

Getting ready for digital exams

2020 Guide for Principal's Nominees and school technical support

July 2020



Getting ready for digital exams



Introduction

This guide covers what you need to know to prepare for digital exams, from infrastructure and internet capability to getting your teachers and students confident with the exam software.

If your school is planning to enter students for one of the 58 digital exams being offered in 2020, it's important to make sure you, your students and your staff are ready for digital exams.

Updates may be made to this guide until 1 July, as we finalise digital exams for 2020. Make sure you have the most up-to-date version by checking the link here: <https://www.nzqa.govt.nz/assets/About-us/Future-State/NCEA-Online/school-readiness-guide.pdf>

You can also use our [NCEA Online preparation timeline](#) to get an overview of who needs to do what, when as you prepare for digital exams.

What's new in 2020

In 2020, two thirds of exams will be available digitally. Te Reo Māori and Te Reo Rangatira have been expanded to all three levels as well as the addition of all externally assessed foreign languages and Psychology. You can find a full subject list here: <https://www.nzqa.govt.nz/about-us/future-state/digital-assessment-ncea-online/about-ncea-online/>

Table of Contents

- Getting ready for digital exams
Introduction.....P2
- Digital exams: Getting started.....P3
- Where to get support.....P4
- Prepare your students.....P5-6
- Check your infrastructure.....P7
- Check devices.....P8-9
- Prepare exam rooms.....P10
- Frequently asked questions.....P11

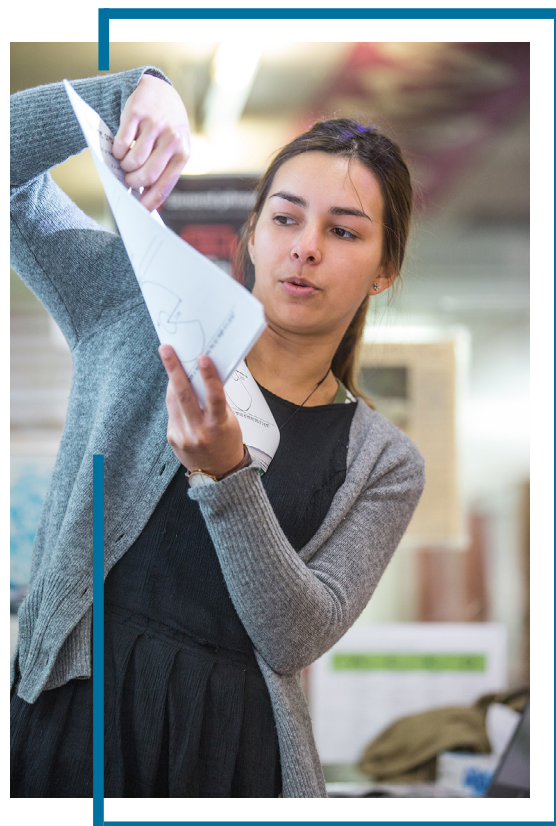


Digital Exams: Getting started



Whether this is your first year entering students in a digital exam or you're increasing the number of entries, you'll need to consider:

- Are the students learning digitally in class? If they're not, digital exams might not be the best option right now.
- Do you have the space required for the number of students you plan to have sit digital exams?
- Who is providing devices - your school or the students, and are these suitable for digital exams?
- Will there be enough suitable devices available for students and supervisors?
- Are your Exam Centre Manager and supervisors confident using computer technology?
- If you're increasing participation, consider what went well last year and what areas to focus on to improve e.g. student/teacher confidence in the platform, internet capacity, checking devices
- Do you have IT support available during exams?



Dipping your toe in

If it's your first time offering a digital exam, we recommend taking a staged approach to digital exams. Start small and dip a toe in by offering the option of digital exams to a few motivated students, or a select number of classes in a year group.

This gives you a chance to test your school infrastructure and processes to make sure you are ready to offer digital exams to a larger cohort of students.

Paper exams will remain an option for all students, including those entered in digital exams, while we transition from paper to digital exams.

Plan, prepare, practice

These are the core principles you need to increase confidence and ensure a successful digital exam experience.

- Make a **plan** - what can you do now? What needs to be done when? Who needs to do it?
- **Prepare** your students and staff by letting them know what to expect during the year and make sure your digital entries are accurate before 9 September.
- **Practice** makes perfect. Familiarise yourself, your teachers and your students with the exam platform and what to expect in a digital exam. Test your network and infrastructure to make sure it can handle your planned number of entries.



