'fail' early in the year because there isn't a way of catching up. High-achieving students can reach the required credits needed for NCEA Level 1 before the end of the year and also disengage.

- Some students are demotivated by literacy-heavy assessments, including for courses they expect to be more practical, like Technology and Physical Education.
- Not achieving is demotivating – students who are failing most of their credits are three times more likely to report they aren't enjoying NCEA Level 1.

NCEA Level 1 is manageable, but not stretching the more academically able students.

- Most students (68 percent) find their NCEA Level 1 workload manageable.
- Although the larger achievement standards are better for spending longer on topics, for some students they still can lead to piecemeal learning, and many standards aren't challenging enough to stretch academically able students. Some schools are offering NCEA Level 2 standards, as well as NCEA Level 1 standards, to keep students challenged and motivated.
- Because of the larger standards, assessments are more often ending up happening at the same time (bunching together) because teachers and students need time to teach and learn the content before assessments can be set. This may settle down once schools become used to the new NCEA content.
- Girls are more likely to find their workload unmanageable (36 percent compared to 25 percent of boys) and more likely to be stressed (58 percent compared to 35 percent of boys).

In the following sections we look at each of these findings in more detail.

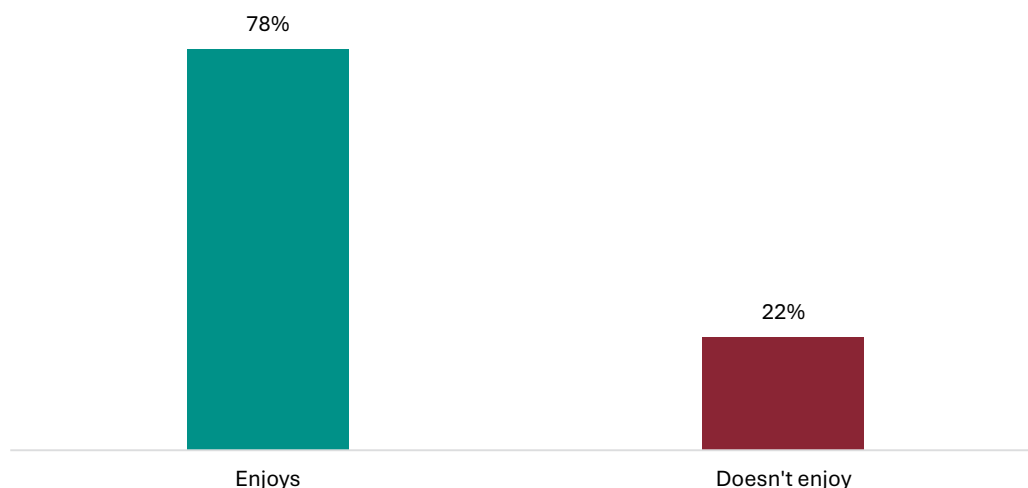
1) How well is NCEA 1 motivating students?

a) Enjoyment of learning

Most students enjoy their learning.

Most students (78 percent) are enjoying their learning at NCEA Level 1 (22 percent are not).

Figure 46: *Student views on whether they are enjoying their learning.*



Some students told us they enjoy the larger standards of NCEA Level 1 because they allow them to spend longer exploring a topic. In addition to the larger standards, students told us learning is enjoyable when the content is interesting and relevant, when teachers are engaging, or when they see it as useful for their pathways beyond school.

“I enjoy the subject and I want to do well in it, if I can see a future career through it.”

STUDENT

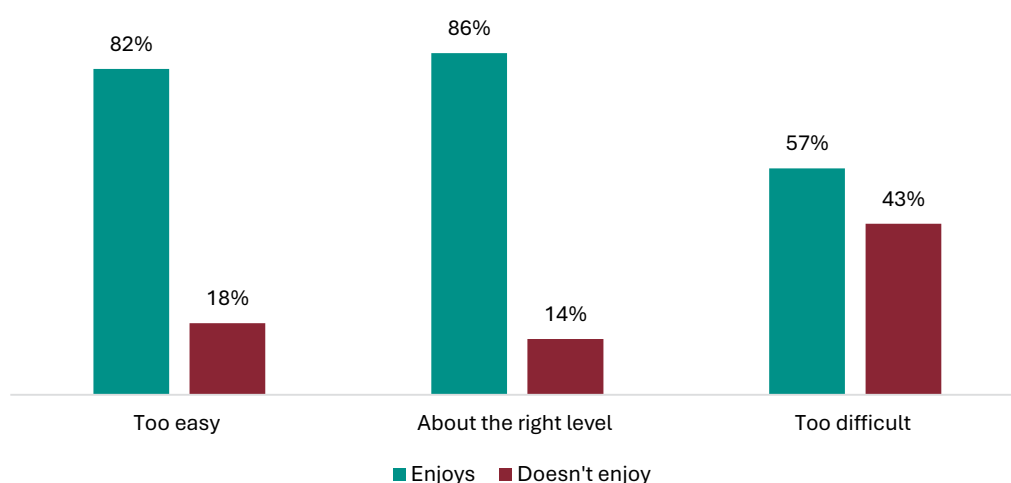
“When I see that the teacher is having a good time teaching, normally that motivates me. It’s mainly the mood of the teachers and the students responding to them.”

STUDENT

Students struggling with NCEA Level 1 are not enjoying their learning as much.

NCEA Level 1 is not as enjoyable for students who are finding NCEA Level 1 too difficult, if they are not achieving their credits, or haven’t achieved their co-requisite yet. Just under three in five students who find NCEA Level 1 too difficult (57 percent) think it is enjoyable, compared to almost nine in 10 students who think their learning is at the right level (86 percent).

Figure 47: *Proportions of students who enjoy their learning, by learning levels.*



Students are over four times¹ more likely to say they aren’t enjoying their learning if they think NCEA Level 1 is too difficult, compared to those who think it is the right level of challenge.

¹ Odds ratio 4.37 ($p < 0.01$) – from logistic regression modelling.

Students are three times^m more likely to say they aren't enjoying NCEA Level 1 if they aren't achieving standards compared to those achieving their standards (at any level).

Less than half (47 percent) of students who aren't achieving their credits think learning is enjoyable, compared to 91 percent of students who are achieving standards with Excellence.

These findings put an emphasis on helping students to achieve because, unsurprisingly, not achieving is stressful and unenjoyable for students. We heard from teachers that not enjoying learning and not achieving risk students disengaging from their learning altogether.

“Our kids will be motivated if they're achieving. If they're not achieving, they will 100 percent switch off and we will never get them through. And there will be some kids now that won't get through because they just haven't experienced any success of any kind in any of their classes.”

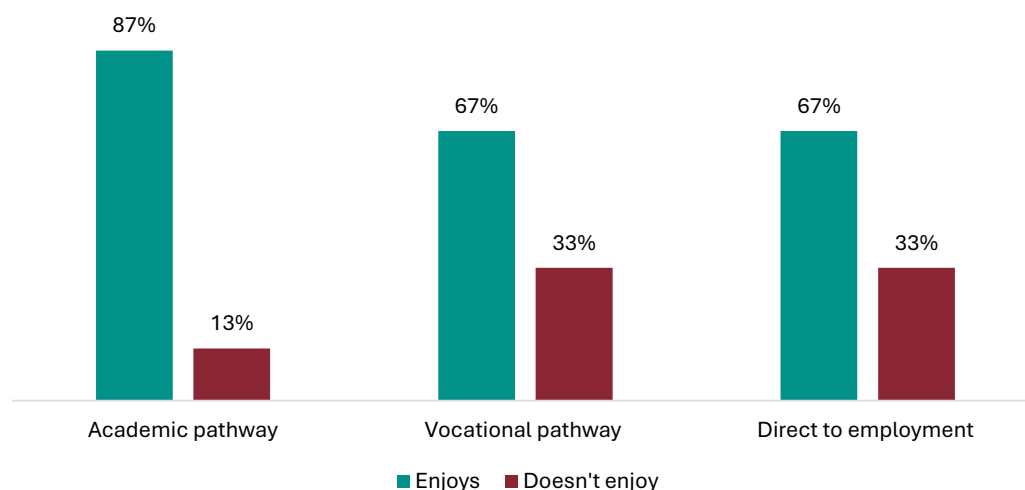
LEADER

Students on an academic pathway are enjoying their learning more than students on other pathways.

Students are two-and-a-half timesⁿ as likely to be enjoying their learning if they are on an academic pathway compared to all other pathways.

Students on vocational or direct employment pathways aren't enjoying their learning as much. Just two-thirds of students on vocational and direct-to-employment pathways (67 percent for each group) are enjoying their learning compared to almost nine in 10 (87 percent) of those on an academic pathway.

Figure 48: *Proportions of students who enjoy their learning, by future pathway.*



^m Odds ratio 3.07 ($p < 0.01$) – from logistic regression modelling.

ⁿ Odds ratio 2.42 ($p < 0.01$) – from logistic regression modelling.

Students on a non-academic pathway told us they aren't enjoying NCEA Level 1 learning due to the heavy literacy load, which is a big jump from Year 10. Students were most likely to say this in relation to subjects that are more practical or hands-on, such as Technology or Physical Education, because they weren't expecting a heavy literacy load for these subjects. This is similar to what teachers told us.

“It's been a huge increase in the literacy. And the kids are bored. And they're getting it from every subject.”

TEACHER

We also heard some creative or hands-on subjects aren't offered at some schools and students have to take courses that aren't aligned with their interests or career pathways. Similarly, some parents and whānau told us schools have been focusing more on academic pathways, and students are encouraged to take 'more academic' subjects, even when this isn't their preference. These all lead to students not enjoying their learning as much.

“I want to do subjects [related to] building or other trades, instead of just the subjects that everyone else is doing.”

STUDENT

“[My children] got several courses assigned that they are not interested in and were convinced to take to fill the gaps. This has significantly contributed to their increased lack of motivation and participation in class and school.”

PARENTS AND WHĀNAU

School leaders told us that the new NCEA Level 1 is better for high-achieving students because the bigger standards allow for deeper learning and the higher-stakes exams motivate them to focus.

“I think NCEA Level 1 is a good push for our students [who] are very capable but a bit lazy.”

LEADER

However, schools expressed concern that, despite the changes, NCEA Level 1 may not be stretching all students enough. Some schools are offering a mix of NCEA Level 1 and Level 2 courses to keep them motivated.

“Science does not provide sufficient learning for Levels 2 and 3 Science subjects. It is not engaging for Science teachers to teach and high achieving students are missing out.”

TEACHER



b) Motivation to achieve as best as they can

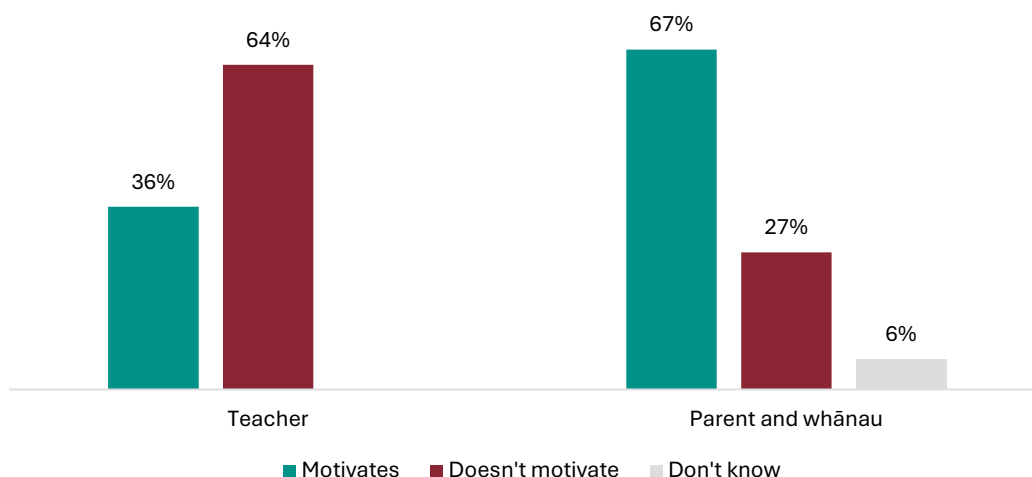
NCEA Level 1 isn't motivating students to achieve as well as they can.

Motivating students to achieve is an important aspect of a qualification, but the current NCEA Level 1 is not doing this.

Teachers do not think NCEA Level 1 is motivating students to achieve as best as they can, with almost two-thirds of teachers (64 percent) reporting this.

Almost a quarter of teachers (24 percent) say the current NCEA Level 1 is motivating students to achieve less now than before the changes. Almost two-thirds (63 percent) say there is no real difference, and one in eight teachers (13 percent) report the changes have increased student motivation to achieve.

Figure 49: *Teacher and parent and whānau views on whether NCEA Level 1 motivates students to achieve.*



Some schools report their students are less motivated under the new NCEA Level 1 because the lengthy time between big assessments means students lose momentum. They also indicate a delay in results being reported to students, which means students don't experience success early in the year which is motivating to them.

Parents and whānau are more positive than teachers about how well NCEA Level 1 motivates their children to achieve. Two-thirds (67 percent) of parents and whānau report NCEA Level 1 motivates their children (27 percent disagree).

Parents and whānau tell us NCEA Level 1 motivates their children to focus and do well if they have supportive teachers and motivating peers. We however also heard that the lack of clear information and guidance from teachers this year can make students disengaged. Teachers are still figuring out the changes for this year, and this means students aren't adequately supported to engage in learning.

“[My daughter]’s had a really good Maths teacher [...] So she went from finding Maths difficult, lacking confidence, [to] doing really well in Maths. She’s passed all her assessments for that.”

PARENT AND WHĀNAU

“Some teachers are still struggling to decipher requirements, which is very unmotivating for my child. Extremely disappointing.”

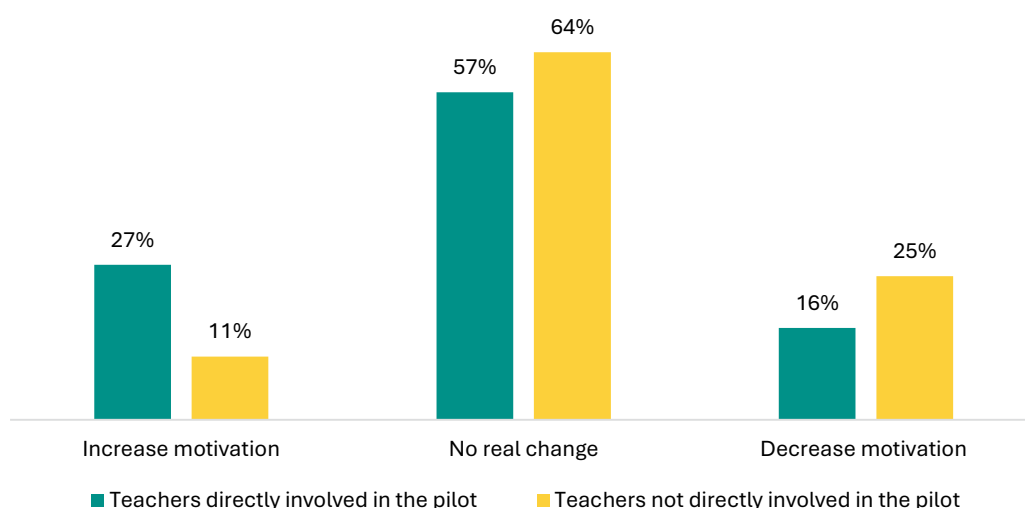
PARENT AND WHĀNAU

Teachers involved in the pilots are more likely to say the changes to NCEA Level 1 increase student motivation to achieve.

Teachers in pilot schools are more confident about the changes and, therefore, are better placed to make their courses more engaging to their students, impacting on student motivation.

More than a quarter of teachers (27 percent) involved in the pilots say NCEA Level 1 is more motivating for students after the changes, compared to about one in 10 teachers (11 percent) not involved in the pilots.

Figure 50: *Teacher views on the impact of the changes to NCEA Level 1 on student motivation, by being directly involved in the pilot.*



“[The school doing the pilot] felt more confident because they have been through it, having knowledge of what’s going to work and for whom.”

LEADER

c) Motivation to keep studying through the year

NCEA Level 1 isn’t motivating students to stay engaged in their learning throughout the year.

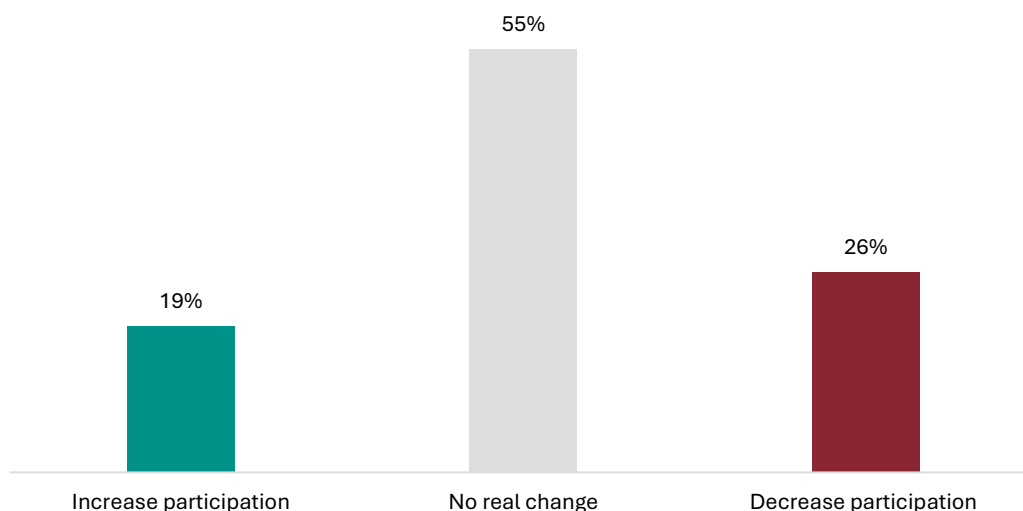
With fewer, larger standards, more students need credits from assessments scheduled later in the year, which is designed to keep them participating. But students who fail the larger standards early, especially in the first one or two standards, are more likely to disengage in the following terms as they can’t gain enough credits to make it up and achieve NCEA Level 1.

“I’m worried for the kids because there are only four opportunities, if they do not get the first internal, they’ll start to worry, ‘What have I got? What are my opportunities?’”

TEACHER

Around a quarter of teachers (26 percent) say the changes to NCEA Level 1 reduce participation throughout the year and a quarter of teachers (26 percent) also think the changes make it less likely that students will attend school throughout the year.

Figure 51: *Teacher views on the impact of the changes to NCEA Level 1 on student participation.*



We collected data in Term 2 and heard that some students were already disengaging, especially students who had repeatedly not achieved the co-requisite. Parents and whānau told us that their children, who hadn't achieved or did not see themselves achieving, are losing motivation to attend school.

“My son is worried because everyone else seems to have credits and he has hardly any. He is losing his motivation to even attend school.”

PARENT AND WHĀNAU

“Students are leaving because they're not achieving success.”

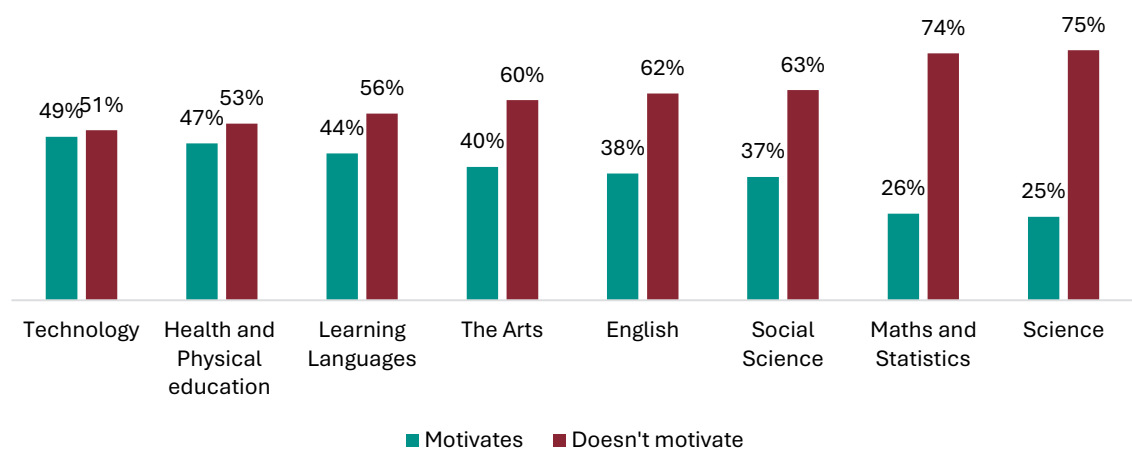
LEADER

d) Motivation across different learning areas

Science and Maths and Statistics teachers are most likely to report NCEA Level 1 isn't motivating students to achieve, and that it's less motivating than before.

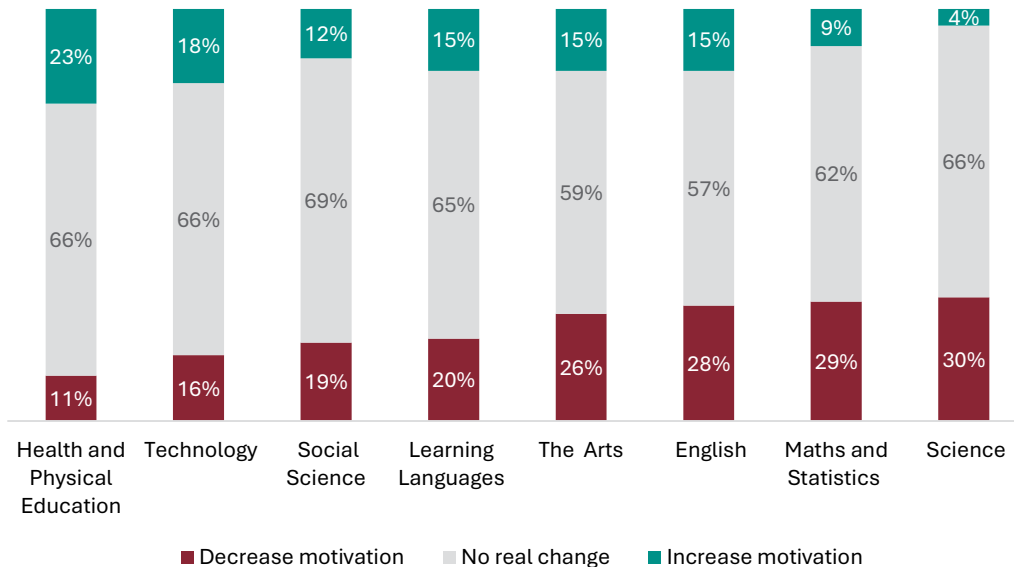
Three-quarters of Science (75 percent) and Maths and Statistics (74 percent) teachers report NCEA Level 1 doesn't motivate students to achieve as well as they can. By comparison, around a half of Technology teachers (51 percent) and Health and Physical Education teachers (53 percent) say NCEA Level 1 doesn't motivate students to achieve as well as they can.

Figure 52: *Teacher views on whether NCEA Level 1 motivates students to achieve, by learning area.*



While most teachers report the changes to NCEA Level 1 make little difference, about three in 10 Science teachers (30 percent), Maths and Statistics teachers (29 percent), and English teachers (28 percent) report the changes will decrease motivation to achieve. This contrasts with only one in 10 Health and Physical Education teachers (11 percent) who report this.

Figure 53: *Teacher views on whether NCEA Level 1 has impacted student motivation to achieve, by learning area.*

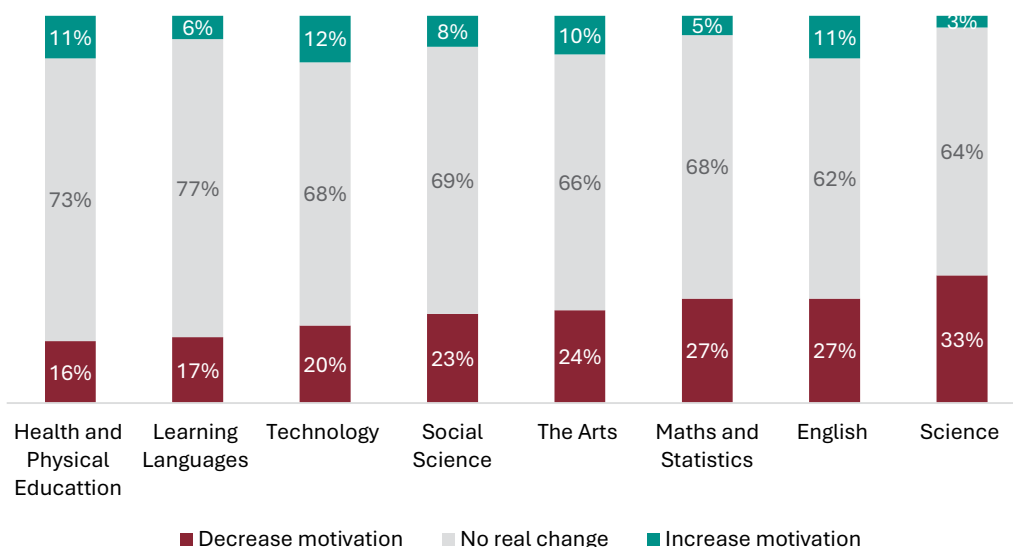


Science teachers are also the most concerned about student motivation to attend.

Motivation to achieve and engagement are strongly correlated. Therefore, unsurprisingly, teachers who were concerned about the impact of the NCEA Level 1 changes on motivation to achieve are also concerned about the impact on student engagement.

A third of Science teachers (33 percent) report the changes make it less likely that students will attend throughout the year. Around a quarter of English teachers (27 percent) and Maths and Statistics teachers (27 percent) report the same, compared to only one in seven Health and Physical Education teachers (16 percent).

Figure 54: *Teacher views on whether NCEA Level 1 has impacted student motivation to attend school throughout the year, by learning area.*



We heard that the literacy requirements in the Science and Maths achievement standards are especially demotivating for students with lower literacy skills or those who do not speak English as their first language. The increased literacy requirements for the new NCEA Level 1 can also be less motivating for students in practical, hands-on subjects or performing subjects (such as Physical Education, Woodwork, Drama).

“It’s harder to read and understand the English used in the question, than to actually work the Maths out.”

STUDENT

2) How manageable is NCEA 1 for students?

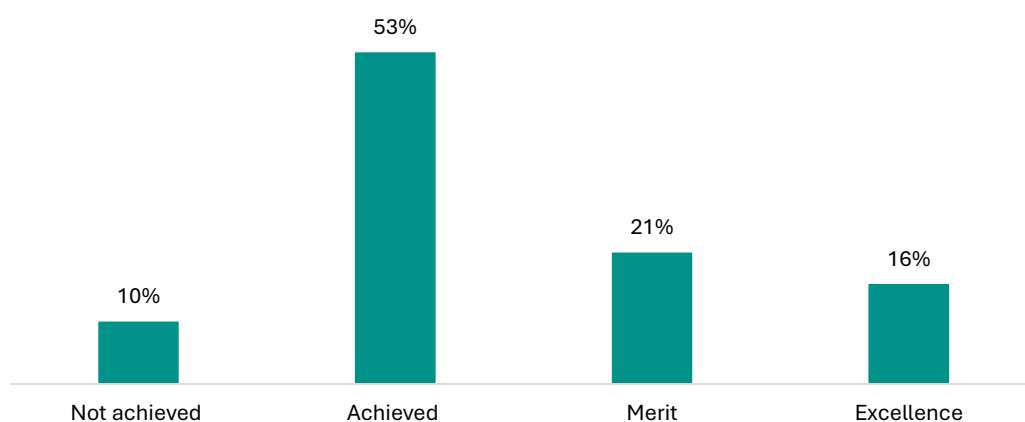
a) Difficulty

Most students report NCEA Level 1 is at the right level of difficulty.

Most students (69 percent) of students report NCEA Level 1 is at the right level of difficulty for them. Nearly a quarter (24 percent) of students report it is too difficult while less than one in 10 (7 percent) report it is too easy.

Just because students are finding Level 1 difficult doesn’t mean they aren’t achieving their credits – only 10 percent of students aren’t achieving most of their credits. Just over half (53 percent) are gaining mostly achieved credits, one in five (21 percent) are mostly gaining merit credits, and one in six (16 percent) are mostly gaining excellence credits.

Figure 55: *Proportion of students gaining most of their credits at each achievement level (so far).*



Parents and whānau provide similar responses to students about the difficulty of NCEA Level 1. Two-thirds of most parents and whānau (67 percent) report NCEA

Level 1 is at the right level of difficulty for their child, one in five (20 percent) report it is too difficult, and one in eight (13 percent) report it is too easy.

Parents and whānau whose children find NCEA Level 1 unmanageable tell us that the larger amount of content is difficult for their children to navigate through. Some report that their children would do better with smaller chunks of learning given at a time, and more scaffolding and supports from teachers are needed.

“NCEA for my child is daunting. She needs extra help but doesn’t seem to get it.”

PARENT AND WHĀNAU

“The literacy component has overcomplicated the questions and made it extremely difficult for even intelligent students and adults to comprehend what is required for individual subjects.”

PARENT AND WHĀNAU

Students tend to say NCEA Level 1 is difficult when they struggle with the literacy load of the assessment. They feel that they need to write well, or use the correct technical terms in order to get an endorsement. This means an added workload, and a challenge for students with lower literacy skills.

“In Biology for example, it’s very particular with the type of vocabulary you use. So you could know the topic really well, but if you don’t use a certain word or term, then you’ll get marked down.”

STUDENT

“You need to include more content more concisely and the room for error is less.”

STUDENT

We heard that less academically able students can find fewer, larger standards challenging, as they need to revisit knowledge learned a few months back when they come to the assessments.

However, we heard that some standards are too easy. For example, we heard Science teachers are concerned about the generalist approach to Science being too easy for high achieving students. This is similar to what we heard for Social Sciences, where teachers report that removing core Accounting and Economics knowledge has made Commerce too easy.

“[For the Science course], we can chuck this generic course together and everyone can jump in and teach it. But our big concern at the moment is we’re not preparing kids to actually do NCEA Level 2 with this course.”

SCIENCE TEACHER

“They’ve taken out basically all the Economics, all the Accounting, things that prepares for Level 2. They’ve made Commerce really woolly and really fluffy.”

SOCIAL SCIENCE TEACHER

Students who find NCEA Level 1 too difficult may leave school without any qualification.

Students who aren’t achieving their credits are the most likely to say NCEA Level 1 is too difficult, with almost seven in 10 (68 percent) reporting this.

Students who haven’t achieved in their first two internal assessments due to the level of difficulty are worried about the externals that are still to come, which they think will be even more difficult to achieve. The level of difficulty matters if it means some students will stop trying altogether and drop out of school without any qualifications.

“NCEA Level 1 has been like hell for me. Many of my friends are saying ‘If I don’t pass I will drop out of school’, or stressing about failing and repeating due to the new NCEA Level system.”

STUDENT

Leaders and teachers report the new form of NCEA Level 1, particularly the fewer, larger standards, doesn’t work for students who can’t hold or process a large load of information.

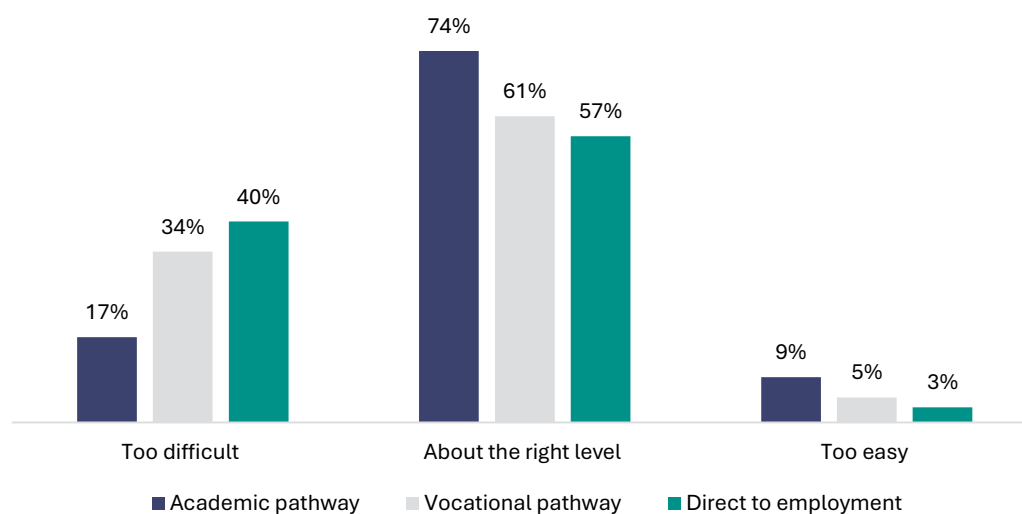
“Many of our priority learners struggle with exams and with a large assessment. We expect a dip in results, at least for the initial one to two years.”

LEADER

Students on vocational and direct to employment pathways are more likely to find NCEA Level 1 difficult.

Student pathways after school also make a difference. Forty percent of those going directly to employment and 34 percent of those on a vocational pathway are finding it too difficult. Only 17 percent of those on an academic pathway are finding it too difficult.

Figure 56: *Student views about the learning level in NCEA Level 1, by future pathway.*



Parents and whānau are also more likely to say NCEA Level 1 is too difficult if their child is on a vocational or direct to employment pathway – 26 percent and 35 percent respectively compared to just 13 percent of parents and whānau with a child on an academic pathway.

Students on vocational pathways might also find the assessment difficult, because the courses and assessments are more geared towards academic pathways than their vocational pathways.

“So, if they are a vocational student who’s looking at end of Year 12 to go into apprenticeship, then yes they need to get some form of literacy and numeracy in the world beyond school. But do they really need to achieve university expectation if they are not going to university?”

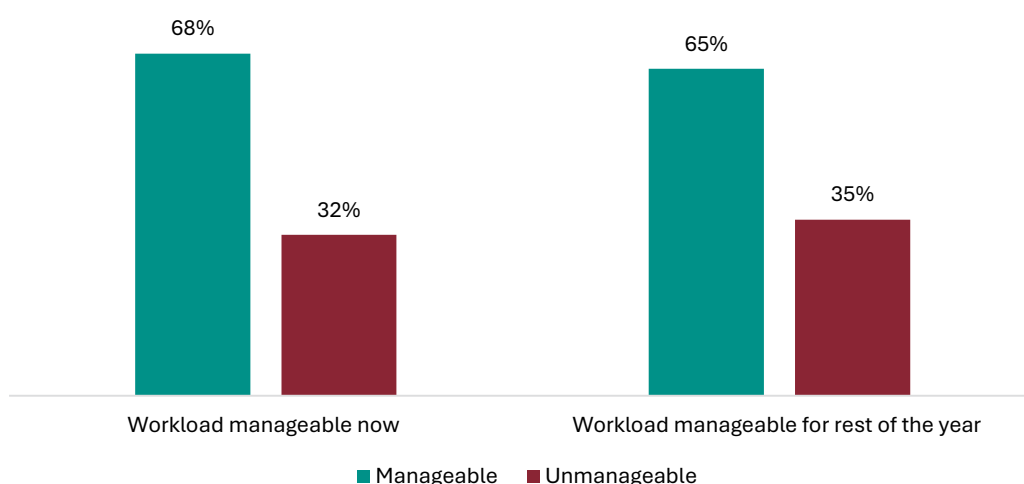
TEACHER

b) Workload

NCEA Level 1 workload is manageable for most students.

