

In Confidence

Office of the Minister of Education

Chair, Cabinet Social Wellbeing Committee

## Changes to strengthen NCEA

### Proposal

1. I seek Cabinet's in-principle agreement to a package of changes to strengthen the National Certificates of Educational Achievement: NCEA, and reduce teacher and student workload, subject to further design work and potential refinement ahead of final Cabinet approval by December 2019.
2. The change package responds to what we heard from New Zealanders about NCEA through the NCEA Review and Education Conversation | Kōrero Mātauranga, and will:
  - 2.1. Make NCEA more accessible, including by ending NCEA fees
  - 2.2. Retain NCEA Level 1 as an optional level
  - 2.3. Make NCEA's literacy and numeracy requirements more robust
  - 2.4. Simplify NCEA's structure to clarify workload expectations
  - 2.5. Refocus on fewer, larger standards within coherent courses
  - 2.6. Ensure parity of mātauranga Māori in NCEA, and
  - 2.7. Signal clearer pathways to further education and employment.

### Executive Summary

3. NCEA was adopted as our principal school qualification from 2004.<sup>1</sup> It has been continually refined. Respected both nationally and internationally, it is delivered successfully across schools, kura and tertiary education organisations (TEOs).
4. 16,000 New Zealanders gave us feedback on NCEA through the Education Conversation | Kōrero Mātauranga. These New Zealanders represented a broad cross-section of our society, including young people, parents and whānau, employers and leaders from a wide range of communities. We heard that NCEA's basic building blocks – its open field nature, standards-based assessment, credits, mix of internal and external assessment, and its inherent flexibility – are beneficial. However, NCEA doesn't work as well as it could.
5. New Zealanders have told us that while NCEA is a strong qualification, we could do more to make it work for every young person. I recommend that Cabinet agree in principle to a package of changes which would strengthen NCEA.

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<sup>1</sup> Minister of Education, *Qualifications for Young People Aged 16 to 19 Years*, Paper for the Cabinet Committee on Social Policy (25 September 1998) at [3].

6. The package is grouped into seven broad changes:
  - 6.1. Retain Level 1 as an optional level of NCEA.
  - 6.2. Make NCEA's literacy and numeracy requirements more robust.
  - 6.3. Simplify NCEA's requirements and workload expectations.
  - 6.4. Refocus on fewer, larger standards within coherent courses.
  - 6.5. Parity for mātauranga Māori in NCEA.
  - 6.6. Signal clear pathways to further education and employment.
  - 6.7. Make NCEA more accessible.
7. This package is the result of an extensive engagement process on New Zealanders' experiences with NCEA, and reflect the advice of the Ministry of Education and the Ministerial and Professional Advisory Groups that I have appointed for this Review on how to strengthen the qualification.
8. Together, these changes would make NCEA more credible and robust. They will set clearer, high expectations of all young people working towards an NCEA.
9. Teacher and student workload would be reduced, with a shift away from fragmented, small assessments towards larger, more coherent blocks of learning and assessment. NCEA would be more accessible, but also more focused on the most important learning needed to set young people up for success.
10. It would also give better effect to our partnership under the Treaty of Waitangi by ensuring that te ao Māori and mātauranga Māori are given equal recognition with other bodies of knowledge.
11. If you agree in principle to this change package, the Ministry of Education will engage with stakeholders to consider its detailed design and implementation implications.
12. Out of this process, I will be well placed to set out for you in full the fiscal and system implications of the change package I have proposed, including how these changes will be implemented; the support which might be required to deliver change; and detailed financial implications.
13. I will then report to Cabinet Social Wellbeing Committee on the outcomes of this work by December 2019, and seek your final agreement to changes to NCEA, reflecting any refinements agreed out of the Ministry's design and implementation engagement.
14. If agreed, changes could begin to be implemented from 2020. Implementation would be linked to a scheduled review of the achievement standards that credential National Curriculum learning, with changes phased in between 2020 and 2024.

## **Background**

15. On 13 December 2017 [CBC-17-MIN-0066] Cabinet approved the Terms of Reference for the NCEA Review. Cabinet agreed that the review will be framed by five key principles: *wellbeing, inclusion and equity, coherence, pathways and credibility*. The review was scoped

to be inclusive of all facets of NCEA's performance, but excluded some core components of NCEA from scope, such as the University Entrance award.

16. As part of the NCEA review, I commissioned a Ministerial Advisory Group (MAG) on NCEA to develop a discussion document on proposals to strengthen NCEA. The MAG is a group of innovative thinkers that has brought new perspectives on NCEA and challenged traditional thinking on senior secondary education and assessment.
17. On 21 May 2018 [CAB-18-MIN-0229] Cabinet approved the release of a discussion document authored by the MAG, to commence a public engagement on the future of NCEA, as part of the Education Conversation | Kōrero Mātauranga. Cabinet noted that I would report back on proposals for change to NCEA in early 2019.
18. The engagement phase of the NCEA Review ran from 27 May to 19 October 2018. More than 16,000 New Zealanders from a diverse range of backgrounds contributed their views on what worked well with NCEA, and what aspects of NCEA could be strengthened. The findings of the engagement were considered at two large-scale workshops in July and December 2018.
19. Midway through the engagement, I appointed the Professional Advisory Group (PAG), composed of current and former principals and teachers with extensive experience working with NCEA, to ensure the views of practitioners were embedded at the heart of the Review [APH-18-MIN-0162].
20. The NCEA Review is a 'big review' within my Education Portfolio Work Programme. It will advance our objective of a high quality, inclusive public education system. However, some of the deep-rooted challenges identified through the NCEA Review – nequity of access to high quality learning opportunities, disparities of esteem between pathways – will require coordinated effort across the education portfolio, including the Review of Tomorrow's Schools; the Reform of Vocational Education; Curriculum, Progress and Achievement; the Workforce Strategy; the Careers System Strategy; Ka Hikitia; Te Ahu o te reo Māori; and the Pacific Education Plan.

