

Design with students

A suggestion for implementing the strategy
'Design considerations in NCEA assessments'
from the Guide: [Universal Design for Learning](#)

Includes:

Introduce UDL to ākonga

Support student agency

Support autonomy and choice making

Help students decode achievement standards

Useful resources

Inclusive Education

From

Guide: [Universal Design for Learning](#)

Strategy: [Design considerations in NCEA assessments](#)

Suggestion: [Design with students](#)

Date

19 June 2026

Link

inclusive.tki.org.nz/guides/universal-design-for-learning/co-design-with-students

Introduce UDL to ākongā

Support ākongā to co-design teaching and learning approaches that are going to work for them.

Introduce them to UDL and review current needs and preferences.

Identify together potential barriers to learning and useful supports.

- 1 Play the [Understanding Universal Design for Learning video](#) or the [UDL and the NZC video](#) to introduce ākongā to UDL.
- 2 Discuss key themes and share why you are learning about and also introducing them to UDL.
- 3 Invite ākongā to complete the downloadable "[Supporting learning: What's in the way & what would help?](#)" activity or create a similar activity for your own context.
- 4 Review completed templates (here is an example) and note common barriers and requests for support.
- 5 If possible, discuss as a department or learning area and take a coordinated approach.
- 6 Discuss with ākongā possible actions you will take to meet their learning needs and preferences and get their feedback.
- 7 Trial changes in practice, review with ākongā and continue to explore UDL together.

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Support student agency

Intentionally supporting engagement is an integral part of a UDL approach.

Wherever possible provide learners with discretion and autonomy.

In your subject could you offer a combination of the following:

- ✓ Partial or complete student agency over context
- ✓ Student agency over choice of how best to demonstrate knowledge
- ✓ The collection of evidence over time rather than a set event
- ✓ The ability to be assessed when the student feels ready, rather than waiting for a set event
- ✓ Student agency over the design of the assessment
- ✓ Student agency over the design of supports such as check-ins, time management templates, planners, evidence gathering tools.

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Support autonomy and choice making

Students will differ in how much and what kind of choices they prefer to have.

Simply providing choices is not enough.

Read [CAST's Optimize individual choice and autonomy](#) for short overview of considerations.

Key messages:

- Offer choices or options that are relevant and useful to ākongā
- Ensure ākongā have access to the supports or tools to make use of the choices offered
- Discuss with ākongā how to make a choice that is going to work for them
- Support ākongā to make a choice that suits their needs, preferences and strengths
- Scaffold the way choices can be made by making levels of autonomy available to all ākongā.

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Help students decode achievement standards

As students process information differently, create opportunities to build understanding in multiple ways.

Consider using a combination of approaches.

Invite students in small groups to:

- ✓ find the achievement standards and criteria for your subject on [NCEA | NZ Curriculum subjects](#). (Go to the Assessment tab within each learning area to find these)
- ✓ express both the standard and achievement criteria in their own words. (Open the assessment tab and click on each relevant standard)
- ✓ define the difference between achieved merit and excellence could look like, in their own words
- ✓ unpack the standard, what is the purpose of this learning? What do you need to demonstrate? (Select the “Unpacking” tab in the standard)
- ✓ look at the assessment activities and identify a context that resonates with you. (Select the “Activities” tab in the standard).

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Useful resources



Assessment case studies from teachers

Teachers in a range of subjects describe their innovative internal assessment practice in short videos. Teachers describe assessing their students' achievement in integrated and cross-curricular learning situations, or via project-based learning where students have agency to solve a problem through a project, or through personalised assessment in response to learning grounded in the student's context. Discussion questions are included.

Publisher: New Zealand Qualifications Authority

[Visit website](#)



Assessment case studies from students

Students whose learning has been the subject of innovative assessment describe how their learning is now more engaging. They outline the difference it makes when they can choose the context – whether that's based on a personal interest, a familiar situation or part of a personal interest project – and speak about achieving beyond their own expectations. Discussion questions are included.

Publisher: New Zealand Qualifications Authority

[Visit website](#)



Connections between subjects and career pathways

Ki hea rā? (Where to?) are downloadable posters which show the connections between classroom learning and young people's aspirations. Use them to bring subjects to life by making connections between the curriculum and career pathways. They are useful for ākonga and their whānau when considering subject choices.

[Visit website](#)

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