

# **Networks of Expertise**

## **An evaluation**

**Jo MacDonald and Davina Hunt**

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**2025**

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# 1. Background

## Building evaluative capability within the NEX initiative

Teacher Development Aotearoa (TDA) has partnered with the New Zealand Council for Educational Research (NZCER) since 2021, for NZCER to provide evaluation support for the Networks of Expertise initiative (NEX). The work programme has been iterative and co-constructed, enabling NZCER to provide “just-in-time” support that is aligned with TDA’s responsibility for evaluation of the initiative:

- identifying priorities for strengthening the networks
- promoting and supporting development of evaluative capability
- providing consistent, accurate, and impact-focused reporting from NEX to the Ministry of Education (MoE).

Over the past 3 years, NZCER has undertaken the following activities:

1. developed a Theory of Change (ToC) for the NEX initiative which has underpinned all other activities (see Appendix B)
2. developed overarching evaluation questions which were used as a framework for a small evaluative insights project in 2023
3. provided advice on collecting impact-focused data through NEX milestone requirements
4. analysed five 6-monthly NEX milestone reports to provide evaluative insights on progress of the initiative. The fifth one of these focused on reflections and impact across the 2021–23 NEX contract.
5. promoted and supported evaluative capability of NEX leaders by running a webinar, presenting workshops at a NEX summit, and creating a podcast episode.

## Current context

The NEX initiative was piloted in 2017 and the first NEX were funded in 2018. A new Request for Proposals was issued for the current NEX in 2021. The 2025 NEX programme extended MoE contracts with 351 NEX that were initially contracted from 2021–23 and then had three short-term extensions throughout 2024. All NEX provided an action plan for 2025, with a focus on Government priorities—numeracy and literacy, including the NCEA co-requisites. The data for this evaluation were collected prior to the 2025 Budget, when funding announcements that will change the context for NEX were announced (e.g., the end of funding for Kāhui Ako, potential changes to the support for NEX).

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1 Thirty-six NEX were contracted in 2021–23.

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## 2. The evaluation

### Purpose of the evaluation

This study is intended to support MoE's decision making about the future of the NEX initiative. The evaluation findings also provide useful insights that contribute to TDA's review of their leadership of the initiative and will be of interest to current and future NEX leaders.

Three overarching questions framed the evaluation:

1. To what extent is the NEX initiative achieving desired outcomes and having an impact? For whom, in what ways, and in what circumstances?
2. What features of the initiative are particularly successful and support NEX to have an impact on teaching and learning?
3. What changes would improve the model for the future?

These questions align with the Government's new Social Investment approach where monitoring and evaluation is used to "understand how effective our interventions are—is what we are doing having the intended effect/what might we need to change?"<sup>2</sup>

### Our approach

#### A mixed methods sequential design

We took a mixed methods approach to the evaluation, using a sequential design. A survey of all NEX was implemented first, followed by a focus group with a sample of NEX leaders and an in-depth interview with the TDA team. Undertaking the qualitative data collection after the survey allowed us to draw on the initial survey data, delving deeper into emerging findings.

#### Data

##### *A survey of all NEX*

All NEX leaders and executive members were invited to complete an online survey towards the end of Term 1 2025. The survey was made available on 28 March and remained open until after the summit on 5–6 May. Information about the survey and a link to complete it online were posted on the Circle platform used by TDA to communicate with NEX. TDA encouraged people to complete the survey and posted reminders.

We received 38 complete responses<sup>3</sup> from 23 NEX, a 66% response rate from NEX. Over half (55%) of respondents were NEX leaders or co-leaders. The remaining 45% selected "Other" and described roles such as executive member (e.g., treasurer, secretary) or kaiārahi.

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<sup>2</sup> Source: Presentation by Social Investment Agency, August 2024.

<sup>3</sup> There was a high number of incomplete responses. Some of these may be one individual starting the survey more than once; others may be people starting the survey and only completing the first few questions. This may be because the survey was predominantly targeted at NEX leaders, and with its wider availability on the Circle platform may have reached individuals who felt they did not have sufficient knowledge to complete it.