### **The NCEA qualification's current requirements**

21. NCEA comprises three separate qualifications: NCEA Levels 1, 2 and 3, typically attempted by students across Years 11, 12 and 13. However, young people may attempt any level of NCEA at any time, and no level of NCEA is compulsory.
22. For each NCEA students must achieve 80 credits. Sixty must be from the certificate level or above (i.e., Level 2 for Level 2), and 20 can be carried over from one NCEA level lower (i.e., from Level 2 to count towards Level 3 – a 'carry over'). For many students this means an effective requirement of 60 'new' credits for each of Levels 2 and 3.
23. Credits recognise learning in schools, kura, and TEOs, either using achievement standards (conventional school fields of study, derived from the National Curriculum) and unit standards (other fields, usually derived from industry). The National Curriculum does not make learning in any specific Learning Areas or Wāhanga Ako compulsory in Years 11 – 13, although learners are expected to develop key competencies (such as "thinking" and "relating to others") for learning under *The New Zealand Curriculum*, and to build towards a graduate profile for learning under *Te Marautanga o Aotearoa*.
24. Literacy and numeracy requirements, evidencing foundational language and numerical skills, must be met. Over seven hundred of the achievement standards, drawn from across the National Curriculum, are "literacy or numeracy-rich" (but do not directly assess these skills),

and 10 credits from each of the lists will meet the requirements. Alternatively, six unit standards are benchmarked to the Adult Progressions for Literacy and Numeracy. Three “English for Academic Purposes” (ESOL) unit standards are also available.

25. This flexibility was intended to support diverse pathways and maximise student choice in courses. The flexible standards-based approach, with both internal and external assessment, works for many students whose successes may not otherwise be recognised. The ability to ‘mix and match’ standards allows for flexibility in course design. However, this flexibility needs to be balanced with a focus on ensuring access to quality choices.
26. At the moment, students must pay fees to attain an NCEA; currently set at \$76.70 per student per year, with entries for New Zealand Scholarship (for high-achieving students) bearing further fees. Paying fees gives students full access to their Record of Achievement, which sets out the standards they have achieved, alongside some summary information, such as endorsements (awarded for attaining a number of Merit or Excellence credits across a subject or course) and awards (like University Entrance).

### Why change is needed

27. When NCEA was introduced, the content of the previous School Certificate, Sixth Form Certificate and Bursary was broken up into the standards which now comprise NCEA. These achievement standards (derived from the National Curriculum) sit alongside unit standards, derived from industry bodies of knowledge.
28. This has resulted in a much more flexible system, which better responds to the diverse pathways and strengths young people will need to succeed in the future. But over time the learning that can be recognised by NCEA has expanded as the number of standards has grown, making it much harder for students, teachers and whānau to identify what learning is most important.
29. This means that NCEA assessment practice does not always meet its potential. We have heard the following in relation to the five key principles of the Review:
  - 29.1. **Wellbeing** – Practice in delivering NCEA drives excessive assessment workload for students, schools, tertiary educators, and teachers. Young people are not always supported to exercise agency and reflect their identity in their learning.
  - 29.2. **Equity and inclusion** – NCEA assessment is not consistently inclusive of all identities, cultures and abilities. Ākonga Māori, Pacific students, disabled students and students with additional learning support needs often do not get access to the learning they need to thrive as themselves. Kura do not always have access to the instructional and assessment materials to provide a full range of learning across *Te Marautanga o Aotearoa*, and mātauranga Māori is not well integrated in English medium.<sup>2</sup>
  - 29.3. **Coherence** – Learning and assessment practices under NCEA are often fragmented, so students miss out on important learning and do not make connections across their

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<sup>2</sup> Māori respondents reported that teachers in English medium had low expectations of Māori students, that more support was needed to deliver NCEA for all ākonga Māori, and that te reo Māori, iwi dialect, Māori knowledge and ways of learning are not widely valued. NCEA’s flexibility was a strength for many Pacific respondents, although they also reported that they could be directed towards less academically demanding pathways by teachers. There was also a desire to see Pacific ways of learning reflected in assessment. Students in other diverse groups (e.g., young disabled people, refugee and migrant communities, those in Corrections facilities) also responded favourably about NCEA’s flexibility, but expressed concerns about how well it promoted genuine equity and inclusion, including the accessibility of assessment tasks and resources.

study or the curriculum. Some students attain an NCEA without the knowledge, skills and capabilities needed to succeed.

