

Minister of Education knew new qualification could block way forward for thousands of students

Secondary education is about helping young people identify their strengths, building competence across time in ways that work for them. This approach benefits our wider communities and society as all young people are given a path forward.

Erica Stanford knew there was a real risk that thousands more young people could leave school without a qualification under the new Certificate of Education, but pressed ahead without putting that risk squarely before the public.

In 2025 the Ministry of Education did modelling to see how the proposed new qualification would affect the student achievement numbers. This is standard practice for the Ministry when new initiatives are rolled out in the education system, so that they can give the Minister informed advice.

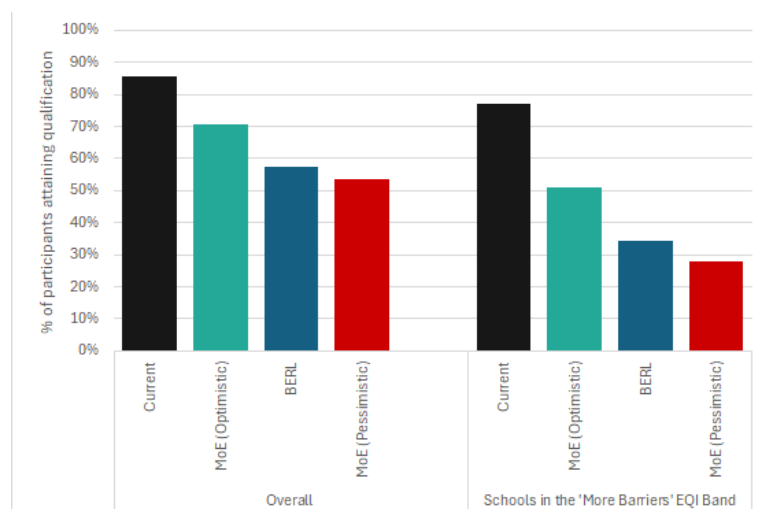
They did this 18 months ago, but didn't release it.

PPTA requested the documents under the Official Information Act. The information reveals that the Ministry advised the Minister Erica Stanford of a “potential significant drop in attainment of the qualifications” under the proposed new qualification.

The Ministry's modelling shows Year 12 achievement rates falling by 15 percentage points in the Ministry's 'optimistic' scenario and plummeting by 27 percentage points in a 'pessimistic scenario'. These numbers are an average across the nation, but the impact is not evenly shared. Achievement drops are most severe for the poorest schools, ranging from falls of 27 to 52 percent

These results are strikingly similar to the independent modelling that PPTA commissioned from independent researchers at BERL which found that almost 15,000 additional students could be at risk of not achieving the new NZ Certificate of Education. The Minister dismissed this research as “disgusting” and “scaremongering in defence of mediocrity” even though she had had the same information given to her as Ministry advice.

Figure 1. Estimated percentage of participants attaining the Year 12 qualification under assessment system changes, MoE and BERL modelling

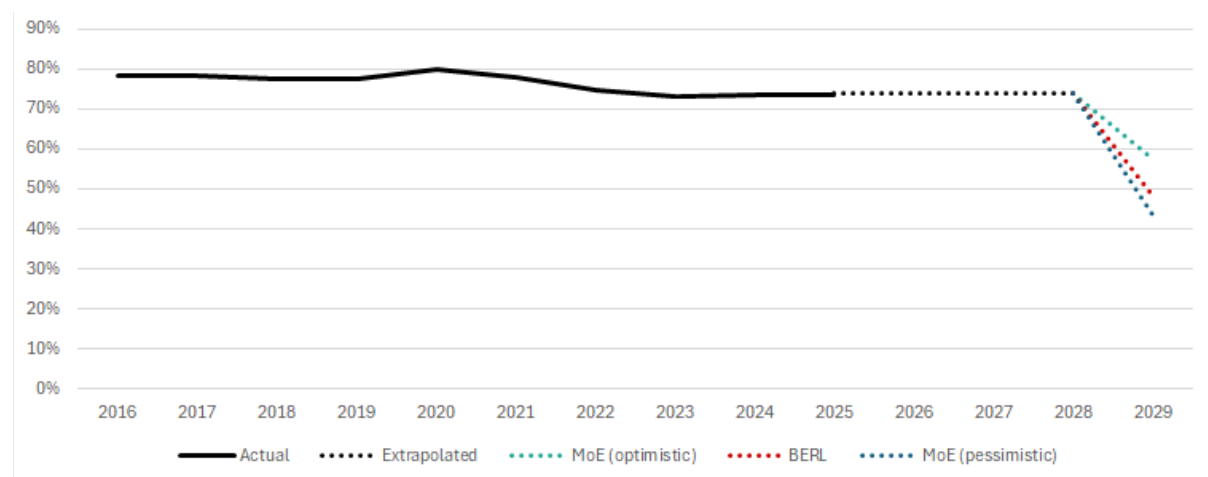


The Minister has also repeatedly claimed the replacement of NCEA has strong support from schools, parents and the wider community. However, the advice now released shows she chose to progress a model that was not the preferred option of her own Principals' Advisory Group (PAG). This group is made up of current secondary principals who the Minister has selected to give her advice based on their first-hand experiences in schools.

The PAG supported an option more likely to address equity concerns, and more closely aligned with qualifications such as Cambridge.

On the basis of this modelling, and BERL's, the drops in attainment we could potentially see in 2029 are like nothing we have experienced before.

Figure 2. Enrolment-based Year 12 Students Attaining NCEA Level 2 or Equivalent, 2016-2026, plus extrapolated for 2026-28 and modelled for 2029



Note: these achievement rates are on the standard 'enrolment basis' whereas the MoE-modelled results in the previous graph were presented on a 'participation basis'.

The Minister's delays to the timeline for implementing the qualifications are not enough to address the concerns raised by PPTA's BERL report and the Minister's own advice.

Teachers and schools are being asked to deliver one of the biggest changes to secondary education in a generation without the time or resources they need to make it work, and thousands of students face leaving school without knowing where their strengths lie.

PPTA will continue to advocate for these critical changes to meet the needs of students and communities, and for teachers to be supported and resourced in their implementation.