

2026 Feedback to Schools | kura Pulse Check

Overview

The second annual School and Kura Pulse Check survey was open for Principal's Nominees (PNs) to complete between 9 February and 13 March 2026. We received 261 responses to the survey. The survey response rate was 51% (of the 507 schools | kura NZQA engaged with in 2025). This is a slight improvement on the 2025 survey response rate of 47%.

The response rate is sufficient for drawing reliable conclusions about your views of NZQA and our services¹.

Thank you to all those PNs/schools who completed the survey for us. There were 33 questions in the survey, including 10 questions asking for further feedback and comment (free text).

Your responses have helped us to get a clearer picture of:

- what is working well with our processes
- the areas of our service delivery that you rate more highly than in 2025
- what didn't work so well for your school in 2025
- your views on key questions, e.g. returning co-requisite examination scripts, sufficiency of number of provided examination buffer packs, and readiness for a 'digital by default' approach to Level 1,

The table below summarises your survey feedback² including comparisons to the 2025 survey results where relevant, and our response.

¹ Noting that when responses are disaggregated by School EQI group, region and school type (English-medium or Kura Māori) there is some under and over representation in the survey responses.

² A full report of the survey results is available on request.

Topic	NZQA response
<p>Participation in NCEA</p> <p>For 78% of respondents (204 out of 261) attaining NCEA Level 1 in 2026 is the intended assessment outcome for more than half of their Year 11 students. An additional 13% (34 of 261) are offering some NCEA Level 1 achievement standards in 2026.</p> <p>11% of respondents (29 out of 261) were offering alternatives to NCEA, such as Cambridge International and International Baccalaureate.</p>	<p>The responses to these questions were similar to 2025.</p> <p>Once we receive complete enrolment and entries data from schools, we will be able to determine an accurate picture of NCEA Level 1 participation in 2026.</p>
<p>NCEA co-requisite assessments</p> <p>97% of respondents (253 out of 261) agreed or strongly agreed that making candidate responses to co-requisite assessments available to candidates once results are released would improve the support that schools kura can provide to their students.</p>	<p>NZQA has previously not returned NCEA Co-requisite assessments to students, in line with international practice for this type of assessment. However, due to consistent feedback that returning candidate responses would improve support for students, NZQA is currently exploring this option for future assessment events.</p>
<p>Digital assessment</p> <p>97% (254 out of 261) schools participated in digital external assessments or exams in 2025.</p> <p>93% of respondents (235 out of 254) agreed or strongly agreed that their schools kura was prepared for delivering digital assessment in 2025. This is an increase on 2025 when 82% of respondents (174 of 212) strongly agreed or somewhat agreed that their schools kura was prepared for delivering digital external assessments.</p>	<p>We are pleased that respondents expressed very positive views about school preparedness and NZQA's guidance on our digital assessment platform, and we acknowledge the work that schools have done to support this.</p>

Topic

NZQA response

85% of respondents (216 out of 254) agreed or strongly agreed that NZQA guidance on the digital assessment platform was clear. This is an increase on 2025 when 76% of respondents (161 of 212) strongly agreed or somewhat agreed that NZQA guidance on the digital assessment platform was clear.

66% of respondents (168 out of 254) agreed or strongly agreed that examination buffer packs based on 15% of entries in digital exams provided in 2025 were sufficient to meet requirements in each session. 19% (47 of 254) disagreed or strongly disagreed, and 15% (39 of 254) neither agreed nor disagreed.

65% of respondents (165 out of 254) agreed or strongly agreed that their school | kura is ready for a 'digital by default' approach to Level 1 external examinations in 2026 (where the expectation is that if an exam is available digitally, paper exams are only completed if individually required). 18% (46 of 254) disagreed or strongly disagreed, and 17% (39 of 254) neither agreed nor disagreed.

157 respondents provided additional comments about how NZQA could support schools | kura to deliver a positive digital experience for students:

Practice and Access: Provide access to digital practice assessments and the Assessment Master platform for mock and internal assessments so students can familiarise themselves with the environment.

Infrastructure Support: Improve infrastructure stability, specifically regarding high-speed internet connections and reliable power supplies in large exam spaces like gyms.

Device Suitability and Equity: Address device shortages by providing or funding more devices for students who do not have their own suitable technology.

Responses to the questions about buffer packs, the 'digital by default' for Level 1, and the comments provide us with useful insights to factor in to our digital strategy planning.