- 29.4. **Pathways** – Not every student gets access to the full range of possible quality pathways through NCEA. Some schools may lack the resources to offer a range of learning options or students may be channelled into courses that do not align with their future goals and aspirations. Too many students don't successfully progress from schooling or foundation tertiary into further study, training, or work.
- 29.5. **Credibility** – There is confusion about how NCEA attainment shows what students know and can do. There is a lack of confidence that NCEA's requirements for literacy and numeracy are robust and valid. Not all students achieving NCEA have the literacy and numeracy levels they need for further study, employment and life.
30. These findings are closely aligned with those of the Ministry of Education and the Advisory Groups. The Ministry, drawing on the perspectives raised by New Zealanders in the course of public engagement and its own research and analysis, has told me that we could build better safeguards into NCEA to ensure that every young person – not just some – can access a quality, meaningful pathway through NCEA.
31. The MAG suggest that NCEA is a good qualification – it works well for many, but it could be excellent. They want an NCEA through which students have full access to what's really important, and can experience learning that recognises their individual culture, identity and aspirations. They have a vision of students who are able to exercise informed agency in their learning journey, and access coherent courses and programmes that support progress along a personalised pathway.
32. The PAG believes NCEA is a robust qualification and supports its core design and flexibility. Their vision is for a focus on learning rather than assessment, and providing ākonga Māori equitable opportunities to learn and achieve as Māori whichever school they attend. They believe NCEA needs to be an assessment system which provides equitable opportunities for learning to be assessed, and enables authentic contexts for assessment. They want changes to be made to greatly reduce student and teacher workload while improving the credibility of NCEA.
33. To achieve the outcomes above, and the visions of the MAG and PAG, I recommend you agree in principle to a package of changes to strengthen NCEA, detailed below.
34. Many of these changes would inform the direction of, and in some cases will be implemented through, the scheduled review of achievement standards. This involves a phased review of the 1000+ achievement standards used to credential National Curriculum learning, and would be completed by 2024.
35. The Ministry of Education is working to complete a detailed design for the review of achievement standards this calendar year, with engagement at the level of individual subjects commencing next year. This phased implementation reflects the volume of work required to review all relevant standards – which in practice form the building blocks of most secondary schools' curricula – and to ensure that changes do not disadvantage students moving through the system during the implementation period.

### **Change 1: Make NCEA more accessible**

- **Ensure achievement standards are accessible by design, so students are not unfairly impeded by disability or additional learning support needs.**

- **Identify existing Special Assessment Conditions that can be reasonably extended to all students – such as additional time or large-text papers.**
- **For other forms of Special Assessment Conditions, simplify the application and evaluation process where possible to facilitate access.**
- **End NCEA fees, including for Scholarship.**

### **Commentary**

36. Many young people and their whānau – particularly those who are disabled or have additional learning support needs – told us that they faced unjust barriers to accessing and succeeding in NCEA. I do not want that to be the case.
37. At present, traditional examination conditions are the default and students need to prove their need for Special Assessment Conditions (additional support or different conditions for young people who are disabled or have learning support needs). This presumption should be reversed, where possible, and we should seek to extend some conditions as an option for all students. For example, scripts with larger text could be readily extended to all students who want them.
38. Through the review of achievement standards I propose to ensure the standards exemplify inclusive practice built on Universal Design for Learning principles (including for languages, cultures, identities, disabilities, genders and sexualities) so that Special Assessment Conditions are less frequently required. This supports all students to achieve and succeed.
39. In the shorter term, we will work towards making access to SACs more equitable. While the number of SAC applications has increased significantly in the last four years, particularly in low decile schools, it is still the case that fewer students in low decile schools apply for and access SAC. We will continue to support NZQA's work to address this by simplifying access to SAC and assisting schools to identify the students who may benefit from SAC, particularly in lower decile schools.
40. I also propose to end all NCEA fees for domestic students, including for Scholarship examinations (which currently have very low rates of participation in low decile schools) from this year (2019) onwards. Although results can be viewed online, students with unpaid fees do not receive a formal recognition of achievement. Removing all domestic fees will cost approximately \$10 million per year, but will ensure students receive their qualification and are able to access their chosen learning or employment pathway. It would also make it less administratively difficult for schools, whānau, and students than under the status quo. I have made provision for the cost of this change in Budget 2019

### **Change 2: Retain NCEA Level 1 as an optional level**

41. From the start of the Review, some questioned whether NCEA Level 1 was still necessary, with some preferring an approach that builds to NCEA L2 over two years (an approach referenced by some schools in relation to 2018 NCEA Level 1 attainment data). Three years of high-stakes assessment is unusual by international standards, and fewer young people are leaving school at the end of Year 11.
42. However, New Zealanders told us that for some young people NCEA Level 1 remains valuable, and can be a stepping stone – both to NCEA Levels 2 and 3, and to a pathway on to further study and employment. I agree with the conclusion of the Ministry, and the MAG and PAG, that NCEA Level 1 should be retained in some form.

43. For around 10% of students, NCEA is their highest exit qualification, and many school leaders recommended retaining the Level 1 qualification as a key motivator for their students, particularly in low decile schools. There was also concern that removing NCEA Level 1 could increase the 'jump' to Level 2, increasing student pressure in Year 12, which will feel higher stakes. NCEA Level 1 standards also give students structured and credentialed opportunities to develop disciplinary knowledge necessary to prepare them for more advanced learning at Level 2 and beyond.
44. The MAG had initially proposed making a project a mandatory requirement of NCEA Level 1. Many of those engaged supported quality project-based learning, but did not want it to be a compulsory part of a Level 1 qualification. I agree. Those already doing project-based learning in their schools suggested that a suite of standards could be created to assess inquiry, collaborative problem solving, and communication. I support such an approach, rather than including a mandatory project in Level 1.

