



Terms of Reference

NCEA Review

The Minister of Education, the Honourable Chris Hipkins, has asked the Ministry of Education to lead a review of the National Certificates of Educational Achievement (NCEA). The review will comply with the New Zealand Qualifications Authority's Rules for reviewing qualifications. It is an opportunity to learn from NCEA's users, and to explore potential refinements to ensure that the qualifications continue to be credible and robust.

These Terms of Reference explain:

- Why the Government is reviewing NCEA.
- The broad scope and guiding principles of the review.
- How people can participate in the review.
- An overview of the review process.

Purpose of the review

The New Zealand Qualifications Framework (NZQF) Qualification Listing and Operational Rules were updated in 2013, requiring a review of qualifications every five years. The first review of NCEA is due to be completed by the end of 2018.

The introduction of NCEA as New Zealand's main national qualifications for secondary school students represented a significant and positive modernisation of the system of secondary school assessment. However, the full potential of NCEA has yet to be fully realised, likely due in part to the way targets around credit accumulation have driven the implementation of the qualifications.

Government has decided to conduct the review to build on what has been achieved with NCEA thus far, and respond to emerging needs and opportunities. This will ensure NCEA helps create an education system where learning is central, and provides relevant value into the future for those who attain the qualification. It is an opportunity to understand the experiences of New Zealanders who interact with NCEA – whether as students, parents, whānau, teachers, school leaders, tertiary providers, iwi, employers, or members of the wider community. Those experiences can be used to refine NCEA to strengthen its design and implementation, both in secondary and tertiary education. Any changes to NCEA or its implementation resulting from consultation will need to be approved by the Minister of Education.

The NZQF Operational Rules also require the development of purpose and outcome statements for every qualification, including NCEA – describing where a qualification leads, and what can be expected from graduates with the qualifications. Developing these statements for NCEA will ensure that NCEA remains useful, relevant and fit for purpose by continuing to meet the needs of learners and our broader society and economy.

Context

The National Certificates of Educational Achievement (NCEA) are New Zealand's main national qualifications for secondary school students, comprising certificates at levels 1 to 3. NCEA was implemented over three years from 2002 to 2004 and is listed on the New Zealand Qualifications Framework (NZQF) alongside other New Zealand secondary and tertiary qualifications. It has developed into a well-regarded set of qualifications, respected nationally and internationally.

NCEA is a standards-based assessment system: learners are not compared to one another to determine their grades, but are assessed against a standard. To achieve an NCEA, a learner must gain sufficient credits across a range of standards, each of which tests a discrete package of skills, knowledge and/or attitudes. NCEA is highly flexible, covering a range of learning across a variety of pathways.

Since 2004, a number of changes have been made to strengthen NCEA:

- In 2007, certificate endorsements were introduced to recognise learners who achieved consistently well across their programme of study.
- Between 2009 and 2011, achievement standards were aligned with the National Curriculum.
- In 2011, course endorsements were introduced to recognise consistent levels of achievement in a particular course.

This review aims to improve on NCEA's strong foundations to ensure that it is a robust qualification system that is valued by learners, their families, whānau, employers, tertiary education organisations, iwi and communities.

Scope

The NCEA review is an opportunity to discuss New Zealanders' experiences with NCEA. The review will be guided by the overall aim of ensuring the robustness of NCEA, and by a commitment to ensuring that NCEA recognises the position of Māori appropriately, giving effect to the rights and duties set out in the Treaty of Waitangi.

The review will be framed by the following key principles which ensure a schooling qualification system effectively supports and provides value to its users. These principles are deeply connected, and many topics which will be discussed throughout the review relate to more than one principle. These principles are not presented in order of importance or priority.

Key principles		The design and use of NCEA should ensure that:
1	Wellbeing	NCEA promotes the wellbeing of young people and teachers through effective and fair teaching and assessment practice.
2	Equity	NCEA facilitates high expectations for all young people, and ensures that every student has the potential and opportunity to succeed.
3	Coherence	NCEA enables young people to access the powerful knowledge, skills and attitudes identified in the National Curriculum.
4	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.
5	Credibility	NCEA is readily understood, widely supported, and validly measures achievement.

