



# Digital Assessment for NCEA

## Digital assessment is an established feature of the NCEA assessment system.

In this paper we look at uptake in schools and kura. We also discuss the benefits of digital NCEA assessments for students, along with our research on student experiences with digital assessment and their achievement compared to paper-based assessment.

## Uptake of digital assessment

NZQA has been offering digital assessment since 2016. We now offer most of our NCEA end of year examinations digitally. This year 69 of 97 NCEA examination sessions (71%) and 8 NZ Scholarship examination sessions will have assessments available digitally<sup>1</sup>.

To date, NZQA has operated an 'opt-in' model where schools can choose the extent of their participation in digital end of year examinations for those examinations that are available digitally. We analysed student participation and school engagement in the 2024 academic year to better understand the uptake.

<sup>1</sup> Digital assessments are not offered in some subjects in the Science and Mathematics learning areas for example, as these assessments require students to write up their calculations. Music is another example.

## About digital assessments

Digital examinations have the same content and a similar layout to their paper-based equivalents, but students respond on devices rather than using pen and paper. Where examinations include a resource booklet, these booklets are still paper based.

Students attempt digital examinations in an exam centre (typically their school), supervised by NZQA staff.

Assessments for NCEA co-requisite standards and some Te Marautanga o Aotearoa Level 1 subjects/ wāhanga ako are designed primarily for digital delivery. Schools and kura can print PDFs of these assessments for students to use if necessary, instead of completing the assessment on their device.

## NCEA and New Zealand Scholarship examinations offered digitally in 2025

	NCEA Level 1	NCEA Level 2	NCEA Level 3	New Zealand Scholarship
Examinations available digitally	22	23	23	8
Examinations available only on paper	3	11	14	20
Total	25	35	37	28

## Student participation

By the end of 2024, 59% of Year 11-13 students had participated in at least one end of year digital examination, up from 49% in 2023.

Just over a quarter (27%) of all end of year NCEA examination results were from assessments completed digitally, and where digital assessment was available, 61% of examination results were assessed digitally. Digital uptake is highest for NCEA Level 1 examination results.

Table 1 summarises the uptake against all examination results, while Table 2 summarises the uptake against the examination results for examinations which are offered digitally and on paper.

In addition, 78% of Year 10 students participated in one or more of the digital co-requisite assessments in 2024. Only 5,191 of the 256,596 co-requisite assessments were completed on paper.

**Table 1: Student participation in end of year NCEA examinations, 2024**

Level	Total number of results	Total number of digital results	% of all results that were digital
1	114,507	58,941	52%
2	256,751	53,079	21%
3	164,065	30,068	18%
Total	535,323	142,088	27%

**Table 2: Student participation in end of year NCEA examinations where digital assessment is offered, 2024**

Level	Total number of results where digital assessment is offered	Total number of digital results	% of digital results in subjects offered digitally
1	79,960	58,941	74%
2	97,959	53,079	54%
3	56,901	30,068	53%
Total	234,820	142,088	61%

## School engagement

We have been tracking the digital engagement status of each school and kura on a five-point scale from 'No digital engagement' to 'Embedded digital engagement', meaning they are engaging in a substantial amount of digital assessment.

Of the 503 schools with students who participate in end of year examinations, 405 schools (81%) have an 'Embedded' or 'High' digital engagement profile. Schools with an 'Embedded' or 'High' digital engagement profile can be found across all school EQI groups.

The digital engagement profile by School Equity Index Group shows only small differences.

Table 3 summarises the digital engagement profiles of schools and kura, by socio-economic barriers to attainment (School Equity Index Group).

While the uptake in digital assessment has been trending up for a number of years, there is more work to do to encourage and support schools to engage with digital assessment in those examinations where digital is an option.