### **Change 3: Make NCEA's literacy and numeracy requirements more robust**

- **Replace NCEA's current literacy and numeracy requirements with a more consistent and robust benchmark that can be assessed against when students are ready.**
- **Develop tools for teachers and tertiary educators to make consistent, reliable judgments about literacy and numeracy, such as exemplars and digital tests.**
- **Develop new standards as a co-requisite to assess this benchmark, which are externally graded.**

#### **Commentary**

45. New Zealanders have told us that because NCEA's current literacy and numeracy requirements are not consistently or directly assessed to the same benchmark, actual skills can vary by student, resulting in a view that the requirement lacks credibility.
46. I considered refining the existing requirements. However, the standards have been rebuilt before (most recently in 2013), and my view – and the advice of the Ministry, MAG and PAG – is that credibility issues will continue until a clear, robust assessment is implemented. Instead I seek in-principle agreement to:
- 46.1. Establish a set of consistent benchmarks for assessing literacy and numeracy, applying across all relevant assessment tools or formal requirements. This would be based on analytical work undertaken by the Ministry of Education in 2016, and will be supported by further technical work to ensure the benchmarks are right.
- 46.2. Develop new, specialised literacy and numeracy assessment standards to credential against these benchmarks, with a maximum grade of 'Achieved' available. These would be externally graded, to avoid increasing teacher and tertiary educator workload, and to ensure the credibility of the new requirement.
47. Achieving the assessment standards would be a requirement of awarding NCEA Levels 1, 2 or 3. However, students would be able to meet the literacy and numeracy requirements from Year 7, giving students, whānau and teachers more time to identify and respond to student needs, and to identify those students not making expected progress early to get them on track. It would also ensure an acute focus on ensuring students are, wherever possible, sufficiently literate and numerate to attempt NCEA Level 1 before they reach Year 11.
48. These standards would contribute to a co-requisite literacy and numeracy requirement of 20 credits, and would not count towards the usual credit requirements of any level of NCEA.

While they would be required to attain an NCEA at any level, failure to achieve the literacy and numeracy requirements would not stop any student making progress towards any level of NCEA while they work towards literacy and numeracy.

#### **Change 4: Simplify NCEA's structure to clarify workload expectations**

- **Remove the 'carry over' credits and make each Level of NCEA a 60 credit qualification.**
- **Clarify the expected number of credits that a student should enter each year.**
- **Restrict resubmissions (further attempts at an assessment without a new assessment task) to increasing a Not Achieved grade to an Achieved grade only.**

#### **Commentary**

49. We heard last year that New Zealanders are confused by the 'carry over', and want an NCEA which is easier to understand. We also heard that workload has become excessive in some schools and for some students and teachers.
50. The Ministry and the Advisory Groups recommend removing the 'carry over' and setting the number of credits required for each level of NCEA at 60 as a way to simplify NCEA's requirements. While this means a reduction of 20 credits for Level 1, this will be counterbalanced by the addition of the 20 credit literacy and numeracy requirement (which some students may still be working towards alongside Level 1). Levels 2 and 3 will still require the same number of Level 2 and 3 credits, but 20 credits from a lower level will no longer form part of the qualification. I support this recommendation. The 'carry over' has limited value, adds complexity, is poorly understood, and can result in poor decision making.
51. This will support the broader approach to addressing workload via the shift to fewer, larger standards (Change 5) but I recognise the importance of taking action immediately to respond to feedback that workloads are currently adversely affecting student and teacher wellbeing. For that reason I propose:
- 51.1. implementing the new credit expectations in paragraph 49 from 2021, and producing detailed, subject-level guidance for teachers on how to use only 20 credits from existing standards to build a course while the new standards are developed;
- 51.2. restricting resubmissions from 2020, as a response to widespread concerns that the policy is being abused to scaffold students into grades. This change will encourage students and teachers to make sure sufficient learning has occurred before assessment takes place, and will discourage excessive 'check and correct' behaviours which allow students to repeatedly resubmit work to improve their grades.
52. This should begin to reduce workload on students and teachers from 2020, with a more significant impact from 2021 onwards. The second change would mean that resubmission would be available to correct errors denying an Achieved grade, but remove most of the workload pressure associated with resubmission.
53. The MAG recommended caps on the number of credits students can enter. However, caps could introduce distortions in learning and assessment decisions (e.g., not attempting any unit standards to 'save room' for achievement standards). I instead support a clear expectation that 120 credits at Level 1 and 2, and 100 credits at Level 3, is a full programme of learning, with counts above this potentially being excessive. This would equate to 5 or 6 subjects or courses, but be non-binding – schools would remain free to enrol students in a greater number of credits if this was appropriate and manageable for the individual student.