Most students can cope with their workload. Over two-thirds of students (68 percent) report their current workload is manageable (32 percent report it is not manageable). In addition, almost two-thirds (65 percent) anticipate their workload will be manageable for the rest of the year (35 percent report it won't be manageable).

Figure 57: *Student views on workload manageability now and for rest of the year.*



Teachers respond in a very similar way to students about student workload manageability indicating teachers have a very accurate gauge on what is going on for their students. Two-thirds (67 percent) of teachers report that their students' workload is manageable (33 percent report it isn't manageable). Almost half of teachers (46 percent) report there is no difference in student workload due to the changes, however a third of teachers (33 percent) say workload is less manageable than before (21 percent say it's more manageable now).

Parents and whānau are also fairly positive about their child's workload this year. Eighty percent of parents and whānau report their child's workload has been manageable this year (15 percent report it has not).

“My daughter is busy, but not overly stressed. I think it's the right mix presently.”

PARENT AND WHĀNAU

Students who find their workload unmanageable told us that the amount of homework and self-directed study expected of them this year has been a jump from Year 10.

“I used to have a little chit chat [in class], but now I feel like I have to stay really focused, or else I might miss something. I’m afraid that if I’m absent, then I’ll miss something really important.”

STUDENT

Some students also feel their teachers are moving too quickly to cover the required content, and there is not enough time for them to digest information before moving on.

“I think the teachers get a shorter time to teach us. They kind of rush through the topics and we have to quickly learn it all.”

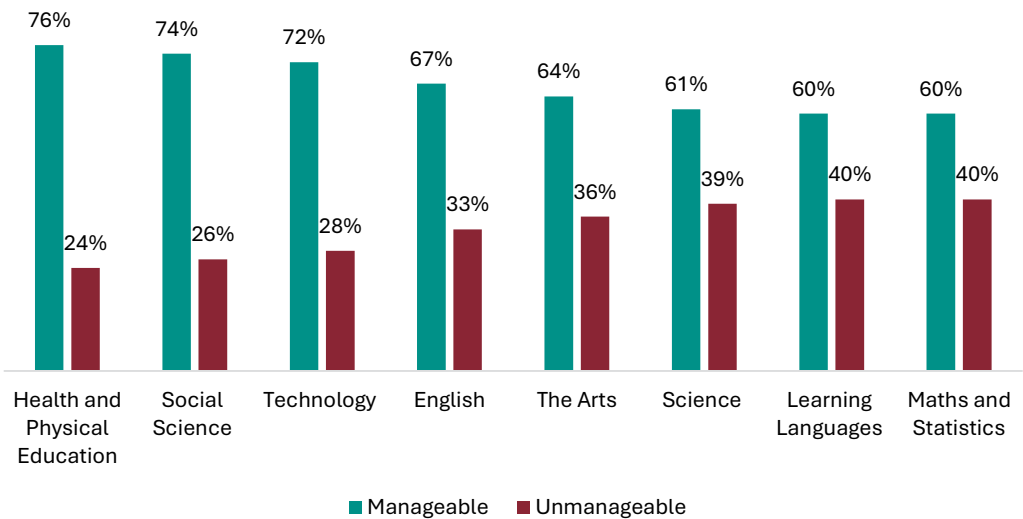
STUDENT

Science and Language subjects may be less manageable than others.

Teachers of Languages and Science are more likely to report that student workload is not manageable compared to teachers of Technology, Social Science, and Health and Physical Education.

Around two in five teachers of Languages and Science (40 and 39 percent respectively) believe that student workload is not manageable, compared to only about a quarter of Technology (28 percent), Social Science (26 percent), and Health and Physical Education (24 percent) teachers.

Figure 58: *Teacher views on whether NCEA Level 1 is manageable for students, by learning area.*



Science and Maths and Statistics teachers think the workload is less manageable for students because of the merging of subjects and the bigger standards. Teachers have less time to cover the amount of content. Social Science teachers in some schools thought that the Māori concepts, added in a tokenistic way, are adding to students' load.

“We have to memorise quite a few Māori terms for our assessments.”

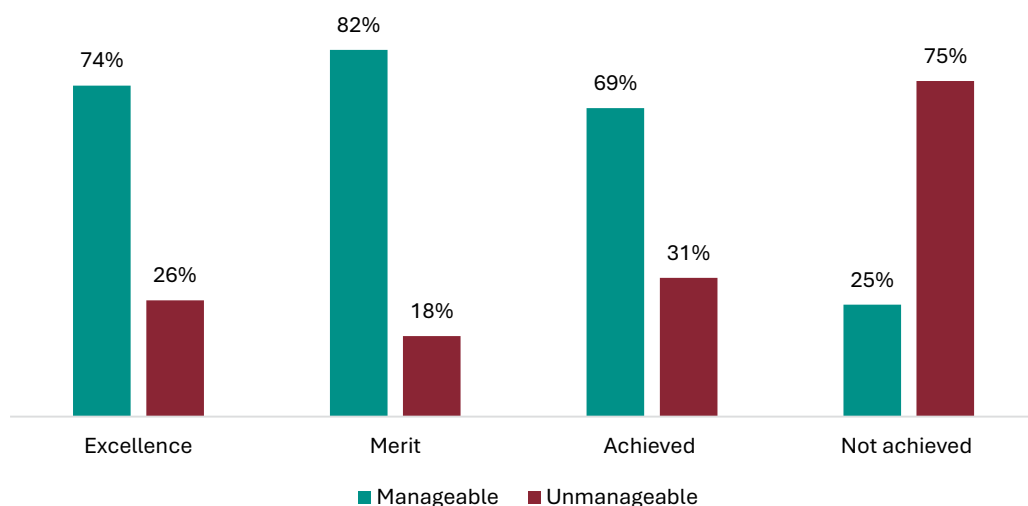
STUDENT

Students who are finding NCEA Level 1 too difficult, who aren't achieving their credits, and who have not achieved their literacy and numeracy co-requisite are the least likely to find NCEA Level 1 manageable.

Only a third (34 percent) of students who find NCEA Level 1 too difficult report their overall workload is manageable, compared to 77 percent of students who report NCEA Level 1 is at the right level of difficulty and 88 percent of those who report it is too easy.

Only a quarter (25 percent) of students who aren't achieving most of their credits report it is manageable, compared to 69 percent of those who are gaining mostly achieve credits, 82 percent of those gaining merit credits, and 74 percent of those gaining excellent credits.

Figure 59: *Student views on whether NCEA Level 1 is manageable, by level most credits are achieved at.*



Students are less likely report NCEA Level 1 is manageable if they haven't already achieved the co-requisite. Around two-thirds (63 percent) of students who haven't yet achieved their literacy and numeracy co-requisite report their workload is manageable, compared to 72 percent of students who have already achieved them.

We heard that students who have already achieved the co-requisite have a smaller workload, while students who haven't achieved them yet, are sometimes taking additional classes to prepare them for sitting the co-requisite again in Year 11.

“Probably some of the students are lot happier because they had got literacy and numeracy last year. So, they're just purely thinking about 60 credits.”

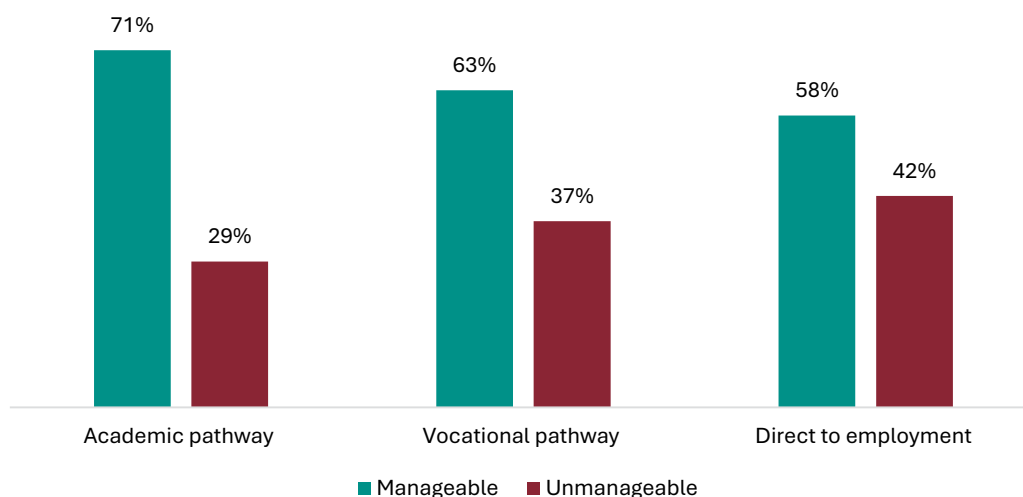
LEADER

Students on an academic pathway are most likely to find workload manageable.

The pathways that students report they are on also influences how manageable student workloads feel. Around three in five students on vocational and direct-to-employment pathways feel their NCEA Level 1 workload is manageable (63 and 58 percent respectively), compared to seven in 10 students on an academic pathway (71 percent).

Students on academic pathways are more likely to find their NCEA Level 1 workload manageable as they have more time to explore a topic, which students on academic pathways enjoy. Students on vocational or direct-to-employment pathways find the amount of learning covered too large prior to assessment.

Figure 60: *Student views on whether NCEA Level 1 is manageable, by future pathway.*



Parents and whānau of students on academic pathways told us their children have developed self-directed study skills to help them manage their workload. Formal assessment in NCEA Level 1 also means their children are putting effort into studying, rather than just doing the bare minimum to get through the year. Meanwhile, parents and whānau of students on vocational pathways told us their children are struggling with workload if they have had to choose more academically-focused subjects than they would have liked.

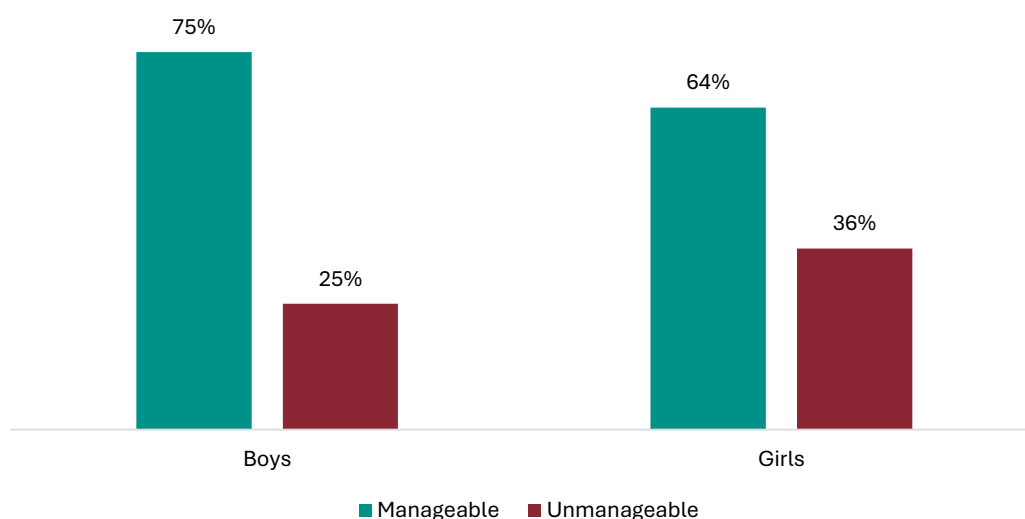
“Unfortunately, NCEA Level 1 is still geared towards academic achieving students and demoralising for those students that are high functioning practically but not academically.”

PARENT AND WHĀNAU

Girls are finding workload less manageable.

Interestingly, there are differences in workload manageability by gender. More than a third (36 percent) of girls find their NCEA Level 1 workload unmanageable, compared to a quarter (25 percent) of boys.

Figure 61: *Student views on whether NCEA Level 1 is manageable, by gender.*



We heard from some girls that they tend to do a significant amount of revision prior to assessments. This greater effort could be the reason why girls tend to find workload less manageable than boys.

“Revision for external assessments is a must for me.”

FEMALE STUDENT

“When [my daughter] started to do the essays her stress levels definitely went up. If she had something due, her stress levels went up.”

PARENT AND WHĀNAU

Assessment workload is manageable for most students except when assessments bunch, although this may resolve over time.

Almost seven in 10 students (69 percent) report their assessment workload has been manageable so far this year (31 percent feel assessment hasn't been manageable). Similarly, two-thirds (66 percent) report assessment workload will be manageable for the rest of the year (34 percent report it will not).

While assessment workload was manageable for most students, there are times when assessments bunch together and this is stressful. Bunching impacts students of all abilities and is most challenging for students who have extra-curricular activities such as sports and employment.

Bunching is not a new problem. However, the larger standards might make it worse. Teachers and students need time to teach and learn the content before assessments can be set. At some schools, this means internals are scheduled later in Term 2 or early Term 3. As a result, assessment load has been light in the first part of the year and heavier towards Term 3 and Term 4, when externals are also scheduled. Sport tournaments are also scheduled in Term 3, meaning students need to prioritise.

The submitted reports, which are overtime externals, are bunching across subjects. There is less opportunity for schools to space them out because they need to happen over several sessions. The logistics are already challenging, as discussed more in Chapter 8.

“All of the assessments tend to be at the end of the Term and year, because it's exam season and gets highly stressful a lot of the time.”

STUDENT

“Everything's going to be at the same time, at the back end of Term 3. Monitoring academic achievement and progress of students, to then put interventions in place, has been a lot more difficult now with Level 1.”

LEADER

We heard that the scheduling of internal assessments may become easier as teachers get used to teaching the new larger standards.

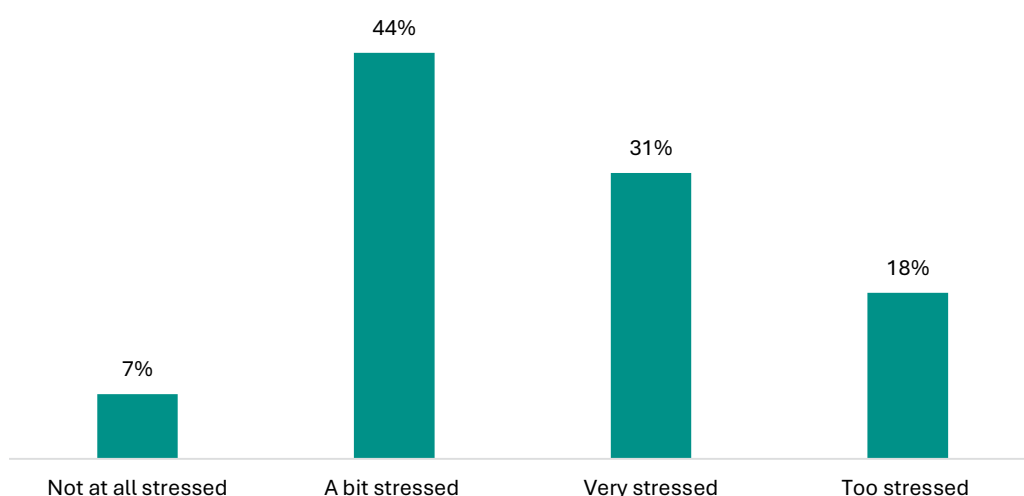
c) Stress levels

Tests are stressful, whatever the qualification or format. Although we don't know how stressed students were before the changes, we wanted to know how stressful the assessments are for the current NCEA Level 1. We might expect that students will find assessments a 'bit stressful' and so we only identify students as being stressed if they answered, 'very stressed' or 'too stressed'.

Almost half of students are stressed about their assessments.

Almost half of students report being stressed about their assessments (31 percent are very stressed, 18 percent too stressed). Parents and whānau are more positive about their children's stress levels – just over a quarter (27 percent) report their child is stressed (20 percent too stressed, 7 percent very stressed).

Figure 62: *Student views about their stress levels for NCEA Level 1 assessment.*



We heard students are feeling more stressed about their assessments because they are the first students to be going through the NCEA Level 1 changes and their teachers are still making sense of the new standards. Some students also told us that they probably hadn't achieved as well as they should have because assessment requirements had changed halfway through.

“The teachers don't know what they are teaching us for the assessments and that is really stressful. I don't know what I am doing otherwise.”

STUDENT

Parents and whānau who said their children are stressed are concerned that their children would never achieve the co-requisite, with the current stakes and the way co-requisite is assessed digitally. Parents and whānau are concerned their children would not qualify for NCEA, even if they achieve the other 60 credits.

“Co-requisite only adds further stress to kids – especially those who are already struggling behind. School drop-out rates will increase, meaning underaged kids are leaving the school system.”

PARENT AND WHĀNAU

Students who are finding NCEA Level 1 too difficult and who aren't achieving their credits, are the most stressed about assessments.

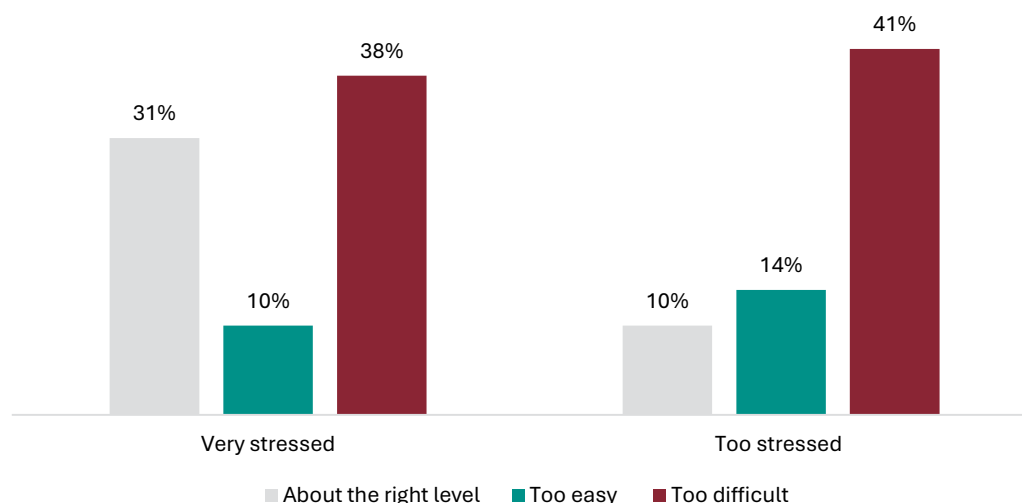
Unsurprisingly, students who are finding NCEA Level 1 too difficult are more stressed. Almost eight in 10 students who find it too difficult (79 percent) are stressed, compared to about four in 10 students (41 percent) who report NCEA Level 1 is at the right level, and almost a quarter (24 percent) who report it is too easy.

Similarly, parents and whānau of children who are finding NCEA Level 1 too difficult are most likely to say their child is stressed – 64 percent compared to 19 percent of parents and whānau of children who find NCEA Level 1 at the right level, and 5 percent of parents and whānau with children who find it too easy.

“My son has achieved the numeracy and reading co-requisite but not the writing one as yet. This is hugely stressful for him and has caused him to hate English as a subject, causing more issues for his learning/achieving.”

PARENT AND WHĀNAU

Figure 63: Student views about assessment stress, by learning level.^o



We heard that students are stressed because the assessments are high-stakes, especially the co-requisite. Students who find NCEA Level 1 difficult are concerned that they won't meet the requirements for NCEA Level 1 if they don't achieve the co-requisite and therefore won't get the qualification. We heard this is causing these students a lot of stress.

^o The graph will not total to 100 percent because the full scale is not presented.

“Everything’s very crammed this year, I’ve noticed. I thought the whole point of having five credit assessments was to stop the crammed thing, but it’s actually made it worse because they’re bigger assessments worth more credits.”

STUDENT

Parents and whānau of children on an academic pathway are the least likely to say their child is stressed.

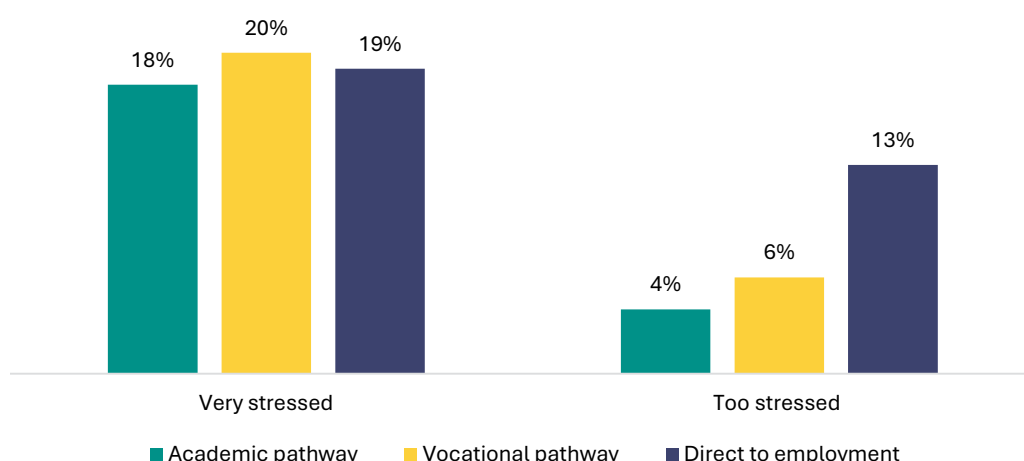
Parents and whānau of children on an academic pathway are the least likely to report their child is stressed (22 percent, with 18 percent reporting very stressed and 4 percent too stressed).

However, we also heard from students that, while it is easy to get an Achieved endorsement for standards, they find it harder to get the Excellence endorsement. As a result, students aiming for Excellence might experience a high level of stress prior to each assessment. Students aiming for subject endorsement also feel there is less room for mistakes in assessment for each standard, due to the fewer number of them.

“I have to achieve all three assessments to pass, to get endorsed for Science. I have to get all three at Excellence and I can’t mess up one part.”

STUDENT

Figure 64: Parent and whānau views on their child’s stress for NCEA Level 1 assessment, by future pathways^p.



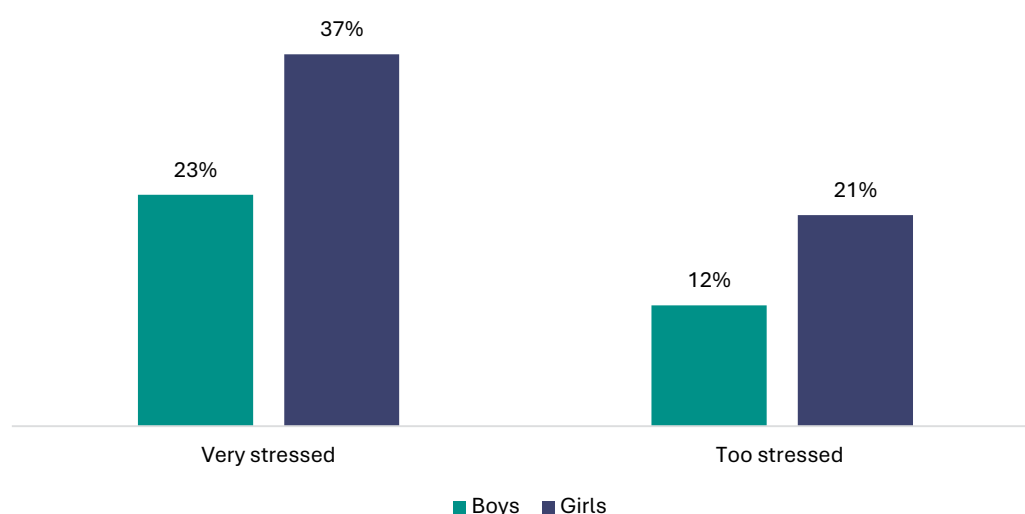
Parents and whānau of students on an academic pathway told us assessments are pitched at the right level and provide the right pressure to help prepare them for the more important exams in NCEA Levels 2 and 3.

^p The graph will not total to 100 percent because the full scale is not presented.

Girls are more likely to be stressed about assessments.

Gender also plays a role. Almost three in five girls (58 percent) report being unreasonably stressed about their assessments (37 percent very stressed, 21 percent too stressed) compared to just over a third of boys (35 percent, with 23 percent very stressed and 12 percent too stressed).

Figure 65: *Student views about their stress levels for NCEA Level 1 assessment, by gender.^q*



We heard that girls tend to be more stressed prior to assessments, especially when they are under the pressure of performing well in high-stakes assessments.

“They are a high-stakes exam that does not accurately represent my daughter’s capacity but instead contributes hugely towards her anxiety and mental health challenges.”

PARENT AND WHĀNAU

Conclusion

Most students are enjoying their learning at NCEA Level 1. Unsurprisingly, students are less likely to be enjoying it if they are finding it too difficult or aren’t achieving their credits. Students on academic pathways are mostly finding workload and assessments manageable. Students on other pathways are finding workload and assessment less manageable, because they are more likely to be finding NCEA Level 1 too difficult. These findings put an emphasis on helping students to achieve, through their learning not only at Years 11 but in Years 1-10 that set them up to achieve at NCEA Level 1.

The next chapter sets out how the co-requisite has impacted NCEA Level 1.

^q The graph will not total to 100 percent because the full scale is not presented.



Chapter 6: How has the co-requisite impacted on NCEA Level 1?

The requirements for NCEA Level 1 literacy and numeracy have changed significantly from the previous NCEA Level 1. We looked at how this change is being delivered and the impact that it is having. We found that the co-requisite helps improve the reliability of NCEA Level 1 qualification, however there are a number of challenges around their administration and how able students are to pass these requirements.

This chapter sets out the extent to which the co-requisite is improving the quality of the qualification and the current challenges of administering the assessments. The final part of the chapter looks at the current issues around achievement and the readiness of students to take these assessments.

What we looked at

This chapter looks at how the co-requisite is impacting NCEA Level 1, in terms of manageability, and quality of the qualification.

The co-requisite was introduced to strengthen literacy and numeracy requirements and assessments. It is worth 20-credits including 10 credits for literacy or te reo matatini (reo Māori literacy), and 10 credits for maths or pāngarau (reo Māori numeracy). The co-requisite only needs to be achieved once and can be counted towards each level of NCEA.

During the transition period, between 2024 and 2027, the co-requisite can be achieved by participating in the co-requisite assessments, known as Common Assessment Activities (CAAs), or by gaining 10 literacy and 10 numeracy credits from a list of approved standards. From 2027, the co-requisite can only be achieved by participating in the CAAs.

The first opportunity for students to sit the co-requisite exams was in May or June 2024. Most, but not all schools, offered them to their students.

This chapter sets out findings on:

- 1) the extent to which the co-requisite improves the reliability of NCEA Level 1
- 2) the challenges faced with administering the co-requisite CAAs
- 3) the challenges with achievement rates so far.

What we found: an overview

Schools value the standardisation introduced by the co-requisite, but administering the assessments is logistically challenging.

- Nearly two in five teachers (38 percent) and half of leaders (51 percent) say the co-requisite makes the NCEA Level 1 qualification more reliable by standardising the measurement of literacy and numeracy.
- Administering external assessments is a particular issue for the co-requisite as many students sit it at the same time and finding spaces that allow for exam conditions can be difficult at some schools.
- In the first assessment for 2024 the pass rate for the co-requisite assessments (CAAs) was only 59 percent for reading, 56 percent for writing, and 46 percent for numeracy (and lower rates for Māori and Pacific students). There is a risk that, when the co-requisite becomes compulsory, many students who leave school aged 16-17 will leave with no qualification, unless there is an uplift in teaching and learning in Years 0-10.

In the following sections we look at each of these findings in more detail.

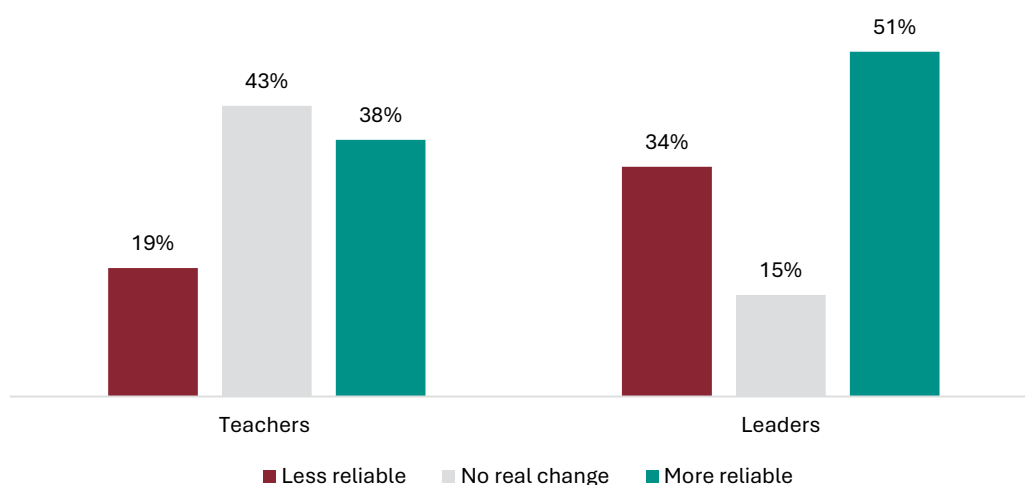
1) To what extent does the co-requisite improve the reliability of NCEA Level 1?

The co-requisite helps improve the reliability of NCEA Level 1 qualification, but some students will require additional support to achieve it.

The co-requisite helps improve the reliability of NCEA Level 1 by standardising how students are assessed and what they are assessed on. The large number of standards that could previously be used to assess literacy and numeracy were varied and didn't always directly assess literacy and numeracy. Consequently, students may have achieved them but weren't necessarily prepared for tertiary education or the workplace.

As covered in Chapter 3, half of leaders (51 percent) and just under two in five teachers (38 percent) report the literacy and numeracy co-requisite makes the NCEA Level 1 qualification a more reliable measure of student knowledge and skills.

Figure 66: *Teacher and leader views on whether the literacy and numeracy co-requisite makes NCEA Level 1 more/less reliable.*



Leaders and teachers consistently told us the introduction of the co-requisite improves reliability because it standardises how students are accredited for literacy and numeracy. Some schools also told us the co-requisite informs an earlier focus on literacy and numeracy for their junior years (Years 9-10) and leads to a stronger integration of literacy across subject areas.

“The standardised measurement of numeracy and literacy, I actually saw that it needed to be done.”

LEADER

“The flow-on effect of the literacy and numeracy co-requisite has been working quite well. We’re working through with those literacy classes for our junior years.”

LEADER

However, they are also concerned that that the co-requisite risks high failure rates.

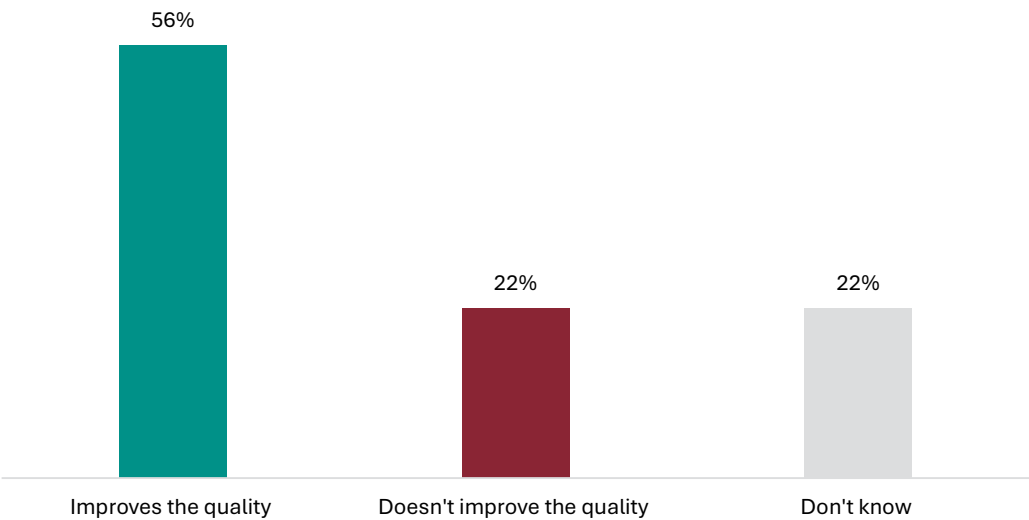
Over half of parents and whānau (56 percent) also report the co-requisite improves the quality of the NCEA Level 1 qualification, although just over one in five (22 percent) disagree and another one in five (22 percent) don’t know. Similar to leaders and teachers, parents and whānau who report the co-requisite improves the quality of the NCEA Level 1 qualification do so because they can have confidence their children can read and write.

“I like the co-requisite as it improves what NCEA Level 1 is and if people are hiring, they know that the student has attained a certain level of maths and literacy.”

PARENT AND WHĀNAU



Figure 67: *Parent and whānau views on whether the co-requisite improves the quality of the NCEA Level 1 qualification.*



However, schools and parents and whānau are concerned that earlier teaching and learning has not prepared students well for the co-requisite CAAs.

Although the transitional period continues until 2027, the other approved standards for gaining literacy and numeracy during this period are still a lift in requirements, which teaching in Years 0-10 may not have prepared students for well for.

“The co-requisite literacy and numeracy CAAs are not inclusive. There are many other ways to measure literacy and numeracy than a one-hour high stakes exam. I love the idea of gaining a literacy and numeracy qualification but not as an exam.”

LEADER



Employers raise concerns that the co-requisite being offered as digital exams may not allow students to demonstrate they can read and write in real-life or workplace situations, and will disadvantage students who are not doing well in exams.

“Students need to learn their Maths and English through practical assessments. The world is largely a practical place.”

EMPLOYER

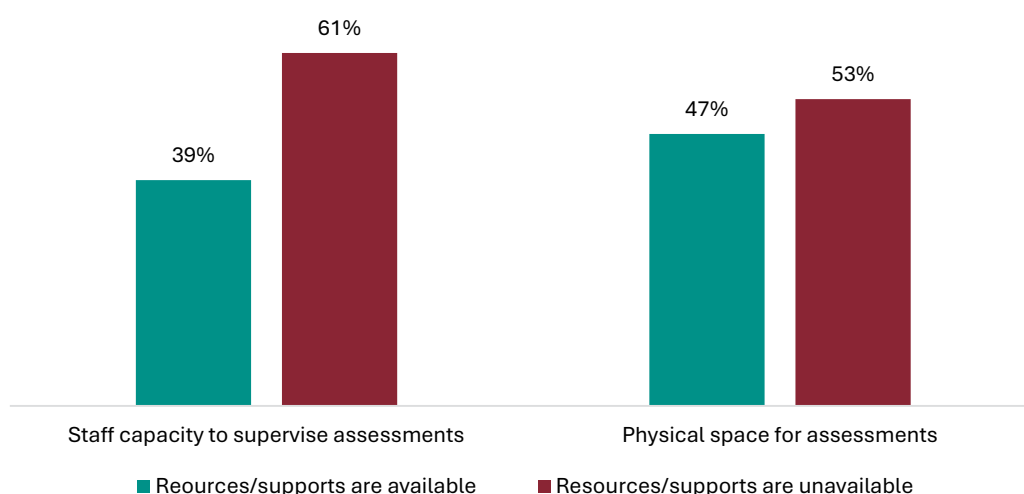
2) What are challenges with administering the co-requisite?

