



New senior secondary qualifications NZCE (Year 12) and NZACE (Year 13)

NCEA is being replaced by new senior secondary qualifications.

Internationally comparable, credible, and consistent, the new senior secondary qualifications will take a subject-based approach and are designed to assess against the new knowledge-rich curriculum.

From 2028 onwards, students will be able to complete the:

- Foundational Award for literacy and numeracy benchmarked at Year 11
- New Zealand Certificate of Education (NZCE) in Year 12 (from 2029)
- New Zealand Advanced Certificate of Education (NZACE) in Year 13 (from 2030)

Why are the qualifications changing?

While NCEA was designed to be flexible, this flexibility has encouraged a focus on credit counting to simply attain the qualification, rather than developing the critical skills and knowledge needed for clear pathways into future study, training or employment.

During our public consultation last year, we asked principals, teachers, parents, employers and the community what they thought about NCEA. With more than 10,000 people having their say, there was broad support for changes to the qualifications.

Recognition

To achieve an NZCE or NZACE qualification, students must:

- **pass a minimum of three** subjects at that year level or above, and
- **pass the Foundational Award** benchmarked at Year 11 curriculum level.

To recognise students who have achieved more subjects, the number of subjects a student has passed for each qualification will be stated on their Certificate (e.g. NZCE 4, NZACE 5).

A Year 13 subject can count towards gaining NZCE as long as it is not a subject already used to gain NZCE, for example, a student can't use Year 12 English and Year 13 English to gain NZCE.

A student can study Year 12 subjects in Year 13 to gain NZCE.

NZCE and NZACE will require a student to have foundational literacy and numeracy skills gained through the Foundational Award, which is benchmarked at Year 11, and typically sat in Year 11, although it can be sat at any time.

The Foundational Award can also be awarded if a student passes English or Mathematics in year 12 or 13 instead of the year 11 assessment.

Transitional arrangements will be in place for two years, so that students can use the current literacy and numeracy corequisite to be awarded the Foundational Award. It will be clearly stated on a student's record of achievement if they used the corequisite to gain the award.

Endorsements

Excellence in student achievement will be recognised via two new certificate endorsements.

To gain an endorsement, students will need to **pass at least five subjects**, with **a certain number of high grades** to achieve each endorsement. For example, three A grades achieves a Distinction endorsement.

The exact design and names for these new endorsements will be confirmed in the coming months.

New Zealand Certificate of Education	
John Smith	
NZCE 5	Awarded with Distinction
Foundational Award	Awarded
NZCE Subjects	
History	B
Physics	A+
Building & Construction	A
Mathematics	A+
Geography	B

Example of achievement

This image provides an illustration of what a student's achievement could look like under the new senior secondary qualification system. The exemplar naming of endorsements and layout of from the final product may differ from the example provided here.

A breakdown of assessment grades for individual assessments as part of each subject will be provided on a student's record of learning.

Assessment

Assessment for every subject will include a **mix of coursework and at least one exam**.

The weighting of each assessment type will vary across subjects and be dependent on the content of the subject curriculum.

Students can generally expect around **three to four assessments per year for each subject** including one exam.

Students will be encouraged to complete all assessments and try their best as each mark counts towards their final grade.

Grading

A new six-point grading system will be introduced which ranges from A+ to E (A+, A, B, C, D, E).

Students must achieve a C or higher to pass a subject.

This will:

- show greater recognition of students' achievement
- be more comparable internationally and with parts of the tertiary sector, and
- be easier for parents to understand.

Compulsory enrolment

From 2028, it will be compulsory for Year 11 students to take:

- Mathematics | Pāngarau
- English | Te Reo Rangatira
- Science | Pūtaiao.

During public consultation last year, Science | Pūtaiao was suggested as an additional compulsory subject as it improves critical thinking, problem solving and evidence-based reasoning which can open a wide range of pathways after school. This will mean that more students will have the opportunity to develop these capabilities.

The Ministry of Education will work with schools and wharekura who need additional support to provide Science | Pūtaiao to students in Year 11.

In Years 12 and 13, no subjects will be compulsory, but all students will need to take at least five subjects.

Transitional arrangements for students

For students part way through NCEA

Students who have almost completed NCEA when the new qualification system begins will still be able to complete their NCEA qualifications. For example, a student in Year 13 in 2029 who still needs 10 credits to get NCEA Level 3 in 2030 will be able to earn those remaining credits in school or tertiary provider.

These transitional arrangements will apply in specific situations and for a set period. NZQA and the Ministry are doing further work on the exact arrangements, and further information about these will be shared when it is confirmed.

For the Foundational Award

There will also be transitional arrangements for the new Foundational Award, which includes literacy and numeracy requirements and is a co-requisite for NZCE and NZACE.

The first two groups of students taking the new NZCE and NZACE will be able to achieve the Award through either the new assessment, benchmarked at Year 11, or through the current NCEA co-requisite assessment. Their Certificates will clearly show the level achieved.

What's next?

More work will be done this year to create detailed operational rules and policies to support the new qualifications.

This includes:

- reassessment opportunities
- transitional arrangements
- how individual assessments will be aggregated to form one overall subject grade, and
- NZQA's review of the minimum University Entrance requirements.

Key dates

2026	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• New national curriculum for Year 9 and 10 available.
2027	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• New curriculum for Year 9 and 10 required to be used.• New national curriculum for Year 11 available.• New national curriculum for Year 12 and 13 available (ministry and industry-led subjects)
2028	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• New national curriculum for Year 11 required.• Foundational Award introduced, NCEA Level 1 removed.
2029	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• New national curriculum for Year 12 required, including new industry-led subjects.• NZCE introduced, replacing NCEA Level 2.
2030	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• New national curriculum for Year 13 required, including new industry-led subjects.• NZACE introduced, replacing NCEA Level 3.