## Change 5: Refocusing on fewer, larger standards within coherent courses

- **Rebuild the achievement standards towards fewer, larger standards that reflect the National Curriculum, particularly the most important content in each Learning Area, Wāhanga Ako or subject.**
- **Strengthen industry-derived standards to support high-quality packages of vocational education and training within NCEA, including closer alignment with the National Curriculum.**
- **Expand course endorsements to include “Achieved” grades and require registered courses to include a brief course description.**

### Commentary

54. In the course of public engagement, we were told that while the flexibility offered by a standards-based qualification was widely valued, it could also result in excessive fragmentation. This can lead to incoherent courses and learning.
55. NCEA is comprised of achievement standards and unit standards (both industry-derived and developed by NZQA, such as Māori Performing Arts standards). The proposed changes below seek to strengthen the system across both of these areas.
56. I support rebuilding the sets of achievement standards within a subject or field of study so that teachers are empowered to design quality programmes of learning within well-defined boundaries. This would give young people better access to both disciplinary depth in areas where they want to specialise, and to a broad, comprehensive education which prepares them for a range of pathways. Through the review of achievement standards:
- 56.1. The size of standards would be made consistent, likely between 4 and 6 credits, rather than the current 2 to 8+ range, which is inconsistently applied.
- 56.2. Reduce the maximum size of NCEA subjects and fields of study, likely to around 20 credits per subject. Originally each subject had 24 credits, but over time this has increased (Level 1 English has 41, for example).
- 56.3. Rebalance the number of credits available between internally and externally assessed standards. Aiming for an approximate 50:50 split (as when NCEA was first implemented) would mean most NCEA subjects would then have two externally assessed standards, with some exceptions.
- 56.4. Ensure that there is consistency in how different sources of knowledge are treated within a National Curriculum context. For example, ensuring that mātauranga Māori (see Change 6), vocational pathways (Change 7) and Pacific knowledges are reflected in achievement standards, or equally high quality unit standards and associated materials, as appropriate.
57. While it is important to preserve NCEA’s valued flexibility, it should promote a flexible array of *quality* pathways. I therefore intend to work with educationalists and teachers to identify by June 2020 the most important learning within the National Curriculum, and use this to provide a framework for the review of achievement standards, and for these fewer, larger standards.
58. Teachers and students would have fewer opportunities for streaming or opting out of important content. More credits per assessment would allow a focus on rich learning, with a positive impact on student and teacher workloads. We will also be able to sharpen links to

the National Curriculum, recognise emerging forms of practice (including integrated and cross-curricular learning, and project- and problem-based methods), incorporate diverse worldviews, and build accessibility and inclusion into standards' fundamental design.

59. I also intend to seek to reverse the ongoing decline in external assessment (from 46% of achievement standard results in 2012, to 31% in 2016). This is driven by the growth in the availability of internally assessed standards, pressure to raise attainment rates, a buffer against failing externals, and higher internal pass rates.
60. Focusing on internals is not inherently a negative outcome, but there are concerns that students are avoiding the standards that they find challenging – particularly examinations – leaving them unprepared for further education. A robust examination system is a key contributor to NCEA's credibility, and high-stakes assessments under exam conditions can be a very effective way of assessing important knowledge and skills alongside other kinds of externally-graded assessments (e.g., portfolios). Excessive use of internals can also drive teacher workload, as they bear the main burden of designing, delivering, marking and moderating internal assessment. We expect to see the number of internal assessments per year undertaken by each student reduce by up to 30%, without changing the amount of high quality learning occurring.
61. The review of Level 1 achievement standards will also emphasise a smaller number of standards to encourage students to focus on breadth as they work towards NCEA Level 1. This would balance a focus on exploration within a broad range of Learning Areas or Wāhanga Ako, while retaining some specialised standards per subject to credential foundational disciplinary learning.
62. NCEA's recognition of industry-relevant learning is a key strength, and students and whānau value the ability to undertake vocational education and training as part of their NCEA. However, it is often seen as having lower status. Although only a third of Year 13 school leavers go into degree-level study within a year of leaving school, University Entrance's relatively high status makes it seem like the 'default' measure of success. Our education system needs to better prepare all students for successful transitions into further study or work. This requires increasing the credibility and coherence of NCEA qualifications, which includes vocational education and training, and enabling smooth transitions to higher level education.
63. The substantial reform agenda under consideration through the Reform of Vocational Education (RoVE) will provide opportunities to address these issues. Without prejudicing final decisions on RoVE, I wish to highlight a focus on:
  - 63.1. involving industry standard-setting bodies and employers in the review of achievement standards, to ensure achievement standards can support vocational learning;
  - 63.2. working in partnership with industry standard-setting bodies, schools and other providers offering NCEA, to review how learning towards industry-derived standards could be better aligned to NCEA and the National Curriculum;
  - 63.3. designing curriculum tools to support schools and foundation tertiary education organisations to deliver high quality and coherent pathways for all students, not just those on an 'academic' pathway – including considering the future of the Vocational Pathways.
64. The final proposed change in this area is to expand course endorsements from 2020 to recognise attainment at Achieved level (e.g., Biology, Achieved), to include more courses

assessed (partially or fully) with industry-derived standards, and to require the registration of a brief statement of course objectives.