### ***A focus group with a sample of NEX leaders***

A sample of NEX leaders were invited to participate in a face-to-face focus group at the NEX leader summit on 5 May. We asked people responding to the survey to express interest in participating in the focus group. We had more volunteers than we needed, so were able to select a diverse group that varied in relation to the size of NEX, subject context, and sector focus. In total, eight NEX leaders and one kaiārahi participated, from nine NEX.

To maximise the focus group time, we sent participants a broad outline of the questions in advance. We also invited them to bring along an artefact to discuss in relation to the impact of their NEX.

### ***A group interview with the TDA team***

In a 1-hour interview with the three members of TDA we asked about their perspectives on the impact of the initiative, and their leadership function as the Network Hub.

### ***Existing data***

We include data about NEX activity and outputs collected by TDA through milestone reporting.

### **Analysis**

Quantitative data and qualitative data were analysed separately first, then brought together in a meaning-making session to generate key findings in relation to each evaluation question. We also used the outcomes in the ToC to support the evaluative conclusions we reached.

Qualitative data from the open-ended questions in the survey, from the focus group with NEX leaders and the interview with TDA, were analysed thematically. Quantitative data from the survey were analysed to produce descriptive statistics.

### **Limitations**

We have the perspectives of two-thirds of the 35 NEX in this report. We do not know how the 12 NEX not included would have responded to the survey questions, or whether a particular perspective is missing. However, the 23 NEX we have responses from include subject associations (large and small), and cross-curricular-focused NEX.

It was beyond the scope of the evaluation parameters and budget to use economic methodologies such as cost-benefit analysis to measure the monetary value of the NEX initiative. However, we looked for evidence of participants' perspectives on the value of the initiative, using a broad definition of value.

It was also beyond the scope of this evaluation to collect data directly from teachers. NEX are required to do this themselves, for discussion of impact in milestone reporting. We sought NEX leader perspectives on the impact on teachers and primed them to focus on evidence they had for their responses. A limitation of this is that NEX leaders are likely to show a positivity bias due to their role in the initiative and their stake in it.

The findings in this study add to the sector's knowledge about the NEX initiative and this model of professional learning and development (PLD). We focus on outcomes, but the scope and design of the study mean we cannot have certainty about causation; that is, the extent to which observed outcomes were caused by engagement with the NEX. However, we used a range of strategies to lend support to claims about outcomes and impact, sufficient for the level of certainty needed for the context (Ashton & Apgar, 2023; Davidson, 2005):

- Mapping evidence to the ToC. This brings plausibility to the association between the intervention and the outcome, through the narrative of change (Aston & Apgar, 2023).
- Employing mixed methods for triangulation.
- Being transparent about where the evidence comes from, who collected it, and how it was collected. This included gaining ethics approval before collecting data and ensuring voluntary participation and confidentiality to enhance the trustworthiness of data.

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## 3. Findings

This section combines all data to address each of the three evaluation questions in turn. Where relevant, findings are mapped back to the ToC (see Appendix B).

### To what extent is the NEX initiative achieving desired outcomes and having an impact?

The first evaluation question asks, “To what extent is the NEX initiative achieving desired outcomes and having an impact? For whom, in what ways, and in what circumstances?” We use data from the NEX leader survey and focus group, and the interview with TDA to answer this.

#### The initiative is achieving its outcomes

To develop the list of desired outcomes shown in Figure 1 we started with the short- and medium-term outcomes in the initiative’s ToC. This was supplemented by other possible outcomes that emerged in the evaluative insights study (e.g., better teacher wellbeing). To prime NEX leader respondents to hone in on evidence they had about impact, the first substantive question in the survey asked, “Which of these aspects of potential impact do you *collect data* about?” The responses to this question are presented later in this report (Figure 4), where we discuss how building evaluative capacity was built into the initiative.

We then asked, “Thinking about the data you have, how much of a difference has your NEX made?” Note that all respondents were asked this question, so a “don’t know/don’t have data” option was included. Responses to this question are shown in Figure 1.