In 2026, NZQA will continue to strengthen the readiness, reliability, and equity of digital assessment delivery, building on feedback from schools | kura and work already underway. Priorities include increasing access to digital practice opportunities, improving platform reliability and resilience, strengthening assessment integrity and security, enhancing usability and accessibility, and ensuring

Topic	NZQA response
<p>Security and Authenticity: Enhance platform security to prevent unauthorized copy-pasting and the use of external AI tools like Grammarly during assessments.</p> <p>Technical Features: Clarify technical requirements early in the year, including support for Māori macrons and integrated text-to-speech or speech-to-text functionality.</p> <p>Subject Suitability: Re-evaluate the suitability of digital exams for subjects like Mathematics, Science, and Geography, where paper is often preferred for drawing diagrams and balancing equations.</p> <p>User Interface: Improve the digital interface to reduce the need for excessive scrolling between resource booklets and the question response area.</p>	<p>subject-appropriate delivery models across digital and paper assessment.</p> <p>These initiatives form part of NZQA’s phased, digital-by-default approach. Given the scale, technical complexity, and shared system dependencies involved, many of these developments are expected to progress over multiple years, with refinement and expansion continuing beyond 2026 in partnership with schools kura and the wider sector.</p>

External assessment

We surveyed teachers in December 2025 about the 2025 external examinations. We received responses from 80 teachers. This feedback fed into our post marking review processes, and helped with preparation for discussions with subject associations.

In the 2026 survey we provided an opportunity for any additional comments or feedback about particular assessments. The feedback provided focussed on:

- timely communication of changes to assessment specifications and standards (well before the start of the academic year), and
- removing or reducing the financial barriers associated with grade queries to ensure lower-income students are not at a disadvantage.

Topic

NZQA response

We asked about provisions provided to students with Special Assessment Conditions. 78% of respondents (203 out of 261) agreed or strongly agreed that provisions provided to students with Special Assessment Conditions were appropriate.

126 respondents provided additional comments about how we could we further support schools in relation to SAC:

Staffing Support: Provide additional funding to cover the costs of hiring, vetting, and training Reader/Writers and specialised supervisors.

Space Requirements: Support schools in managing the logistical demand for quiet, individual physical spaces which are increasingly scarce as SAC numbers grow.

Integrated Digital SAC: Ensure that assistive tools like text-to-speech (Polly) are standard and available for all digital external assessments.

Visual Accessibility: Improve the design of diagrams and charts to ensure they are accessible to students with visual impairments, such as colour-blindness.

Streamlined Processes: Offer more specialised guidance and resources for staff to help manage the growing administrative burden of SAC applications and delivery.

External moderation

60% of respondents (156 out of 261) agreed or strongly agreed that external moderation reports support teachers and kaiako to make valid and reliable assessment judgements. This is an increase on 2025 when 42% of respondents (88 of 211) strongly agreed or somewhat agreed external moderation reports

2024 was the first year of implementation of the new NCEA Level 1 standards. In-year moderation was also introduced. Moderation of the NCEA Level 1 standards was prioritised in 2024 and again in 2025.

We are pleased to see a lift in respondents' views

Topic	NZQA response
<p>support their teachers and kaiako to make valid and reliable assessment judgements.</p> <p>51% of respondents (133 out of 261) agreed or strongly agreed that the feedback in NZQA’s external moderation reports was clear. 23% (61 out of 261) strongly disagreed or disagreed. This is an improvement on 2025 when 38% of respondents (80 of 211) strongly agreed or somewhat agreed that the feedback in NZQA’s external moderation reports was clear, and 44% (92 of 211) of respondents strongly disagreed or somewhat disagreed.</p> <p>141 respondents provided additional feedback on moderation reports:</p> <p>Specific Feedback: Shift away from generic or “copy-pasted” comments toward detailed, constructive feedback that clearly identifies what was missing from student work.</p> <p>Exemplar Availability: Provide a larger volume of high-quality, up-to-date exemplars, with a particular focus on the newly introduced Level 1 standards.</p> <p>Interpretive Consistency: Ensure that moderator interpretations are consistent and align with previously provided exemplars and Pūtake.</p> <p>Consistency of feedback quality across subjects: Feedback for some subjects is more helpful than for others.</p> <p>Clarity of Requirements: Clearly outline the specific steps or content required to move between grade boundaries (e.g., from Not Achieved to Achieved).</p> <p>Responsive Query System: Improve the moderation query process to be more responsive and helpful when teachers seek clarification on a moderator’s decision.</p>	<p>of how external moderation reports can support teachers, and the clarity of feedback in NZQA’s external moderation reports, compared to 2024.</p> <p>In 2024, NZQA introduced a new feature in the External Moderation Application to encourage direct feedback from teachers. At the bottom of the Moderation Report teachers can select the Feedback button and rate the report of how ‘clear’, ‘detailed’ and ‘helpful’ the report was. What we immediately learned is that when we agree with assessor decisions the assessors still want to know why.</p> <p>NZQA will consider this feedback alongside other sector feedback relating to External Moderation, as part of its work to identify potential improvements to moderation feedback, systems and platforms.</p>