65. At present, students who attain at least 14 credits at either Merit or Excellence level within a given course (registered by their school at the start of the year with NZQA), including 3 credits in external assessments, receive a course endorsement. Course endorsements are supported by teachers, students and whānau, and are a useful measure of coherence – as they require schools to register full courses. The extension of course endorsements to include industry-derived standards is a change that could significantly improve parity of esteem between subjects and courses, and would be worked through with relevant standards-setters.

### **Change 6: Parity of mātauranga Māori in NCEA**

- **Integrate mātauranga Māori and te ao Māori explicitly into the outcome statements for NCEA, and into the design of assessment standards.**
- **Ensure parity of support for ākonga Māori in all settings, and for Māori medium NCEAs.**

### **Commentary**

66. Māori respondents were very clear through last year's engagement that they wanted to see mātauranga Māori and te ao Māori genuinely respected by NCEA and within our schools and kura. To ensure Te Tiriti o Waitangi is honoured, NCEA should enable ākonga Māori to succeed as ākonga Māori and be free from racism, discrimination, and stigma in education. Mātauranga Māori and te reo Māori need to be valued within NCEA.
67. While this change is focused on strengthening the place of mātauranga Māori, te ao Māori and te reo Māori within NCEA, this change is likely to help all students access an NCEA which is more responsive to their culture and identity, and which reflects the diverse bi- and multi-cultural nation in which we live.
68. This change would make full use of the levers NCEA gives us to effect change, recognising that these deep-seated issues will require coordinated effort across the Education Portfolio Work Programme, including through the system-wide (student, whānau, teacher, leadership) approaches grounded in tikanga Māori being progressed through the refresh of Te Kotahitanga. This includes considering changes to the qualification's outcome statements to direct the system, and associated accountability mechanisms, to value mātauranga Māori so that ākonga see themselves in the qualification, and so that te ao Māori is of equal status to other worldviews.
69. I will also seek feedback on how best to address a number of issues with te reo Māori NCEA assessment, such as poor standard design for varied levels of proficiency, a lack of focus on practical and useful language, and iwi dialect not being supported. This would likely include exploring options to rebuild the existing mātauranga Māori unit standards (such as Māori Performing Arts) as achievement standards, increasing the range of achievement standards linked to *Te Marautanga o Aotearoa*, and ensuring all assessment standards appropriately value this knowledge, opening up additional pathways for students to gain achievement standards and endorsements, and awards like University Entrance.
70. As part of the review of achievement standards, the Ministry would work to build teacher capability to incorporate mātauranga Māori, te ao Māori, and te reo Māori (where this can be done safely and appropriately) into teaching under NCEA across all settings and contexts, and provide guidance on contextualising task design for student backgrounds, identities, languages and culture.

71. Māori medium NCEAs are not currently supported by the volume of assessment and teaching materials – such as assessment resources and teaching and learning guides – which we believe are required to ensure every learner can access breadth and depth through NCEA. This has meant that the default choice for many whānau has been to revert to English medium schooling at secondary level. When I report back to Cabinet by December, I will provide recommendations on support for Māori medium.

### **Change 7: Signal clearer pathways to further education and employment**

- **Draft a graduate profile for NCEA Levels 2 and 3 that balances offering a broad and holistic education with opportunities to specialise for all young people.**
- **Investigate developing a Vocational Entrance Award, to enable direct entry into higher-level vocational education and training.**
- **Rebuild the Record of Achievement to emphasise clear, summary information.**

#### **Commentary**

72. We have heard that while pathways on from NCEA to further study, work and life in the community are already working well for many learners, this experience is not universal. New Zealanders also told me that it can be difficult to navigate and understand the complexities of different NCEAs, and that students, whānau and schools could have better, clearer information with which to make good choices about pathways through and beyond NCEA.
73. I propose including clear purpose and outcome statements in the graduate profiles for each NCEA qualification. These will clearly communicate the expectations on local curriculum design, programme design, and delivery that would then be enabled and supported by the revised assessment standards.
74. If this approach were taken, the statements for each NCEA would reflect:
- 74.1. NCEA Level 1 refocused on a broad education, underpinned by foundation exploration of a range of disciplines and robust literacy and numeracy.
  - 74.2. NCEA Levels 2 and 3 promoting more specialisation and deepening disciplinary knowledge and skills, underpinned by increasingly sophisticated social and emotional skills and capabilities, and readiness to transition to further education or the world of work.
  - 74.3. The explicit valuing of te ao Māori and mātauranga Māori, recognising that the drafting of these statements will need to be led by Māori, for Māori, during the consultation on detailed design and implementation implications.
75. In addition, the redevelopment will be guided by the vision and outcomes described in the Ministry of Education's Pacific Education Strategic Framework, and will consider the impact on young people in Oranga Tamariki care or transitioning out of Oranga Tamariki care.
76. I am also interested in developing a Vocational Entrance (VE) Award (or Awards). Having a VE Award with a common standard would create clearer pathways into higher-level vocational education and training, and reposition vocational education as a valued pathway for students leaving secondary school and foundation tertiary education. The specific design of the Award(s) and related programmes of learning will be subject to further development, including working with industry standards-setting bodies, as well as both the school and tertiary sectors.

77. A light-touch redesign of the Record of Achievement would prioritise summary information (e.g., course endorsements, awards) and deprioritise detailed information. This would complement continued investment in student-facing resources being delivered through our School Leavers' Toolkit initiative and the work through the Careers System Strategy. We expect this redesign to align with the development of Achieved-level course endorsements, to ensure all students can signal their specialisations clearly.