Teachers have ...

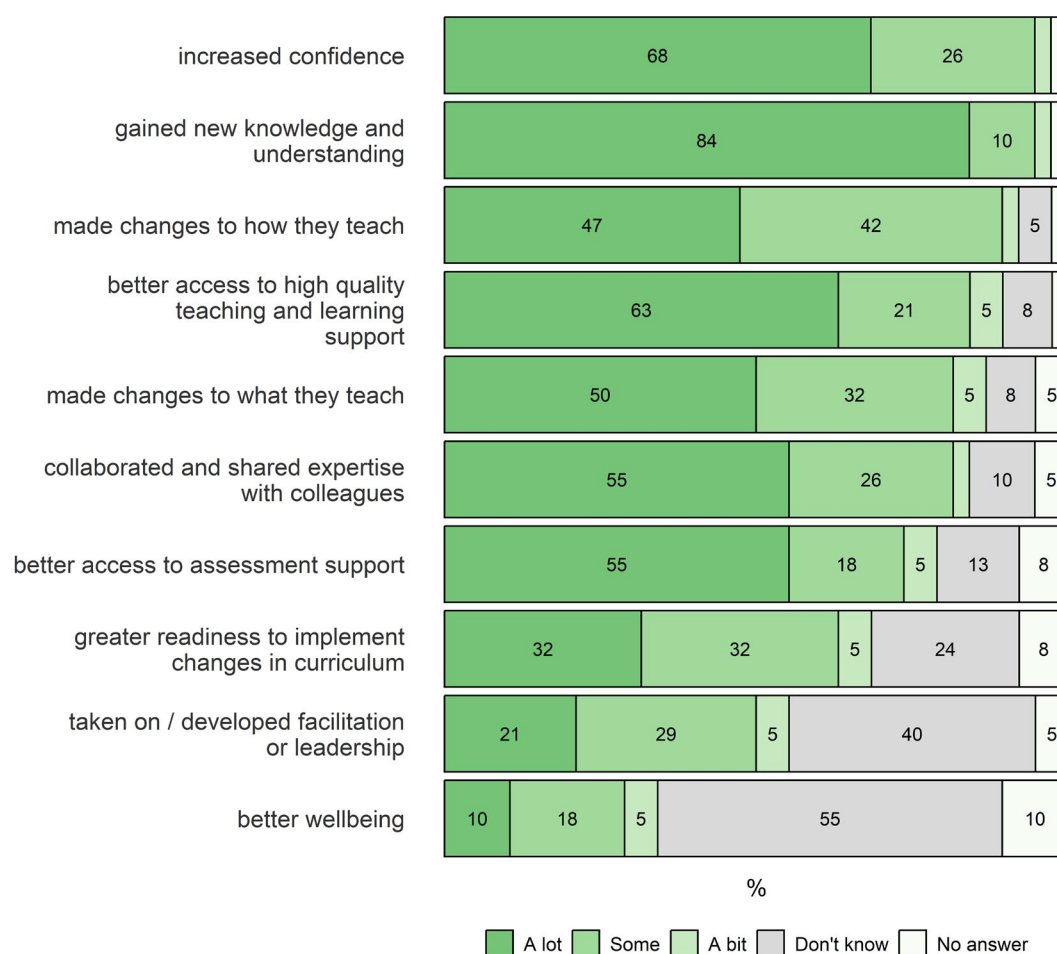


FIGURE 1 Thinking about the data you have, how much of a difference has your NEX made? (n = 38)

Short-term outcome: Kaiako have new knowledge and confidence as a result of engagement with NEX.

- Nearly all (97%) of the respondents indicated that their NEX had increased teachers' confidence, with over two-thirds (68%) saying their NEX had made "a lot" of difference, and a quarter (26%) "some" difference to confidence levels.
- The same proportion (97%) of respondents indicated that, as a result of their NEX, teachers had gained new knowledge and understanding, with most (84%) saying their NEX had made "a lot" of difference.