Administering the co-requisite assessments is logistically challenging for schools.

As detailed in Chapter 2, the co-requisite CAAs are offered twice per year and schools are required to administer them. Schools have flexibility in how they administer them. For example, students can sit the CAAs in classrooms, and schools have most recently been informed there is no time limit on the duration. However, schools are tending to run them as exams, which means finding spaces that allow for exam conditions. For practical reasons, schools are typically limiting the duration of the CAAs to an hour.

Due to the large numbers of students sitting the co-requisite CAAs, schools find them challenging to administer. Just over three in five leaders (61 percent) report their school doesn't have the staff capacity to carry out the external assessments and just over a half of leaders (53 percent) say they don't have the physical space for external assessments.

Figure 68: *Leader views on whether their school has resources and supports in place to implement NCEA Level 1 assessments.*



Other logistical challenges include timetabling a large number of students for the tests, ensuring enough devices, and troubleshooting and rescheduling when there are technical issues with logging in. These logistical challenges can impact students across the school. For example, we heard that some schools are having to ask students who aren't sitting the CAAs to remain at home, which was undermining school messaging on attendance.

“We don't have the physical space. The physical spaces that we have got are open spaces and just not fit for purpose.”

LEADER

“We had to timetable students on different days and different times based on space and device availability. When we did the co-requisite in May, we had to keep the Years 9 and 10 at home.”

LEADER

Chapter 8 provides more detail on the challenges of administering external assessments, which includes the co-requisite CAAs.

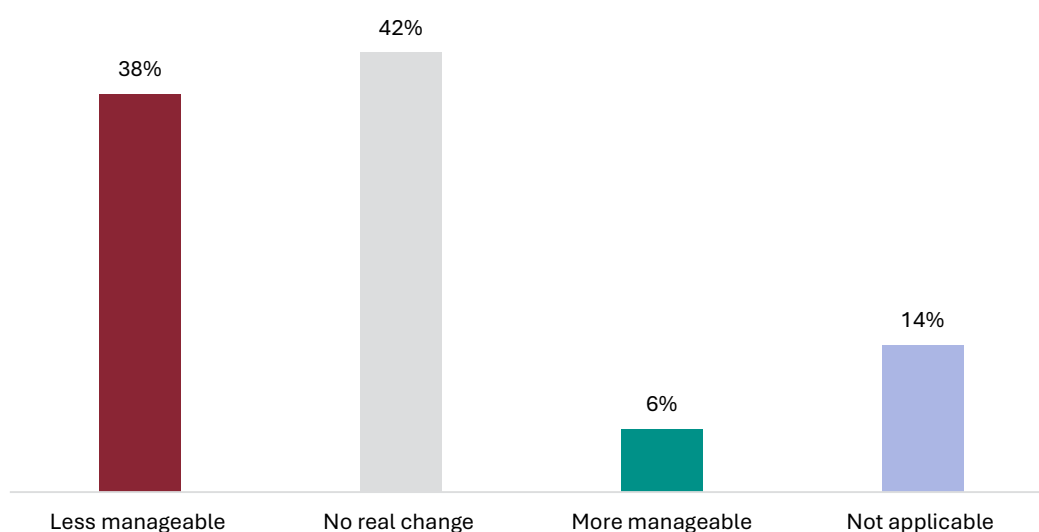
The co-requisite assessment is impacting teacher workload, especially the workload of the Principal's Nominees.

The co-requisite assessments (CAAs) are new and therefore teacher and leader workload is impacted. This is particularly the case for Principal's Nominees who are responsible for organising assessments at the school.

Just over four in five leaders (85 percent) report that delivering the co-requisite has made their workload less manageable. Just under three in 20 leaders (14 percent) report no real change to workload, and only 1 percent report that it has made workload more manageable.

Teachers are also finding the co-requisite challenging. Just under two in five teachers (38 percent) report that this change has made teacher workload less manageable. Just over two in five (42 percent) report this change has made no change to their workload and just over one in 20 (6 percent) report that it has made their workload more manageable (a further 14 percent of teachers answered 'not applicable', because they aren't directly impacted by the co-requisite). More on the manageability of Level 1 is covered in Chapter 8.

Figure 69: *Teacher views on workload manageability due to the introduction of literacy and numeracy co-requisite.*



The Principal's Nominees who are responsible for managing the external assessments, including the co-requisite CAAs, have a much higher workload this year (discussed in Chapter 8).

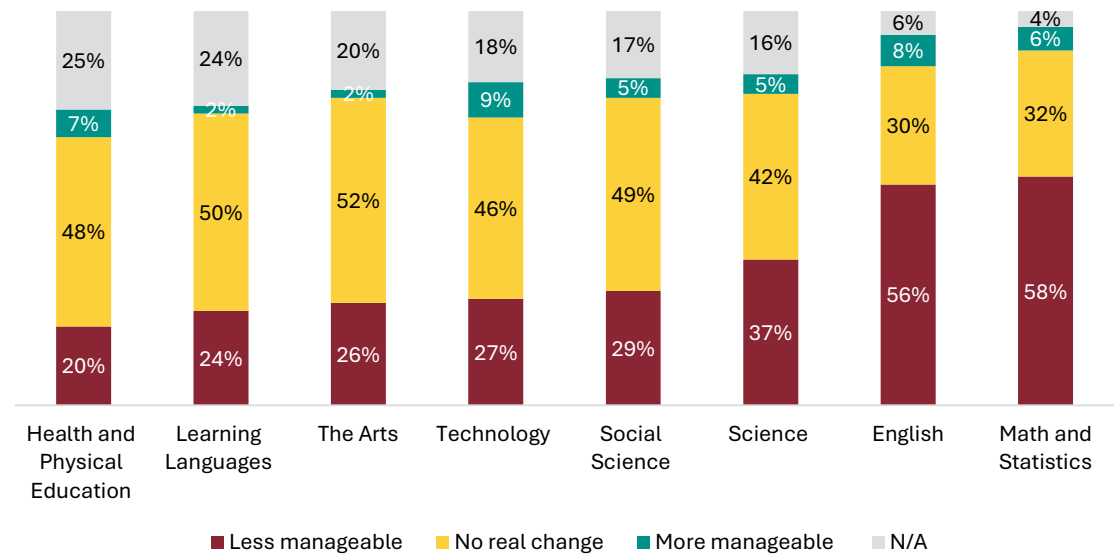
“As a Principal's Nominee I need time and assistance to manage the unwieldy workload. It is not my job to administer external assessments such as the literacy and numeracy co-requisite CAAs, yet I have spent hours doing this.”

PRINCIPAL'S NOMINEE

Maths and English teachers are impacted most by the co-requisite.

The literacy and numeracy co-requisite has impacted teachers differently across subjects. Just under three in five Maths and Statistics teachers (58 percent) and English teachers (56 percent) report this change has made NCEA Level 1 less manageable. This is compared to one in five of Health and Physical Education teachers (20 percent) and about a quarter of Language teachers (24 percent).

Figure 70: *Teacher views on whether literacy and numeracy co-requisite has impacted manageability, by learning area.*



Maths and English departments are usually taking on more of the additional work in preparing students for the co-requisite, but other teachers are also carrying this responsibility.

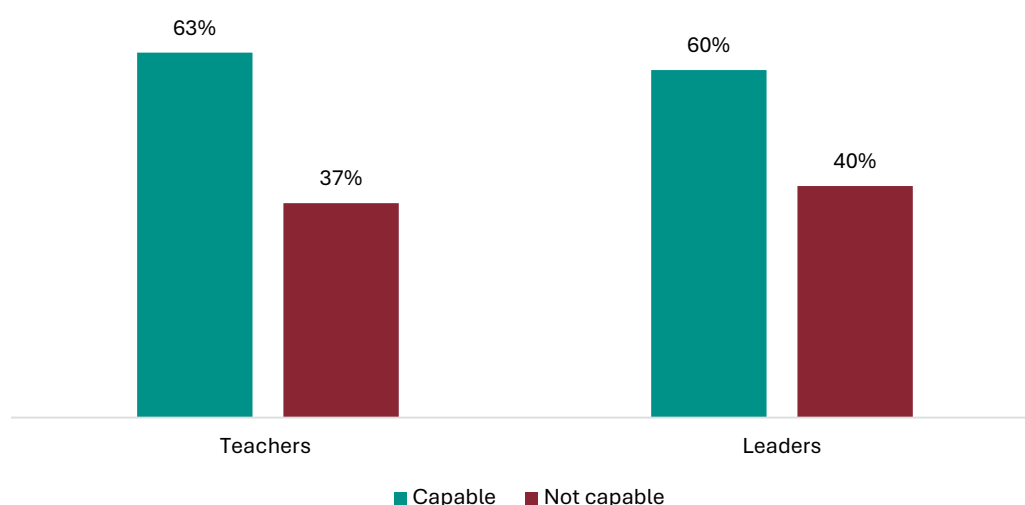
“Let’s be fair on the Maths teachers. They can’t be expected to offer 15-plus credits and also be relied on to help students with the numeracy co-requisite.”

LEADER

More teachers need knowledge and skills to deliver the literacy and numeracy co-requisite.

Teachers don’t always have the knowledge they need to deliver the co-requisite assessments. Just under two in five teachers (37 percent) say they don’t have the capability to deliver the literacy and numeracy co-requisite (63 percent do have the capability). A similar percentage of leaders (40 percent) say teachers do not have the have the necessary knowledge and skills to deliver the literacy and numeracy co-requisite (60 percent report their teachers do). See more about teacher capability in Chapter 8.

Figure 71: *Teacher views on their capability to deliver the literacy and numeracy co-requisite.*



Teachers across subjects, not only English and Maths teachers, feel they have a collective responsibility to help their students achieve the co-requisite because they are integral to the NCEA Level 1 qualification. However, many don't have the necessary knowledge and skills to support students at risk of failing, and there isn't time for this within the teaching of their own courses.

We heard another problem with the co-requisite is that results are being returned only as Achieved/ Not Achieved. This means that teachers don't know which areas their students are yet to achieve, to support them to catch up in the next sitting.

“We have numeracy class to try and get as many kids through the second time. But students haven't had any targeted intervention, because we don't know which content to target.”

TEACHER

Some students are struggling with the way co-requisite assessments are offered.

The way co-requisite CAAs are administered doesn't work well for all students. We heard that the co-requisite being delivered as one-off digital tests have not been accessible. They have been challenging for a range of students, including students who have low digital literacy, neurodiverse students, students who don't cope well with exam stress, and for students who had not been exposed to the language or contexts used in the exam questions.

We heard that the digital platform is challenging for some neurodiverse students, because it was hard to navigate, requiring a lot of scrolling up and down to access sections of the text. NZQA note that students can use a paper-based format, so this information needs to be communicated more clearly to schools.

“The reading was hard when it’s reading off the screen. I got mumbled up with the sentences. I find it easier to read it off paper.”

STUDENT

“Time constraints and the added complication of needing to be digital and understood in that format – [It’s] the scroll of death for those students.”

TEACHER

“People sometimes think that a test on computer makes it easier. But for our very bottom group, it doesn’t. They haven’t got computers and can’t practice anything at home, even just practicing typing an essay.”

LEADER

Schools want alternative ways for students to demonstrate their numeracy and literacy skills, rather than just an exam. Schools also want the results of co-requisite to be returned to them earlier and to include feedback (rather than just Achieved/Not Achieved), so that students and teachers can work on targeted intervention to prepare for the next sitting. Students are also stressed by the long wait for results.

“Students sat numeracy week five of Term 2 this year. The results aren’t going to come out till August. The next sitting is five weeks later. We need to know sooner so we know which students need that extra support.”

LEADER

“These boys who struggle so much but want to pass [the co-requisite] don’t know what they need to improve on. They just go back and make the same mistakes because no one tells them otherwise.”

TEACHER

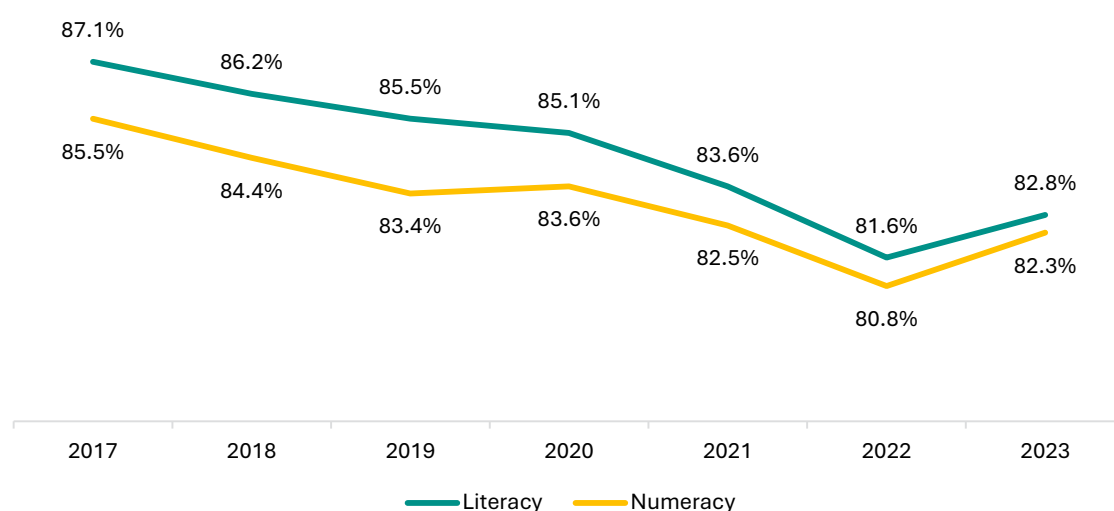
3) What are challenges with achievement rates so far?

Year 11 achievement for NCEA Level 1 literacy and numeracy has been on a slight downward trend since 2017.

Year 11 students have historically been more likely to achieve NCEA Level 1 literacy than numeracy. Accounting for some variability year-on-year, there has been a slight downward trend for both literacy and numeracy achievement. In 2023, 83 percent of Year 11 students achieved the NCEA Level 1 literacy requirements and 82 percent achieved the numeracy requirements, compared to 87 percent and 86 percent, respectively, in 2017.¹⁶

With the introduction of the co-requisite in 2024, the requirements for NCEA Level 1 literacy and numeracy have been tightened. As discussed above, until 2027, NCEA Level 1 literacy and numeracy can be achieved either through the co-requisite CAAs or the reduced number of approved standards. With the tightening of the requirements, it is expected that the achievement of Year 11 students will be lower this year than in previous years.

Figure 72: *Percentage of students attaining NCEA Level 1 literacy and numeracy by the end of Year 11.*



Only three in five students are achieving the reading standard and two in five are achieving the writing standard.

We looked at the achievement of the co-requisite CAAs^r, which will be the only way to achieve the NCEA Level 1 literacy and numeracy requirements when the transitional arrangements finish in 2027. The literacy requirements include two standards – one in reading and one in writing.

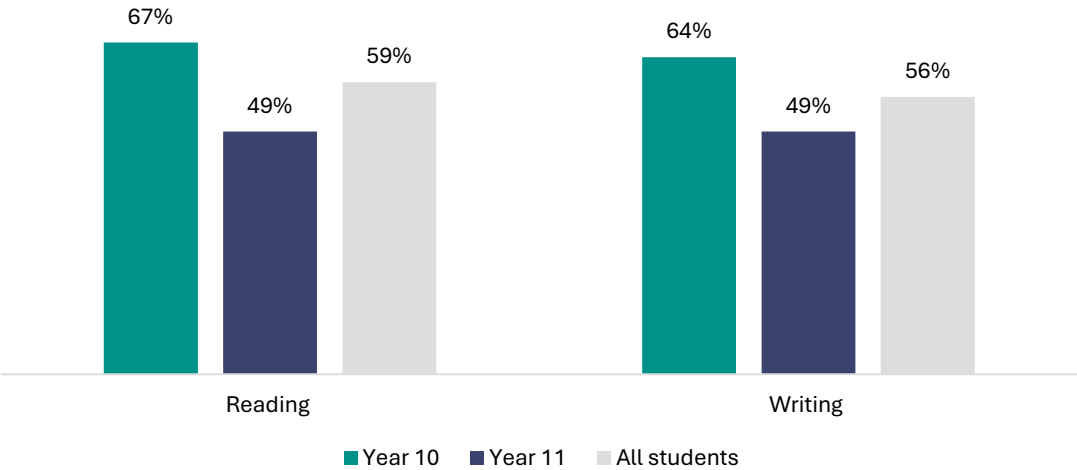
In the first reading assessment in 2024, just under three in five students (59 percent) achieved the reading assessment. More than two-thirds of Year 10 students (67 percent) achieved this standard and just under half (49 percent) of Year 11 students.

^r Data source: NZQA

These rates are similar to the year before, where 64 percent of all students sitting the reading standard achieved it in the first assessment event and 57 percent achieved it in the second.

In the first writing assessment in 2024, just under three in five students (56 percent) achieved the writing assessment. Just under two-thirds (64 percent) of Year 10 students achieved this standard and just under half (49 percent) of Year 11 students achieved this standard. These rates are similar to the year before where 56 percent of all students sitting the reading standard achieved it in the first assessment event and 55 percent achieved it in the second.

Figure 73: *Proportion of students achieving the literacy co-requisite in the first assessment event of 2024.*



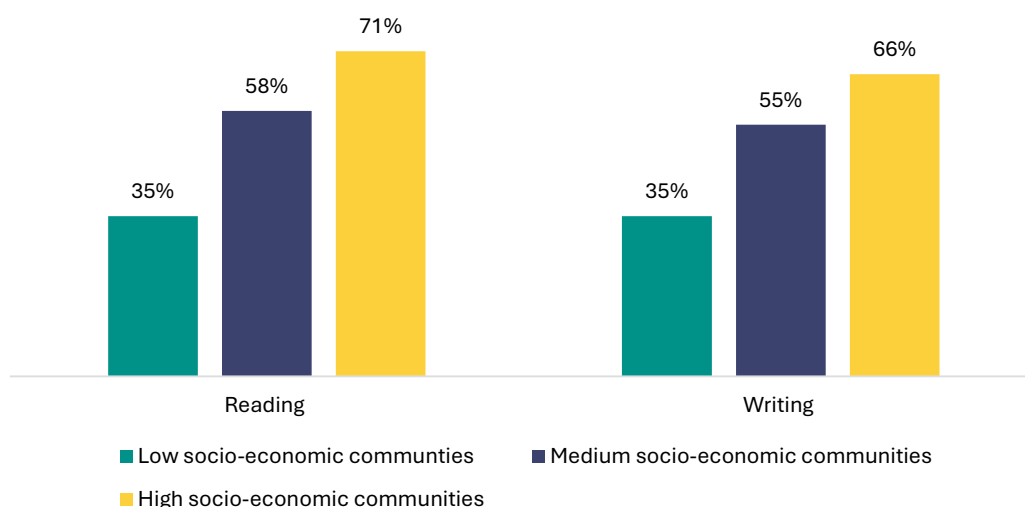
Students in Year 10 are more likely to achieve the co-requisite because this is when most students first sit them. This means that students in Year 11 are often attempting them again and found them difficult the first time around.

Achievement for the literacy co-requisite is lower in low socio-economic communities and for Māori and Pacific students.

Achievement for the reading and writing co-requisite assessments is higher for schools in high socio-economic communities than low socio-economic communities.^s Seventy-one percent of those in high socio-economic communities achieved the reading standard in 2024, compared to 58 percent of those in mid socio-economic communities, and 35 percent of those in low socio-economic communities. Sixty-six percent of those in high socio-economic communities achieved the writing standard in 2024, compared to 55 percent of those in mid socio-economic communities, and 35 percent of those in low socio-economic communities.

^s Data source: NZQA.

Figure 74: *Proportion of students achieving the literacy co-requisite, in the first assessment event of 2024, by socio-economic communities.*



Reading and writing achievement also differs by ethnicity. Forty-six percent of Māori students and 37 percent of Pacific students achieved the reading standard in 2024. Forty-five percent of Māori students and 44 percent of Pacific students achieved the writing standard in 2024.

Our survey data tells us that students who are planning to go to university are more likely to have achieved their literacy co-requisite in Year 10. Sixty-five percent of those on academic pathways had achieved their literacy co-requisite in Year 10, compared with 44 percent of those on a vocational pathway, and 30 percent of those on a pathway direct to employment (note that not all Year 11 students that we surveyed were offered to sit the co-requisite assessments in 2023 by their schools, so these numbers reflect both achievement and participation).

Less than half of students are achieving the numeracy co-requisite and achievement rates are lower for schools in low socio-economic communities and for Māori and Pacific students.

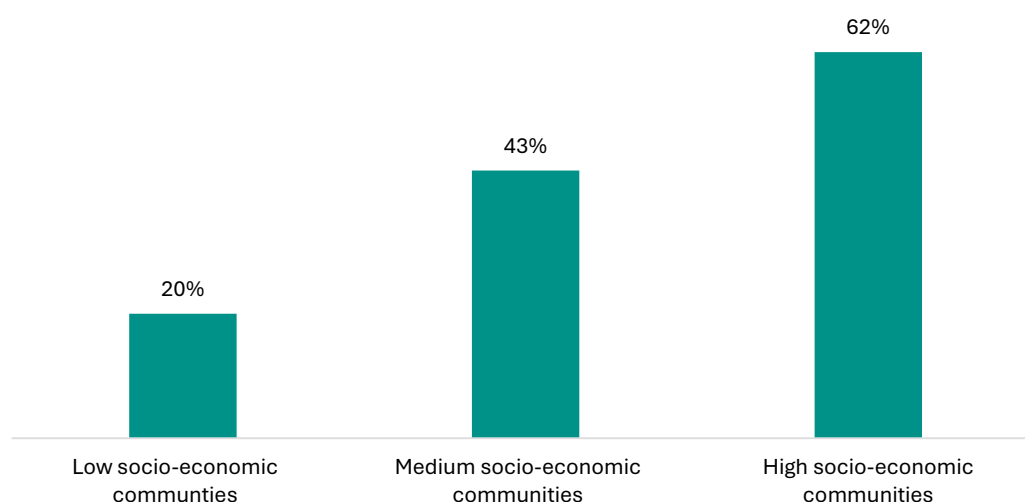
In the first co-requisite numeracy assessment in 2024^t, almost half of all students (46 percent) achieved. Just under three in five Year 10 students (57 percent) achieved this standard and just under a third of Year 11 students (31 percent) achieved it.

These rates are similar to the year before where 56 percent of all students sitting the reading standard achieved it in the first assessment event and 49 percent achieved it in the second.

Schools in higher socio-economic communities had a higher achievement rate than those in low socio-economic communities. Sixty-two percent of those in high socio-economic communities achieved the numeracy standard in 2024, compared to 43 percent of those in mid socio-economic communities and 20 percent of those in low socio-economic communities. Numeracy achievement also differs by ethnicity. Twenty-nine percent of Māori students and 23 percent of Pacific students achieved the numeracy standard in 2024.

^t Data source: NZQA.

Figure 75: *Proportion of students achieving the numeracy co-requisite, by socio-economic communities.*



We heard that the co-requisite numeracy standard is literacy-heavy, and this is challenging for students with lower literacy skills, such as ESOL students and some students on vocational pathways. These concerns are evidenced, as well, in our survey data, which tells us that students who are planning to go to university are more likely to have achieved their numeracy co-requisite in Year 10. Just over seven in 10 students (72 percent) on academic pathways had achieved their numeracy co-requisite in Year 10, compared with half (50 percent) of those on a vocational pathway, and just under two in five (38 percent) on a pathway direct to employment.^u

“We would often have some students [from overseas] whose Maths is the subject that they did really well, and it was their booster. They actually can’t do the assessment, which is wholly literacy based.”

LEADER

When the CAA becomes the only way to achieve literacy and numeracy, without an uplift in teaching and learning in earlier years, there is a risk students will leave school without an NCEA qualification

Student performance in literacy and numeracy has been declining.¹⁷ The OECD’s Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) 2018 results, for what students know and can do, assessed 15-year-olds performance in reading, mathematics and science. Aotearoa New Zealand reported declining mean performance across all three subjects.¹⁸ This is indicative of students missing the building blocks of literacy and numeracy in Years 0-10 of primary and secondary schooling.

^u Note that not all Year 11 students that we surveyed were offered to sit the co-requisite assessments in 2023 by their schools, so these numbers reflect both achievement and participation.

To support students to achieve the literacy and numeracy co-requisite, some schools have started offering literacy and numeracy courses in the junior years and providing targeted interventions for students at risk of not achieving in Year 11 – including school holidays and after school sessions for students at risk of not achieving. Schools are also planning how they will integrate literacy and numeracy across courses. Schools are also creating dedicated literacy and numeracy co-ordinator roles to support these plans, and staff are upskilling with relevant PLD.

Conclusion

While the NCEA literacy and numeracy co-requisite requirement has made the qualification more reliable, administering the new digital common assessment activities for literacy and numeracy is challenging for schools. Poor student achievement in these assessments is a concern for teachers who are worried about students experiencing failure and disengaging from learning.

The next chapter sets out how NCEA is working for a diverse range of learners.



Chapter 7: Is NCEA Level 1 working for all students?

NCEA Level 1 needs to work for a wide range of students so that all students have the opportunity to achieve.

We looked at how well NCEA Level 1 is working for Māori and Pacific students, students who qualify for Special Assessment Conditions (SACs), and transient students. We found that NCEA Level 1 isn't always working well for these learners, which reflects that education in prior years does not always deliver for these learners.

In this chapter we set out why NCEA Level 1 is and isn't working for different groups of learners.

What we looked at

It is important to know how the changes to NCEA Level 1 are impacting different groups of students, including priority groups including Māori students, Pacific students, and students who qualify for Special Assessment Conditions (SACs). We also looked at how NCEA was working for transient students.

This chapter sets out findings on:

- 1) how priority groups are achieving NCEA Level 1
- 2) the extent to which NCEA Level 1 is delivering for Māori students
- 3) the extent to which NCEA Level 1 is delivering for Pacific students
- 4) the extent to which NCEA Level 1 is delivering for students who qualify for Special Assessment Conditions (SACs)
- 5) the extent to which NCEA Level 1 is delivering for transient students.

What we found: an overview

Some aspects for NCEA Level 1 aren't working as well for Māori students, Pacific students, and students who qualify for Special Assessment Conditions (SACs).

- Māori students and Pacific students more often don't know enough about NCEA Level 1 to make their subject choices (43 percent of Māori students and 47 percent of Pacific students compared to 38 percent of non-Māori and 38 of non-Pacific students).
- Māori students are more likely to report that NCEA Level 1 is too difficult (29 percent compared to 22 percent of non-Māori students), to find the workload unmanageable (39 percent compared to 31 percent of non-Māori students) and

to be stressed by their assessments (54 percent compared to 48 percent of non-Māori students).

- Pacific students are more likely to report that NCEA Level 1 is too difficult (29 percent compared to 23 percent of non-Pacific students) and to find their assessment workload unmanageable (37 percent compared to 30 percent of non-Pacific students).
- Students who qualify for SACs are more likely to report that NCEA Level 1 is too difficult (36 percent compared to 22 percent of non-SACs students) and to find their assessment workload unmanageable (41 percent compared to 29 percent of non-SACs students).

In the following sections, we look at each of these findings in more detail.

1) Achievement for priority groups

Achievement for Māori and Pacific students prior to NCEA

How well NCEA Level 1 delivers for Māori and Pacific students reflects to a large degree how well education has delivered for them in previous years. Māori and Pacific students have lower achievement in English (reading)¹⁹ and maths²⁰ in Year 4 and Year 8 (compared to non-Māori and non-Pacific students).

Reading achievement for Māori students (in 2019)

- In Year 4, half of Māori students (50 percent) were achieving below expected curriculum level for reading, compared to 34 percent of non-Māori students.
- In Year 8, three in five Māori students (62 percent) were achieving below the expected curriculum level for reading, compared to 40 percent of non-Māori Year 8 students.^v

Reading achievement for Pacific students (in 2019)

- In Year 4, over half of Pacific students (57 percent) were achieving below the expected curriculum level for reading, compared to 35 percent of non-Pacific students.
- In Year 8, seven in 10 Pacific students (70 percent) were achieving below the expected curriculum level for reading, compared to 40 percent of non-Pacific Year 8 students.

Maths achievement for Māori and Pacific students (in 2022)

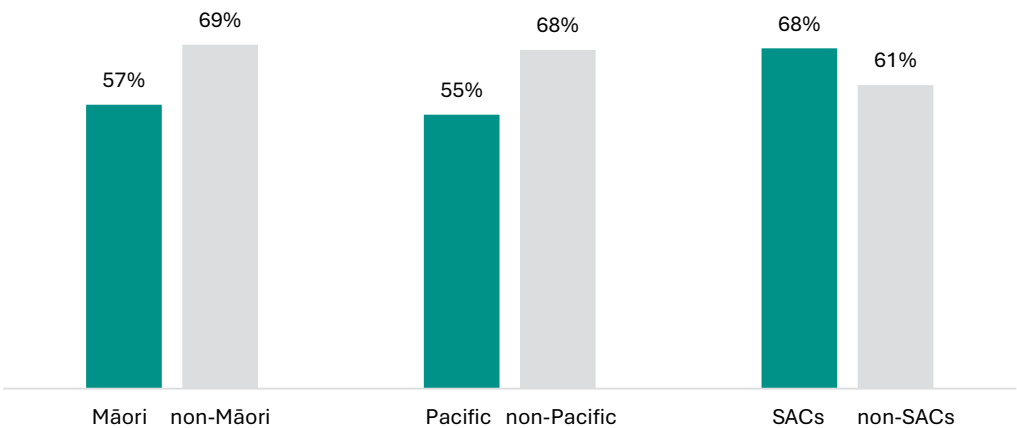
- In Year 4, a third of Māori students (30 percent) were achieving below expected curriculum level for maths, compared to 15 percent of non-Māori students.
- In Year 8, around four in five Māori students (79 percent) were achieving below the expected curriculum level for maths, compared to 53 percent of non-Māori Year 8 students.
- In Year 4, around two in five Pacific students (37 percent) were achieving below curriculum level for maths, compared to 15 percent of non-Pacific students.
- In Year 8, just under nine in 10 Pacific students (85 percent) were achieving below the expected curriculum level for maths, compared to 54 percent of non-Pacific students.

^v Students in Year 4 are expected to achieve at curriculum level 2, and students in Year 8 are expected to achieve at curriculum level 4. See TKI (<https://assessment.tki.org.nz/content/download/5533/49185/file/Expected+Curriculum+Progress.pdf>)

NCEA Level 1 achievement in 2023

The graph below shows NCEA Level 1 achievement in 2023^w. It shows that achievement is relatively low for Māori and Pacific students and relatively high for students who qualify for Special Assessment Conditions (SACs).

Figure 76: NCEA Level 1 achievement rates in 2023.



In 2023, achievement was lower for Māori students than for non-Māori students. Less than six in 10 Māori students (57 percent) achieved NCEA Level 1 compared to almost seven in 10 non-Māori students (69 percent).

Low NCEA Level 1 achievement for Māori students helps explain why Māori students are more likely to leave school with lower qualifications. In 2023, just over a quarter (28 percent) of Māori students left school with below NCEA Level 1 qualification, and 13 percent left with NCEA Level 1 as their highest qualification compared to non-Māori students (14 percent and 9 percent respectively).

NCEA Level 1 achievement was also relatively low for Pacific students in 2023. Just over half of Pacific students (55 percent) achieved NCEA Level 1, compared to almost seven in 10 non-Pacific students (68 percent). Success in NCEA Level 1 is essential for Pacific students because they are more likely to leave school with an NCEA Level 1 qualification as their highest qualification. In 2023, 11 percent of Pacific students left school with NCEA Level 1 as their highest qualification, compared to 9 percent of non-Pacific students.

Students who qualify for SACs achieved marginally better than students who don't qualify in 2023. SACs can involve a range of supports with difficulties that directly impact student access to fair assessment, including the use of a writer or reader, computer, rest breaks, Braille, or enlarged papers. Examples of SACs include:

- special papers for vision-impaired students
- writers or readers for students with learning disorders, such as dyslexia

^w Data source: NZQA.

- rest breaks for students with diabetes
- separate accommodation for students with anxiety disorders.

Given the higher achievement of SACs students in 2023, it is likely these supports are enabling them to achieve. Another reason the achievement rate of SACs students is relatively high, may be because SACs are most often accessed by schools in high socio-economic communities where students do comparably well.²¹ One of the goals of the NCEA Level 1 changes is to simplify the application and evaluation process for SACs, so this may change over time.

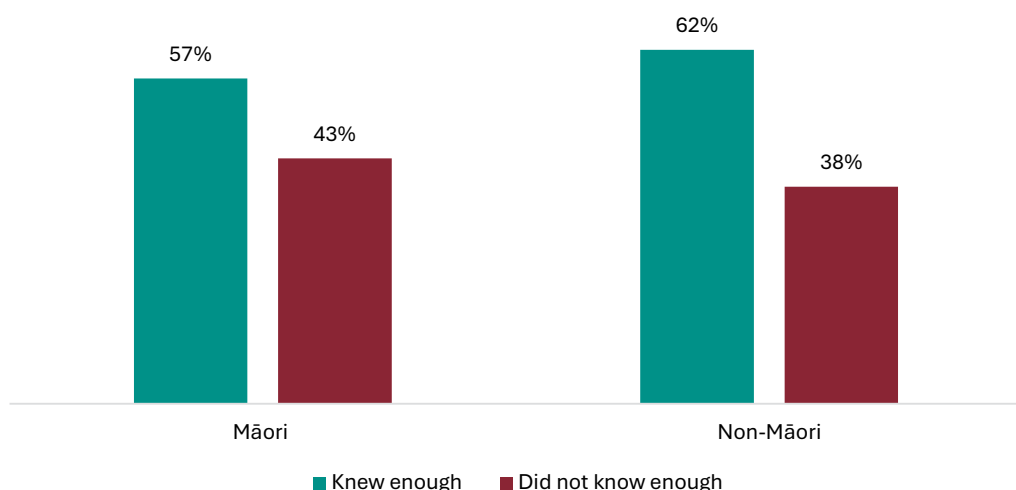
2) To what extent is NCEA Level 1 delivering for Māori students?

Māori students more often don't know enough about NCEA Level 1 to make their course choices.

Having the right information to make course choices is important for students' futures, however Māori students tend to be less informed.

Māori students are less likely to know enough about NCEA Level 1 to make good choices and course decisions – 43 percent of Māori students don't know enough, compared to 38 percent of non-Māori students (57 percent of Māori students do know enough, compared to 62 percent non-Māori).

Figure 77: Māori and non-Māori student views on whether they knew enough about NCEA Level 1 workload to make courses and decisions.