### **Next steps through to final approval of the proposed change package**

78. Between now and December the Ministry of Education will engage with stakeholders to consider the detailed design and implementation implications of this change package. Out of this process, I will be able to provide Cabinet Social Wellbeing Committee with:
- 78.1. the design details of the proposed changes above, and what they might look like (individually and as a package) if implemented;
  - 78.2. clear information about levels of support for the proposed change package, and the likely impact it would have on our education system and sector;
  - 78.3. a detailed implementation plan for how we would translate the proposed change package into practice in our secondary schools and wharekura while managing the transition impacts on students and teachers;
  - 78.4. detailed financial implications, which will reflect the final design of the proposed change package.
79. As a result of the Ministry's engagement process, I may also propose to refine some of the above proposed changes, depending on the nature of the responses received.
80. In the interests of certainty, I intend to announce the final approved package before the end of the school year.

### **Consultation on this paper**

81. When preparing this paper I have considered the extensive feedback provided through the engagement phase of the NCEA Review, which ran from 27 May to 19 October 2018. Through targeted engagement activities (focus groups, interviews, workshops and hui), we listened to the members of society who are not always heard or well-served by the education system, including:
- 81.1. youth with additional learning support needs and learning support organisations;
  - 81.2. disabled youth;
  - 81.3. teen parents;
  - 81.4. Rainbow youth and the LGBTQI+ community;
  - 81.5. Alternative Education groups;
  - 81.6. youth in Corrections institutes;
  - 81.7. young people and staff in Oranga Tamariki-run youth justice residences.

82. Refugees, migrant communities, and ethnic minority communities were also supported to engage via focus groups and public workshops. Members of all of the above groups were also invited to attend two CoLab events held in July and December 2018.
83. In addition to engagement with the general population, the Ministry undertook a targeted Māori engagement strategy, which included hui, focus groups, rangatahi, and engaging leaders in the Māori medium education. There was also Māori representation on both the Ministerial and Professional Advisory Groups. Through this engagement, I heard about a range of issues specific to ākonga Māori, both from respondents involved in Māori medium education and in English medium education. Māori respondents had a range of views on NCEA, and the proposed changes take account of the diversity of the Māori population.
84. Pacific communities were engaged in targeted ways including through focus groups, interviews, Pacific radio campaigns, workshops, and fono. Niue and the Cook Islands were also included in the engagement. The Ministry of Education is also working to ensure Pacific students' needs and interests are supported by NCEA, and that the outcomes of the NCEA Review align with the vision and outcomes of the Pacific Education Strategic Framework.
85. I have consulted extensively with the education spokesperson for the National Party and leader of the ACT Party respectively. This reflects my commitment to engage with the Opposition throughout the review. I expect to receive their formal feedback on the package ahead of further discussion on this paper.
86. In addition, the following agencies were consulted on the proposed changes in this paper:
- |  |  |
|--|--|
| The New Zealand Qualifications Authority | The Ministry of Business, Innovation, and Employment                           |
| Tertiary Education Commission            | Oranga Tamariki—Ministry for Children  |
| Education Review Office                  | The Department of Corrections  |
| Teaching Council of Aotearoa New Zealand | The Department of Internal Affairs, including the Office of Ethnic Communities |
| Te Puni Kōkiri                           | The Treasury   |
| The Ministry of Pacific Peoples          | The Office of Disability Issues  |
| The Ministry of Women                    | State Services Commission  |
| The Ministry of Social Development       |  |
| The Ministry of Youth Development        |  |
87. The Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet was also informed.

## Financial Implications

88. Your in-principle agreement to the proposed change package does not have financial implications. In the first instance these costs will be met within Vote Education baselines.
89. The financial implications of the finalised change package, which I propose to bring to Cabinet Social Wellbeing Committee for consideration in December, will be materially affected by:
- 89.1. the detailed design of NCEA which emerges from that consultation, which will have a significant impact on the scale and cost of the change proposed;
  - 89.2. the extent and nature of the support which is required to ensure successful implementation.

## **Legislative Implications**

90. The changes in this paper do not require legislative changes to implement.

## **Impact Analysis**

91. The changes in this paper do not require changes to legislation or regulations, and so are not subject to the Regulatory Impact Assessment requirements.
92. However, reflecting the significance of the changes, the Ministry is undertaking impact assessment as part of its own policy programme. This will be further developed using the outcomes of the Ministry's engagement on detailed design and implementation implications, and inform the implementation plan I will include when I report back to Cabinet Social Wellbeing Committee by December.

## **Human Rights**

93. There are no human rights implications arising out of the proposed changes included in this paper. The proposed change package is consistent with the New Zealand Bill of Rights Act 1990 and the Human Rights Act 1993.

## **Gender Implications**

94. The vast majority of young New Zealanders of all gender identities participate in NCEA. No specific gender impact analysis has been undertaken. Instead, care has been taken to ensure that the perspectives of all genders, and gender-diverse people, have been able to influence the outcomes of the Review via public engagement and focus group activities.