Where to get support



NZQA is here to support your school while you transition to offering digital exams. If you have questions about digital exams, get in touch.

Contact us:

- Get in touch with your school relationship manager by phone or email.
- Email us at ncea.online@nzqa.govt.nz.

NCEA Online self-guided tutorial series

NZQA will be offering a self-guided tutorial series for schools getting ready for digital exams from July onwards.

This series is designed for PNs and covers the basics of what you need to know and do if your school has students sitting a digital exam over 10 short videos with accompanying resources.

This tutorial is best for schools which have not run a digital exam before or that need a refresher on the technical and infrastructure requirements for digital exams.

NCEA Online scaling up support

NZQA will also be offering support and information for schools who are scaling up: increasing their participation in digital exams.

NZQA will be providing resources to help you plan for scaling up and consider the different areas where you may need additional support during this transition.

This will be available from August onwards.

NCEA Online Q&A sessions

NZQA will be running Q&A sessions for both schools new to digital exams and those scaling up. All sessions will be facilitated by NZQA school relationship managers.

This collaborative sessions will give you an opportunity to ask questions about and discuss some of the core topics related to digital exams, such as effectively managing change as you move to digital exams and preparing your infrastructure.

You will have the opportunity to hear what other schools in your session are do and work together to problem solve common issues.

More information on the sessions will be available in July.

Support guide for teachers

In addition to this guide for PNs, we have also released a guide for teachers on what they need to know to prepare their students for digital exams. You can find the guide to share with your teachers [here](#).



Prepare your students



It's good practice for students to become familiar with the exam software, as well as being confident using a device.

Students should complete practice activities on the device they will be using in a digital exam. Being familiar with the device they're using increases their confidence.

Practice activities

NZQA has practice activities available at www.nzqa.govt.nz/ncea/ncea-exams-and-portfolios/external/digital-exams/

These show students how to use the digital exam platform. These resources also prepare them for what to expect before, during and after a digital exam.

Activities and resources include:

- Activities to become familiar with the exam and messages they may receive during an exam.
- Digital exam papers for subjects from 2019 being offered online in 2020 can be accessed from the [student exam hub](#). Individual standards are available on the [subject](#) page. The responses are not saved, these activities let them experience the look and feel of online exams.

Past exams that include copyright material require a login for access. Principal Nominees's can find the login via the school's NZQA provider account. Audio files and resource booklets for language exams can be downloaded from the resources for externally assessed standards.

Students can use this login to access the exam. They will have to agree to the copyright terms and conditions prior to entering the exam.

- Information on preparing devices for an exam.
- How students log in, what they need to bring and what happens if something goes wrong during a digital exam. Information on the login process for 2020 will be confirmed in July.

Online learning skills

Students sitting digital exams should be confident using a device. Skills your students will need include:

- Reading and navigating web pages
- Typing an answer
- Using word processing
- Tapping/moving a cursor to locate and select information on a page.

Consider whether you need to include student activities to increase confidence in these skills along with getting familiar with the digital exam platform.

[TKI](#) provides teaching resources for digital learning you can refer to.

We also recommend teachers become familiar with the practice activities, so they can support the preparation of their students.

Your school should plan class time to run through the generic and subject based practice activities with students.

Students entering a digital exam should complete practice activities beforehand, to ensure they're prepared.

Learner login for exams

Students will use the same login details to access their digital exam as they use to access their learner login.

Make sure students new to NCEA have set up their learner login account and returning students know their login information before going into their digital exam.

Students will receive information on setting up their accounts on their NSN cards, distributed to schools on 22 July as well as on their candidate information sheet and exam admission slip available in October.

You could also add this information to your parent portal so they can remind students to create/update their account as required.



Prepare your students



What your students need to know

Your students need to know what to expect on the day of a digital exam and will have questions. The most common questions have been answered below. A complete list of common questions and answers can be found on the digital exams page for students [here](#).

What if I decide not to do the exam online on the day?

You can choose to move to paper at any time before or during the exam.

If you have started a standard online, you're encouraged to complete the standard digitally before moving to the next standard on paper. If you choose to switch to paper, the rest of the exam must be completed on paper. You will not be able to switch back to the digital exam.

What happens if I move away from the exam window?

If you attempt to move away from the exam or try to access other areas of your device, you'll get a warning message. If you do not return to the exam immediately, you'll be locked out of the exam.

To ensure you are not locked out by mistake, ensure your screensaver, notifications and automatic updates are disabled.

The supervisor can unlock the exam but may need to report the possible breach to NZQA.