Parents and whānau responded similarly. More than half (54 percent) of Māori parents and whānau indicated they didn't know enough about NCEA Level 1 to help their children make the right subject choices, compared to two in five (40 percent) non-Māori parents (46 percent of Māori and 60 percent of non-Māori parents indicated they knew enough).

We heard from Māori students that they don't have much information about credits needed to achieve NCEA Level 1 or endorsements. They also want clearer information on how certain subjects would build into their intended career. This is similar to what we heard from other, non-Māori, students. Māori parents and whānau told us that NCEA is difficult to understand, even for highly educated and engaged parents and whānau, particularly in the way schools' offer courses and credits.

“I don't know, if I can't get as many credits as I'm supposed to, do I have to go back and re-do NCEA Level 1?”

MĀORI STUDENT

“NCEA Level 1 needs to be explained in simpler terms, not just for the students, but also for parents, because it'll scare parents away.”

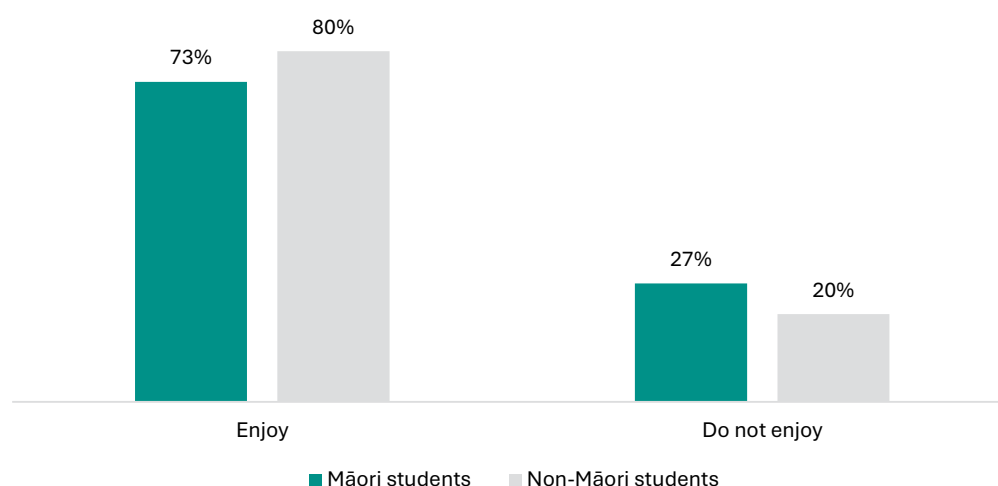
MĀORI PARENT AND WHĀNAU

Māori students are less likely to enjoy their NCEA Level 1 learning.

Enjoying learning is an important aspect of students getting the most out of school, but Māori students are less likely to be enjoying their learning.

Just over a quarter of Māori students (27 percent) don't enjoy their NCEA Level 1 learning, compared to one in five non-Māori students (20 percent).

Figure 78: *Māori and non-Māori student views on whether they are enjoying their NCEA Level 1 learning.*



We know that NCEA Level 1 isn't as enjoyable for students who are finding NCEA Level 1 too difficult, which may be a contributing factor for Māori students (see below). We also heard from Māori students, and Māori parents and whānau, that

the inclusion of mātauranga Māori hasn't been implemented well. Māori concepts integrated in the NCEA Level 1 achievement standards are sometimes basic and repetitive across subjects, which impacts enjoyment.

“[Mātauranga Māori] is all at a basic level. We have learned the same Māori concepts every year for our total time at school. The teachers just include it to tick the box without really covering any learning.”

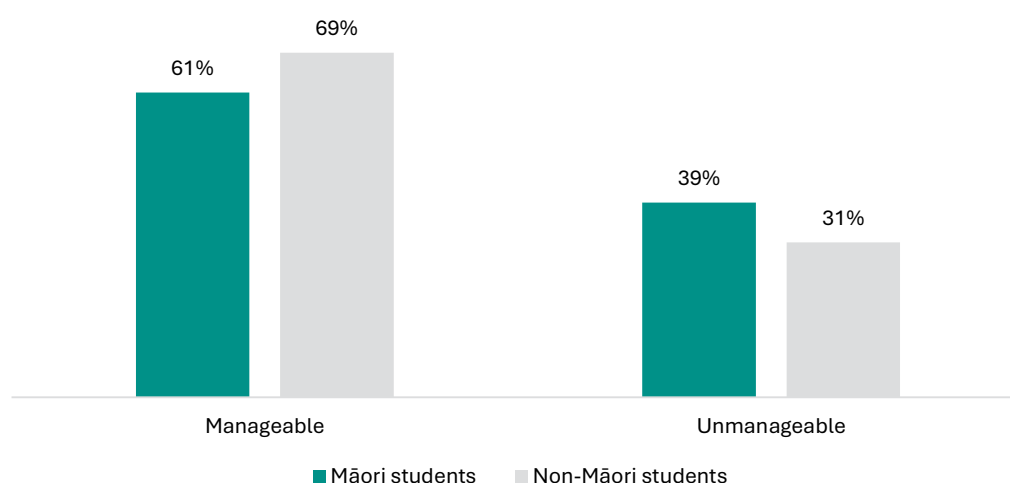
MĀORI STUDENT



Māori students are more likely to find their NCEA Level 1 workload unmanageable.

Māori students are more likely to find their workload unmanageable – about four in 10 Māori students (39 percent) compared to three in 10 non-Māori students (31 percent) find it unmanageable.

Figure 79: *Māori and non-Māori student views on whether their NCEA Level 1 workload is manageable.*



One reason is that achievement in the literacy and numeracy co-requisite is lower for Māori students. And if students didn't achieve the co-requisite in Year 10, their Year 11 workload is increased by having to do additional learning to help them raise their literacy and/or their numeracy skills.

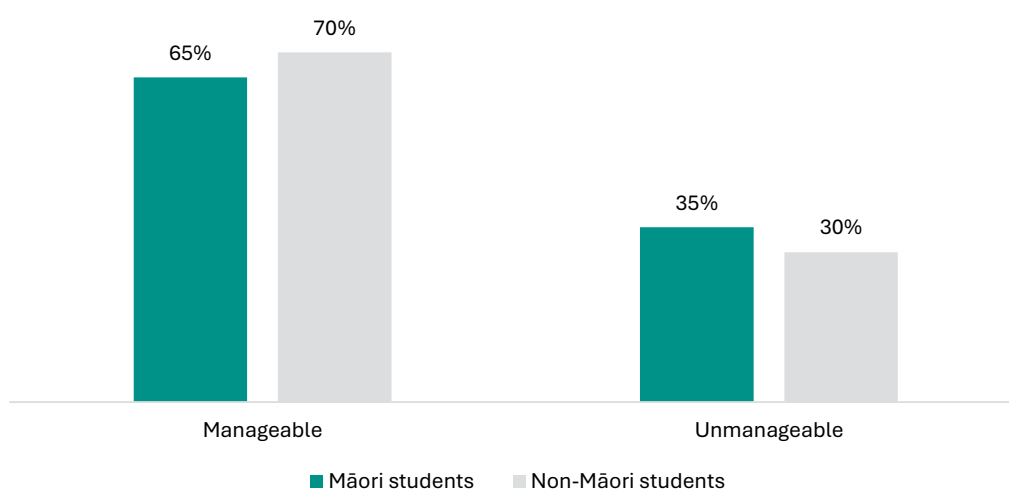
Māori students are more likely to find their assessment workload unmanageable.

Students need to feel that their assessments are manageable, and not be unreasonably stressed about completing assessments to get the best out of school, but this is not always the case for Māori students.

More than a third of Māori students (35 percent) report that their assessment workload is unmanageable. This is marginally higher than for non-Māori – just three in 10 non-Māori students (30 percent) report the same thing.

Māori students are more likely to report feeling very stressed about their assessments compared to non-Māori students (54 percent compared to 48 percent). This is unsurprising if Māori students are more likely to be finding NCEA Level 1 assessments unmanageable.

Figure 80: *Māori and non-Māori student views on whether their NCEA Level 1 assessment workload is manageable.*



We heard that Māori students find some of the contexts provided in some assessments unfamiliar, which can make them feel unmanageable.

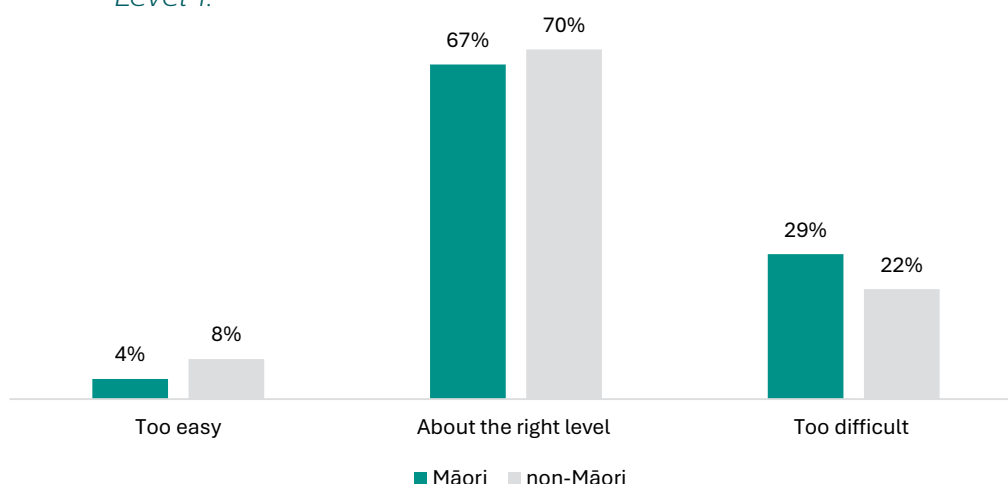
“The questions should be worded so I’m able to understand, instead of sitting there confused when I know all the stuff I’ve learned in class.”

MĀORI STUDENT

Māori students are more likely to find NCEA Level 1 too difficult.

While most Māori students (67 percent) do report NCEA is about the right level, only 4 percent say it’s too easy. We also found that Māori students are more likely to find NCEA Level 1 too difficult. Just under three in 10 Māori students (29 percent) find NCEA Level 1 too difficult, compared to just over one in five non-Māori students (22 percent).

Figure 81: *Māori and non-Māori student views on the learning level of NCEA Level 1.*



NCEA Level 1 is not preparing Māori students as well for future pathways.

One key aspect of school is to prepare students for their future. NCEA Level 1 needs to better prepare Māori students for their future pathways.

One in four Māori students (25 percent) report NCEA Level 1 isn't preparing them for Levels 2 and 3, compared to one in five (20 percent) non-Māori students.

It is likely that Māori students report NCEA Level isn't preparing them for NCEA Level 2, at least in part, because they are finding NCEA Level 1 too difficult and their workload unmanageable.

Māori students are also more likely to be on vocational and direct to employment pathways and students on these pathways report that NCEA Level 1 is preparing them less well for NCEA Level 2 and Level 3 compared to students on academic pathways. See more on this below and set out in Chapter 4.

NCEA Level 1 doesn't prepare Māori as well for after school either. Almost half of Māori students (46 percent) report NCEA Level 1 isn't preparing them for when they leave school, compared to just over two in five non-Māori students (42 percent).

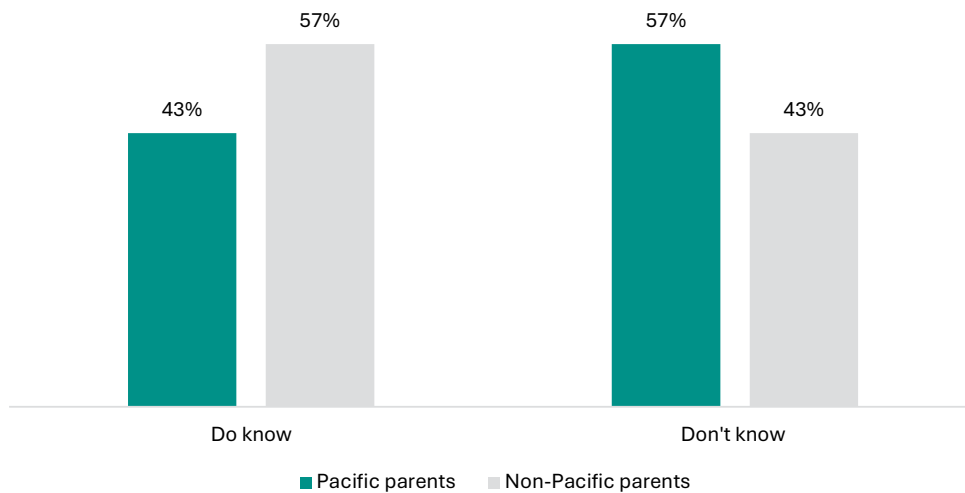
3) To what extent is NCEA Level 1 delivering for Pacific students?

Pacific students more often don't know enough about NCEA Level 1 to make their subject choices.

Pacific students are less likely than non-Pacific students to know enough about NCEA Level 1 to make course decisions. Just under half of Pacific students (47 percent) don't know enough, compared to just under two in five non-Pacific students (38 percent).

Pacific parents are just as likely as non-Pacific parents to know enough about NCEA Level 1 to help their child make course decisions, but less likely to know what is required to get the full NCEA Level 1 qualification. Almost three in five Pacific parents (57 percent) don't know what is required for their child to get the full NCEA Level 1 qualification, compared to just over two in five non-Pacific parents (43 percent).

Figure 82: *Proportion of Pacific and non-Pacific parents on whether they know what is required for the full NCEA Level 1 qualification.*



We heard from Pacific parents that information about NCEA Level 1 is too much or too complicated. Also, Pacific parents want more regular communication from schools about their children's progress. This includes school reports about specific areas that their children need to improve, information about homework and assessments, or feedback from the literacy and numeracy co-requisite, so that they can support their children at home.

“Until now, we have not received any school report for our Year 11 child. We were not invited to support them in their subject choice so [student] is still not sure what to do in the future, which is not a good sign.”

PACIFIC PARENT

Pacific students more often find assessment workload unmanageable.

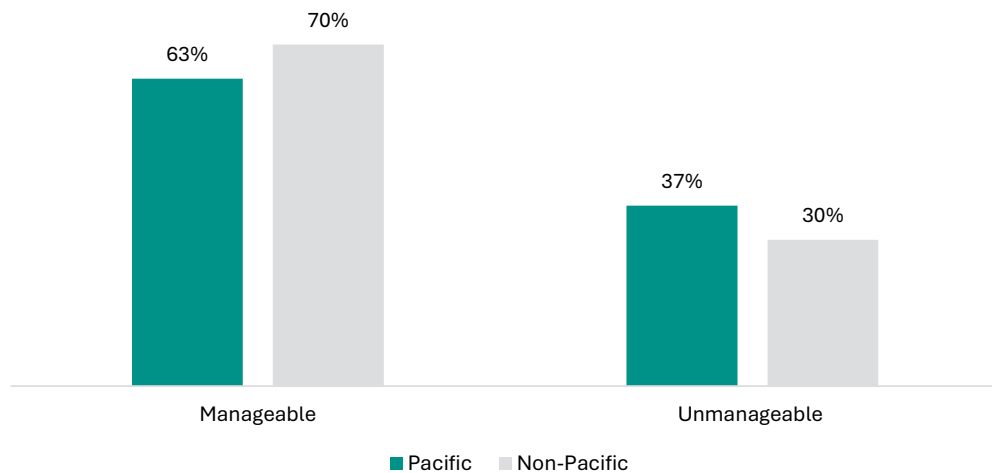
Similar to non-Pacific students, around a third of Pacific students find their NCEA Level workload unmanageable (35 percent and 32 percent respectively). However, Pacific students are more likely to find their assessment workload unmanageable – just under four in 10 (37 percent) compared to three in 10 non-Pacific students (30 percent).

Pacific students told us the requirements for assessments have not been explained well by their teachers, or they keep changing. Some Pacific students also think there is too much work required, compared to the number of credits awarded. These contribute to them feeling the assessments have been unmanageable. They also find the larger standards and the bunching of assessments impacts their workload.

“There is too much work for the first two Terms and it was stressing because I had to do a lot of assessments and they were due on the same day and time.”

PACIFIC STUDENT

Figure 83: *Pacific and non-Pacific student views on whether NCEA Level 1 assessment workload is manageable.*

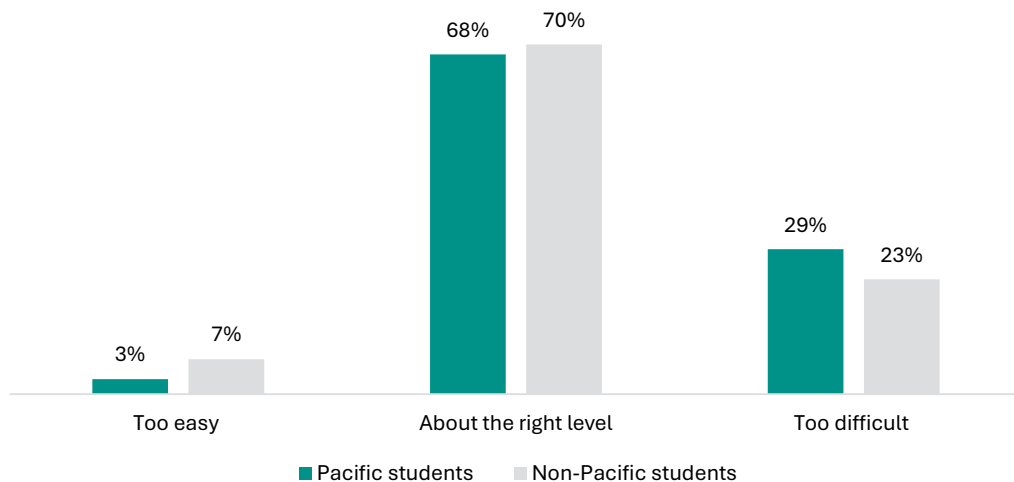


Pacific students are more likely to find NCEA Level 1 too difficult.

Pacific students are more likely to find NCEA Level 1 too difficult compared to non-Pacific students. Three in five Pacific students (29 percent) find it too difficult compared to under a quarter of non-Pacific students (23 percent).

Most Pacific students (68 percent) say NCEA Level 1 is about the right level and just 3 percent say it's too easy (70 percent of non-Pacific students say it's about the right level and 7 percent say it's too easy).

Figure 84: *Pacific and non-Pacific student views on the learning level of NCEA Level 1.*



In interviews, we heard from Pacific students that they find the literacy-heavy NCEA Level 1 difficult, and some of the references and contexts presented in the assessments can feel unfamiliar.

“Science and English is too hard for me. A bit stressing, maybe just slow down a bit.”

PACIFIC STUDENT

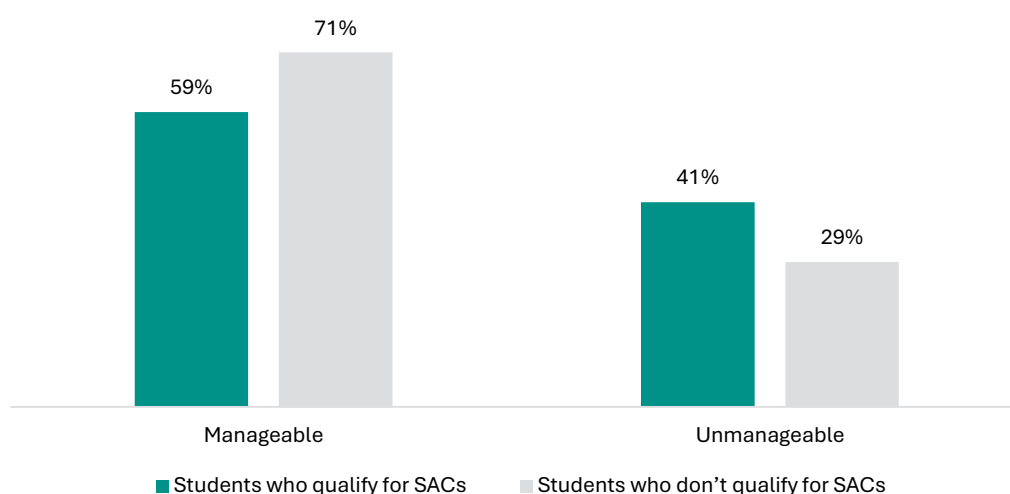
4) To what extent is NCEA Level 1 delivering for students who qualify for Special Assessment Conditions (SACs)?

SACs students find assessment less manageable.

SACs students find their overall workload similarly manageable to other students but find assessment less manageable.

Just over four in 10 students who qualify for SACs (41 percent) are finding their assessment workload unmanageable, compared to less than three in 10 non-SACs students (29 percent).

Figure 85: *Student views on whether NCEA Level 1 assessment workload is manageable for students who do and don't qualify for SACs.*



Parents and whānau respond similarly to students. Parents and whānau with children who qualify for SACs are more likely to say their child's assessment workload is unmanageable – a quarter (25 percent) report this, compared to just under one in five parents and whānau with children who don't qualify for SACs (17 percent).

In our interviews with students and parents and whānau, we heard that assessments can be challenging for students who qualify for SACs depending on what their specific needs are. For example, we heard that some neurodiverse students find the digital and written forms of assessments challenging. They also find the exams for larger standards challenging because they require students to have good memory capacity. Students that struggle with anxiety are also finding the increase in external assessment challenging, because externals are generally more stressful even with the SACs in place.

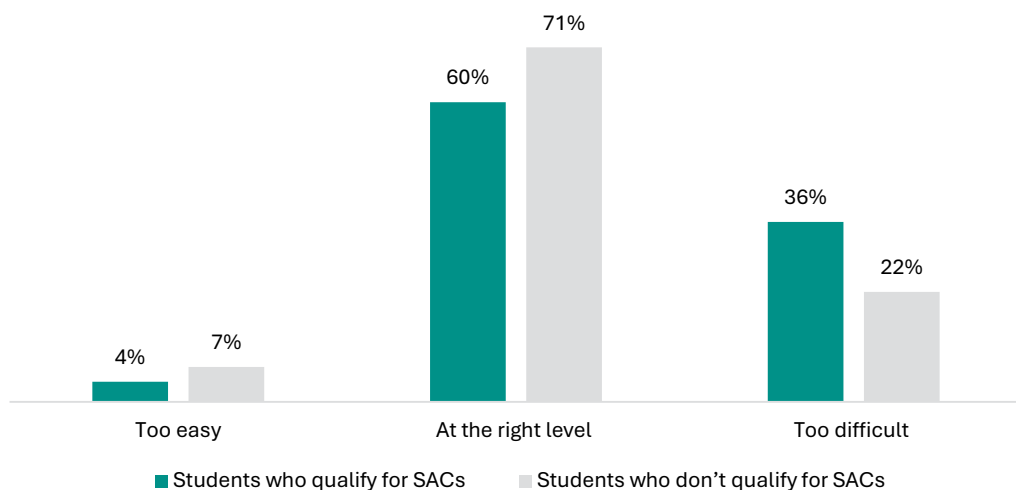
“Every now and then, an exam condition would work where everyone’s quiet around you and all that is OK. But it can be really stressful. I do like being able to decide when I want something done and not have a giant clock in front of me.”

SAC STUDENT

SACs students are more likely to find NCEA Level 1 too difficult, even though they achieve relatively well.

Concerningly, SACs students are more likely to be finding NCEA Level 1 too difficult – just over a third (36 percent) report this, compared to just over one in five non-SACs students (22 percent).

Figure 86: *Student views on NCEA Level 1 learning level, by students who do and don’t qualify for SACs.*



The unmanageability of assessments is likely to be impacting how difficult NCEA Level 1 feels overall. We also heard that the larger standards can be challenging for some students who qualify for SACs because the deeper learning requires different cognitive capabilities, which also impact on exams, for example where needs relate to attention and memory.

“I feel the course material is extremely unorganised, and the standards or expectations have not been set clearly enough that the teachers cannot successfully teach us what we need to know to complete it to a high standard. I also feel the exams could be better worded and easier to interpret, which would make it easier for someone like me who has neurodiversity.”

SAC STUDENT

Students who qualify for SACs more often report being stressed.

SACs students are more likely to be too stressed. A quarter of SACs students (26 percent) are too stressed (26 percent very stressed), while 16 percent of non-SACs students were too stressed (32 percent very stressed).

We heard about the stress of assessments being harder for students who qualify for SACs, especially when they needed to prioritise assessments that were getting bunched together. The literacy component of the assessments was also an added challenge for some of them.

“My son is severely dyslexic, and it seems unlikely that he will be able to pass the literacy tests as the criteria for marking appears to focus strongly on the very areas of literacy that are affected by dyslexia.”

PARENT AND WHĀNAU

“The written language accuracy that a dyslexic learner would be expected to demonstrate is nearly impossible.”

TEACHER

5) To what extent is NCEA Level 1 working for transient students?

Fewer, larger standards create challenges for transient students if they can't catch up.

We heard concerns that fewer, larger standards create challenges for transient students. Students with low attendance rates, transferring between schools, or having other commitments such as doing courses in a Polytechnic off-site, will miss out on important learning points that enable them to achieve the standards.

“Longer standards over a longer teaching time means transient students will be disadvantaged as they move schools and miss different topics.”

LEADER



Transience and poor attendance have always been an issue, but the impacts are more pronounced with the fewer, larger standards. For example, it is more difficult to catch up when joining midway through teaching of a larger standard than it is for a smaller standard. Also, fewer standards mean each one is high stakes, and missing or failing one is more damaging to overall achievement.

Conclusion

It is too early to know how the changes are affecting achievement because NCEA Level 1 assessments are still underway. However, we know that Māori and Pacific students don't historically achieve as well. Currently, we know that Māori students don't know enough about NCEA Level 1 to inform course choices, are less likely to be enjoying NCEA Level 1, and are more likely to be finding it too difficult and unmanageable. Pacific students face similar challenges. Pacific students are more likely than non-Pacific students to find NCEA Level 1 too difficult and the assessment workload unmanageable.

Students who qualify for SACs find elements of NCEA Level 1 challenging, especially the assessments. Transient students are at greater risk of not achieving due to the fewer, larger achievement standards without a chance of catching up later in the year if they do not achieve.

These findings highlight the importance of both learning prior to Year 11 to set up *all* students to succeed at NCEA Level 1 and ensuring NCEA Level 1 is inclusive.

The next chapter sets out what we know about how manageable NCEA Level 1 is for schools.



Chapter 8: Is NCEA Level 1 manageable for schools?

The delivery of NCEA Level 1 needs to be manageable for schools. However, most schools aren't yet finding it manageable and teachers in some learning areas are finding it less manageable than others. Science and Maths and Statistics teachers are finding NCEA Level 1 least manageable.

Schools that have received the most support for implementation are finding NCEA Level 1 the most manageable, indicating that some of the challenges may settle over time. However, manageability for the Principal's Nominees is unlikely to settle without changes or support for administering some of the new external assessments, which is the most challenging aspect of the new NCEA Level 1.

In this chapter we set out how manageable NCEA Level 1 is for teachers and leaders, and how this differs across learning areas and school types.

What we looked at

Implementation going smoothly is important in the roll out of any changes. Working out what has and hasn't gone well is useful to address any issues and make improvements in any further change rollouts.

This section sets out:

- 1) the manageability of NCEA Level 1 for teachers and leaders
- 2) manageability for different school types
- 3) manageability for teachers of different learning areas.

What we found: an overview

Schools are finding the new NCEA Level 1 unmanageable in its first year, and it is likely that some issues will remain after the initial change.

- Implementing changes to any qualifications will have challenges. Some will settle after the changes are embedded.
- Three-quarters of leaders (74 percent) and two-thirds of teachers (66 percent) say NCEA Level 1 is unmanageable. The additional workload for the Principal's Nominee (staff member responsible for organising NCEA at the school), is especially high and is unlikely to reduce over time.

- Administering additional external assessments (co-requisite and submitted reports) is logistically challenging. Three in five schools (61 percent) report they don't have the necessary staff capacity and half (53 percent) report a lack of physical space.
- Half of teachers (49 percent) report not having the capability for mana ōrite (having Equal status for mātauranga Māori in NCEA). Science is finding the inclusion of mātauranga Māori into achievement standards especially difficult.

In the following sections we look at each of these findings in more detail.

1) Manageability of NCEA Level 1 for teachers and leaders

A key issue identified with the previous NCEA Level 1 was that it had become unmanageable for some students and teachers. Manageability issues for teachers were around assessments, resubmissions, ongoing marking, and moderation, leading to teacher burn-out and discontent.²² The changes were designed to address some of these manageability issues.

This section sets out what we know about overall manageability for leaders and teachers, and manageability in relation to some of the main NCEA Level 1 changes to, including:

- a) overall manageability
- b) fewer, larger standards content
- c) new assessment formats
- d) administering external assessments
- e) mana ōrite.

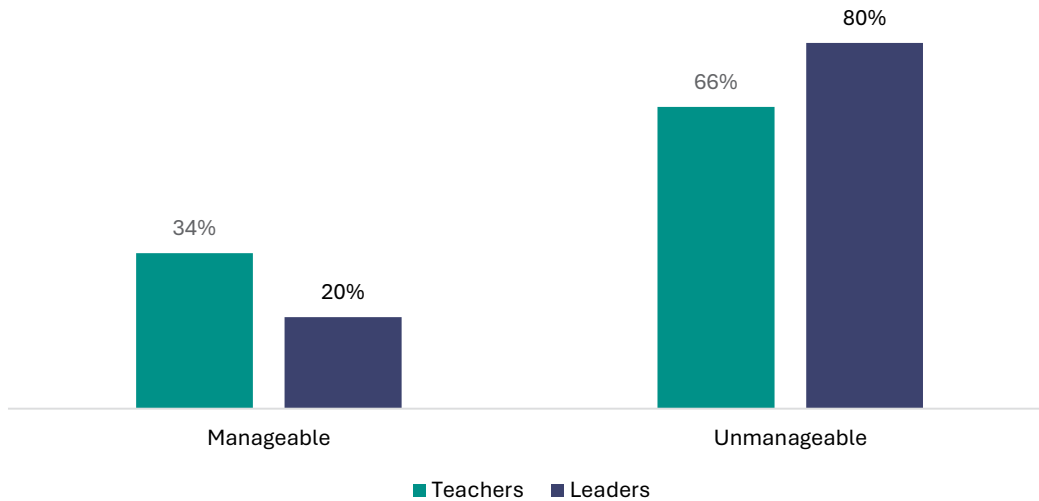
a) Overall manageability

Most teachers and leaders aren't finding NCEA Level 1 manageable.

Teachers and leaders play a crucial role in student achievement, so it is important that they are feeling their job is manageable. However, this not the case at the moment.

Two-thirds (66 percent) of teachers say the new NCEA Level 1 isn't manageable (only a third, 34 percent, report it is manageable). Four in five leaders (80 percent) agree NCEA Level 1 is unmanageable **for teachers** (only 20 percent think that it is manageable for teachers). It is possible that some of the manageability issues are related to the difficulties of implementation and will settle after the first year.

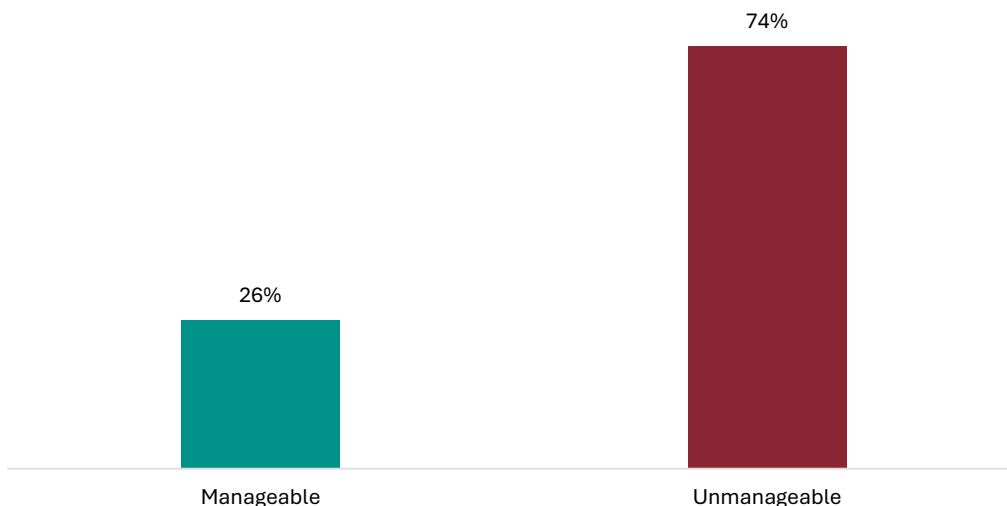
Figure 87: *Teacher and leader views on whether NCEA Level 1 is manageable for teachers.*



Most teachers have the knowledge and skills to deliver the NCEA Level 1 changes, but some don't. Just over two-thirds of teachers (69 percent) report they do, and just under one third (31 percent) report they don't.

Leaders themselves aren't finding NCEA Level 1 manageable. Roughly three-quarters (74 percent) of leaders say NCEA Level 1 isn't manageable and just over a quarter (26 percent) feel it is manageable.

Figure 88: *Leader views on manageability of NCEA Level 1.*



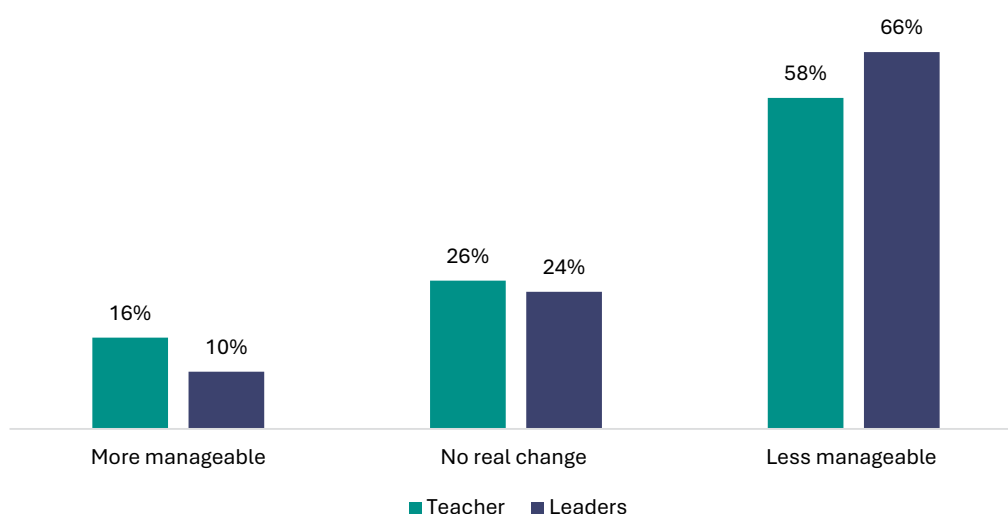
The main concern for leaders in terms of manageability relates to schools now having to run external assessments, including the co-requisite CAAs and the submitted reports. This has made it especially unmanageable for the Principal's Nominees. This is unlikely to change even when the changes have bedded in. See more on this below.

Teachers are finding NCEA Level 1 less manageable than before.