## **Disability Perspective**

95. Inclusive education is an important component of the New Zealand Disability Strategy; in particular Indicator 1.4 in the New Zealand Disability Strategy is that "Disabled people achieve and progress in education."
96. Through targeted engagement activities (focus groups, interviews, workshops and hui), we specifically engaged with youth who are disabled or have additional learning support needs, and learning support organisations.
97. We heard that some disabled students and students with learning support needs are not getting the support they need to succeed in assessment; for example, some standards are difficult to complete for students with a physical disability. Others who responded feel that access to Special Assessment Conditions are often inequitable and unnecessarily laborious. A strong theme in their feedback is the need for an inclusive mindset using Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles when designing assessments. They challenged why assessment needs to be modified to accommodate their needs rather than simply being accessible by design.
98. These views have been incorporated into the proposed changes I have presented.

## **Proactive Release**

99. I propose to release this paper proactively. Release will be subject to redactions as appropriate under the Official Information Act 1982.

## Recommendations

The Minister for Education recommends that the Committee:

1. **note** that NCEA is a fundamentally sound qualification, but that through the Education Conversation | Kōrero Mātauranga and NCEA Review, I have identified opportunities to strengthen the qualification to better realise its potential
2. **note** that the changes proposed are intended to:
  - 2.1. improve the structural coherence of NCEA assessment to more efficiently capture the key knowledge, skills and capabilities students need to succeed;
  - 2.2. reduce teacher and student workload;
  - 2.3. promote culturally responsive, coherent teaching and learning;
  - 2.4. improve the tools and support available to teachers and tertiary educators delivering NCEA related learning;
  - 2.5. improve the information and support available to students and whānau to enable more informed decision making in relation to NCEA.
3. **agree** to end all NCEA fees for domestic students, including for Scholarship, as funded in Budget 2019
4. **agree** to the Ministry of Education engaging with stakeholders on the detailed design and implementation implications of the proposed change package, to inform a final change package, which I will present to Cabinet Social Wellbeing Committee in December 2019
5. **agree in principle**, subject to the report back in recommendation 4, to make NCEA more accessible by:
  - 5.1. ensuring achievement standards are accessible by design, so students are not unfairly impeded by disability or additional learning support needs.
  - 5.2. identifying existing Special Assessment Conditions that can be reasonably extended to all students – such as additional time or large-text papers.
  - 5.3. for other forms of Special Assessment Conditions, simplifying the application and evaluation process where possible to facilitate access.
6. **agree in principle**, subject to the report back in recommendation 4, to retain NCEA Level 1 as an optional level
7. **agree in principle**, subject to the report back in recommendation 4, to make NCEA's literacy and numeracy requirements more robust by:
  - 7.1. replacing NCEA's current literacy and numeracy requirements with a more consistent and robust benchmark that can be assessed against when students are ready
  - 7.2. developing tools for teachers and tertiary educators to make consistent, reliable judgments about literacy and numeracy, such as exemplars and digital tests
  - 7.3. developing new standards, which are externally graded, as a co-requisite to assess the benchmark in recommendation 7.1.

8. **agree in principle**, subject to the report back in recommendation 4, to simplify NCEA's structure to clarify workload expectations by:
  - 8.1. removing the 'carry over' credits and make each Level of NCEA a 60 credit qualification
  - 8.2. clarifying the expected number of credits that a student should enter each year
  - 8.3. restricting resubmissions (further attempts at an assessment without a new assessment task) to increasing a Not Achieved grade to an Achieved grade only
9. **agree in principle**, subject to the report back in recommendation 4, to refocus on fewer, larger standards within coherent courses by:
  - 9.1. rebuilding the achievement standards towards fewer, larger standards that reflect the National Curriculum, particularly the most important content in each Learning Area, Wāhanga Ako or subject
  - 9.2. strengthening industry-derived standards to support high-quality packages of vocational education and training within NCEA, including closer alignment with the National Curriculum
  - 9.3. expanding course endorsements to include "Achieved" grades and require registered courses to include a brief course description
10. **agree in principle**, subject to the report back in recommendation 4, to ensure parity of mātauranga Māori in NCEA by:
  - 10.1. integrating mātauranga Māori and te ao Māori explicitly into the outcome statements for NCEA, and into the design of assessment standards.
  - 10.2. ensuring parity of support for ākonga Māori in all settings, and for Māori medium NCEAs.
11. **agree in principle**, subject to the report back in recommendation 4, to signal clearer pathways to further education and employment by:
  - 11.1. drafting a graduate profile for NCEA Levels 2 and 3 that balances offering a broad and holistic education with opportunities to specialise for all young people.
  - 11.2. investigating developing a Vocational Entrance Award, to enable direct entry into higher-level vocational education and training.
  - 11.3. rebuilding the Record of Achievement to emphasise clear, summary information.
12. **note** that my report to Cabinet Social Wellbeing Committee by December 2019 will include full information on the potential impacts of change, including financial implications, following detailed design work and testing implementation implications
13. **note** that, subject to Cabinet's approval of a final package of changes, implementation could occur alongside the scheduled review of achievement standards, with changes phasing-in between 2020 and 2024

14. **agree** that I release this paper proactively, coinciding with the start of the Ministry's consultation on detailed design and implementation implications, subject to redactions as appropriate under the Official Information Act 1982.

Authorised for lodgement

Hon Chris Hipkins

Minister for Education

Proactively Released