Topic	NZQA response
<p>159 respondents provided additional substantive feedback on what would help a schools kura submit work for external moderation within 10 days of submitting results to NZQA. These comments are summarised as follows:</p> <p>Automated Notifications: Implement automated reminders or pop-up notifications within student management systems (like KAMAR) to alert staff when moderation is due.</p> <p>Portal Reliability: Improve the speed and reliability of the submission portal to prevent technical crashes and time-consuming individual file uploads.</p> <p>Administrative Time: Provide dedicated time or funding for staff to complete the administrative tasks required for external moderation.</p> <p>Integrated Tracking: Develop a more integrated tracking system for Principal Nominees (PNs) to easily monitor outstanding moderation tasks following live data reporting.</p>	
<p>Managing National Assessment reviews</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 85 respondents had an MNA review in the last 12 months. 88% of respondents (75 out of 85) agreed or strongly agreed that the actions and considerations raised in NZQA's MNA reports were clear. In 2025, 89% of respondents (51 of 57) strongly agreed or somewhat agreed that the actions raised in their MNA report were useful. 91% of respondents (77 out of 85) agreed or strongly agreed that the MNA review process supports improvements to assessment and quality assurance processes at their school/kura. In 2025, 93% of respondents (53 of 57) strongly agreed or somewhat agreed that the MNA review 	<p>We are pleased with the positive feedback on how helpful our Managing National Assessment reviews are for schools.</p> <p>During 2026, we continue to refine our approach to ensure we focus on risks to the qualification.</p>

Topic	NZQA response
<p>process supports improvements to assessment and quality assurance processes at their school/kura.</p> <p>24 respondents provided additional substantive feedback on how we might improve the MNA process and support:</p> <p>Valued SRM Support: Maintain the current high level of professionalism and supportive engagement provided by School Relationship Managers (SRMs).</p> <p>Training Resources: Develop more online video tutorials and specialized onboarding resources for newly appointed Principal Nominees.</p> <p>Focus on Practice: Ensure the audit process remains focused on supporting practical assessment quality rather than creating “paperwork for paperwork’s sake.”</p> <p>Diverse Feedback: Incorporate larger student samples or digital surveys into the process to gather a broader range of student perspectives.</p> <p>Leadership Support: Provide tools that help school leadership identify and address inconsistent assessment practices within their own teaching teams.</p>	
<p>Assessor support</p> <p>240 of respondents used or engaged with NZQA’s resources and assessor support.</p> <p>68% of respondents (162 out of 240) agreed or strongly agreed that the NZQA’s resources (e.g. exemplars and assessment schedules) support teachers/kaiako to carry out assessments for individual standards. In 2025, 57% of respondents (110 of 192) strongly agreed or somewhat agreed that NZQA’s resources (e.g. exemplars and assessment schedules) support their teachers and kaiako to develop assessments which are aligned with individual standards.</p>	<p>We are pleased to see strong engagement with NZQA resources and assessor support by Principal’s Nominees and acknowledge the constructive feedback from school leaders.</p> <p>NZQA continues to develop assessment resources to support assessors. When standards change, suitable student work is sourced through external moderation to create new public exemplars and additional samples for the Assessor Practice Tool.</p>