The impact of NEX on teacher confidence, and knowledge and understanding was clearly evident in qualitative responses from NEX leaders when they were asked to provide examples of impact. The examples here describe increased confidence and new knowledge and understanding in the areas of curriculum, assessment and pedagogy:

Understanding the science of learning and how it links to the new curriculum. (Survey respondent)

Ready availability for teachers to ask questions and clarify their understanding about NCEA changes. (Survey respondent)

Deeper understanding and awareness of culturally responsive teaching and pedagogy in Aotearoa. (Survey respondent)

We have heard from many teachers how the PLD attended and/or resources they use give them confidence that they're 'doing it right' or 'on the right track'. (Survey respondent)

Kaiārahi workshops around Aotearoa have provided generalist primary teachers with the skills and resources to use [arts subject] as a strategy for teaching numeracy, literacy and te reo. (Survey respondent)

Respondents also indicated that, as a result of their NEX, teachers had better access to high-quality teaching and learning support (89%) and better access to assessment support (78%).

Over half (55%) of respondents indicated that they didn't know whether their NEX had made a difference to teacher wellbeing (note that this is consistent with Figure 4 which shows that 55% of respondents said they did not collect data about whether their NEX made a difference to teacher wellbeing; only 18% of respondents said their NEX collected data about this, and 21% were unsure). However, the connection between increased confidence and wellbeing was evident in this qualitative response:

Supporting teachers' peace of mind—knowing that what they are delivering aligns with current curriculum and assessment in turbulent and forever changing times. (Survey respondent)

Medium-term outcome: Kaiako have made changes to their practice as a result of engagement with NEX and are sharing this with others.

This medium-term outcome can be seen through teachers putting increased confidence, and new knowledge and understanding into action, by changing their practices, and sharing expertise with others. The extent to which teachers are sharing expertise with colleagues is discussed below, along with the strengthened connections outcome:

- 92% of respondents indicated that teachers had made changes to *how* they teach, with just under half (47%) saying their NEX had made "a lot" of difference, and 42% selecting "some" difference.
- 87% of respondents indicated that teachers had made changes to *what* they teach, with half (50%) saying their NEX had made "a lot" of difference, and just under one-third (31%) selecting "some" difference.

Respondents provided examples of changes to what and how teachers teach, that they attributed to engagement with their NEX:

A number of schools have completely rewritten their whole subject programme/area based on the work they have done with our NEX. (Survey respondent)

Many teachers reported that templates, exemplars, and resources provided by kaiārahi assisted them in teaching/learning for the new Level 1 externals. (Survey respondent)

Teachers who report they are learning and implementing new neuroinclusive strategies. (Survey respondent)

Understanding and using strategies to engage Māori ākonga. (Survey respondent)

Everyone leaving one of our streams of PLD has gone back to school with an action plan and reported back that they have implemented at least some aspects of the plan successfully. (Survey respondent)

More teachers and educators are incorporating climate change, biodiversity, mātauranga Māori, nature connection, and other important aspects of [subject area] into their everyday practice, as a result of increased knowledge/skills/confidence gained from online and in-person professional learning delivered free by [NEX] and our collaborative local groups. (Survey respondent)

Medium-term outcome: NEX and TDA have contributed to strengthened connections within and across the education system.

Most (84%) respondents indicated that teachers were collaborating and sharing expertise with colleagues, with over half (55%) saying their NEX had made “a lot” of difference to this, and a quarter (26%) selecting “some” difference. Connectedness and collaboration were strong themes in the impact examples provided, with improved connections at multiple levels of the system. Later in this report, we highlight the community of practice model and connectivity across NEX as features of the initiative that support its success.