Most topics relating to the structure and implementation of NCEA – including the rules and requirements for each certificate, and how NCEA is supported and administered – are within the scope of the review. It will cover a wide range of topics raised by its users, including but not limited to:

Principle	Topics will include:
1. Wellbeing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The impact of overassessment on student wellbeing and teacher workload Internal moderation requirements and practice, and the impact on teacher workload
2. Equity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Equity of access to diverse, high-quality learning opportunities Distinction between ‘academic’ and ‘vocational’ learning, and how we value the contributions of each Encouraging and recognising Māori learning as Māori, including mātauranga Māori and te reo Māori
3. Coherence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The degree to which NCEA credentials ‘soft’ or ‘21st century’ skills and capabilities from the National Curriculum, and cultural competencies, particularly the principles, values, attitudes and key competencies Assessment-driven teaching and learning Literacy and numeracy requirements The evolving role of digital technology in assessment, particularly traditional end-of-year examinations
4. Pathways	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The role of each level of NCEA, particularly the structure and relevance of NCEA Level 1 The practice of levels of NCEA being treated, in practice, as prerequisites for the next Facilitating seamless transitions between settings, and from schooling on to further education and the world of work
5. Credibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The number of credits at each level How we can better ensure that NCEA is easy for young people, families and whānau, teachers, employers and the wider community to understand

The review may also cover other matters relating to NCEA which are not explicitly excluded. A series of questions relating to specific topics will be released in the Discussion Document in April 2018.

The core features of NCEA – such as standards-based assessment and the use of achievement and unit standards – are considered sound, and are not included in the scope of the review. The University Entrance and New Zealand Scholarship awards are excluded from the scope of the review because they are independent from NCEA. Individual standards and associated material are also not included, because an achievement standards review in 2019 will follow the NCEA review, where individual and groups of standards may be considered.

Out-of-scope

- Standards-based assessment
- That both achievement and unit standards can contribute towards an NCEA
- University Entrance Award
- NZ Scholarship Award
- Individual achievement and unit standards and associated resources

Engaging stakeholders

Extensive public consultation will be conducted in 2018 for the review through a range of media - including working groups, workshops, focus groups, and surveys. The Ministry of Education will also work with the Ministerial Advisory Group and Youth Advisory Group, and a Ministry of Education Reference Group, through the review period.

Key processes and outputs		
1	Representative Consultation	From February 2018, the Ministry and the Ministerial Advisory Group, in consultation with stakeholders, will identify relevant topics for public consultation.
2	Working Groups	The Ministry and the Ministerial Advisory Group will work with groups and stakeholders to refine topics to be focused on by the review, and the consultation process. This will involve engagement with a variety of groups to seek input on the topics which will be most relevant to New Zealanders.
3	Discussion Document	In late April, the Ministerial Advisory Group, supported by the Ministry of Education, and with contribution from the Youth Advisory Group and Reference Group, will draft a Discussion Document which will be submitted to the Minister of Education. It will contain a range of resources, including background information to help every interested New Zealander to participate in the review.
4	Public Consultation	From late April, the Ministry will hold wider public consultation on NCEA through a range of formats such as workshops and surveys. The Ministry of Education will also engage with focus groups to capture the voices of young people and their families and whānau.
5	Consultation and Recommendation Reports	In late August, the Ministry will produce a Consultation Report from its consultation processes which summarises what has been heard from New Zealanders about NCEA. In September, with contribution from the Ministerial Advisory Group, Youth Advisory Group and Reference Group, the Ministry of Education will draft a Recommendations Report drawing on the Consultation Report, for the Minister of Education.
6	Implementation Report	An Implementation Report will be developed by the Ministry of Education, based on the Minister of Education's recommendations. This report will be released in early 2019 and will lay out the next steps to implement recommendations.
7	Implementation	Any outcomes of the review will be clearly signalled and implemented with regard to the impact upon stakeholders.