Topic	NZQA response
<p>57% of respondents (138 out of 240) agreed or strongly agreed that the assessor support their schools kura accessed had helped improve their assessment capability. 35% of respondents (84 out of 240) neither agreed or disagreed which is an indicator that respondents were uncertain about how to answer this question.</p> <p>116 respondents provided additional substantive feedback on how NZQA could improve our assessor support offerings:</p> <p>Alignment of Documents: Ensure that assessment standards, clarifications, and exemplars are fully consistent to avoid confusing or contradictory information.</p> <p>Full-Work Exemplars: Provide complete student work examples rather than truncated snippets, showing the full breadth required for different grade levels.</p> <p>Broader Coverage: Expand the range of standards supported on the Pūtake platform to include a wider variety of subjects and levels.</p> <p>Pre-Moderation Features: Introduce a feature where teachers can submit their assessment tasks for feedback or “approval” prior to use with students.</p> <p>Consistent Expectations: Maintain steady expectations and interpretations over time to prevent the stress of “shifting goalposts” during moderation.</p> <p>82 respondents provided additional feedback on how NZQA can improve support and resources for creating assessments with Te Reo Māori and Mātauranga Māori content. Their feedback is summarised as follows:</p> <p>Bilingual Resources: Provide English translations for Māori-medium specifications and resources to support non-fluent Principal Nominees and staff.</p>	<p>School leaders have emphasised the importance of clear alignment between standards, clarifications and exemplars. Maintaining alignment is an ongoing focus, particularly as standards change. Where misalignment occurs, older resources are unpublished and replaced as new, aligned materials are developed.</p> <p>A mix of full-work and partial exemplars is provided, reflecting subject-specific needs to manage authenticity. The online Assessor Support programme initially prioritised outlier standards and then new Level One RAS standards. As these needs have largely been met, coverage is now being progressively expanded across subjects and levels based on greatest need.</p> <p>To support consistent interpretation and use of resources, NZQA provides guidance on recontextualising assessment tasks through online modules and the Transforming Assessment Praxis programme.</p> <p>Feedback on assessment resources supporting Te Reo Māori and Mātauranga Māori will inform ongoing development of bilingual materials, subject-specific resources, and professional learning and collaboration opportunities.</p>

Topic	NZQA response
<p>Workshops and Wānanga: Increase the frequency of face-to-face workshops and Wānanga with content creators to deepen understanding of the material.</p>	
<p>Community Building: Facilitate online networks or communities for Kaiako to share resources and engage in peer moderation.</p>	
<p>Standardised Concepts: Provide lists of suggested Te Reo terms and concepts to ensure consistency and accuracy across different assessment tasks.</p>	
<p>Subject Specifics: Address the lack of resources for specific areas, such as Te Ao Haka, by expanding the material available on the Pūtake platform.</p>	

Data and Information

77% of respondents (202 out of 261) agreed or strongly agreed that their schools | kura receives the support needed in relation to managing school data.

We are pleased that respondents feel supported in their school data management. NZQA has worked with SMS vendors to transition away from secondary batch processing to APIs, which allow your SMS to communicate directly with NZQA systems. Schools are no longer required to upload monthly batch files.

66% of respondents (172 out of 261) agreed or strongly agreed that they can easily access the information they need from NZQA’s website and portals.

NZQA upgraded its Learner Portal in 2025 to improve usability and access to information.

Communication and engagement

88 respondents provided additional substantive feedback on engagement (i.e. communication methods and frequency) with school | kura:

- **SRM Continuity:** Minimise the frequent shuffling of School Relationship Managers to maintain stable and consistent relationships with schools.
- **Simplified Navigation:** Consolidate the multiple web portals and simplify the website structure to make it easier to find up-to-date forms.
- **Valued Direct Mail:** Continue using the “PN EmailLink” and task lists, as these are viewed as highly effective and timely communication tools.
- **Website Usability:** Improve the search functionality and overall user experience of the student-facing side of the NZQA website.
- **Immediate Responses:** Maintain the high level of accessibility and responsiveness currently shown by individual SRMs when contacted with queries.

Strengthening our communications channels, accessibility, and usefulness of NZQA’s online resources and support for schools remains an ongoing priority.

Overall feedback on NZQA quality assurance and support functions

Topic	NZQA response
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82% of respondents (214 out of 261) agreed or strongly agreed that NZQA’s quality assurance (e.g. Managing National Assessment reviews and external moderation of school-based assessment) and support functions enable their schools | kura to improve their assessment / Aromatawai practices.

The table below summarises the level of agreement:

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
39	175	39	7	1
15%	67%	15%	3%	0%

The agreement rate for this overall feedback question is an NZQA accountability reporting measure. Answers and written comments to the more detailed questions within the survey give NZQA a clear steer on areas for improvement (as well as those that are working well).

In 2025, 77% of respondents (160 of 208) strongly agreed or somewhat agreed that NZQA’s quality assurance and support functions enable their schools | kura to improve their assessment / aromatawai practices.