#### *Within-school*

Increased collaboration between colleagues during planning and delivery of curriculum. (Survey respondent)

#### *Within-subject/focus area (within-NEX)*

Built a stronger sense of community amongst our subject teachers including isolated teachers. (Survey respondent)

The sector feels more cohesive. With so much change in education lately, it has been amazing for our NEX to have had funding which enables us to proactively and positively keep the waka moving forward. (Survey respondent)

Educators feel more connected ... educators from across the motu can connect with new ideas and each other more easily. They can connect with and collaborate with others across the country to share questions, ideas, and create a support network. (Survey respondent)

#### *Across NEX*

The network of networks, I've really appreciated. It gives you the sense that you are part of something pretty powerful when you know, when you put all of the pieces together. (NEX leader, focus group)

Medium-term outcomes: NEX have progressed in their commitment to a Te Tiriti o Waitangi-based Aotearoa in their organisation and PLD practices. NEX are culturally capable and have integrated Mātauranga Māori across their work.

We did not include a quantitative item on the extent to which NEX had progressed their commitment to Te Tiriti o Waitangi or integrated mātauranga Māori into their work. Some NEX gave examples of this in qualitative comments in both the survey and focus group. These also refer to strengthened connections, new knowledge, growing leadership, and changes in practice:

My artefact is a photograph that we took on Saturday, when we were just in the room next door, where we were holding a hui for our Māori and Pacific kaiako to enact one of our actions on giving effect to Te Tiriti. And it's about spreading the aroha, building a collective community of practice,

reaching out, developing Māori leadership. And yeah, just really kind of making connections—whakawhanaungatanga. (NEX leader, focus group)

Teachers attending mātauranga Māori PLD have reported not only has this influenced and changed what they do in the classroom but also in a much wider context. (Survey respondent)

Most recently I've been engaging around climate change education. It's big, emotive and cross-curricular, so I have appreciated the opportunity via [NEX] to learn more and discuss how to teach young people about it. In particular the discussions about mātauranga Māori around climate change have been really beneficial. (Educator quote from 2025 survey, provided by survey respondent)

And we for us as an association, we are deeply, deeply committed to giving effect to Te Tiriti o Waitangi, and we really are focusing on that this year ... it's part of our action plan. (NEX leader, focus group)

Long-term outcome: As a result of engagement with NEX, kaiako have increased capability to provide high-quality teaching, and respond to curriculum and pedagogical change and strategic shifts in the system.

The evaluation focused particularly on short- and medium-term outcomes of the initiative, but one item is relevant to the long-term goal for teachers to have increased capability to provide high-quality teaching and respond to changes in the system. Given that this is a longer-term outcome, and that the curriculum is undergoing considerable change, it could be expected that fewer respondents report an impact than for the earlier outcomes. Still, over two-thirds (69%) of respondents indicated that teachers had greater readiness to implement changes in curriculum. One-third (32%) indicated their NEX had made “a lot” of difference to this, the same proportion indicated “some”, and 5% said “a bit”.

The ToC does not explicitly include the overarching goal of making a difference for students, but teachers' PLD is funded “on the premise that it should generate improvements in teaching practice that enhance students' experiences and outcomes” (McChesney et al., 2024, p. 464). One example provided by a NEX highlighted improved student achievement:

NCEA success for students in high deprivation schools as a consequence of in-depth PLD. (Survey respondent)

### **NEX are making a difference for marginalised teachers who may find it harder to have their PLD needs met**

We asked NEX leaders responding to the survey to indicate which groups of teachers their NEX had engaged with and how much of a difference this had made to each group (Figure 2). NEX have a focus on expanding their reach, although this looks different for each context. These findings show that NEX overall are making a difference for teachers across settings, including those who may have specific unmet PLD needs due to isolation, sector, or career stage.