What if I have a problem with the online exam that can't be resolved quickly?

You can switch to paper. You do not need to copy what you have completed so far onto the paper exam as this will be saved on the exam software server.

If you are not able to work while your supervisor and technical support will look for a solution, you will be given additional time at the end of the exam to make up for time lost and ensure you have three hours to complete the exam.

Will I still get a resource booklet?

If your exam includes a separate printed booklet of resource material your exam supervisor will give this to you.

Can I use different languages when I'm answering a digital exam?

Yes, you will be able to use a different language, as appropriate for the subject, by switching the Language Keyboards. You need to ensure you have the language keyboard software packs downloaded and fully enabled prior to entering the exam.

We strongly suggest having practiced this language switching on the device you intend to use for your digital examination before the examinations.

As with paper exams, you can answer your exams in English or Te Reo Māori, if the exam allows it. A list of subjects that can be answered in Te Reo Māori can be found [here](#).

How often is my work saved?

Your work is saved every 30 seconds and when moving between standards.

It is stored in the cloud service of the exam software provider for access by NZQA.

What happens if my device loses connection during an exam?

If you have lost connection, a pop-up screen will alert you if you try to move between pages.

Don't worry! Raise your hand and the supervisor and technical support staff will help you.

Don't refresh or close your browser. Once connection is established again, the supervisor can confirm that your work has been saved.



Check your infrastructure



What your school needs

Having a strong internet connection is key to ensuring a successful experience.

Your school needs to ensure your network has the required **coverage** and **bandwidth** for the digital exams you are offering.

Your IT support will need to be closely involved in making sure your network and internet connection are robust enough to support all your students sitting digital exams.

The capacity you need will depend on the number of students entered for digital exams and where they are seated in your school.

Testing your internet capacity

To test your internet strength, have all students who are scheduled to complete a digital exam sign onto their device and play [this](#) video while in the space you will be using on the day of the exam.

If any of the devices experience lagging or can't load the video, this suggests you will need to increase your internet bandwidth or segregate your network. As well as strength, you need to consider coverage and test for any dead zones in exam rooms.

N4L support

NZQA will be partnering again with Network for Learning (N4L) to provide **network assurance checks** for schools with students entered in digital exams.

This involves working with your school's local IT support to check internet equipment in exam rooms, assess the performance of wireless infrastructure and determine if there are wireless connection 'dead spots'.

In the report, N4L can advise on setting up the school's digital exam environment in certain ways, including the use of VLANs and whitelisting the exam URL. Making changes are the school's responsibility.

N4L will contact schools directly in term 3 to arrange a network assurance check.



Network tips for the day of a digital exam



- Make sure you have technical support available during the exam, either on-site or off-site
- Prioritise the digital exam traffic: restrict use of the network in year 9 and 10 classes and other connected devices e.g. phones
- Segregate your network, especially for larger exams.



Check devices



Whether your students bring their own device or the school provides them, you will need to ensure they meet the specifications for a digital exam.

Most laptop and desktop computers are compatible with the digital exam platform, including Chromebooks. Netbooks are not recommended due to having small screens and slow processors.

Students should have a chance to familiarise themselves with the device they'll be using prior to the exam.

Have IT support check devices or use the guidance below with students. Make sure you set aside time before exams begin to complete a check.

The digital exam device readiness check on our website shows the browser, operating system and screen resolution of the device being used.

You can find it here: <https://www.nzqa.govt.nz/ncea/ncea-exams-and-portfolios/external/device-readiness-check/>

Device specifications

- Laptop or desktop computer
Touch screen portable devices can only be used if they have physically attached keyboards. Students using on-screen touch functionality will be locked out of the exam by the security mechanisms in the software.
- Fully charged with minimum 3 hours of battery power or access to power source
- The operating system being used is one of the following
 - Microsoft Windows 7, 8.1, 10+
 - Apple Mac OS 10.13+
 - Chrome OS
- The device has one of the following browsers installed
 - Google Chrome, version 74+
 - Safari (Mac), version 11+

Note: *The exam software cannot be accessed from an outdated or unsupported browser. Firefox, IE, Edge and Opera are NOT supported.*

Device set up

- Notifications, screensavers and automatic updates must be disabled
- Screen resolution must be set to minimum 1366 x 768 pixels
- The browser must be set to full screen
- The device must be connected to the internet through the school's WiFi network, or a cabled connection
- A language keyboard has been installed and enabled, for students answering in Te Reo Māori or a foreign language.



Using power banks in digital exams

Students may bring power banks into the exam room. These must be stored in their sealed emergency evacuation pack under their desk.