More than half of teachers (58 percent) say the changes make NCEA Level 1 less manageable overall. Roughly a quarter (26 percent) report there has been no real change, and just 15 percent report NCEA Level 1 has become more manageable.

Leaders support what teachers are saying, with two-thirds (66 percent) reporting that the changes have made NCEA Level 1 less manageable for teachers (24 percent think there is no change and 10 percent think it is more manageable for teachers).

Figure 89: *Teacher and leader views about whether changes make NCEA Level 1 less/more manageable for teachers.*



Teachers told us NCEA Level 1 is less manageable, due to the collapse of achievement standards into larger ones, as well as the merging of subjects. Teachers feel that this made teaching some subjects, such as Maths and Science, less manageable due to the amount of content crammed into some of the achievement standards. See more on this below.

We also heard while more externals mean teachers don't have as much marking as before, their administrative load has increased.

Leaders report the changes have made NCEA Level 1 less manageable **for them** – just over seven in 10 leaders (71 percent) report this. Just over one in five leaders (22 percent) say there is no real change, and only 7 percent say the changes make NCEA Level 1 more manageable for them.

Leaders, especially the Principal's Nominees, have been impacted by the new externals that schools are required to administer. See more on this below.

b) Fewer, larger standards

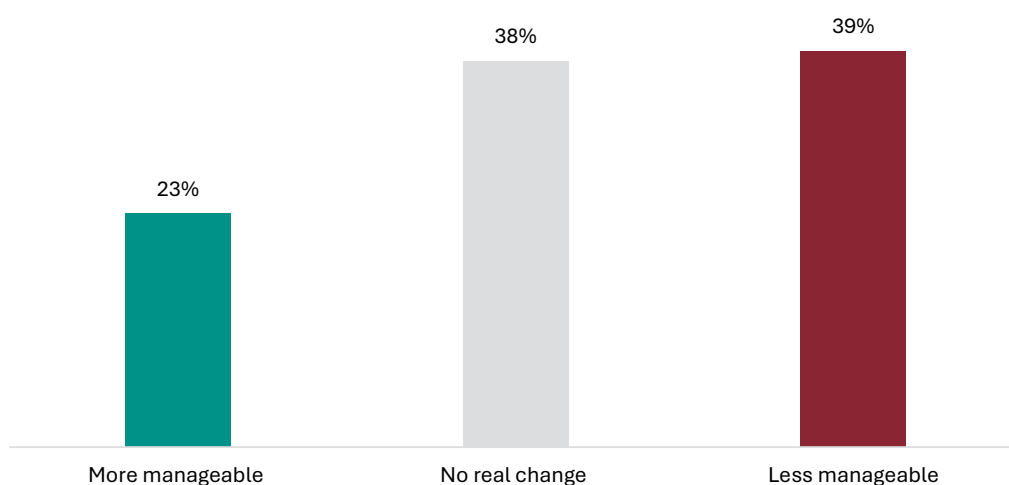
Fewer, larger standards were introduced to ensure the NCEA qualification credentials the most significant knowledge and skills in a subject. Subjects have typically been re-designed with four achievement standards – two internally assessed and two externally assessed – worth 20 credits in total.

Teachers find covering the content for all four achievement standards challenging.

Even though the changes have reduced the number of standards teachers need to teach and assess in each subject, the content needing to be covered for these larger standards can be more than teachers feel they have time to teach.

Just under two in five teachers (39 percent) report that fewer, larger standards make NCEA Level 1 less manageable. A similar proportion (38 percent) report they make no real difference, and just under a quarter (23 percent) report they make NCEA Level 1 more manageable.

Figure 90: *Teacher views on whether fewer, larger standards make NCEA Level 1 more/less manageable.*



More positively, just over four in five teachers (81 percent) say they have the capability to deliver the new, larger achievement standards. Only just under a fifth of teachers (19 percent) don't think they have the required knowledge and skills.

Teachers told us that while there are fewer standards, because these standards are larger, the amount of content to cover in the year has remained the same and has even increased in some learning areas due to the merging of some subjects. For example, we heard one of the achievement standards for Maths combines learning that was assessed by several standards from the old NCEA Level 1, collectively worth more than five credits. Teachers are concerned about not being able to deliver the content of all four standards. This is a reason some teachers are only offering three in their courses.

“We only teach three achievement standards, because the other one was just too chunky and big, and just not enough time to get through.”

TEACHER

“I’m not going deeper. We’re actually covering broader, and far more stuff than we did.”

TEACHER

Leaders are more positive about the manageability of the fewer, larger standards.

Leaders are more positive about the fewer, larger standards because it means more time will be spent on teaching and learning, which will eventually have positive impacts on student engagement and achievement. They also expect the deeper learning will be more engaging to teach. However, they note that the move to fewer, larger standards requires a shift in mindset for both teachers and students.

“[NCEA Level 1] can encourage a focus on the curriculum and the learning matrix rather than the assessment. That, to me, is the main mindset that we need to change.”

LEADER

Almost half of leaders (46 percent) say fewer, larger standards make no real difference to manageability. Just under two in five leaders (38 percent) say they make NCEA Level 1 less manageable, and about one in six (16 percent) say they make NCEA Level 1 more manageable.

c) Administering external assessments

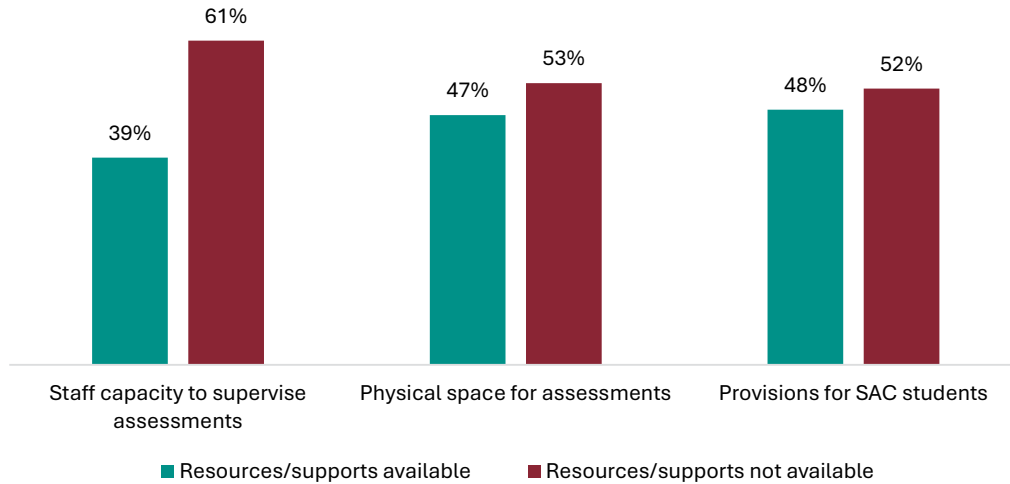
External assessments, especially exams, were previously administered by NZQA – for example, in exam centres and invigilated by NZQA staff. Alongside the increase in external assessment in the design of the new NCEA Level 1, schools are administering the co-requisite CAAs and submitted reports. Administering externals on this scale is a big shift for schools, affecting manageability, especially for school leaders, as discussed below.

Schools don’t always have the resources and supports for the new externals.

Successful changes need the right resources and supports, but schools don’t always have them.

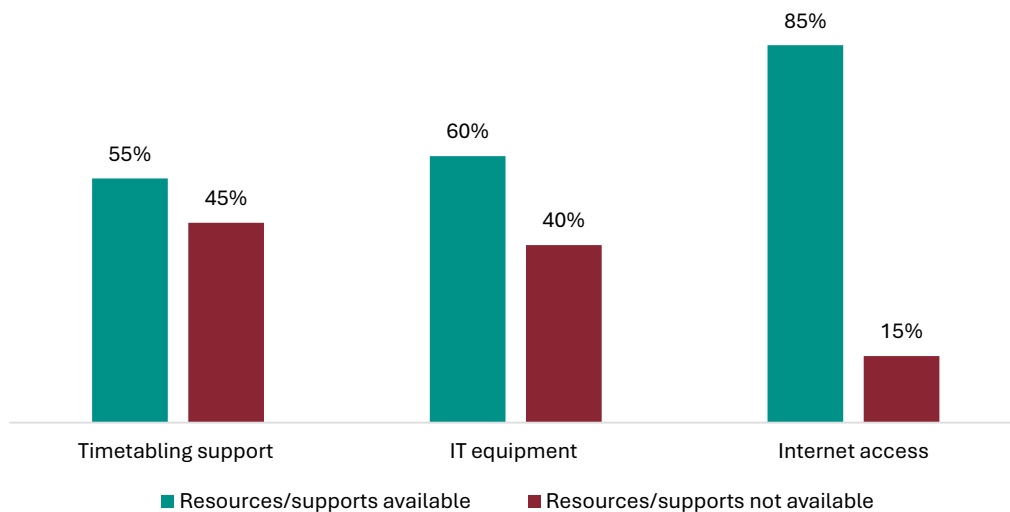
Three in five leaders (61 percent) report their schools don’t have the staff capacity for NCEA Level 1 assessments. Over half of leaders additionally report their schools don’t have access to the physical space needed to carry out the assessments or the right provisions for Special Assessment Conditions (SACs) (53 percent and 52 percent respectively).

Figure 91: *Leader views on whether the school has resources and supports in place for assessments.*



Just less than half of leaders (45 percent) report their schools don't have the timetabling support they need, and another two in five (40 percent) report they don't have access to the IT equipment that they need. However, most leaders (85 percent) report their schools do have suitable internet access to administer their assessments, but three in 20 (15 percent) report they don't.

Figure 92: *Leader views on whether the school has resources and supports in place for assessments (continued).*



The challenge of running the co-requisite CAAs and the submitted reports are especially challenging. Some of the main issues we heard are listed below.

- **Ensuring authenticity:** ensuring authenticity is a challenge for all assessments, but especially for externals because teachers aren't marking them. Schools being responsible for authenticity is especially challenging when large numbers of students are using their own devices in spaces that aren't easy to invigilate. Authenticity can be monitored more easily in computer labs, but most schools are not set up for this on the scale required. Schools are looking at software options to help them, but these are expensive.

“We are a school that's relatively well-resourced in terms of technology, and we're still struggling to come up with effective procedures and systems that will cope.”

TEACHER

- **Digital submissions:** student submissions for external assessments must be uploaded to the NZQA system and this takes up a lot of time for teachers. The co-requisite CAAs can be completed on paper, but most often it is completed on the NZQA system, so the CAAs are not as problematic as other types of external assessment, such as the submitted reports.
- **Logistical issues:** as indicated by our survey results, running externals involves schools having appropriate classroom space, internet capacity, and technological devices for student. Logistics also require timetabling management to ensure sufficient staffing. Some external assessment formats require specialist equipment, such as cameras to record evidence for a digital submission, and schools don't always have this on the scale required.

“These co-requisite CAAs are another thing: printing the exam paper, getting kids to fill it in, scanning it, uploading it, and then finding out there's another form I have to complete for each student and enter all their numbers. It's like far out!”

PRINCIPAL'S NOMINEE

- **Staffing issues:** administering external assessments on the scale required for the new NCEA Level 1 requires additional staffing, to invigilate or authenticate externals. Some schools are using reliefs at a cost, or their own teachers who volunteer time.

“The teacher time to manage assessments and be away from their classes to perform supervision has tripled for us as a school. We cannot sustain this level of supervision.”

LEADER

“This coming round [of co-requisite assessments] we will probably have between three to four hundred students sitting at the same time. You need a computer supervisor (who can fix technical problems) plus another supervisor for every 25 students in a space. We’re completely reliant on teachers’ goodwill [to supervise].”

LEADER

- **Accommodating SACs:** with the increased number of externals, this increases the usual challenge of meeting the needs of students who qualify for SACs, involving both logistical and staffing issues. For example, trying to ensure sufficient reader-writer capacity and appropriate spaces for SACs students, who often sit exams separately.

Principal’s Nominees workload has increased significantly, and it is unlikely to settle.

Three-quarters of Principal’s Nominees (75 percent) report NCEA Level 1 is unmanageable (only 25 percent report it is manageable).

Just over two-thirds (69 percent) of Principal’s Nominees report their workload is less manageable than before. Only a fifth (20 percent) report there is no real change, and 11 percent report their workload is more manageable than before.

“No one thought of all the stress and the pressure of running that assessment fell on the Principal’s Nominees’ shoulders. That caused heaps of headaches.”

LEADER

Workload for Principal’s Nominees is unlikely to reduce following implementation, as schools take up the role of exam centres to run the reading, writing, and numeracy CAAs and the submitted reports. Principal’s Nominees told us their workload has increased, including tasks such as entering and tracking students for the co-requisite; managing SAC applications and arrangements at school (sourcing reader-writers or rooms); scanning pen-and-paper tests; and managing derived grades applications.

The additional workload generated by submitted reports (conducted over a number of days under exam conditions) has been particularly problematic for Principal’s Nominees to timetable and logistically manage. The additional workload of

organising rooms, digital devices, and monitoring or controlling school internet usage during these assessment periods has been especially challenging. Larger schools have found it more challenging because of the large number of students involved, across multiple subjects.

Some schools have created additional roles such as literacy and numeracy coordinators to support the Principal's Nominees with the administration and monitoring of the co-requisite. Assistant Principals or SENCo are supporting Principal's Nominees in some schools if they have the staff capacity to do so, however, not all schools can afford to do this.

d) New formats of assessment

As detailed in Chapter 3, with the intention of making NCEA Level 1 more accessible, new formats assessments have been introduced. Achievement standards might specify that students can submit their assessment as a written piece, an audio or video recording, slides, or a combination of these. For external assessments, teachers need to submit these assessments to NZQA for marking, which means uploading submissions formats to the NZQA system.

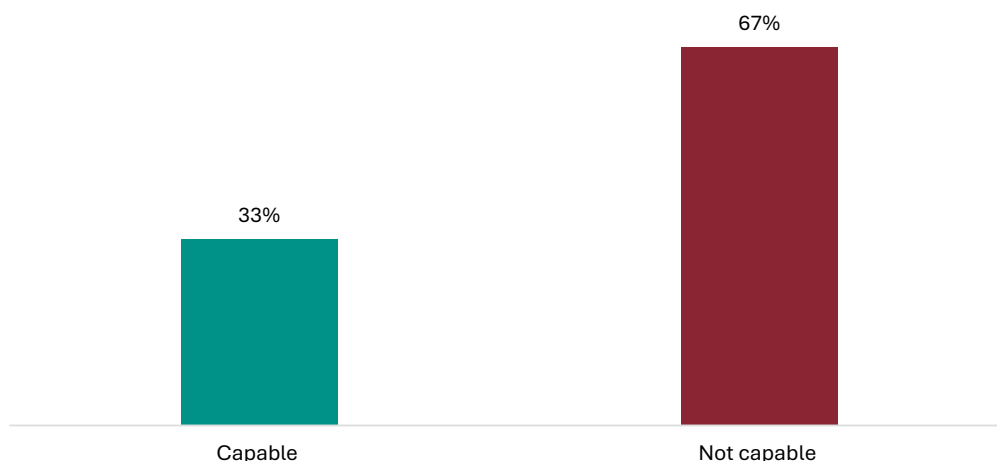
New assessment formats are difficult for teachers without clear guidance and exemplars.

Teachers need more guidance on how to use the new assessment formats as the logistical challenges are making these new formats difficult.

Almost two in five teachers (38 percent) say the new assessment formats make NCEA Level 1 less manageable. Almost a half of teachers (49 percent) report they make no difference to the manageability of NCEA Level 1, and one in eight (13 percent) report they make NCEA Level 1 more manageable.

Manageability is partly, but not mainly, a capability issue. Just over two-thirds of teachers (67 percent) say they have the capability to deliver the new assessment formats and a third (33 percent) don't.

Figure 93: *Teacher views on their capability to deliver the new assessment formats.*



We heard teachers aren't confident to deliver new assessment formats without clear guidance and exemplars, as described in Chapter 3. This may be an implementation issue, which will resolve over time, or some assessment formats may need to change. Manageability concerns are also due to resourcing and logistical issues. Teachers don't always have the resources for the new assessment formats, such as the video and audio recording equipment, and making sure videos and audio recordings adequately capture student knowledge and skills can be a practically challenging.

“The amount of ‘evidence’ required is scary. It feels as a teacher I am endlessly snapping photos, videoing and uploading for the portfolios.”

TEACHER

Leaders find new assessments difficult due to practical challenges.

Just over half of leaders (52 percent) report that the new assessment formats make NCEA Level 1 less manageable for them. Just over two in five leaders (41 percent) report they make no real difference to manageability, and 7 percent report that they make NCEA Level 1 more manageable.

Separately to the issues of administering the submitted reports and the CAAs, discussed above, leaders report some of the new assessment formats aren't manageable due to the practical challenges of offering different assessments to different students and ensuring fairness across how they are marked. If their teachers aren't yet confident with all the new formats, student guidance on the assessments and teacher marking may be impacted.

Inconsistencies between assessment formats will show up in moderation. However, leaders are currently concerned about the timeliness of the moderation process for the internal assessments, to support teachers with their judgements, for marking student work especially for assessments that are at the border of Merit and Excellence.

“Moderation dates are all over the year. I've got to keep checking and checking.”

LEADER

“The teachers have the powers to make their own judgment, but when they do that, they [might] completely misinterpret the standard. When it is moderated next year the moderators will say we are not meeting the national requirement. The [moderation] reports will be back tracking. We're behind.”

LEADER

e) Mana ōrite

Integrating mātauranga Māori into NCEA Level 1 is part of a wider programme called Mana ōrite mō te mātauranga Māori, or Mana ōrite, which aims to give equal status, support, and resourcing for mātauranga Māori across all aspects of NCEA. As the programme matures, schools are likely to become more confident with implementation. In this section, we capture how manageable schools are finding mana ōrite at a point in time in relation to the changes for NCEA Level 1. Chapter 9 focuses on implementation issues more specifically, identifying the role PLD can play in making mana ōrite more manageable for schools.

Including mātauranga Māori into achievement standards has made teaching NCEA Level 1 more challenging for many teachers.

Currently, almost a half (48 percent) report that including mātauranga Māori into achievement standards has made NCEA Level 1 less manageable for teachers. Just over two in five (42 percent) report this change has made no difference and one in 10 (10 percent) report that it has made NCEA Level 1 more manageable.

Teachers told us they value the inclusion of mātauranga Māori, however, they need more time and more work to authentically integrate mātauranga Māori. In the absence of practical PLD for teachers in this regard, it continues to be a challenge. This is particularly so in schools where staff are predominantly Pākehā. Science and Maths teachers also find mātauranga Māori challenging.

“It’s pretty hard to put it into a local curriculum context, because you are reinventing that wheel again and we’re time poor.”

TEACHER



Half of teachers currently lack capability to include mātauranga Māori into achievement standards.

Out of all the changes, teachers have the lowest capability for this change. Just under half of teachers (49 percent) do not have the capability to include mātauranga Māori into their teaching and learning programmes that are assessed by these achievement standards with just over half (51 percent) reporting they have the knowledge and skills to deliver this change.

Teachers told us integrating mātauranga Māori is challenging but we consistently heard teachers enjoy bringing in a stronger focus on Māori perspectives in their subject areas, when this is done authentically. However, teachers feel that the inclusion of mātauranga Māori is “tag-on” or “tokenistic” because, for example, we heard that it can simply involve learning an additional Māori term beside the English term, rather than authentically engaging with local culture. Teacher experiences vary across learning areas and subjects. See more on this below.

Leaders who expressed some concern about teachers' capability to include mātauranga Māori told us there is a lack of continuous and practical PLD for teachers, especially those who are new to the profession. They feel that integrating mātauranga Māori will take time, and require more specific training, rather than just the ideology. Schools are also concerned for their overseas-trained teachers to develop in this capability.

“The challenge for our school is that there are new staff coming in and sometimes they're not local to New Zealand. So it is a challenge to bring mātauranga Māori in immediately. It should be a journey.”

TEACHER

Incorporating mātauranga Māori into NCEA Level 1 has been easier for schools due to staffing and local supports.

Different schools had different experiences weaving in mātauranga Māori. Schools where the majority of staff are Pākehā or overseas-trained teachers find it more challenging. They lack confidence, can feel pressured to act as the “expert” in an area that they are not sure of or have much knowledge in, and are aware that getting it wrong is high-stakes.

“If you've got a predominantly Pākehā teaching workforce and all of a sudden, they were expected to be expert in mātauranga Māori, and put that across, it is probably not realistic.”

LEADER

There are also logistical and practical challenges. At one school, we heard there was no marae nearby. At another school, we heard the local iwi was not well-resourced to support the school.

Schools note that mana ōrite is a journey that will take time to build. Some schools have made a start in developing their ability to integrate mātauranga Māori, however, at this time, challenges remain, particularly for some learning areas and schools.

2) Manageability for different school types

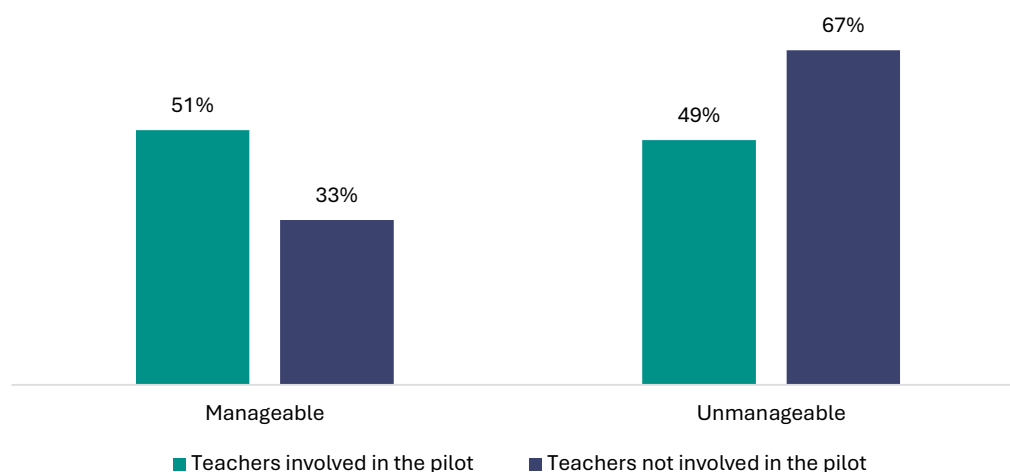
Teachers directly involved in the pilot are more likely to report NCEA Level 1 is manageable.

Schools who were involved in the pilot have had more time to embed the changes. Teachers who were directly involved in the pilot are twice^x as likely to also report NCEA Level 1 is manageable.

^x Odds ratio 2.32 ($p < 0.01$) – from logistic regression modelling.

Just over half (51 percent) of teachers involved in the pilot feel NCEA Level 1 is manageable compared to only a third (33 percent) of teachers not involved in the pilot reporting the same.

Figure 94: *Teacher views on whether NCEA level 1 is manageable, by those involved in the pilot.*



Teachers told us that being part of the pilot meant they their planning load settled, and they were able to spend time refining resources and moderate assessments. Some schools told us they expect NCEA Level 1 will be more manageable once the changes become established.

“If we hadn’t spent a year and a half, almost two years, put heaps of hours of work in from our staff, we wouldn’t be sitting here so positive or comfortable.”

HEAD OF DEPARTMENT TEACHER FROM A PILOT SCHOOL

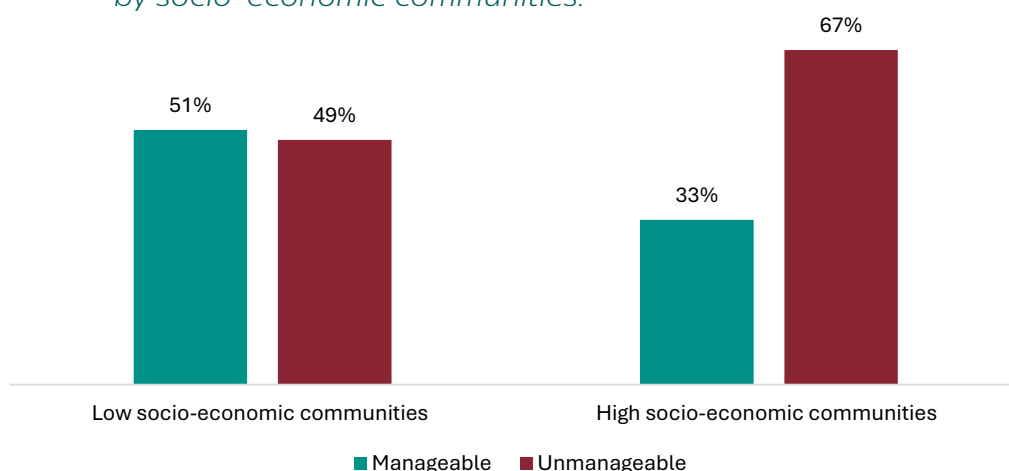
Schools in lower socio-economic communities are finding NCEA Level 1 more manageable.

Just over half of teachers in low socio-economic communities (51 percent) feel NCEA Level 1 is manageable after the changes, compared to only a third of teachers in high (33 percent) socio-economic communities.

Teachers in schools in lower socioeconomic communities are twice^y as likely to report NCEA Level 1 is manageable than those in other socio-economic communities.

^y Odds ratio 2.09 ($p < 0.01$) – from logistic regression modelling.

Figure 95: *Teacher views on whether NCEA Level 1 is manageable, by socio-economic communities.*

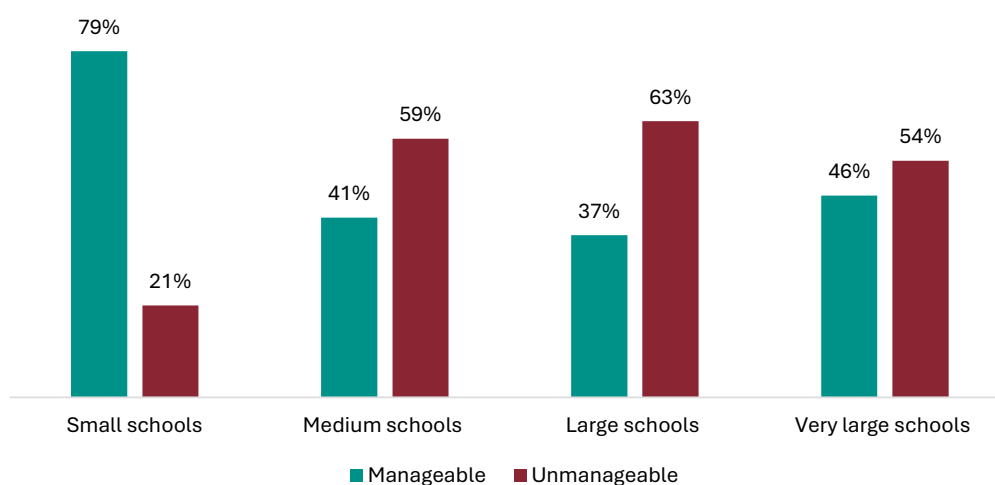


Leaders in low socio-economic communities more often report (42 percent) that NCEA Level 1 is manageable compared to leaders in moderate socio-economic communities (22 percent) and high socio-economic communities (16 percent).

Larger schools are struggling more with the logistics of external assessments.

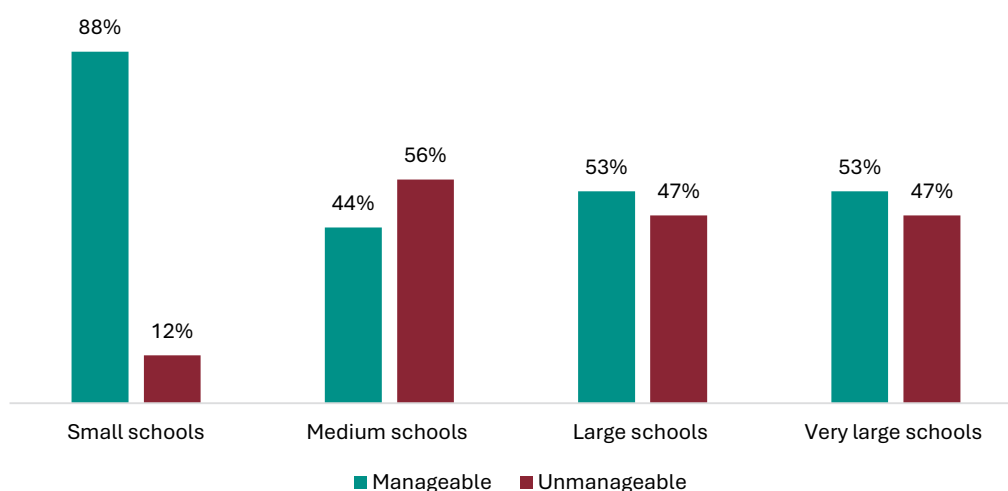
Just over a half (54 percent) of leaders in very large schools, just over three in five (63 percent) in large schools, and just under three in five (59 percent) of leaders in medium schools don't have the necessary physical space for assessments. This is compared to only a fifth (21 percent) of leaders in small schools reporting this issue.

Figure 96: *Leader views on whether they have the physical space for assessments, by school size.*



Just under a half (47 percent) of leaders in very large schools and large schools, and just under three in five (56 percent) of leaders in medium schools report they don't have support and resources for timetabling for assessments. This is compared to just over one in 10 leaders (12 percent) in small schools reporting this issue.

Figure 97: *Leader views on whether they have the support and resources for timetabling for assessments, by school size.*



Larger schools find logistics difficult, due to complex timetabling and shortage of rooms or spaces that can be used for supervised assessments. For example, we heard a school had to roster their Year 9s and 10s to stay at home during Year 11 assessments. This impacts the learning of Year 9s and 10s and undermines the school's messaging on attendance; and, unsurprisingly, raises concerns for parents and whānau. When there is a technical glitch, large schools find it hard to schedule another time for hundreds of students to re-sit, without rearranging timetables of the whole cohort or school.

“Timetabling needed adjusting, relocating whole blocks for kids to move down to a different block for learning because we’ve got to operate 3500 students, of which 650 need to do a special test which has no time limit. It makes things very, very difficult for us.”

LEADER

3) Manageability for teachers of different learning areas

NCEA Level 1 subjects have been changed to give students a broader foundational education, reducing subject choice and limiting specialisation until Level 2. Some subjects have changed more significantly than others, impacting manageability for teachers at least in the short term.

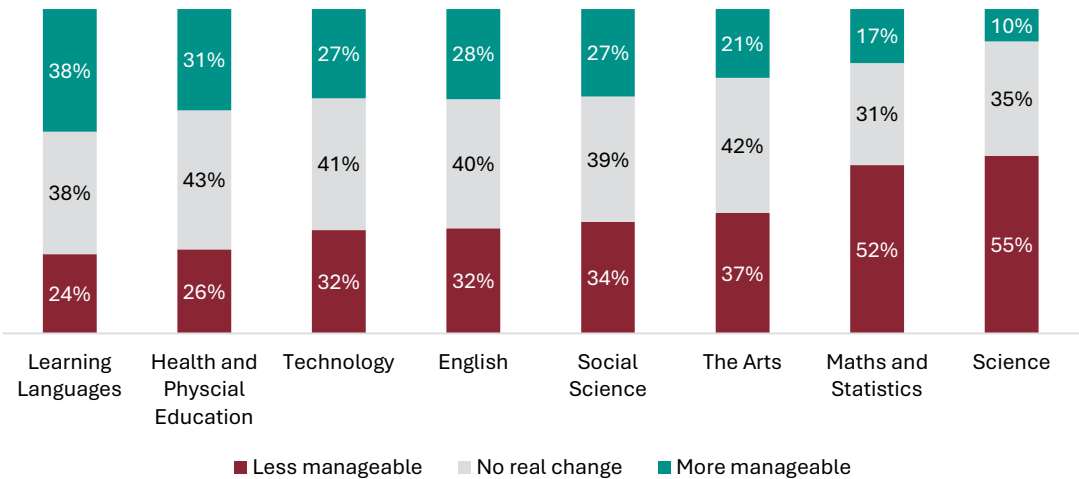
For example, in the Science learning area, the Science subject remained, but Chemistry and Biology were merged into one subject (previously two individual subjects), and Physics was combined with Earth and Space Science to become Physics, Earth and Space Science.

In the Social Science learning area, Economics, Business Studies, Accounting have all been merged into one subject called Commerce. The Technology learning area has also had significant change due to the merging of subjects. Other specialised subjects no longer to be offered at NCEA Level 1 include Art History, Classical Studies, Media Studies, Psychology, and Latin.

Science and Maths and Statistics teachers are finding the fewer, larger standards least manageable.

Fewer, larger standards as impacted manageability for teachers differently by learning area. Over half of Science teachers (55 percent) and half of Maths and Statistics teachers (52 percent) report this change has made NCEA Level 1 less manageable. This is compared to about a quarter of Language teachers (24 percent) and Health and Physical Education teachers (26 percent).

Figure 98: Teacher views on whether fewer, larger standards have impacted manageability, by learning area.



Teachers in some subjects such as Maths and Sciences don't feel that NCEA Level 1 is manageable, because they have a greater teaching load in their subjects, when achievement standards collapsed into larger ones.

“Too many contents to cover in one standard. For example, the new 1.2 achievement standard consists of content from all seven previous Maths standards.”

MATHS TEACHER

Teachers and leaders told us that there is anticipation that there would be new changes to curriculum and NCEA, meaning they will continue to find it unmanageable.

Practical subjects are finding the new external assessments challenging to deliver.

We asked leaders how the amount of external assessment had changed for NCEA Level 1 courses as a result of the changes. Just under two-thirds of leaders (64 percent) say external assessment has increased in the Health and Physical Education learning area. This is because prior to the changes, Physical Education did not have any external assessment and now, there are two external achievement standards.

This change, in the balance of assessment for Physical Education, has been poorly received because leaders and teachers tend to think external assessments aren't the best way to assess practical skills. In particular, they report the heavy literacy requirement takes away the practical component of this subject, while requiring video-recorded evidence also poses logistic challenges.

“Physical Education standards are doing a disservice to our students by becoming more academic and less practical. Our students are kinaesthetic learners who learn by doing and this is their strength. The Level 1 Physical Education course does not encompass the true essence of our subject anymore.”

TEACHER

Almost two in five leaders (37 percent) say external assessment has decreased for Science, this is more than teachers in any other learning area. We heard that science teachers are offering just one external, and sometimes none, because they aren't clear on what is required and the information has been arriving too late in the year to prepare students. We talk more about the challenges with implementation in Chapter 9. The balance of internal and external may change as teachers become clearer about what is required.

Science and Technology teachers are most likely to report that integrating mātauranga Māori into new NCEA Level 1 achievement standards is challenging.

Incorporating mātauranga Māori into achievement standards has impacted manageability for teachers differently across learning areas. Just over three in five Science teachers (62 percent) and just over half of Technology teachers (54 percent) report this change has made NCEA Level 1 less manageable. This is compared to almost two in five English teachers (38 percent) and just over a third of Language teachers (36 percent).

For subjects such as Sciences or Maths and Statistics, teachers find it more challenging because it is difficult to do this authentically. For example, they might just add kupu Māori, rather than te ao Māori concepts. We heard that these are just additional terms to teach and don't make teaching Science concepts any easier.