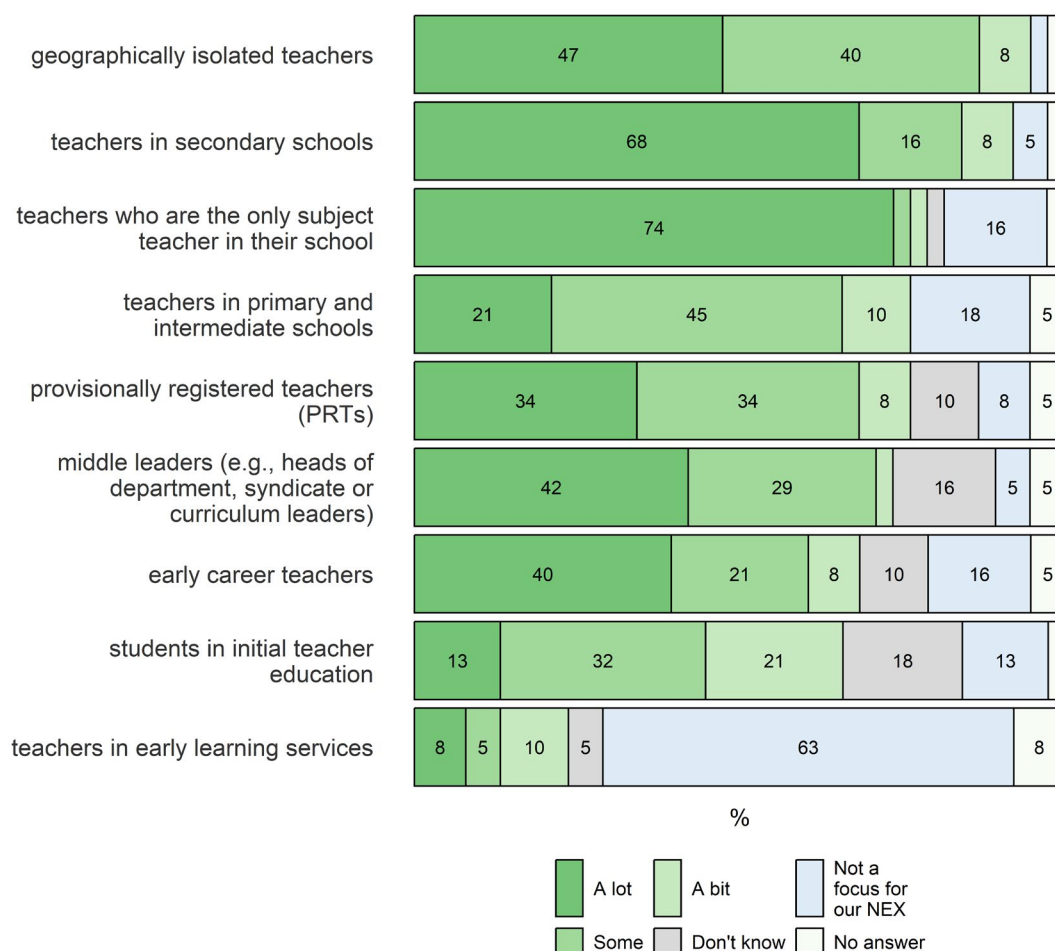


FIGURE 2 Thinking about the data you have, how much of a difference has your NEX made for the following groups of teachers? (n = 38)

### Isolation

- Nearly three-quarters (74%) of respondents indicated they had made “a lot” of difference to teachers who are the only subject teacher in their school.
- In addition, nearly all (95%) indicated that their NEX had made a difference to geographically isolated teachers:

A full-time kaikōtuitui arataki oranga allows for more face-to-face hui to support ALL teachers—including rural and small/single departments. (Survey respondent)

We have managed to offer more face-to-face PLD support and help to fund teachers (in rural & isolated areas and Provisionally Certificated Teachers) to get to [this PLD]. (Survey respondent)

### Sector

- Nearly all NEX work with secondary teachers, with 24 specifically funded to support NCEA. Figure 2 shows that 92% of respondents indicated they had made a difference to secondary teachers, with over two-thirds (68%) saying they made “a lot” of difference.
- Three-quarters (76%) of respondents indicated their NEX worked with primary teachers. The impact on these teachers was perceived to be lower than on secondary teachers, with one-fifth (21%) indicating their work had made “a lot” of difference, and 45% “some” difference.



- The initiative has had least impact in early learning services, with 63% of respondents indicating this sector was not a focus for their NEX. Fewer than one-quarter (23%) of respondents said their NEX had made a difference to teachers in early learning services.