Students can ask the supervisor to retrieve and plug in the power bank if required. Any instances of power bank use will be recorded by the supervisor.

Power banks with wireless capability and/or memory/storage capacity will not be allowed and a student bringing this type of device will constitute a breach of exam rules.



Check devices



Guidance on device set up

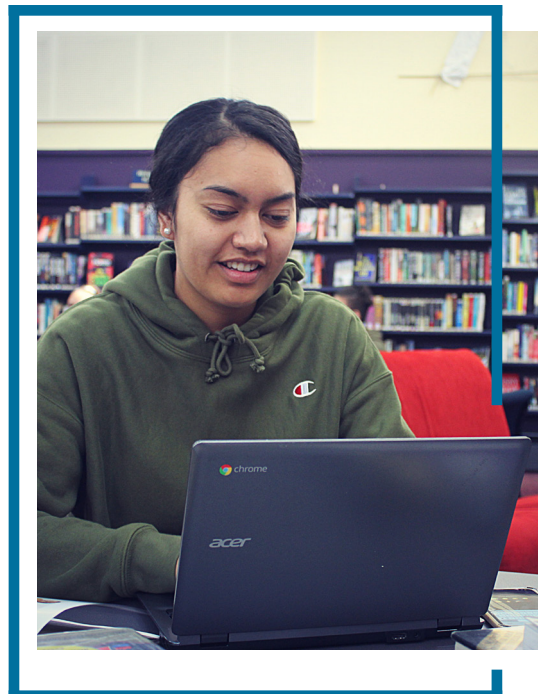
If a device does not meet the specifications for a digital exam, it will need to be updated to meet the specifications or an alternative device will need to be used.

Use the links below to find more information on how to complete the tasks necessary to prepare a device for a digital exam.

If notifications, screensavers and automatic updates are not properly disabled, students may be locked out of their digital exam. A supervisor will need to unlock the exam for a student to continue.

The table below links to detailed instructions to complete set up tasks, based on the operating system and browser a device is using.

If possible, have technical support on-site or available to assist with device set up on days with digital exams.



How do I disable notifications?	Chrome OS	Microsoft Windows	Apple Mac
How do I disable my screensaver?	Chrome OS	Microsoft Windows	Apple Mac
How do I disable/schedule automatic updates?	Chrome OS	Microsoft Windows	Apple Mac
How do I update my browser?	Google Chrome	Safari (Mac)	
How do I set my browser to fullscreen?	Google Chrome	Safari (Mac)	
How do I install and enable a language keyboard?	Chrome OS	Microsoft Windows	Apple Mac



Prepare exam rooms



Setting up your space

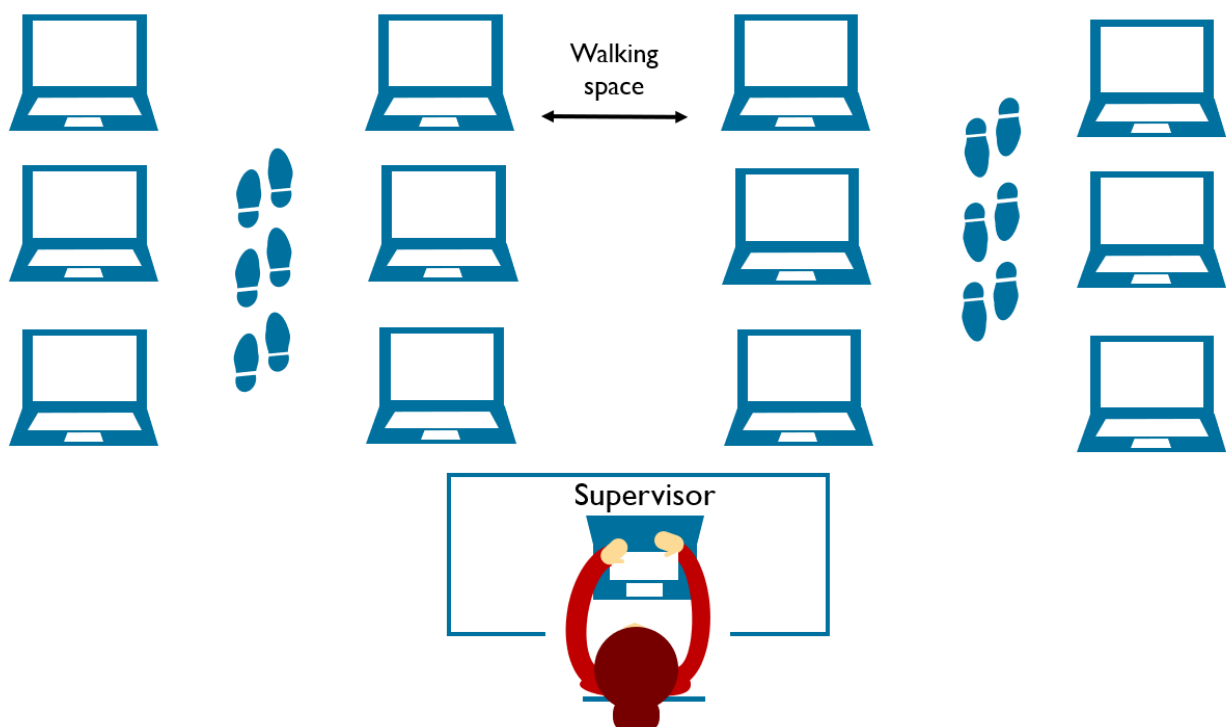
Space requirements for digital exams are different from paper exams. Work with your Exam Centre Manager to set up the right kind of space to offer digital exams. You'll need to keep the following in mind:

- Exam rooms must comply with health and safety regulations. This includes ensuring any plugs or cords are not a hazard.
- Each room requires one device (laptop/desktop) for the exam supervisor(s) to monitor the exam from the supervisor dashboard.
- We recommend, if space allows it, having separate rooms for students sitting exams digitally and on paper. This makes invigilation easier and reduces distractions for students.
- If students sitting both paper and digital versions of the exam do share a room, place students sitting the exam digitally at the back of the room to reduce distractions.

Space considerations for invigilation

- Ensure students are placed far enough apart so they cannot see the screens of other students.
- Ensure supervisors can easily walk between rows during the exam.
- Ensure supervisors can observe multiple students' screens from one vantage point. This may be between rows or by standing at the back of the exam room.

Example set up



Digital exams FAQs



These frequently asked questions have been put together based on common questions we received from you by email and in our 2019 digital exams webinars. A full list of FAQs can be found [here](#).

Can schools access the same software you use – for example to use for practice exams?

NZQA planned to explore offering a service for practice exams for delivery in 2021. As part of the COVID-19 response to support schools and students, we are developing a proposal for an early and limited implementation of NCEA Online Practice Exams in 2020. We are working with a small group of Principal Nominees and Subject Association representatives to scope a limited service. More details will be available in June.

Do schools need to supply digital exam supervisors with a device?

Yes, schools will need to provide a device for digital exam supervisors so they can access the supervisor dashboard to monitor students' digital exam activity. A Chromebook is fine for a smaller exam session of fewer than 20 students. For larger cohorts, a larger screen is recommended so the supervisors can more easily view and monitor a larger number of students.

Do students have to set up language keyboards for Te Reo Māori, Te Reo Rangatira and foreign languages?

Students will be able to use a different language, as appropriate for the subject, by switching the language keyboards. The language keyboards software packs must be downloaded and fully enabled prior to entering the exam. We recommend students become familiar with language keyboards throughout the year, ideally using the same device they will use in the exam.

How can students find their digital exam answers from last year?

NZQA keeps digital exam responses for students until 30 June of the year following the exam. These can be accessed by students through the digital exam platform.

Can students copy and paste within the browser to move paragraphs around etc?

Yes, students can copy and paste within the exam browser but not from outside the exam browser. You can see how this works by using the practice activities under [Have a Play](#).

We recommend students use full screen mode so they do not accidentally move outside the browser window while navigating the exam.

Can VPN, LanSchool software or “incognito” browsers affect the authenticity software in a digital exam?

We have not identified any VPNs or incognito browsers that would circumvent the technical, human and process controls we have in place. We recommend disabling all background software to ensure it does not interfere with the exam invigilation software.

NZQA recommends that, where possible, schools have a VLAN set up for the digital exams, and use whitelisting of the exam URL.

What happens if there is a widespread loss of connection during a digital exam?

In the event the issue is not resolved within a short period of time, exam supervisors may choose to revert to paper exams. Students will not need to repeat the work they've already completed in the digital exam. Extra time will be given to make up for time lost due to the loss of connection.

What can cause a widespread loss of connection?

There are a range of reasons that can cause a loss of connection during a digital exam. NZQA, N4L and the exam software provider will be monitoring connectivity through all exams. If an issue is identified, they will contact your ECM to inform them and work to resolve the issue.