“There isn't really a way to just naturally bring mātauranga Māori into Science. It's just thrown in. It ends up just confusing students more.”

TEACHER

We did hear some positive comments about Science teachers being able to weave mātauranga Māori into their teaching. This, however, required the school being proactive in connecting to PLD and local iwi, and having time during the pilot phase to do this.

English teachers find integrating mātauranga Māori easier, because they can do this authentically by referring to Māori authors and texts. Teachers also said students could choose Māori and multicultural texts, which makes the standards more inclusive. This means they have the resources, and the teaching and learning is more authentic.

“[For English] it is more inclusive because of mātauranga Māori being embedded in the curriculum. It also enables the inclusion of more multicultural texts.”

ENGLISH TEACHER



Conclusion

Some NCEA Level 1 changes were intended to make it more manageable for schools, but we heard that the changes have not made NCEA Level 1 more manageable. In fact, the changes have made things less manageable than before. The additional workload for the Principal's Nominees is especially high and is unlikely to reduce over time and is particularly due to administering additional external assessments (co-requisite CAAs and submitted reports), which is logistically challenging. Mana ōrite is the change schools are struggling with the most. However, we do know that change is always difficult at the start of any process and some of the challenges will reduce as the changes are embedded.

The next chapter sets out what has and hasn't worked for implementation.



Chapter 9: What has and hasn't worked from implementation?

Implementing the NCEA Level 1 changes has been a challenge for schools because they weren't prepared for this at the start of the year. Information and resources from the Ministry and NZQA have sometimes arrived late and been inconsistent; and training days have not always been useful. But teachers generally do feel supported by their school leaders and subject associations.

In this chapter we set out how prepared schools were to implement the changes and how manageable implementation has been. We also cover how well teachers and leaders understand the changes they need to implement and how sufficient information, resources, and supports are for schools.

What we looked at

Implementation going smoothly is important for the roll out of any change. Working out what has and hasn't gone well is useful to address any issues and make improvements for further change, including the upcoming changes to NCEA Levels 2 and 3.

This chapter sets out findings on:

- 1) how prepared schools were
- 2) how manageable implementation has been
- 3) how well teachers and leaders understand what is needed to implement the changes
- 4) how clear, timely, and useful information was
- 5) how useful resources and supports were.

What we found: an overview

What has worked

- Teachers need time to plan and prepare for the changes and have felt supported by leaders who have provided release time for this.
- Subject associations have played a key role in supporting teachers by keeping them updated, connecting them with each other, and providing classroom resources.

- Pilot schools have been a valued source of support for non-pilot schools, and teachers have valued PLD when it has provided opportunities to hear about pilot experiences.
- Schools have valued working with other schools, which has been helpful for moderation and sharing resources. Working in a cluster is especially helpful for small schools, who have fewer staff to share the load of implementation.

What hasn't worked

- Seven in 10 teachers (70 percent) and half of leaders (51 percent) weren't prepared to fully implement the changes at the start of this year. Schools feel like they are 'building the plane while flying it' and couldn't start implementation earlier due to a lack of guidance and resources.
- Information has been unclear, inconsistent, and changing. This has been frustrating for teachers and stressful for students. For example, schools report information about the duration of exams and the word count for written assessments have been changing throughout the year.
- Of the teachers that have accessed PLD, almost three in 10 (28 percent) didn't find it useful. They want better PLD to be run by experts, more practical, and classroom focused.
- A lack of exemplars is making it difficult for teachers and students to know what is required, especially for the new assessment formats.

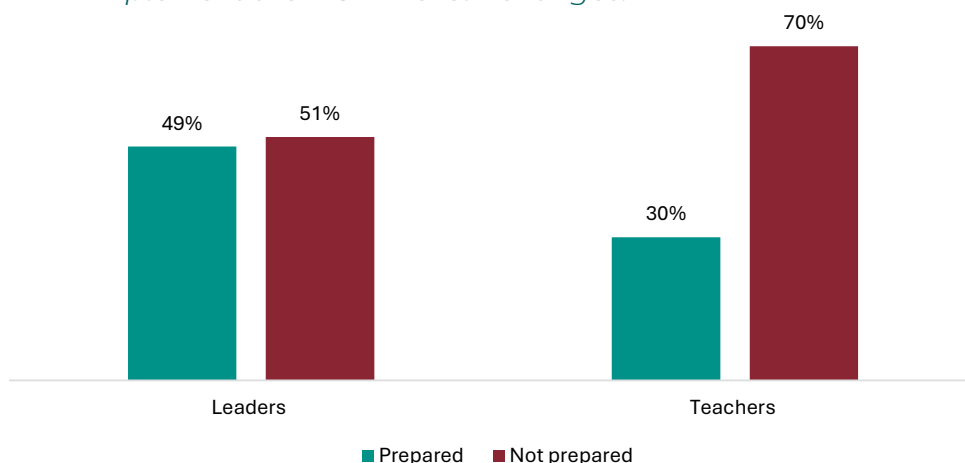
In the following section we look at each of these findings in more detail.

1) How prepared were schools?

Schools weren't prepared for implementation at the start of the year due to late and insufficient resources and supports arriving late.

Just over half of leaders (51 percent) weren't prepared to implement the NCEA Level 1 changes at the start of this year (49 percent were prepared). Teachers were even less well prepared – seven in 10 (70 percent) reported being unprepared at the start of this year (30 percent were prepared).

Figure 99: *Leader and teacher views on whether they were prepared to implement the NCEA Level 1 changes.*



We consistently heard schools were unprepared due to late and insufficient resources and supports. Schools have been particularly concerned about late and inconsistent information and guidance about assessments. For example, test dates have been shared with schools late, affecting the planning and timetabling. We also heard information has been inconsistent between different websites and documents, and inconsistent within documents. See more on this below.

Teachers also told us moderation support was lacking when they designed their assessments. Moderation supports the credibility of assessment by ensuring that assessment is valid, and grade judgements are fair, across teachers and schools. Schools need to submit moderation for the standards assessed each year to ensure quality of assessments to NZQA. However, moderation results were returned to schools late, or without useful feedback to help teachers to make improvements.

“My workload has just tripled because I’m trying to build the plane, but I don’t know what the plane is supposed to look like, or where it’s going.”

TEACHER

Another key factor impacting schools’ preparedness is lack of support while implementing the changes. Schools experienced varying levels of support from the Ministry of Education and NZQA facilitators, who might not have enough information themselves. See more on this below.

Schools involved in the pilot and in low socio-economic communities were most likely to be prepared because they received more support.

Support for delivering the changes is a crucial aspect of schools feeling prepared. Pilot schools and schools in low socio-economic communities were the most prepared.

Fifty-nine percent of teachers who were involved in the pilots felt prepared, compared to only 27 percent of teachers who weren’t part of the pilots. Non-pilot schools feel that they had to get to implementing new changes within a short time frame and didn’t have enough support. Pilot schools recognise they had more support and suggest the same level of support should be given to all schools.

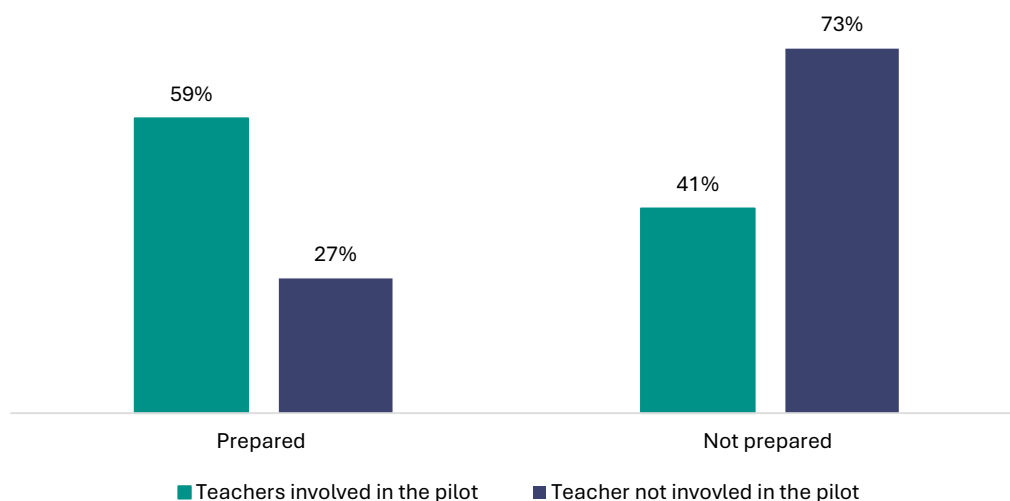
“We’ve learned a lot from doing pilots, but we know there’s going to be schools out there that are just facing this, in a real situation now. Their learning curve will be very steep.”

LEADER IN PILOT SCHOOL

“There’s the expectation that we can just do it in a heartbeat and deliver. This lack of consideration has been probably the biggest frustration I’ve had.”

TEACHER IN NON-PILOT SCHOOL

Figure 100: *Teacher views about whether they were prepared to implement NCEA Level 1, by being directly involved in the pilot.*



Around three in 10 teachers at schools in high and moderate socio-economic communities were prepared (30 percent and 27 percent respectively), compared to almost half of teachers (47 percent) in schools in low socio-economic communities. This seems counter-intuitive, given the additional challenges facing schools in low socio-economic communities. The reason could be due to schools identified as 'less ready' being targeted with more support through the Ministry of Education's change programme.²³

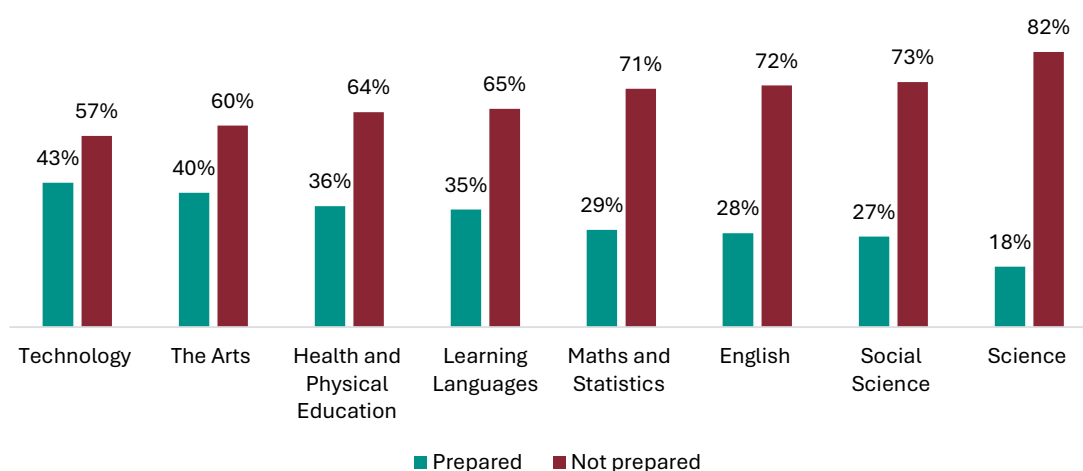
Teachers were more likely to be prepared for implementation in learning areas like the Arts and Technology and least likely to be prepared in Science.

Teachers were less prepared in some learning areas than others due to the varying scale of the changes to content and assessments for the new achievement standards.

Two in five Arts teachers (40 percent) and Technology teachers (43 percent) report they were prepared for the changes, compared to just under one in five Science teachers (18 percent).

About a third of teachers from other learning areas reported being prepared for the changes; 36 percent of Health and Physical Education teachers, 35 percent of language teachers, 29 percent of Maths and Statistics teachers, 28 percent of English teachers, and 27 percent of Social Science teachers.

Figure 101: *Teacher views on whether they were prepared to implement the NCEA Level 1 changes, by learning area.*



Teachers explained that NCEA Level 1 changes weren't as significant in the Arts and they were finding it easier to incorporate mātauranga Māori than many other subjects.

“The emphasis on mātauranga Māori and other cultural contexts allows students to explore themes in ways that align with their individual learning styles and cultural backgrounds, making the qualification more inclusive for diverse groups.”

ARTS TEACHER

We heard that Technology teachers in the subject association had been working closely with the Ministry of Education in preparation for the changes, which may have helped.

Sciences teachers didn't feel prepared due to the scale of change happening in this learning area, including the merging of subjects, the increase in literacy requirements, and the challenge of authentically integrating mātauranga Māori into the learning content for the new standards.

Also, information arrived late for the Science exam, which means teachers aren't prepared well enough to teach the content for it in a way that gives them confidence that they are setting students up to achieve.

“There has been inadequate time to appropriately prepare teachers and therefore students in the new content.”

SCIENCE TEACHER

“From the Science point of view, it’s just so overwhelming.”

SCIENCE TEACHER

2) How manageable has implementation been?

Most leaders and teachers are finding the scale of change challenging.

The scale of the change this year is challenging because schools weren’t able to do much preparation in advance and because administering external assessments is a significant change.

Around three in five leaders (61 percent) and teachers (58 percent) feel that implementing the changes this year has been unmanageable. About two in five leaders and teachers have found implementation manageable (39 percent and 42 percent, respectively).

Leaders and teachers consistently told us they are overwhelmed by the scale of the change without enough time to prepare. Teachers feel like they are ‘building the plane while flying it’ and were unable to prepare much earlier due to a lack of information. They have had to use their own time, holiday, or school breaks to attend workshops and seminars, or catching up on re-planning. This is particularly so for non-pilot schools and subject areas, who are working with the new achievement standards for the first time this year.

“For the over-time external that’s coming up, I am feeling very ill-prepared. This school holiday I will spend a lot of time on that. We are making the plane while it’s in the air, and that’s really what it feels like.”

TEACHER

The requirement for schools to administer external assessments is a major challenge that is making implementation feel unmanageable. While part of the marking load has been taken away from teachers, they have more of a role in supervising and authenticating the external assessments.

Leaders told us that information about assessment timelines or guidelines are not communicated to schools prior to the start of the year, or too close to implementation date. This impacts schools timetabling and teacher allocation.

“It’s almost insulting to send out to school a term planner and some instructions on what’s going to happen in Term 3 with this over-time assessment, within a week and a half until school finishing for Term 2.”

LEADER

Teachers in small schools, schools in low socio-economic communities, and pilot schools are finding implementation more manageable.

Small schools were over twice as likely as schools of other sizes to find implementing the changes as manageable.^z It could be because of the logistical challenges involved in implementing the externals that we heard from big schools.

Schools in low socio-economic communities are also twice as likely to find implementing the changes had been manageable than schools in moderate or high socio-economic communities.^{aa} As noted above, this is likely because schools identified as less ready were targeted with more support through the Ministry of Education's change programme.

Teachers directly involved in the pilot are two-and-a-half times more likely to find implementing the changes manageable, compared to those not involved in the pilot.^{ab} We consistently heard teachers feel more confident with the resources and understanding they have from the pilot. This is also likely due to the support that they received during the pilot.

“I was freaking out last year because I wasn't sure what I was doing. I had great support during the pilot, that kept me going. This year, I feel great about everything. I did the pilot, I'm completely under control.”

TEACHER IN PILOT SCHOOL

Science, Social Science, and Maths and Statistics teachers are finding implementation challenging.

Teachers in these learning areas are finding implementation challenging due to the scale of the change, which is higher than some other learning areas due to the merging of subjects.

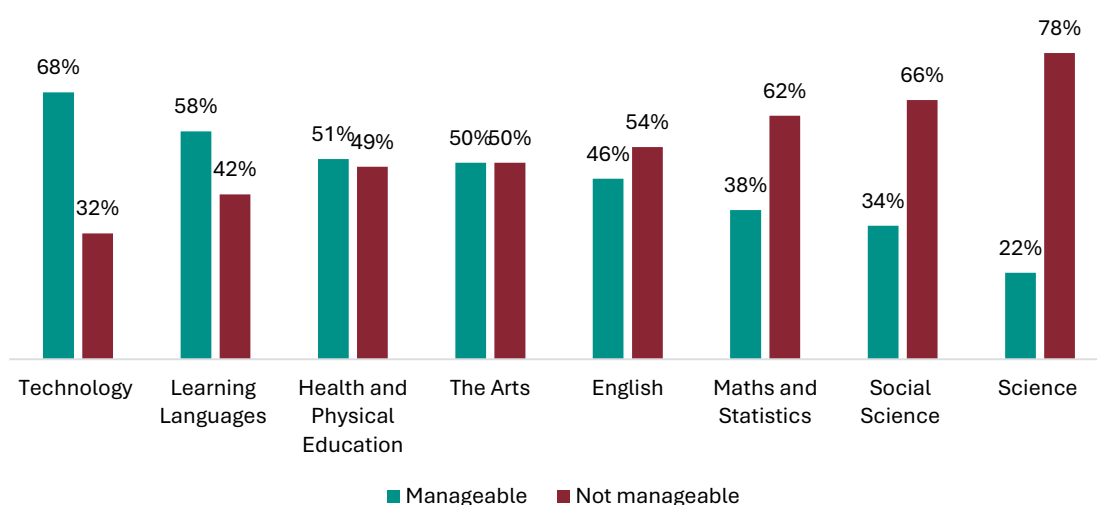
Science teachers are the most likely to say implementing the changes this year has been unmanageable – with just under four in five (78 percent) reporting this. Two-thirds of Social Science teachers (66 percent) and slightly fewer Maths and Statistics teachers (62 percent) also report the changes have been unmanageable. By comparison, less than a third of Technology teachers (32 percent) say implementation has been unmanageable.

z Odds ratio 2.16 ($p < 0.01$) – from logistic regression modelling.

aa Odds ratio 1.99 ($p < 0.01$) – from logistic regression modelling.

ab Odds ratio 2.47 ($p < 0.01$) – from logistic regression modelling.

Figure 102: *Teacher views on whether implementing the NCEA Level 1 changes was manageable, by learning area.*



We heard that some learning areas, such as Science, Social Science, and Maths and Statistics, have had more change to implement. For example, within the Social Science learning area, we heard that losing Accounting and Economics has made it challenging for teachers to prepare students with enough knowledge for specialisation in NCEA Level 2. Doing so requires additional teaching and learning that isn't covered by the NCEA Level 1 achievement standards.

“Accounting, Economics, and Business Studies have been amalgamated to Level 1 Commerce. That's certainly a huge challenge for the Commerce teachers around New Zealand, just to understand the different nuances of the three different courses and how that works as a generic course. The next challenges will be that those classes will then break off again into specialist courses at Level 2 and 3”

COMMERCE TEACHER

Similarly, teachers are finding it hard to prepare students doing Science for the individual sciences that are taught at NCEA Level 2.

3) How well do leaders and teachers understand what is needed to implement Level 1 changes?

Most, but not all, leaders and teachers understand how to implement the changes.

Understanding is supported by resources and supports, which pilot schools have had more of, and, conversely, undermined when information keeps changing.

Most leaders (79 percent) and teachers (69 percent) report that they understand what they need to do to implement NCEA Level 1 changes. However, around two in 10 leaders (21 percent) and three in 10 teachers (31 percent) don't.

Leaders and teachers who understand what needs to be done to implement NCEA Level 1 changes tend to be from pilot schools. Being part of the pilot has helped them understand the process, and what works and does not work for implementation. Pilot schools also told us they received more support during the pilot phase.

However, experiences across schools vary, and implementation this year remains challenging even for pilot schools. This is because schools keep getting updates on what and how things need to change, even after the pilots.

“When we signed up to be a pilot school, things were changing all the time. But that was okay because we signed up for that. But if you’ve already got to implementation and you’re still running what feels like a pilot, that’s tough for us.”

LEADER IN A PILOT SCHOOL

We heard stable and experienced leadership was helping teachers respond to the changes. See more on this below.

4) How clear, timely, and useful was information?

Information for schools often arrives late and has been inconsistent and changing.

We heard that a key challenge for implementation has been that important information, such as exemplars and assessment specifications, has been late to arrive or still isn’t available. This has delayed implementation and is a reason that leaders and teachers did not feel prepared for implementation at the start of this year. For example, we heard there were no resources available for the Arts until the very last minute, and there continues to be a lack of exemplars across learning areas, especially for the new assessment formats.

“We didn’t have access to exemplars and what they looked like before the year started. It felt like we were just kind of riding along, with no clear indication as to where we were heading.”

VISUAL ARTS TEACHER

Another key implementation issue has been contradictory information, including about how to run assessments and what students must do. We heard an example of this when schools were administering the literacy and numeracy co-requisite CAAs. Initially schools were told the co-requisite exams were an hour long, then later told that students could take as long as they needed. This revised guidance has massive implications for timetabling and staffing. In fact, we heard that allowing students to take as long as they need is impractical, and it is unfair to students in different schools who are being given different amounts of time for the co-requisite.

“[The co-requisite CAAs] were originally designed as a one-hour test, but it took kids half an hour to log on for a start. They’d only done half a test [by the end of allocated time], but there’s another class coming into that classroom. That then put our entire school day into chaos.”

LEADER

Leaders and teachers also pointed to the inconsistent information between the Ministry of Education and NZQA. We heard about inconsistencies between achievement standards in relation to assessment activities, exemplars, and marking guidance. In addition, published resources are also not always finalised, and teachers find that their preparation based on earlier versions of an achievement standards can become outdated.

“I could base [my planning] off last year’s stuff, which is irrelevant. I could base it off the pilot stuff, which has completely changed. So I’m genuinely in the dark.”

TEACHER

The availability of information, within a short time frame prior to implementation, has caused a high workload this year.

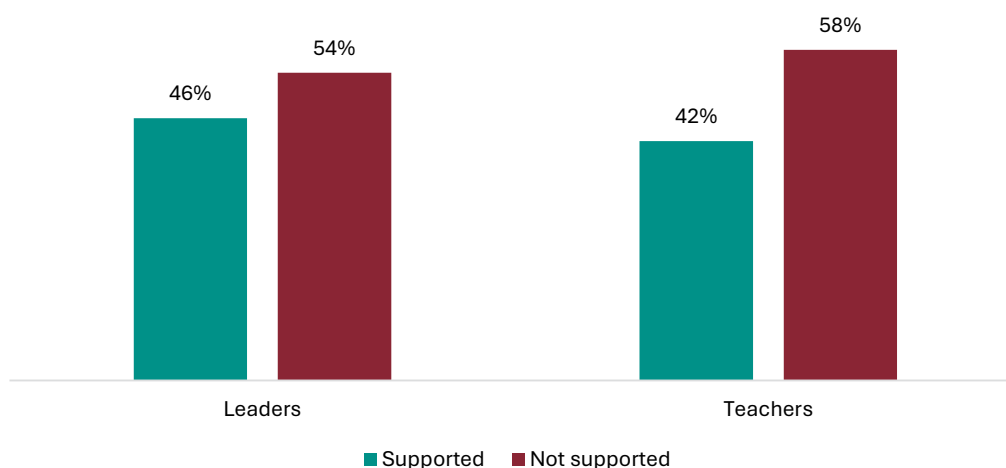
5) How useful were resources and supports?

Support from subject associations have been the most valued by schools.

Subject associations were actively involved in updating schools on the changes and providing teachers with resources and support, including training, while resources and supports from the Ministry of Education and NZQA were often late or insufficient.

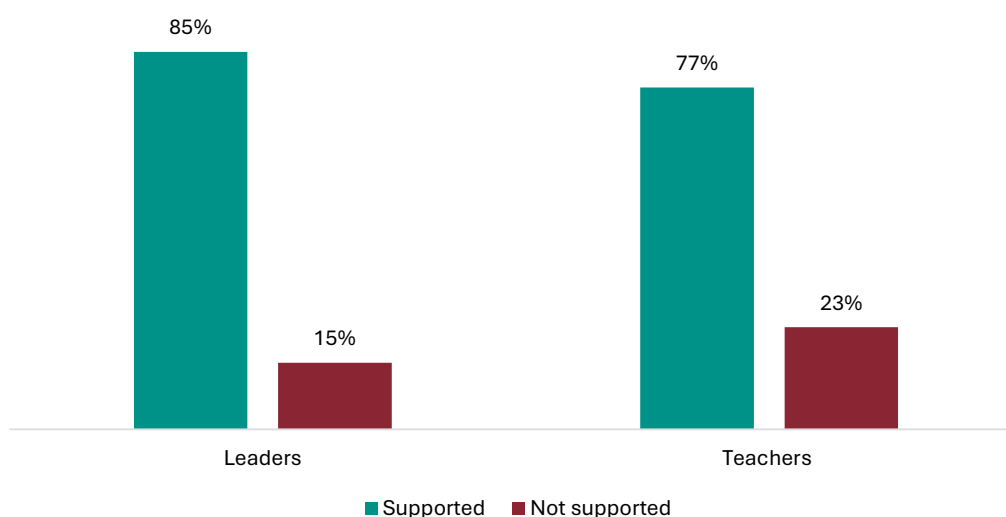
More than half of leaders (54 percent) and almost three in five teachers (58 percent) don’t feel supported overall to implement the changes. Almost half of leaders (46 percent) and just over two in five teachers (42 percent) do feel supported.

Figure 103: *Leader and teacher views on whether they are supported to overall implement the changes.*



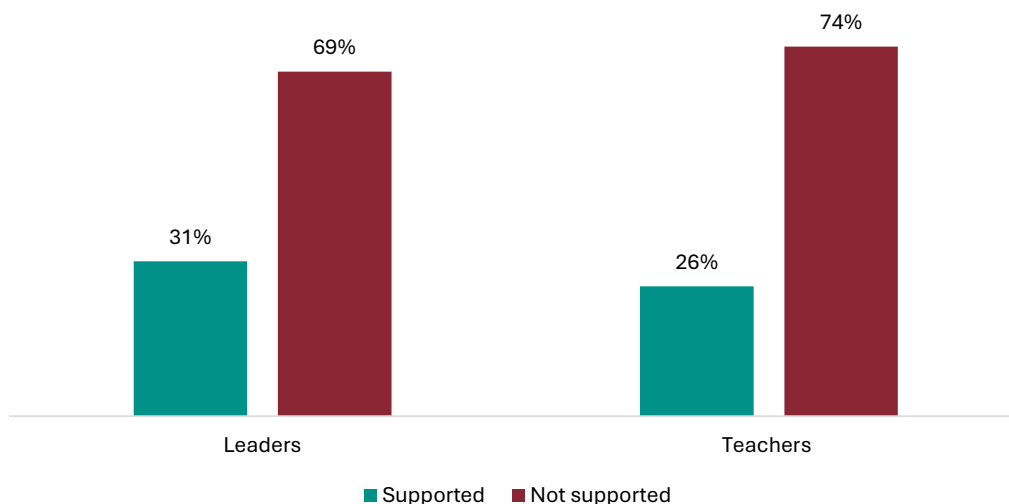
Most leaders and teachers feel supported by their subject associations. Just over four in five (85 percent) of leaders and 77 percent of teachers report that their subject associations support them to implement the changes (only 15 percent of leaders and 23 percent of teachers don't).

Figure 104: *Leader and teacher views on whether they are supported by subject associations to implement the changes.*



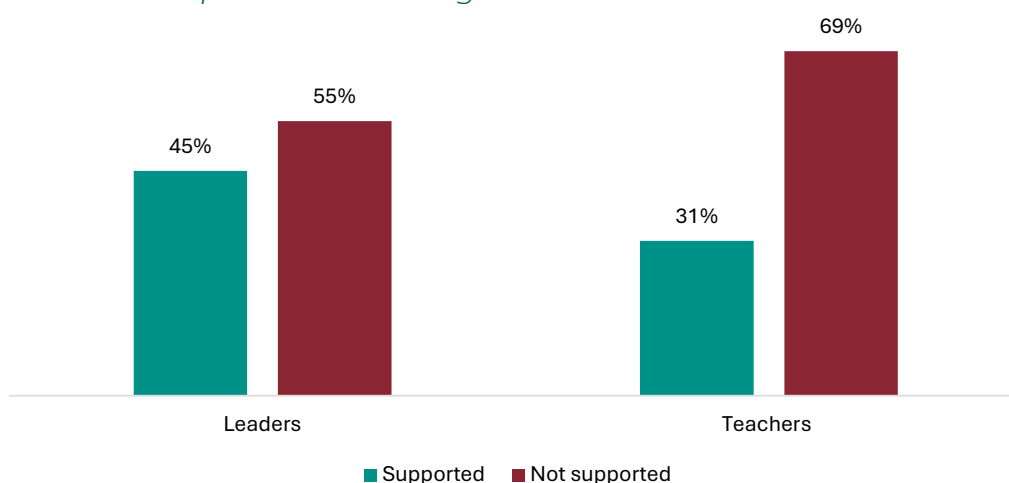
In comparison, teachers and leaders are less supported by the Ministry of Education. Less than a third of leaders (31 percent) and only a quarter of teachers (26 percent) feel supported by the Ministry of Education to implement the changes (69 percent of leaders and 74 percent of teachers don't).

Figure 105: *Leader and teacher views on whether they are supported by Ministry of Education to implement the changes.*



Leaders say they are slightly better supported by NZQA. Almost half of leaders (45 percent) say they are supported, although just over half (55 percent) say they aren't. Just under a third of teachers (31 percent) say they are supported by NZQA, and seven in 10 (69 percent) say they aren't.

Figure 106: *Leader and teacher views on whether they are supported by NZQA to implement the changes.*



Schools didn't feel supported by the Ministry of Education and NZQA due to lack of clear, timely, and useful information (see more on this below). Subject associations, meanwhile, have provided teachers with resources and training or webinars that are practical and tailored to their subjects.

Subject associations have also supported teachers and schools in other ways. They are keeping schools updated with information related to their subjects, providing professional learning and development (PLD) and resources within a short timeframe. They also connect teachers, especially those in rural areas or small schools, together for support with moderation.

“Subject resources have come from our own subject associations. [They] have done all the work to give us the [resources], not the Ministry of Education.”

TEACHER

Given the support subject associations provide to schools, we consistently heard that they need to be better resourced. Subject associations are run by subject teachers themselves, often working as volunteers in their own time. Subject associations received network of expertise funding from the Ministry of Education and have used it to create resources or a paid role for a lead subject teacher to offer online support. Schools and subject associations told us this funding is much needed, and they want to know if this will be continued.

“The associations are actually teachers themselves. So all the volunteers and all this workload and expectation has been forced onto them to implement.”

TEACHER

“Working on subject associations is all a voluntary capacity. It is pretty massive when we are also getting our heads around what we’re doing in our classrooms as well.”

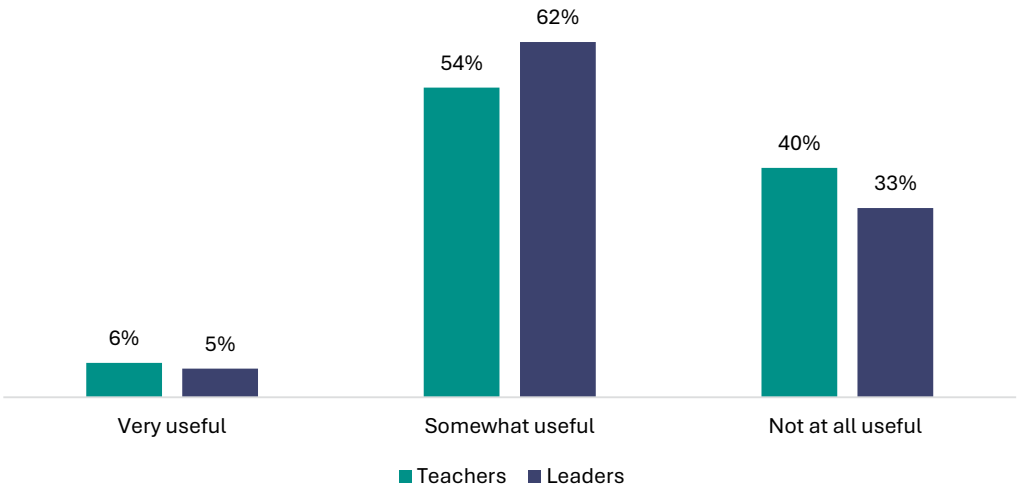
SUBJECT ASSOCIATION TEACHER

Most leaders and teachers have accessed the Ministry of Education and NZQA websites, but they don’t always find them useful.

The Ministry of Education and NZQA websites hold information about NCEA Level 1 that teachers and leaders need. The Ministry of Education website is accessed by almost all leaders (98 percent) and nearly four in five teachers (89 percent).

Around six in 10 leaders and teachers are finding the Ministry of Education website useful – 5 percent of leaders and 6 percent of teachers find this website very useful, 62 percent of leaders and 54 percent of teachers find it somewhat useful, and a third of leaders (33 percent) and 40 percent of teachers don’t find it useful at all.

Figure 107: *Teacher and leader views on the usefulness of the Ministry of Education website*



Almost all leaders (99 percent) and teachers (96 percent) have accessed the NZQA website. Twelve percent of leaders and 8 percent of teachers find it very useful, 74 percent of leaders and 65 percent of teachers find it somewhat useful, and 14 percent of leaders and 27 percent of teachers don't find it useful at all.

We heard from leaders and schools that these websites are the main and formal source of information to help schools with implementing the changes. However, we heard from Principal's Nominees that information on the websites is too lengthy and not easy to use. For example, the guidance for Assessment Master^{ac} is too long to get through in a short time, while also running the tests.

“The Assessment Master Handbook for administrators is too long. I don't need a whole document. We're already running. We don't have time.”

LEADER

Schools told us that trying to navigate information from two agencies was a challenge. The agencies would pass them back and forth, sometimes with none taking ownership of issues.

“[When we have questions about assessment] the Ministry of Education's saying, 'It's NZQA who have made this change. That wasn't the intent of our standard.'”

LEADER

We also heard that the websites give conflicting information, and updates aren't officially communicated – teachers often find out by chance when they revisit the

^{ac} Assessment Master is the online platform used by NZQA to host digital external assessments, including some end-of-year exams and the CAAs.

website or through their subject associations. The websites are also difficult to navigate, with too many links to other web pages that do not provide teachers with the information they need.

“It’s nearly impossible to navigate around the websites. You’ll go on to a link and it just won’t open, or you’re guided to another one, which just has general information that doesn’t give you any answers.”

TEACHER

“What NZQA puts out online is very different to what the Ministry of Education puts online.”

TEACHER

Most teachers and leaders are accessing NZQA resources and over half of leaders and teachers find them useful.