**Table 3: Digital engagement profiles of schools and kura, by School Equity Index Group**

	Embedded	High	Medium	Low	No digital engagement	Total schools/kura
<b>Fewer</b>	27%	48%	10%	7%	8%	83
<b>Moderate</b>	37%	49%	10%	1%	2%	209
<b>More</b>	21%	57%	11%	3%	7%	175
<b>Unassigned</b>	25%	44%	11%	0%	19%	36
<b>Total schools/kura</b>	146	259	53	15	30	

## Benefits of digital assessment for students

We have identified a range of benefits for students who engage in their assessments digitally, as well as their schools and kura. For students, the benefits include:

**Reflecting the way students learn and work** – digital assessment fits in with the common experience of most of today's students: the way they learn, the way they are taught, and the way they produce and submit work for assignments. Students used to typing rather than writing can confidently take the opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge. They can review and edit their answers cleanly and legibly without worrying that marking might be influenced by the appearance of an examination script or assignment.

**Greater accessibility** – there is more supporting functionality available in a digital format, than in a hard copy assessment. The available technology can eliminate some of the traditional barriers to assessment that exist with a paper-based format, especially for students with learning difficulties or disabilities. These include reading questions aloud, spell checker, and other assistive technologies.

**Reflecting Te Ao Māori** – digital assessments can more easily be delivered in both English and te reo Māori. Content can be adapted to enable students to respond in contexts relevant to their culture and experience, which reflect Te Ao Māori and incorporate Mātauranga Māori.

## What our evaluations have found

In the early years of the introduction of digital assessment in schools and kura, we conducted evaluations, including satisfaction surveys of participating students. We received valuable feedback from students which informed early modifications. Those students who participated in the surveys rated their experience consistently high.

Given the features available when students undertake

examinations digitally, such as the ability to easily edit text and move paragraphs around, we have been interested in understanding whether undertaking an assessment on our digital platform advantaged or disadvantaged students. We developed a statistical model to evaluate this. The model compared groups of students using paper and digital who were matched on 'ability', using their grades in internal assessment as a proxy for 'ability'.

Earlier evaluations provided no conclusive evidence of a difference in achievement between the two comparison groups of students that could be attributed to the examination format (digital or paper-based).

Since 2020, engagement in digital assessment has been steadily growing. We repeated the study in 2025, focussing on English Level 2 and Level 3 students who undertook assessment in 2024 for the six available externally assessed standards<sup>2</sup>. We found that comparable students achieved slightly better on digital assessments than on paper for English Level 2. For English Level 3, the findings were not statistically significant as to a difference in performance across the digital and paper formats. We will repeat this work in early 2026 for the 2025 year.

[The technical paper is published here.](#)

## Future direction for digital assessment

NZQA's roll out of digital assessment has been careful to keep pace with the readiness of schools and students, and mindful of the need for digital assessment technologies to prove themselves reliable.

The strong uptake of digital assessment, particularly at NCEA Level 1, supports further moves for digital to become the default setting in subjects where it is available. It will be important that schools can continue to be able to opt out and sit exams on paper where there is a reason for doing so.

High levels of engagement also support expanding the range of subjects where digital assessment is available. However, NZQA acknowledges that some subjects remain unsuitable for being assessed

<sup>2</sup> NCEA Level 1 was not included given the higher uptake of digital in English Level 1 (73% vs 56% for English Level 2 and 55% for English Level 3). The model had difficulty in finding sufficient matches on 'ability' between students in the digital and paper groups for English Level 1.

digitally. This is particularly the case with subjects where students predominantly use pen and paper for their workings, such as mathematics. Over time, the nature of assessment may change or the functionality available within the digital environment may improve to enable such subjects to be taken digitally, but NZQA has no intention of moving a subject to digital without there being a strong benefit for students.

## Conclusion

Digital assessment has benefits for students, including that it reflects the way they learn and work in class. Digital assessment can also remove accessibility barriers faced by students through the availability of assistive technologies like reading the examination questions out loud, and spell checker. Assistive technology availability in digital assessments will over time reduce the need for special assessment conditions.

Digital assessment is now well established within the NCEA assessment system, with almost all schools taking part. While NZQA will continue working to encourage and support digital engagement, digital assessment practices are high or embedded in the majority of schools across each School Equity Index Group.

The strong engagement with digital assessment – particularly at NCEA Level 1 – supports ongoing moves to shift students from traditional paper assessments to our digital platform, and the development of more assessments primarily for digital devices, where subjects are suitable for digital delivery.



Mana Tohu Mātauranga o Aotearoa  
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