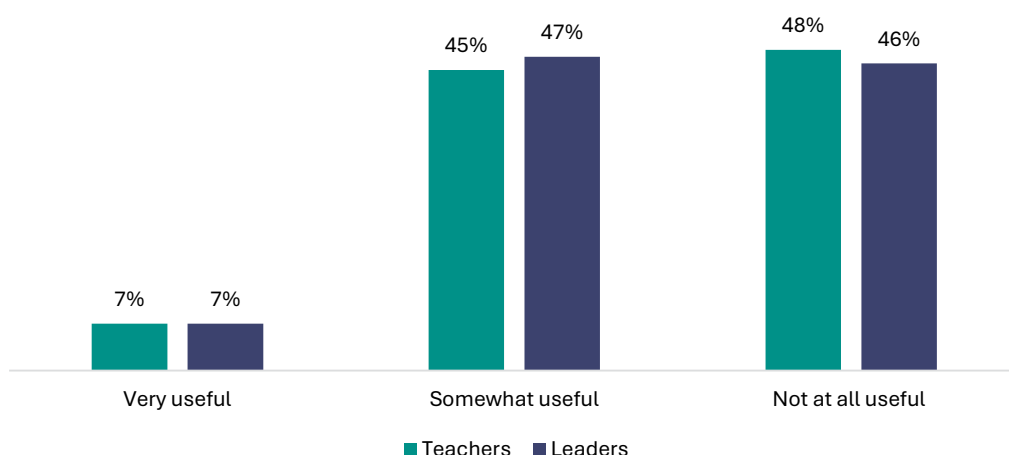
Resources such as exemplars and moderation reports are essential for teachers and leaders working out what is expected of them, but for NCEA Level 1 this not always as useful as they needed to be. For exemplars this is difficult as this is the first year students have taken the new standards.

Over nine in 10 leaders (98 percent) and teachers (93 percent) have accessed the NZQA exemplars. One in 10 leaders (10 percent) and 14 percent of teachers find this very useful, 58 percent of leaders and 49 percent of teachers find it somewhat useful, and a third of leaders (32 percent) and 37 percent of teachers don’t find them useful at all.

Over eight in 10 leaders (82 percent) have accessed the NZQA National moderation reports while just over seven in 10 teachers (71 percent) have accessed these. Seven percent of both leaders and teachers find them very useful, 47 percent of leaders and 45 percent of teachers find it somewhat useful, and just under half of leaders and teachers don’t find them useful at all (46 percent and 48 percent respectively).

Teachers told us they mainly accessed websites for exemplars and assessment specifications to prepare their students. However, we heard there are not enough exemplars across endorsement levels, as well as exemplars in different formats.

Figure 108: *Teacher and leader views on the usefulness of the NZQA moderation reports.*



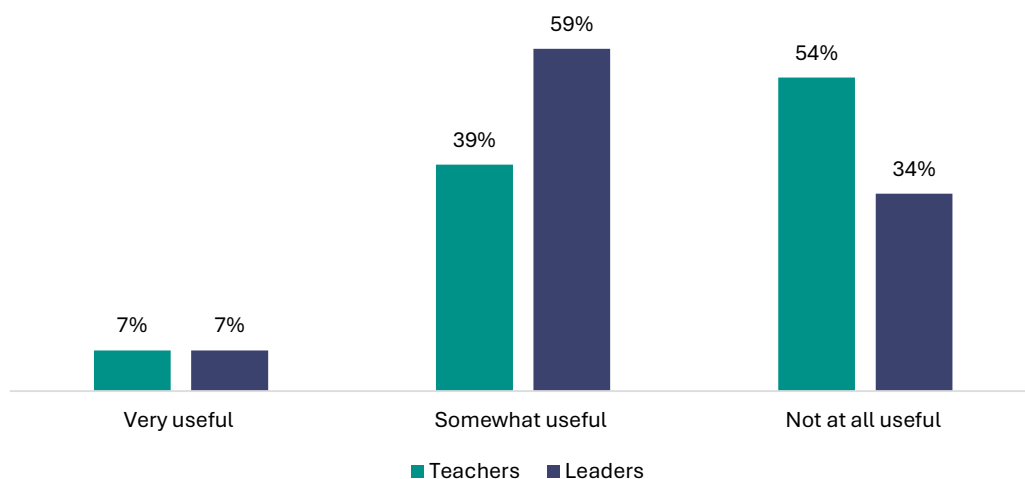
Most leaders have accessed support staff and found them useful, but fewer teachers are accessing them or finding them useful.

The Ministry of Education and NZQA has roles such as National Implementation Facilitators (NIFs), National Assessment Facilitators (NAFs), and National Assessment Advisors (NAAs) to support teachers in the implementation of NCEA Level 1 changes. They lead conversations about mātauranga Māori integration, support teachers to design inclusive programmes, and unpack Learning Matrices, achievement standards, or assessment specification.

Just under nine in 10 leaders (88 percent) and over seven in 10 teachers (70 percent) had accessed the Ministry of Education National Implementation Facilitators (NIFs). Just over one in five leaders (22 percent) and 18 percent of teachers find them very useful, 57 percent of leaders and 43 percent of teachers find them somewhat useful, and 21 percent of leaders and 39 percent of teachers don't find them useful at all.

Almost seven in 10 leaders (68 percent) had accessed NZQA's National Assessment Advisors (NAAs) while just over half of teachers (53 percent) had accessed them. Just 7 percent of leaders and teachers find them very useful, 59 percent of leaders and 39 percent of teachers find them somewhat useful, and 34 percent of leaders and over half (54 percent) of teachers don't find them useful at all.

Figure 109: *Teacher and leader views on the usefulness of NZQA's National Assessment Advisors.*



Ministry of Education and NZQA support roles for schools, such as NIFs, NAAs, and NAFs, have been useful in offering support and guidance. However, they weren't always fully up to date on the changes and didn't fully understand some of the changes themselves. This meant they couldn't answer some of the questions raised by teachers. Some teachers wanted information specific to their subjects, which wasn't deliverable through facilitators, who aren't typically subject specialists.

“[Support staff] were really great in terms of listening, but I think they were also very noncommittal. [Their information] was not very specific, along the line of, ‘Do what you think is right’, ‘Use your professional judgements,’ etc.”

TEACHER

“[NIFs] tried to answer as best as they can, but they knew as much as we did.”

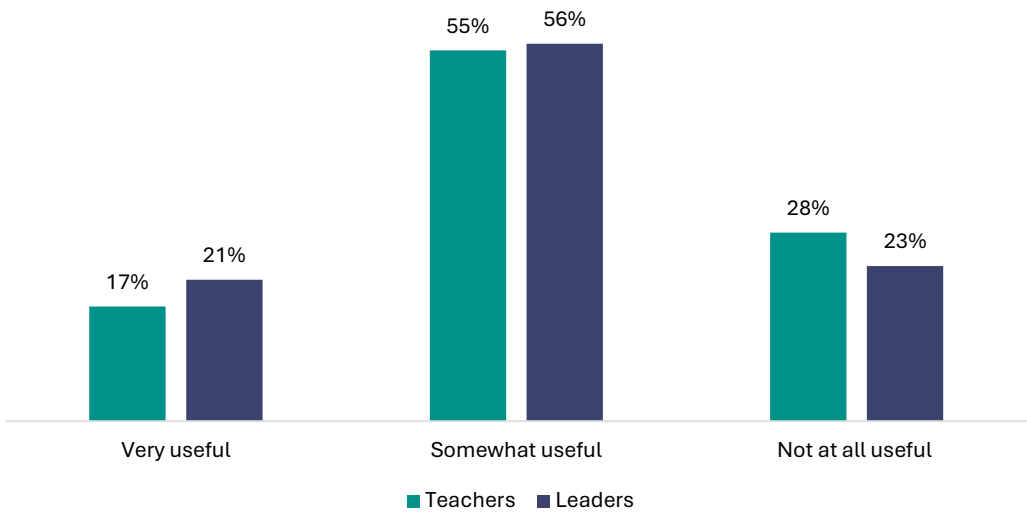
LEADER

Most leaders and teachers have accessed PLD, but around a quarter haven't found it useful.

A lot of PLD has been too general and provided by facilitators who aren't subject specialists. Teachers prefer PLD that is subject-specific and focused on classroom application.

Almost all leaders (99 percent) and over nine in 10 teachers (93 percent) have accessed PLD, but around a quarter of both groups haven't found it useful (23 percent and 28 percent respectively).

Figure 110: *Teacher and leader views on the usefulness of PLD days.*



We heard that some PLD sessions held by the Ministry of Education and NZQA have been helpful, for example, on how the big ideas work in each subject and how to incorporate the big ideas into the larger achievement standards. Teachers also valued any opportunities to learn from the experiences of pilot schools and training with subject specialists, which was particularly useful for small or rural schools, who have fewer subject specialists within their schools.

The Ministry of Education funded four teacher-only days, two days each in 2023 and 2024, to support teachers through the significant changes in curriculum and assessment. Schools could decide how to use these days and what to focus on for their PLD. Some schools used it to connect with subject departments in other schools in their region or facilitate sessions within school subject departments to review the Ministry of Education and NZQA resources.

Guidance from the Ministry of Education on how to use the teacher-only days for developing NCEA subject specific literacy and numeracy practices within a learning area, using the resources on the NZQA website to support mana ōrite, or using website resources to support course planning, was considered high level and vague. Some of the resources were released very late, which did not provide schools enough time to plan the PLD properly. We heard some teacher only-days were ‘wasted’ when they were based on information that later changed, meaning their preparation for implementation was also wasted.

Teachers also told us that PLD was less helpful when it was too general. Many teachers wanted PLD specific to their subjects, but found that PLD facilitators often weren’t able to provide this.

“I got the feeling that the presenters themselves weren’t 100 percent sure where this is going.”

TEACHER

“It would be great to have a few more specific-subject PLD, because the ones we attended was all on Performing Arts.”

VISUAL ARTS TEACHER

We heard that PLD was particularly useful when it allowed leaders and teachers to hear the experiences of pilot schools and when it covered practical tasks, such as how to moderate.

With half of teachers (49 percent) saying they don’t have the knowledge and skills to incorporate mātauranga Māori into the new achievement standards (see Chapter 8 for more details), teachers are invested in PLD for mana ōrite. However, while it has been informative, teachers want PLD on mātauranga Māori to be more practical, so they know how to apply it in their classrooms.

Teachers who had been through previous NCEA changes reported the PLD that time was better organised. They attributed this to more PLD being delivered face-to-face, and by subject experts. It was also more hands-on and information was consistent.

“These last few NCEA days or ‘jumbo days,’ whatever you want to call them, have been far less helpful compared to back in the last time it changed in 2004, due to a lack of concrete information.”

LEADER

“Last time there was a major change, we had ‘jumbo days’ where teachers of the same subject would meet. That’s been impossible to arrange [this time]. Even contacting the Ministry of Education locally here to get any help was impossible, whereas some other regions like Canterbury were able to manage it.”

TEACHER

Teachers are well supported by their leaders, but school resources are stretched.

Almost three-quarters of teachers (73 percent) feel supported by their school leadership team to make the changes. Teachers told us they feel that they are working through the changes together with their leaders. Those involved in pilot (82 percent) feel more supported by leaders compared to those who were not (72 percent).

Teachers told us they received release time from schools, to plan and design courses and materials, and to attend PLD and workshops. Some schools had PLD and workshops that allowed teachers to work collaboratively for internal assessments, or to learn about the changes as a whole school. We also heard teachers who are moderators, or are on subject advisory groups, are supporting their colleagues at school.

“And every Wednesdays and Friday for nine weeks, we’d get relievers and to cover their class as they would be doing online learning or meeting up with a cluster to get the training.”

LEADER

“I took it upon myself to apply for a job with NZQA, as the external moderator. So I’ve got a little bit of insight and knowledge about what’s going on, to share some of that within the department. I almost feel that because I took on that extra role, the department has an advantage of what the expectations of the standards.”

TEACHER

Support from peers is greatly valued by teachers, and the experience shared by pilot schools has benefitted schools especially when working together in subject clusters.

We consistently heard that schools felt more supported during the pilot phase. This is because they had close support from NIFs and NAFs in planning, creating resources, and moderating during the pilot phase. Pilot schools felt that this level of support is needed for all schools during implementation.

Non-pilot schools told us learning from pilot schools’ experiences have been helpful for them (for example, on how to moderate). There is also a reassuring element from pilot schools that workload and confusion can settle down.

Clustering has also been valuable for schools, in moderating and sharing resources. Small schools and small departments particularly find clusters useful. We heard, for example, single-staff department find peers through their subject association connection to support each other in moderation.

“I actually had to put a shout out on our subject Facebook group to find someone who’d done the standard to verify it for me, and I ended up with a teacher from [another city].”

TEACHER

“[Clustering] with a pilot school was probably more valuable than anything else we did.”

TEACHER

Conclusion

Schools were not well prepared for implementation at the start of this year, which has made implementation more challenging. Teachers in some learning areas are finding implementation more challenging than others due to the varying scale of the changes across learning areas. Schools report that that resources and supports provided by the Ministry of Education and NZQA have been less useful than those provided by subject associations and other schools. This is because information provided by the Ministry of Education and NZQA has sometimes arrived late and has been changing. Information has also been inconsistent at times, within and between sources. A lot of PLD is too general and provided by facilitators who aren’t subject specialists. Teachers prefer PLD that is subject-specific and focused on classroom application.

The next chapter sets out the key findings and recommendations.



Chapter 10: Key findings and recommendations

ERO's review of NCEA Level 1 has led to 14 key findings across eight areas. We have identified 21 recommendations in four areas, including quick changes, reform, implications for NCEA Levels 2 and 3, and lessons for future implementation. This chapter sets out our key findings and recommendations.

ERO was commissioned to undertake a review of NCEA Level 1 to look at how implementation is working and the impacts on students and schools so far, and what this means for the proposed future changes to NCEA. In undertaking this review, we drew on evidence from a range of data and analysis, including:

- a review of the international and Aotearoa New Zealand Literature
- administrative data from NZQA, the Ministry of Education, and the IDI
- ERO's own data collection, including over 6,000 survey responses, visits to 21 secondary schools, and interviews with over 300 participants – with teachers, leaders, Year 11 students, parents and whānau of Year 11 students, subject associations, employers (of school leavers), secondary tertiary providers, school boards, and other expert informants.

From this evidence, we have identified 14 key findings across the following eight areas.

- **Area 1:** Is NCEA Level 1 valued?
- **Area 2:** Is NCEA Level 1 now a fair and reliable measure of knowledge and skills?
- **Area 3:** Is NCEA Level 1 helping students make good choices and providing them with the knowledge they need for their future?
- **Area 4:** Is NCEA Level 1 motivating and manageable for students?
- **Area 5:** Is NCEA Level 1 working for all students?
- **Area 6:** Is NCEA Level 1 manageable for schools?
- **Area 7:** What are the implications of the co-requisite?
- **Area 8:** What has and hasn't worked from implementation – lessons learnt?

Context

The findings of this review need to be set in context. NCEA was introduced between 2002 and 2004 as a three-level qualification and while each level can be achieved independently, these can be thought of as a package. In thinking of them as a package, this puts more focus on how the levels build coherently and collectively to prepare students for pathways beyond school. Our findings and recommendations speak to this.

NCEA was designed to be flexible and inclusive and to recognise both academic and vocational competencies. This flexibility makes it complex, which can make it difficult for students and their parents to make informed decisions.²⁴ This flexibility can also lead to variation that can make the qualification less reliable as a measure of student knowledge and skills. Greater standardisation has the potential to increase reliability, but this will inevitably reduce flexibility, and so there is a decision to be made about the aim of NCEA.

NCEA is a system of accreditation and shouldn't drive teaching and learning. The New Zealand National Curriculum should drive this. The National Curriculum is intentionally broad so that schools can design their own local curriculum to align with the values and strengths of their community. Therefore, the local curriculum should determine what is taught and how. However, we have learned that, because the National Curriculum is so broad, NCEA standards tend to be the default curriculum at Level 1. Teachers, naturally, want to set their students up to achieve.

The National Curriculum is being refreshed with the aim to be more prescriptive.^{ad} This will impact teaching and learning across year levels, including in Year 11, and thought needs to be given to how accreditation will align with the Refreshed Curriculum. The Curriculum Refresh will also provide opportunities to prepare students better for NCEA by identifying the learning that matters most across Years 1-10.

Key findings

Area 1: Is NCEA Level 1 valued?

We looked at whether and why different groups, including teachers, students, their parents and whānau, and employers value NCEA Level 1.

Finding 1: NCEA Level 1 remains optional. An increasing number of schools, mainly schools in high socio-economic areas, are opting out of offering it.

- NCEA Level 1 remains voluntary. Most schools offer it, but there is a group of schools that don't. In 2024, one in eight schools (13 percent) aren't offering it (87 percent are). For 2025, more schools (17 percent) plan not to offer it, and 10 percent are still deciding (73 percent of schools do plan to offer it).
- Schools in high socio-economic communities with higher NCEA achievement are least likely to offer NCEA Level 1. Only three in five schools (60 percent) offered it in 2024. They are opting out to better prepare students for Years 12 and 13 and to reduce assessment burn-out. Schools in low to medium socio-economic communities are more likely to offer NCEA Level 1. They value it as an 'exit qualification' for students who leave at the end of Year 11. In 2023, 10 percent of students left at the end of Year 11, and one in five (21 percent) of these students had achieved NCEA Level 1.

^{ad} The Minister announced changes to the New Zealand Curriculum (and Te Marautanga o Aotearoa) on 14 June 2024. Key aims include that the New Zealand Curriculum will be knowledge-rich and clear about what students need to understand, know and do in each year from Years 0 to 13; and teachers will know what to teach, when, and how, based on the science of learning, which provides them with effective teaching strategies and practices. The fully updated national curriculum, including all the other learning areas, and subjects, will be available for all schools to use throughout 2026, giving a full year of implementation support before it's officially required from 2027.

Finding 2: Students and parents and whānau mainly value NCEA Level 1 as a stepping stone to NCEA Level 2. Employers value other skills and attributes over NCEA Level 1.

- Students on an academic pathway, and their parents and whānau, value Level 1 as preparation for NCEA Level 2 because it provides study skills and exam experience, when many students haven't done exams before.
- Parents and whānau assume that employers value Level 1 as a recognised national qualification, but just over two in five employers (43 percent) don't consider it when making recruitment decisions.
- Based on their experience of the previous NCEA Level 1 qualification, just over seven in 10 (71 percent) employers don't think it is a reliable measure of student knowledge and skills, and nine in 10 (90 percent) don't think it's a reliable measure of attitude to hard work.

Area 2: Is NCEA Level 1 now a fair and reliable measure of knowledge and skills?

We looked at whether the new NCEA Level 1 allows students a fair chance to show what they know and can do, and whether accreditation accurately and consistently reflects student performance.

Finding 3: NCEA Level 1 difficulty still varies between subjects and schools due to the flexibility that remains.

- Teachers can choose to offer any combination of standards^{ae}, affecting course content, difficulty, and the amount of internal and external assessment.
- This year, nearly seven in 10 schools (68 percent) offer only three of the four subject achievement standards in their courses, and schools are still using unit standards, which are less demanding. This means students have different amounts of work and different chances of achieving.
- Three-quarters of leaders (75 percent) and just over half of teachers (55 percent) report the credit values are not a reliable indicator of how much work is required.

Finding 4: Authenticity and integrity are more at risk due to the changes, and the biggest concern is about submitted reports.

- Almost one in three teachers (29 percent) report the new formats of assessment make NCEA Level 1 less reliable (53 percent see no real change). They are especially concerned about the submitted report, as it is an external assessment that is carried out over several sessions.
- Artificial Intelligence is a risk for many assessments but a particular risk for the submitted reports without a secure digital platform.
- Teachers are providing different levels of support for students' internal assessments and submitted reports.

^{ae} Achievement standards assess knowledge of a subject. Students can achieve four grades: Achieved, Achieved with Merit, Achieved with Excellence, or Not Achieved. Unit standards assess industry-related knowledge and skills, developed by the Workforce Development Council and NZQA. There are only two grades: Achieved or Not Achieved.

Finding 5: NCEA Level 1 is not yet a reliable measure of knowledge and skills.

- Reliability is an essential element of a high-quality qualification, but due to the remaining flexibility in the system, NCEA Level 1 is not yet a reliable measure.
- Three in five (60 percent) teachers and almost half of leaders (45 percent) report NCEA Level 1 is an unreliable measure of knowledge and skills.
- Almost half of teachers (47 percent) and just over a third of leaders (34 percent) report NCEA Level 1 as less reliable than before (only 18 percent of teachers and 26 percent of leaders say it is *more* reliable). Concerns are focused on how assessments are done and literacy-heavy assessments (e.g., in Technology) which are a barrier for some students demonstrating other skills.
- The co-requisite may help with reliability (see Finding 10) as it introduces standardised requirements for literacy and numeracy.

Area 3: Is NCEA Level 1 helping students make good choices and preparing them for their future?

High-quality qualifications support students to make good choices and prepare them with the knowledge and skills needed for their future. We looked at whether NCEA Level 1 is well understood and whether it prepares students with the knowledge and skills they need for Levels 2 and 3, and for their future beyond school.

Finding 6: NCEA Level 1 remains difficult to understand, and it can be difficult to make good choices.

- NCEA is a complex qualification due to its flexible nature. NCEA needs to be well understood by students so they can make the right choices for their future.
- Students mainly choose courses based on their interest in the content (60 percent) and their future goals for education or employment (56 percent), but they don't always understand enough to make informed choices.
 - Nearly two in five students (39 percent) report they didn't know enough about NCEA Level 1 when they make their course choices.
 - Almost half of parents and whānau don't know what is required for the NCEA Level 1 qualification (46 percent) and feel unable to help their child make the right choices (48 percent).

Finding 7: NCEA Level 1 wasn't set up to, and so doesn't, provide clear vocational pathways.

- Vocational pathways aren't prioritised until NCEA Level 2, so students aren't able to specialise at NCEA Level 1 in vocational areas that interest them (such as construction or creative industries). This prevents students specialising too early but means NCEA Level 1 is working less well for students wishing to pursue vocational pathways.
- Almost half (45 percent) of students on vocational pathways report NCEA Level 1 isn't preparing them for their future and around a quarter (26 percent) report it isn't preparing them for NCEA Levels 2 and 3.
- Based on their experience of NCEA Level 1 before the changes, almost half of employers (46 percent) report it doesn't prepare young people for work – more than half report it doesn't give them good enough maths (55 percent) or reading and writing skills (57 percent). This may change with the introduction of the co-requisite.

Finding 8: NCEA Level 1 isn't always preparing students with the knowledge they need for NCEA Level 2.

- In the absence of a strongly defined national curriculum, assessment is driving what is taught in Year 11. This is a problem when courses don't cover all four subject achievement standards, and especially for subjects that build sequentially (e.g., Maths and Statistics, Science, and Music) or require a full range of skills (e.g., Languages).
- Seven in 10 leaders (71 percent) report NCEA Level 1 doesn't prepare students for the current NCEA Level 2 – this may be because NCEA Level 1 has changed and NCEA Level 2 hasn't.
- It was a jump between NCEA Level 1 and NCEA Level 2 before the recent changes, but teachers report the jump is now bigger for some subjects. This is due to the design of some of the new standards, the merging of subjects, and for schools teaching fewer than all four subject achievement standards.

Area 4: Is NCEA Level 1 motivating and manageable for students?

We looked at the extent to which NCEA Level 1 motivates students to engage in learning throughout the year and to achieve as well as they can, and whether their overall assessment workloads are manageable.

Finding 9: NCEA Level 1 is not motivating all students to achieve as well as they can, and some students disengage early.

- Qualifications need to motivate students to both achieve as well as they can in assessments and participate in their learning throughout the year. But teachers are clear NCEA Level 1 does not do this.
 - Almost two-thirds of teachers (64 percent) report NCEA Level 1 doesn't motivate students to achieve.
- NCEA Level 1 is reducing engagement and participation in education for students who 'fail' early in the year because there isn't a way of catching up. High-achieving students can reach the required credits needed for NCEA Level 1 before the end of the year and also disengage.
- Some students are demotivated by literacy-heavy assessments, including for courses they expect to be more practical, like Technology and Physical Education.
- Not achieving is demotivating – students who are failing most of their credits are three times more likely to report they aren't enjoying NCEA Level 1.

Finding 10: NCEA Level 1 is manageable, but not stretching the more academically able students.

- Most students (68 percent) find their NCEA Level 1 workload manageable.
- Although the larger achievement standards are better for spending longer on topics, for some students they still can lead to piecemeal learning, and many standards aren't challenging enough to stretch academically able students. Some schools are offering NCEA Level 2 standards, as well as NCEA Level 1 standards, to keep students challenged and motivated.

- Because of the larger standards, assessments are more often ending up happening at the same time (bunching together) because teachers and students need time to teach and learn the content before assessments can be set. This may settle down once schools become used to the new NCEA content.
- Girls are more likely to find their workload unmanageable (36 percent, compared to 25 percent of boys) and more likely to be stressed (58 percent, compared to 35 percent of boys).

Area 5: Is NCEA Level 1 working for all students?

All students should have the opportunity to achieve. We looked at how well NCEA Level 1 is working for a range of students.

Finding 11: Some aspects of NCEA Level 1 aren't working as well for Māori students, Pacific students, and students who qualify for Special Assessment Conditions (SACs).

- Māori students and Pacific students more often don't know enough about NCEA Level 1 to make their subject choices (43 percent of Māori students and 47 percent of Pacific students, compared to 38 percent of non-Māori and 38 of non-Pacific students).
- Māori students are more likely to report that NCEA Level 1 is too difficult (29 percent compared to 22 percent of non-Māori students), to find the workload unmanageable (39 percent compared to 31 percent of non-Māori students), and to be stressed by their assessments (54 percent compared to 48 percent of non-Māori students).
- Pacific students are more likely to report that NCEA Level 1 is too difficult (29 percent compared to 23 percent of non-Pacific students) and to find their assessment workload unmanageable (37 percent compared to 30 percent of non-Pacific students).
- Students who qualify for SACs are more likely to report that NCEA Level 1 is too difficult (36 percent compared to 22 percent of non-SACs students) and to find their assessment workload unmanageable (41 percent compared to 29 percent of non-SACs students).

Area 6: Is NCEA Level 1 manageable for schools?

We looked at whether teachers and leaders are finding NCEA Level 1 manageable, both in terms of preparing for and teaching the new achievement standards and administering assessments.

Finding 12: Schools are finding the new NCEA Level 1 unmanageable in its first year, and it is likely that some issues will remain after the initial change.

- Implementing changes to any qualifications will have challenges. Some will settle after the changes are embedded.
- Three-quarters of leaders (74 percent) and two-thirds of teachers (66 percent) say NCEA Level 1 is unmanageable. The additional workload for the Principal's Nominee (staff member responsible for organising NCEA at the school), is especially high and is unlikely to reduce over time.

- Administering additional external assessments (co-requisite and submitted reports) is logistically challenging. Three in five schools (61 percent) report they don't have the necessary staff capacity and half (53 percent) report a lack of physical space.
- Half of teachers (49 percent) report not having the capability for mana ōrite (having equal status for mātauranga Māori in NCEA). Science is finding the inclusion of mātauranga Māori into achievement standards especially difficult.

Area 7: What are the implications of the co-requisite?

From 2024, NCEA certification at any of the three levels requires a 20-credit co-requisite. Currently, this can be achieved by participating in the co-requisite assessments, known as Common Assessment Activities (CAAs), or by gaining 10 literacy and 10 numeracy credits from a list of approved standards. We looked at how this change is being delivered and the impacts of it.

Finding 13: Schools value the standardisation introduced by the co-requisite, but administering the assessments is logistically challenging.

- Nearly two in five teachers (38 percent) and half of leaders (51 percent) say the co-requisite makes the NCEA Level 1 qualification more reliable by standardising the measurement of literacy and numeracy.
- Administering external assessments is a particular issue for the co-requisite as many students sit this at the same time and finding spaces that allow for exam conditions can be difficult at some schools.
- In the first assessment for 2024, the pass rate for the co-requisite assessments (CAAs) was only 59 percent for reading, 56 percent for writing, and 46 percent for numeracy (and lower rates for Māori and Pacific students). There is a risk that, when the co-requisite becomes compulsory, many students who leave school aged 16-17 will leave with no qualification, unless there is an uplift in teaching and learning in Years 0-10.

Area 8: What has and hasn't worked from implementation – what lessons have we learnt?

Change is always challenging. We looked at usefulness of resources and supports to help schools implement the changes to NCEA Level 1 and what can make it more manageable.

Finding 14: Implementation has not gone well.

- Seven in ten teachers (70 percent) and half of leaders (51 percent) report they weren't prepared to fully implement the changes at the start of this year. They feel like they are 'building the plane while flying it' and are frustrated they couldn't start implementation earlier due to a lack of guidance and resources.
- Information has been unclear and inconsistent, and changes have been happening late into implementation.
- Most teachers (93 percent) have accessed professional learning and development (PLD) and most of them (72 percent) found it useful. However, almost one in three teachers (28 percent) said the PLD wasn't very useful. They want PLD that is more practical and classroom focused.

- Access to useful resources and guidance is an important part of supporting implementation. Most teachers have accessed the Ministry of Education and NZQA websites (89 percent and 96 percent) and most find them useful (60 percent and 73 percent). However, many don't – two in five teachers (40 percent) don't find the Ministry of Education website useful and just over a quarter (27 percent) don't find the NZQA website useful.

Recommendations

Based on these key findings, ERO has four areas of recommendations.

- **Area 1: Quick changes** – to address fairness and reliability and help schools to administer external assessments.
- **Area 2: Reform** – including reporting about the purpose of Level 1.
- **Area 3: Implications for NCEA Levels 2 and 3.**
- **Area 3: Lessons for future implementation.**

Area 1: Quick changes

In order to improve the fairness and reliability of NCEA Level 1 and help schools to administer external assessments, ERO recommends the following quick changes.

Recommendation 1: Replace the submitted reports, which are presenting logistical challenges for schools and risks for authenticity and integrity. There is widespread support to discontinue the submitted reports and replace them with a different external assessment.

Recommendation 2: Resource schools for the additional external assessments they are required to administer. Administering external assessments at the scale required for the co-requisite and submitted reports is a big shift, requiring additional staff resources and funding for software to ensure authenticity. Replacing the submitted reports will help, but the co-requisite will remain challenging.

Recommendation 3: Extend the transitional period for the literacy and numeracy requirements to give schools more time to adjust to the co-requisite. The co-requisite helps improve the quality of the NCEA qualification but risks high failure rates and students leaving school with no qualification. More time is needed for teaching and learning to be lifted in Years 1-10 and for interventions to be put in place in Years 11-13 for students who need them.

Recommendation 4: Rethink how external assessment is conducted for practical knowledge and skills. For example, video recording the Drama and Physical Education assessments is logistically challenging and raises concerns around whether a few minutes of video footage provides a fair chance for students to demonstrate their abilities.

Recommendation 5: Review achievement standards, where there's concern, so that credits are an equal amount of work and difficulty. Although most achievement standards are now worth five credits, they are not yet equal. Addressing this can improve the fairness and reliability of the NCEA Level 1 qualification.

Recommendation 6: Revisit whether achievement standards for some subjects

are too literacy-heavy. For example, students highly capable in specific aspects of Maths are unable to demonstrate their skills with literacy-heavy assessments. Also, literacy-heavy assessments may not be the best way to assess practical subjects like Physical Education, Drama, and Technology.

Recommendation 7: Provide results more quickly for the co-requisite

so that teachers can provide timely support to students who need it and know who needs resubmitting for the next round of exams ahead of the deadline, and so students can be motivated by their achievement.

Recommendation 8: Provide schools with exemplars for the full range of

assessment formats so that teachers feel confident to use them. The broader range of assessment formats for NCEA Level 1 increases the ways that students can demonstrate their knowledge and skills so that all students can achieve.

Recommendation 9: Provide resources that schools can use to help parents and

whānau understand the requirements for NCEA Level 1 and improve career guidance to support students' decisions. If parents and whānau understand the requirements better, they can support their children to make the right choices.

In order to allow schools to make the right choices for their students in the short-term, NCEA Level 1 should remain optional.

→ **Recommendation 10: Keep NCEA Level 1 optional for now.** Some schools value it as an 'exit qualification'. However, other schools are opting out because it doesn't meet the needs of students on other pathways. It isn't always preparing them well for NCEA Level 2, and three years of assessment can lead to burn-out, which can undermine achievement at Level 3, which matters for tertiary pathways. Until NCEA Level 1 has been reformed, it should remain optional.

Area 2: Reform

In trying to be everything to *all students* – including students exiting school, those on vocational pathways, and academically able students on tertiary pathways – NCEA Level 1 may not be serving *any students* very well.

However, we can't view NCEA Level 1 on its own. We need to consider how it fits with teaching and learning in Years 0-10, especially Years 9 and 10, which prepare students for NCEA Level 1. We also need to consider how NCEA Level 1 fits with Levels 2 and 3 and whether we want students to have three years of assessment. Most other countries do not. While each NCEA level can be achieved independently, they can be considered as a package to ensure learning and assessment requirements build coherently to prepare students for their intended pathways.

To improve the quality and credibility of the qualification longer term, ERO recommends reform.

→ **Recommendation 11:** Decide on the purpose of NCEA Level 1 and revise the model to fit the purpose. The three main options are set out below.

- a) **Drop it entirely.** This will avoid assessment burn-out for students who remain in school until the end of NCEA Level 3 and avoid disengaging students

who don't achieve before they reach vocational options which start at NCEA Level 2. But this leaves students who leave at the end of Year 11 without a formal, recognised qualification.

- b) **Target it as a foundational qualification.** Keep the breadth of NCEA Level 1 and consider options for the co-requisite, including:
 - i) keeping NCEA Level 1 and co-requisite but significantly increasing support for students struggling with co-requisite, including offering it earlier (e.g., in Year 9) when more time can be dedicating to preparing them
 - ii) allowing students to pass NCEA Level 1 with or without the co-requisite, which can be accredited separately on the certificate
 - iii) replacing NCEA Level 1 with a different national foundational qualification for students who intend to leave school at the end of Year 11.
- c) **Make NCEA Level 1 more challenging to better prepare students for NCEA Level 2 and stretch the most academically able.** This could potentially raise achievement for these students. However, in retaining three years of high-stakes assessment, it risks student burn-out, and non-academically able students may disengage unless there are good vocational subjects.

Whichever model is adopted, to improve the reliability, fairness, and inclusivity, reform should also involve the following.

- **Recommendation 12: Reduce flexibility in the system.** Assessments should be driven by the curriculum (rather than the other way around) and should assess students' understanding of the full curriculum. This requires a less flexible approach to course design, which could include:
 - a) a set number of internal and external assessments, with limited flexibility to choose which ones; or
 - b) a set group of internal and external assessments for a subject, with no choice at all.
- **Recommendation 13: Reduce variability between credits.** Continue to review and revise achievement standards so that credit values reliably reflect the difficulty and amount of work required.
- **Recommendation 14: Retain fewer, larger standards to support deeper learning and reduce flexibility in the system, but put more weight on assessments later in the year.** Scheduling more assessments later in the year or weighting them differently is typical in other countries and can keep students in school and participating for longer as they still have a chance to pass, for example if they have missed a lot of school or moved to a new school within the year.
- **Recommendation 15: Strengthen vocational options and develop better vocational pathways.** Vocational options and subjects remain underdeveloped in the Aotearoa New Zealand system. There is a need for NCEA Level 1 subjects that are motivating and prepare students for apprenticeships and employment without closing off options to switch to an academic pathway at NCEA Level 2. This becomes more possible if teaching in Years 0-10 equips all students with foundational numeracy and literacy skills they need before they reach NCEA Level 1.

Area 3: Implications for NCEA Levels 2 and 3

Some issues at NCEA Level 1 will also apply at NCEA Levels 2 and 3. ERO recommends changes at NCEA Levels 2 and 3.

- **Recommendation 16: Reduce flexibility in the system** so students can have more complete subject knowledge and credits are an equal amount of work and difficulty.
- **Recommendation 17: Decide on the model for NCEA across all three levels**, including deciding how many years of assessment is right and how to achieve the right balance between both academic and vocational pathways. Further work is needed in this area. Similar countries typically only have two years of high-stakes assessment, to avoid burn-out and give more space for learning. Dual pathways are used in some countries to prepare students for vocational pathways and build equal status with academic pathways.

Area 4: Lessons for implementation of future changes

Implementation of NCEA Level 1 has lessons for implementing further changes.

- **Recommendation 18: Sequence changes and signpost earlier.** Schools want to see when changes are coming so they can prepare, and future NCEA changes need to be sequenced with curriculum changes.
- **Recommendation 19: Provide information, supports, and resources to schools earlier.** Schools need earlier information, PLD, and teaching and learning resources. Ideally, they would be available to schools from at least Term 3 in the year preceding changes, so leaders and teachers are ready for full implementation.
- **Recommendation 20: Involve experts in the changes.** Working with subject associations gives access to teachers with subject matter expertise helps identify challenges and opportunities from a school-based perspective.
- **Recommendation 21: Coordinate information and resources better.** Avoiding inconsistencies and gaps in information can help build trust in the change process and ensure it runs smoothly across all schools.

Conclusion

Qualifications are important to life outcomes. These findings tell us that NCEA Level 1 still isn't a fair and reliable measure of student knowledge and skills. Due to remaining flexibility in the system, the difficulty and the amount of work differ by school and learning area, and students sometimes miss out on important subject knowledge. To improve the quality and credibility of NCEA, it is critically important to act on these findings and recommendations.



Appendix 1: Methodology

This appendix summarises the methods used for ERO's NCEA Level 1 review. Further information can be found in the technical report: <https://evidence.ero.govt.nz/documents/technical-report-how-well-is-ncea-level-1-working-for-our-schools-and-students>.

Our evaluation questions

This evaluation of the NCEA Level 1 changes set out to answer the following questions:

- 1) Is NCEA Level 1 valued?
- 2) Is NCEA Level 1 now a fair and reliable measure of knowledge and skills?
- 3) Is NCEA Level 1 helping students make good choices and providing them with the knowledge they need for their future?
- 4) Is NCEA Level 1 motivating and manageable for students?
- 5) What are the implications of the co-requisite?
- 6) Is NCEA Level 1 working for all students?
- 7) Is NCEA Level 1 manageable for schools?
- 8) What has and hasn't worked from implementation – lessons learnt?

Mixed methods design

The evaluation used a complementary mix of qualitative and quantitative data to ensure depth and breadth. The target population was a representative picture of all Composite and Secondary, English-medium state and state-integrated schools in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Our mixed-methods approach integrates quantitative data (administrative data and surveys) and qualitative data (surveys, focus groups, and interviews) – triangulating the evidence across these different data sources. We used the triangulation process to test and refine our findings statements, allowing the weight of this collective data to form the conclusions. The rigour of the data and validity of these findings were further tested through iterative sense-making sessions with key stakeholders.

To ensure **breadth** in providing judgement on the key evaluation questions we did:

- analysis of students who left school with an NCEA Level 1 qualification using the Integrated Data Infrastructure
- online surveys of:
 - Year 11 students
 - school leaders and teachers
 - parents and whānau
 - employers

- an international literature review
- statistical analysis of administrative achievement and enrolment data of NCEA Level 1, including data from ERO's evaluation of schools.

To ensure **depth** in understanding of what things look like 'on the ground' we did:

- interviews and focus groups with:
 - Year 11 and 12 students
 - school leaders and teachers
 - parents and whānau
 - employers
 - subject associations
 - school boards
- sense-making through expert group discussions
- site visits.

IDI analysis

The Social Investment Agency (SIA) undertook a comprehensive statistical analysis of the lives of young people who held no qualification, and those with only a NCEA Level 1 qualification. This included a focus on their characteristics, past experiences, and future outcomes based on administrative data collected by government agencies over the course of their lives.

The cohort used was students who left school between 2010 and 2013 either at or over age 16, or under age 16 with a special exemption. These students were included in the StatsNZ Administrative Population Census in 2023.

For more details on the method of this statistical analysis, see the technical report: <https://evidence.ero.govt.nz/documents/technical-report-how-well-is-ncea-level-1-working-for-our-schools-and-students>.

These results are not official statistics. They have been created for research purposes from the Integrated Data Infrastructure (IDI) which is carefully managed by Stats NZ. For more information about the IDI please visit <https://www.stats.govt.nz/integrated-data>.

The results are based in part on tax data supplied by Inland Revenue to Stats NZ under the Tax Administration Act 1994 for statistical purposes. Any discussion of data limitations or weaknesses is in the context of using the IDI for statistical purposes and is not related to the data's ability to support Inland Revenue's core operational requirements.

Access to the data used in this study was provided by Stats NZ under conditions designed to give effect to the security and confidentiality provisions of the Data and Statistics Act 2022. The results presented in this study are the work of the author, not Stats NZ or individual data suppliers.

Surveys

ERO surveyed Year 11 students. We also surveyed school leaders and teachers, parents and whānau, and employers to better understand how well NCEA Level 1 is received and delivered.

Statistical significance tests were carried out using Kruskal-Wallis and chi-squared tests, as appropriate for the data. Where we report differences for groups, these are significant at $p < 0.05$. Non-responses were excluded from analysis. 'Don't know' responses were retained in our analysis when these represented meaningful responses to the questions asked and added to our understanding. We used a binary logistic regression model.

Administrative data

The New Zealand Qualification Authority (NZQA) provided data on achievement and enrolment rates in NCEA Level 1, and achievement rates by different demographics and subgroups. We drew on ERO data from the school improvement framework.

Interviews and site visits

All site visits and interviews were conducted between June and August 2024, which is during school Term 2 and Term 3. Interviews were held in person and on Zoom, with one participant or a focus group of up to 10 participants.

Interviews were flexible, semi-structured discussion. Interviews were guided by semi-structured questions that were developed from the key evaluation areas of NCEA Level 1 changes and implementation.

Interview guides are tailored for each participant group. This means that different topics guide interviews for school leaders, teachers, students, parents and whānau, employers, and subject experts. All interviews were carried by members of the project team and included evaluation partners with specialist experience in reviewing quality practice.

Data limitations and exclusions

Surveys

Participation was voluntary, and respondents did not have to answer all the questions. All missing data were excluded in the analyses.

Administrative data

The administrative data about internal and external assessment provided by NZQA contained information on students entered or enrolled in assessments, not those who have completed assessments for 2024. This means students who have been entered or enrolled for assessments may not necessarily complete the assessment. Additionally, 2024 achievement rates for students in NCEA Level 1 are only reported for completed assessments. Achievement rates may be different at the end of the year.

Ethics

Informed consent

All participants were informed of the purpose of the evaluation before they agreed to participate in an interview or the survey. Participants were informed that:

- participation was voluntary and could be withdrawn at any time
- their words may be included in reporting, but no identifying details would be shared
- permission to use their information could be withdrawn at any time
- interviews were not an evaluation of their school, and their school or provider would not be identified in the resulting national report
- their information was confidential and would be kept securely, subject to the provisions of the Official Information Act 1982, Privacy Act 1993, and the Public Records Act 2005 on the release and retention of information.

Interviewees consented to take part in an interview via email, or by submitting a written consent form to ERO. Their verbal consent was also sought to record their online interviews. Participants were given opportunities to query the evaluation team if they needed further information about the consent process.

Data security

Data collected from interviews, surveys, and administrative data will be stored digitally for a period of six months after the full completion of the evaluation. During this time, all data will be password-protected and have limited accessibility.

Quality assurance

The data in this report was subjected to a rigorous internal review process for both quantitative and qualitative data which was carried out at multiple stages across the evaluation process. External data provided by the NZQA were reviewed by them.

Survey response tables

The tables below describe the breakdown of principal participants and population statistics from Education Counts.

Table A1: *Characteristics of Year 11 students responding to our survey.*

Student characteristics	Number	Percentage of participants	Percentage of Year 11s in target schools
Ethnicity			
New Zealand European	1,847	68%	53%
Māori	505	19%	21%
Pacific	288	11%	11%
Asian	413	15%	13%
MELAA	129	5%	2%
Gender			
Males	1,041	39%	51%
Females	1,566	59%	48%
Gender diverse	53	2%	<1%
Students who qualify for Special Assessment Conditions (SACs)	275	10%	11%
All students	2716		

Table A2: *Characteristics of parents and whānau responding to our survey.*

Parent and Whānau Characteristics	Number	Percentage of participants
Ethnicity		
New Zealand European	901	13%
Māori	159	26%
Pacific	84	15%
Asian	134	7%
MELAA	11	1%

Parent and Whānau Characteristics	Number	Percentage of participants
Gender		
Males	254	20%
Females	1004	78%
Prefer not to say	20	2%
Have children who qualify for Special Assessment Conditions (SACs)	217	15%
All parents and whānau	1,675	

Table A3: *School characteristics of students responding to our survey.*

School characteristics of sampled students	Number of unique schools	Percentage of unique schools	Percentage of target schools
Urban-rural Index			
Major urban area	47	45%	35%
Large urban area	21	20%	18%
Medium urban area	15	14%	11%
Small urban area	14	13%	21%
Rural area	8	8%	15%
School size			
Small schools	19	18%	42%
Medium schools	31	30%	24%
Large schools	36	34%	22%
Very large schools	19	18%	12%
Equity Index (EQI)			
Low socio-economic area	14	13%	37%
Medium socio-economic area	66	63%	46%
High socio-economic area	25	24%	18%
All schools	105		

Table A4: *Characteristics of leaders responding to our survey.*

Leader characteristics	Number	Percentage of participants	Percentage of target schools
Ethnicity			
New Zealand European	140	56%	--
Māori	16	9%	--
Pacific	4	2%	--
Asian	5	2%	--
MELAA	1	<1%	--
All leaders	255		--

Table A5: *School characteristics of leaders responding to our survey.*

School characteristics of sampled leaders	Number of unique schools	Percentage of unique schools	Percentage of leaders in target schools
Urban-rural index			
Major urban area	59	36%	35%
Large urban area	34	21%	18%
Medium urban area	22	14%	11%
Small urban area	35	22%	21%
Rural area	12	7%	15%
School size			
Small schools	37	23%	42%
Medium schools	59	36%	24%
Large schools	40	25%	22%
Very large schools	26	16%	12%

School characteristics of sampled leaders	Number of unique schools	Percentage of unique schools	Percentage of leaders in target schools
Equity Index (EQI)			
Low socio-economic area	35	22%	37%
Medium socio-economic area	94	59%	45%
High socio-economic area	32	20%	18%
All schools	162		

Table A6: *Characteristics of teachers responding to our survey.*

Teacher characteristics	Number	Percentage of participants	Percentage of teachers in target schools
Ethnicity			
New Zealand European	924	55%	71%
Māori	126	7%	12%
Pacific	37	3%	5%
Asian	136	9%	6%
MELAA	14	1%	1%
Main learning area			
Arts	132	11%	--
English	238	19%	--
Health and Physical Education	116	9%	--
Learning Languages	53	4%	--
Science	208	17%	--
Social Science	217	17%	--
Technology	107	9%	--
Maths and Statistics	185	15%	--
All teachers	1,435		

Table A7: School characteristics of teachers responding to our survey.

School characteristics for teacher respondents	Number of unique schools	Percentage of unique schools	Percentage of target schools
Urban-rural index			
Major urban area	78	44%	35%
Large urban area	34	19%	18%
Medium urban area	24	13%	11%
Small urban area	26	15%	21%
Rural area	16	9%	15%
School size			
Small schools	37	21%	42%
Medium schools	59	33%	24%
Large schools	52	29%	22%
Very large schools	30	17%	12%
Equity Index (EQI)			
Low socio-economic area	27	15%	37%
Medium socio-economic area	106	60%	46%
High socio-economic area	45	25%	18%
All schools	178		

Table A8: Characteristics of schools responding to our 'follow-up' survey.

School characteristics	Number of unique schools	Percentage of unique schools	Percentage of target schools
Urban-rural index			
Major urban area	103	36%	18%
Large urban area	55	19%	11%
Medium urban area	33	11%	21%
Small urban area	63	22%	15%
Rural area	36	12%	35%

School characteristics	Number of unique schools	Percentage of unique schools	Percentage of target schools
School size			
Small schools	96	33%	42%
Medium schools	68	23%	24%
Large schools	83	29%	22%
Very large schools	43	15%	12%
Equity Index (EQI)			
Low socio-economic area	86	30%	37%
Medium socio-economic area	148	51%	46%
High socio-economic area	56	19%	18%
All Schools	290		



Appendix 2: An overview of the 2018 NCEA Review

The then Minister of Education launched the NCEA review as part of the national Education Conversation | Kōrero Mātauranga. He highlighted the strengths of NCEA, including flexibility and inclusion, but also said that he wanted to address the challenges he hears about every day. These challenges included: 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 review of NCEA was framed around the following principles:

Key principles	The design and use of NCEA should ensure that:
Wellbeing	NCEA promotes the wellbeing of young people and teachers through effective and fair teaching and assessment practice.
Equity	NCEA facilitates high expectations for all young people, and ensures that every student has the potential and opportunity to succeed.
Coherence	NCEA enables young people to access the powerful knowledge, skills, and attitudes identified in the National Curriculum.
Pathways	NCEA makes it easy for young people, their parents and whānau, and teachers to make informed choices to enable success in education and later life.
Credibility	NCEA is readily understood, widely supported, and validly measures achievement.

The New Zealand Council for Educational Research (NZCER) was contracted by the Ministry of Education to analyse and report the findings from the public engagement about the future of NCEA.

NZCER analysed responses from:

- 6,758 responses from a quick survey
- 920 responses from NCEA and Big Opportunity survey
- submissions from 155 individuals, 116 groups, and 95 organisations
- 20 workshops comprising 476 people
- 54 focus groups comprising 369 people.

The five principles along with discussion documents outlined above guided the review, including the tool development and analysis of the data. The review asked three main questions.

- 1) What are people's experiences of NCEA?
- 2) What are people's suggestions for strengthening NCEA?
- 3) What are people's responses to the Big Opportunities?

Key findings from the report:

What's working well?

- As an already established strength of NCEA, flexibility was reinforced as a benefit for a range of students.
- People also appreciated the mixture of internal and external credits because it allows students different ways to achieve.
- The standard-based approach is seen as a positive element of NCEA as it works well for students who might not otherwise experience success.
- NCEA sets students up for study, life, and work.
- NCEA is valued as a credible qualification.

What's not working well?

- Assessment is the focus of secondary school, not learning.
- There is a focus on accumulating credits, which often gets in the way of learning.
- Overassessment was cited as a significant problem with the way it was implemented. As such, teachers and students said this contributed to their workload substantially.
- NCEA does not support all students for their future pathways. It is complex, making it hard to understand for some students, parents, and employers.
- The implementation of NCEA can create concerns regarding its credibility, especially about the validity of marking and moderation as different decisions are made at the subject and school level.

What were some suggestions for strengthening NCEA?

- NCEA could encourage students to engage in deeper learning. This could mean reducing the focus on assessment and credit-counting and including more relevant, real-world learning.
- The way NCEA is assessed could be changed. This could be done in many ways, such as decreasing the volume of assessment, improving the balance between internal and external assessment, introducing different assessment formats, and reviewing how credits are allocated and graded to ensure credit sizes are more equitable.

- NCEA structure could be changed. Suggestions on how this could be done included changing the number and content of NCEA levels, and modifying the learning pathways within NCEA.
- Finally, there could be more support around NCEA to help ensure it is implemented in the way it is intended.

Māori perspectives

- The flexibility of NCEA works well for Māori students, which enables teachers to design courses that meet the needs of their students (e.g., Māori performing arts programme based on mātauranga Māori, and Māori approaches and pedagogies).
- The credit system is beneficial for Māori students, with many students and whānau reporting it is motivating.
- Māori students also like being able to achieve credits from higher year levels, especially in Māori focused subjects.
- Māori respondents reported that te reo Māori, tikanga Māori, identity and mātauranga Māori are not seen as having the same status and support as the English language, culture, and other subjects in the curriculum.
- Some teachers hold low expectations for their Māori students in NCEA.
- There are issues around inequitable allocation of resources and supports between Māori medium and English medium schools.
- There were also worries about te reo Māori assessment.
- Respondents in English medium and Māori medium gave suggestions that could help strengthen NCEA and the curriculum. The suggestions aimed to mitigate some of the concerns highlighted above, such as adequate resourcing, recognition of mātauranga Māori, improved moderation, and support for teachers.

Pacific peoples' perspectives

- Pacific students find the mixture of internal and external assessments beneficial. They also like the flexibility to gain credits across NCEA levels and having the option of making subject choices that they find interesting.
- Pacific students trust their teachers and the guidance provided. However, they often feel discouraged from pursuing academically demanding pathways that do not serve them well.
- Pacific parents reported they value NCEA as a formal qualification recognised internationally and that it has pathways to university.
- Pacific teachers like the flexibility of NCEA, which allows them to embed cultural perspectives in their teaching and cater the standards to the needs of their students.
- Pacific respondents suggest that embedding Pacific ways of learning and assessment across NCEA and the curriculum would, in their view, strengthen NCEA.

Six Big Opportunities

The Ministerial Advisory Group developed six Big Opportunities to explore ideas for strengthening NCEA. These are set out below.

- 1) Creating space at NCEA Level 1 for powerful learning.
- 2) Strengthening literacy and numeracy.
- 3) Ensuring NCEA Levels 2 and 3 support good connections beyond schooling.
- 4) Making it easier for teachers, schools, and kura to focus on learning.
- 5) Ensuring the Record of Achievement tells us about learners' capabilities.
- 6) Dismantling barriers to NCEA.

A survey designed specifically to collect feedback on the Big Opportunities was designed and asked two questions. One question asked respondents whether they agreed/disagreed with the aim of the Big Opportunities, and the other question asked respondents on whether agreed/disagreed on proposed ways in which the Big Opportunities could be achieved. In general, respondents tended to agree with the intent of the Big Opportunities more than the how they could be achieved.

More information on the findings from this survey can be found here: [The NCEA review: summary of the findings from public engagement on the future of NCEA.](#)

Feedback on all six Big Opportunities combined with the findings from the previous survey were looked at in relation to the key principles of NCEA:

Key principles	Feedback for strengthening NCEA
Wellbeing	Students feel a sense of achievement when they gain their credits and are working toward a qualification that set them up for their future pathways. However, students and teachers are burdened by overassessment which negatively impacts on their wellbeing and workload. The feedback suggests decreasing assessment workload.
Equity	Feedback suggests a “No fee” approach would make NCEA more equitable. NCEA also needs to enable Māori students, as well as ensuring equitable access for students with disabilities or needing learning support.
Coherence	There are concerns that dividing up learning into disjointed subjects and NCEA standards, coupled with a stronger focus on assessment rather than learning, weakens students’ experiences of coherence in their learning. Feedback suggests focusing on learning rather than assessment, and for courses being drawn from across the curriculum.
Pathways	Feedback suggests NCEA needs to provide more support that would help students keep their subject options open for longer, broadening the curriculum and supporting them to make good decisions for their futures.
Credibility	Feedback suggests more clarity on the qualification because it can be complex to understand.



Appendix 3: NCEA Level 1 types and formats assessments by learning area

NCEA Level 1 Subject	Achievement Standard 1.1 Internal Assessment	Achievement Standard 1.2 Internal Assessment	Achievement Standard 1.3 External Assessment	Achievement Standard 1.4 External Assessment	Unit standards
The Arts					
Dance	A dance sequence (60-90 seconds) & A statement of intention (50 words) – written or oral	Two dance sequences (min 45 seconds) & A statement of intention (50 words) – written or oral	Report Digital submission	Report Digital submission	1 x Unit Standards 4 credits Level 1 NQF
Drama	A performance (2-4 minutes) & A reflection (700 words max written or 4 minutes max video)	A performance (2-5 minutes) & A portfolio of evidence (700 words max written or 4 minutes max video)	Report Digital submission	Report Digital submission	7 x Unit Standards Varying credits (3 – 4 credits) Level 1 NQF
Music	Formats: Sound or video recording Screencast Annotated or notated score Slideshow with embedded files A live presentation	A performance (2 – 4 minutes) on any musical instrument, including voice.	Report A document file (PDF) with accompanying audio files (MP3) & A slideshow (PPTX) with 3 slides.	Portfolio Recording of a complete piece of original music or Visual presentation of the music & Short descriptive statement on how the music was created.	4 x Unit Standards Varying credits (2 – 4 credits) Level 1 NQF
Visual Arts	Visual and written research	Artwork Evidence to show research and development of the artwork	Portfolio Digital submission	Portfolio Digital submission	No Unit Standards

NCEA Level 1 Subject	Achievement Standard 1.1 Internal Assessment	Achievement Standard 1.2 Internal Assessment	Achievement Standard 1.3 External Assessment	Achievement Standard 1.4 External Assessment	Unit standards
Te Ao Haka	Formats: Physical demonstration Annotated visual information Oral presentation Written information	Performance (live or video recording)	Response to stimulus Digital submission	Response to stimulus Digital submission	5 x Unit Standards Varying credits (3 – 4 credits) Level 1 NQF
Health and Physical Education					
Physical Education	Live performance Evidence (video of 3–4 minutes, digital slideshows no more than 8 slides)	Reflection and evidence with a range of formats	Portfolio Digital submission	Report Digital submission	No Unit Standards
Health Studies	Response to questions Formats: Visual presentation Written or oral interviews (up to 800 words)	Response to questions Formats: Visual design Oral (up to 4 minutes) or Written responses (up to 800 words)	Point-in-time end of year Examination Online, paper by exception	Report Digital submission	2 x Unit Standards Varying credits (2 – 3 credits) Level 1 NQF (under Occupational Health and Safety Practice and Resource Recovery Operations)
Learning Languages					
Te Reo Māori Kūki 'Āirani	Interactions Evidence (video recording)	Piece of work (written, spoken, or combination)	Examination Online, paper by exception	Examination Online, paper by exception	No Unit Standards
French	Interactions Evidence (video recording)	Piece of work (written, spoken, or combination)	Examination Online	Examination Online	No Unit Standards
German	Interactions Evidence (video recording)	Piece of work (written, spoken, or combination)	Examination Online	Examination Online	No Unit Standards

NCEA Level 1 Subject	Achievement Standard 1.1 Internal Assessment	Achievement Standard 1.2 Internal Assessment	Achievement Standard 1.3 External Assessment	Achievement Standard 1.4 External Assessment	Unit standards
Gagana Sāmoa	Interactions Evidence (video recording)	Piece of work (written, spoken, or combination)	Examination Online	Examination Online	No Unit Standards
Japanese	Interactions Evidence (video recording)	Piece of work (written, spoken, or combination)	Examination Online	Examination Online	No Unit Standards
Korean	Interactions Evidence (video recording)	Piece of work (written, spoken, or combination)	Examination Online	Examination Online	No Unit Standards
Lea Faka-Tonga	Interactions Evidence (video recording)	Piece of work (written, spoken, or combination)	Examination Online	Examination Online	No Unit Standards
Chinese (Mandarin)	Interactions Evidence (video recording)	Piece of work (written, spoken, or combination)	Examination Online	Examination Online	No Unit Standards
Spanish	Interactions Evidence (video recording)	Piece of work (written, spoken, or combination)	Examination Online	Examination Online	No Unit Standards
Gagana Tokelau	Interactions Evidence (video recording)	Piece of work (written, spoken, or combination)	Examination Online	Examination Online	No Unit Standards
Vagahau Niue	Interactions Evidence (video recording)	Piece of work (written, spoken, or combination)	Examination Online	Examination Online	No Unit Standards
New Zealand Sign Language	Interactions Evidence: Video recording	Communication Formats: Digital scrapbook Vlog Video	Over-time assessment task Digital submission	Over-time assessment task Digital submission	No Unit Standards
Mathematics and Statistics					

NCEA Level 1 Subject	Achievement Standard 1.1 Internal Assessment	Achievement Standard 1.2 Internal Assessment	Achievement Standard 1.3 External Assessment	Achievement Standard 1.4 External Assessment	Unit standards
Mathematics and Statistics	Formats: Digital presentation or Written report (800 words max) Video recording Poster (800 words max)	Response to problem	Response to stimulus Digital submission	Point-in-time end of year Examination Printed paper	1 Unit standard 1 credit Level 1 NQF
Science					
Science	Response to problem Formats: presentation, poster, video, written work	Investigation and report Formats: presentation (3-4 minutes); written work (up to 800 words)	Examination Online	Report Digital submission	No Unit Standards
Agricultural and Horticultural Science	Response to problem Formats: Oral presentation (up to 4 minutes) Written report up to 800 words Slide shows/poster	Presentation Formats: Portfolio of photos Oral presentation written work Slideshow, poster	Examination Online	Questions and answers Online	No Unit Standards
Chemistry and Biology	Presentation Formats: Structured response (up to 800 words) Slideshow Poster Oral presentation (up to 4 minutes)	Presentation Formats: Structured response (up to 800 words) Slideshow Poster Oral presentation (up to 4 minutes)	Report Digital submission	Point-in-time end of year Examination Online	No Unit Standards

NCEA Level 1 Subject	Achievement Standard 1.1 Internal Assessment	Achievement Standard 1.2 Internal Assessment	Achievement Standard 1.3 External Assessment	Achievement Standard 1.4 External Assessment	Unit standards
Physics, Earth and Space Science	Presentation Formats: Written response (up to 800 words) Slideshow Poster Oral presentation/ Video (up to 4 minutes)	Investigation Formats: Written report (up to 800 words) Slideshow Poster Oral presentation/ Video (up to 4 minutes)	School managed assessment Digital submission	Point-in-time end of year Examination Printed paper	No Unit Standards
Social Sciences					
Religious Studies	Inquiry Formats: Oral presentation/ Video (up to 4 minutes) Slideshow Written report (up to 800 words)	Inquiry Formats: Slideshow Annotated boards display (up to 8 displays) Dramatic performance (up to 4 minutes) Oral presentation (up to 4 minutes)	Point-in-time end of year Examination Online, paper by exception	Over-time assessment task Report Digital submission	No Unit Standards
Social Studies	Inquiry Formats: Oral presentation (up to 4 minutes) Written report (up to 800 words) Digital presentation	Presentation Formats: Oral presentation (up to 4 minutes) Written report (up to 800 words) Digital presentation Combination of the above	Point in time end-of-year Examination Online, paper by exception	Over-time assessment task Report Digital submission	No Unit Standards
History	Exploration Formats: Audio-video presentation Annotation (up to 800 words) Voice recording/ Oral presentation	Exploration Formats: Waiata or speech (up to 4 minutes) Written report (up to 800 words) Display board/ Exhibition	Point in time end-of-year Examination Online, paper by exception	Over-time assessment task Report Digital submission	No Unit Standards

NCEA Level 1 Subject	Achievement Standard 1.1 Internal Assessment	Achievement Standard 1.2 Internal Assessment	Achievement Standard 1.3 External Assessment	Achievement Standard 1.4 External Assessment	Unit standards
Geography	Presentation Formats: Poster Story map (up to 800 words) Report (up to 800 words)	Exploration Formats: Story map (up to 800 words) Report (up to 800 words) Digital audio-visual presentation (up to 4 minutes long)	Point-in-time end of year Examination Online / paper	Over-time assessment task Report Digital submission	No Unit Standards
Commerce	Exploration Formats: Oral presentation/ voice recording/ video (up to 4 minutes) Slide presentation Written report (up to 800 words)	Exploration Formats: Oral presentation/ voice recording/ video (up to 4 minutes) Slide presentation Written report (up to 800 words)	Point in time end-of-year Examination Online	Over-time assessment task Report Digital submission	No Unit Standards
Technology					
Materials and Processing Technology	Creation and evaluation of a fit-for-purpose outcome Formats: Digital slide presentation Collection of evidence Video/ recorded oral presentation Combination of above	Creation & evaluation of a purposeful outcome Formats: Digital slide presentation Collection of evidence Video/ recorded oral presentation Combination of above	Report Evidence: including visual presentation of the development of design, responses to prompts, visual evidence	Report Evidence: including visual evidence and responses to prompts	No Unit Standards

NCEA Level 1 Subject	Achievement Standard 1.1 Internal Assessment	Achievement Standard 1.2 Internal Assessment	Achievement Standard 1.3 External Assessment	Achievement Standard 1.4 External Assessment	Unit standards
Digital Technologies	Creation of a computer programme Including: Copy of programmes Image of digital circuit; Video or screen capture of programme functioning; Evidence of programme testing	Creation and evaluation of a fit-for-purpose outcome Including: Annotated screenshots; Audio-video recording; Planning boards testing documentation Description	Point in time end-of-year Examination Online	Digital submission	No Unit Standards
Design and Visual Communication	Portfolio Formats: Sketch models: Hand drawn sketches Photography Overlay With annotation or voiceover explanation	Presentation Including: Rendered image Animation Photographs of physical models	Portfolio Digital submission	Portfolio Digital submission	No Unit Standards
Te Reo Māori					
Te Reo Māori	Interactions Evidence (video recording)	Communication Formats: Written evidence (200–250 words) Spoken evidence (up to 1.5 minutes) Combination of both	Tūmahi Aromatawai Pātahi (Online digital assessment)	Kete Manarua – Assessment Portfolio	No Unit Standards
English					

NCEA Level 1 Subject	Achievement Standard 1.1 Internal Assessment	Achievement Standard 1.2 Internal Assessment	Achievement Standard 1.3 External Assessment	Achievement Standard 1.4 External Assessment	Unit standards
English	Presentation Formats: Speech, seminar Live or recorded presentation (up to 4 minutes long) Written response (up to 800 words)	Response to studied texts Formats: Comic strip Slideshow Digital presentation Public speaking presentation, Vlog (up to 4 minutes long)	Over-time assessment task Digital submission	Point-in-time end of year Examination Online, paper by exception	No Unit Standards



Glossary

Assessment specifications are rules and restrictions for *external assessments* of a standard. These are designed to make sure that assessments are the same across the country. For example, assessment specifications describe which equipment students are allowed to have during the assessment, what materials students are expected to hand in at the end, and what the *assessment format* will be (e.g. video recording or written).

Assessment types in this report are divided into two ways of delivering assessments, external and internal.

- **External Assessment** is an assessment activity designed and marked by NZQA, not the school. External assessments are either completed over multiple sessions, or at one set point in time.
- **Internal Assessment** is an assessment activity run by school staff. Teachers assess students' knowledge and skills for a standard, against a set of NCEA Level 1 criteria.

Assessment formats are the different methods for *external assessments of achievement standards*. Assessment formats used for NCEA Level 1 include the following.

- **Common Assessment Activity (CAA)** is a form of external assessment developed and marked by NZQA and administered by a school. CAAs have to be done in a single session, during a period of time specified by NZQA.
- **Examination (exam)** is a form of external assessment developed, administered, and marked by NZQA. Students provide answers to a set of unseen questions or activities. Exams happen at a specified, scheduled time, usually in Term 4.
- **Performance** is a digital recording of a performance piece that is prepared and performed by the student.
- **Submitted portfolio** is a presentation of work collected over time, to demonstrate that students meet the requirements of standard.
- **Submitted reports** are completed over several sessions in class under exam conditions. They require students to respond to particular topic or question. Students are not able to complete any work at home between sessions. Submitted reports are developed and marked by NZQA, but are administered by a school.

Authenticity means that the evidence submitted for assessment is a student's own work. Authenticity includes checking that data sources are acknowledged and appropriately referenced.

Course is a package of learning and assessment on a topic. Schools can create their own courses to suit the needs of their students. Typically, a course is timetabled for four hours a week. It can be assessed using a mix of NCEA Level 1 *achievement standards* and *unit standards*, that total between 18 to 20 *credits*.

Credits are the basis of the NCEA qualification. Students gain credits by achieving standards: each *unit standard* or *achievement standard* has a defined credit value. One credit is meant to represent approximately 10 hours of teaching, learning and assessment.^{af} This includes teaching time, homework, and assessment time.

Entering students into standards refers to the information that schools send to NZQA, that tells them which standards their students are going to do.

Learning areas are the eight areas set out in the New Zealand Curriculum: Arts, English, Health and Physical Education, Learning Languages, Mathematics and Statistics, Science, Social Sciences and Technology. The eight learning areas break down into 32 subjects that are covered by NCEA Level 1.

Moderation means checking that how assessments are marked is consistent between different teachers and different schools. Moderation supports the credibility of NCEA by ensuring that the difficulty of standards doesn't change depending on where students go to school. There are two types of moderation, internal and external.

- **External Moderation** is done by NZQA. NZQA takes a sample of assessments across schools and produces moderation reports that give guidance to teachers on how to mark more consistently in future.
- **Internal Moderation** is done by a school, or sometimes a group of schools in a local cluster. A sample of multiple teachers' assessments are collected to look at whether their marking of assessments for each standard is consistent.

Pathway describes the journey of study and training (for example, the courses and classes that students take, and the standards they complete) that helps a student reach their preferred destination when they leave school. This report refers to two main pathways, vocational and academic.

- **Vocational Pathways** are referred to when students self-report (or parents and whānau report about their child) that they intend to go to polytechnic or learn a trade (including apprenticeships) when they leave school.
- **Academic Pathways** are referred to when students self-report (or parents and whānau report about their child) that they intend to go to university when they leave school.

Principal's Nominee is a staff member nominated by the school principal to be responsible for organising internal and external examinations at the school that year. The Principal's Nominee liaises with NZQA and school staff to make sure assessment policies and procedures are followed. Other school staff may assist, but this is the Principal's Nominee responsibility.

Special Assessment Conditions (SACs) are available for individual students to meet a range of physical, emotional, sensory, medical, and learning needs. They apply to both internal and external assessments and can include a range of supports including the use of a writer or reader, a computer, rest breaks, Braille, or enlarged papers. Schools need to apply to NZQA for SACs.

^{af} [About assessment standards :: NZQA](#)

Standards are used in schools to assess students' knowledge and skills in a subject or area of study. Standards are the building blocks of NCEA Level 1 courses and the NCEA Level 1 qualification. There are two types: achievement standards and unit standards.

- **Achievement standard** describes the set of skills or knowledge within a subject that students need to have to gain *credits*. The achievement standard will also set out the criteria against which students will be assessed. Achievement standards are developed by the Ministry of Education from the New Zealand Curriculum. There are four grades of achievement standard: Achieved, Achieved with Merit, Achieved with Excellence, and Not Achieved.
- **Unit standard** describes the set of skills and knowledge within an industry-related subject, that students need to have to gain *credits*. Unit standards are developed by the Workforce Development Councils. There are two grades of unit standard: Achieved and Not Achieved.

Subjects are smaller strands of learning within a *learning area*. The Ministry of Education confirmed the subject list for NCEA Level 1. This includes 32 subjects across the eight learning areas in the New Zealand Curriculum.



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