#### **Career stage**

Most respondents indicated their NEX worked with—and made a difference to—teachers at specific stages of their career. Note also that 55% of respondents said teachers had taken on facilitation or leadership roles (Figure 1 above):

- Around three-quarters of respondents indicated they worked with provisionally certificated teachers (PCTs) (76%) or middle leaders (74%):

We are a small subject, and quite often we have people working out in schools, often beginning teachers on their own, sole teachers as heads of department and they need someone to go to, not just to moderate their work, but to support them through the process of beginning their career and staying in their career. And we are, you know, it's key. It's hugely increased our engagement. (Survey respondent)

- Just under half of respondents (45%) indicated they were making at least “some” difference to students in initial teacher education. This is a group that qualitative data suggest more NEX are turning attention to:

Working in conjunction with teacher trainee providers to help increase subject capacity and supporting these teachers as they enter the workforce. (Survey respondent)

#### **NEX are well established and ready to do more**

A sense of progress and growth came through in qualitative data from NEX leaders and TDA. People reflected on how far they'd come and there was a positive sense of NEX “humming”, ready to be growing, and doing more:

This is the first year we've actually felt like, 'actually, we've got this'. We've got this great plan. And we actually can say we've got 3 or 4 results out of the plan, and we feel like we'll get another 3 or 4 by the end of the year. (NEX leader, focus group)

[NEX have] said they are finally able to do what they've always wanted to do .... It's taken them these few years to actually build up to get to that point as well. And a lot of them now, too, they're just thinking bigger. (TDA)

For TDA, this was evident in the milestone reports and conversations they had with NEX leaders, with a shift from focusing solely on outputs to outcomes and impact:

The progress of the NEX. So, looking at the milestones ... when I first started here 2 and a half years ago, and seeing what was being written about in those days, compared to the conversations that we're having with NEX now, the difference is huge ... Back then how many members have you got was the biggest focus and how good the presenter was at their PD. Whereas now [it's] that talk around the impact that they're having and the way that teachers are embracing what they're giving them and using it in their classrooms. And the fact that they're using the words of impact. (TDA)

TDA collates data from the 35 NEX about events (type, number of participants, locations), resource production (names, view/downloads), and individualised support (number of participants, locations). These data allow them to show the growth in outputs over time. Appendix A shows data for the year to 31 March 2025.

## What features of the initiative are particularly successful?

The second evaluation question focuses on the features of the initiative that are particularly successful and support NEX to have an impact on teaching and learning.

### Trusted “just-in-time” support “for kaiako by kaiako” with capacity for personalised support

Just-in-time high-quality resources and PLD “for kaiako by kaiako” underpin the NEX model. Our earlier research (MacDonald, 2023) highlighted these features as essential to the value of the NEX model and the impact it had on teaching and learning. NEX leaders particularly highlighted being trusted by teachers, being seen as relevant, and the ability to be responsive:

It’s the ‘by teachers for teachers’, you know, it’s the knowing the context they just walked out of and being able to relate to it. (NEX leader, focus group)

A positive feature of the NEX initiative is its accessibility and connection with teachers. It is able to be agile to respond to immediate teacher needs. (Survey respondent)

Since the research undertaken in 2023, more NEX have employed kaiārahi, with 20 of the 35 now having someone paid in this role. This has increased the capacity of NEX to be responsive and provide personalised support for teachers, described by TDA as a “game changer”:

A go-to person who will respond exactly to what they need rather than it being generalised support. I mean, the generalised support is there. But the personalised support is also there. (TDA)

Many examples of impact provided by NEX leaders in the survey referred to the kaiārahi role.

### Local clusters along with regional and national events build a community of practice

In the discussion about outcomes, we provided evidence that NEX have contributed to strengthened connections within the education system. A key feature that enables this is the community of practice model that is inherent in the name “Network of Expertise”. NEX provide support for a subject, interest, or learning area, and are funded to bring teachers with this focus together at national and regional PLD events, providing opportunities for teachers to connect with each other and with experts. Local clusters within regions maintain and expand this community of practice model. One respondent described this as their “foundation”:

Cluster groups: networks of collegial support for teachers, this is our foundation for building knowledge and confidence among teachers and for building leadership within our community. (Survey respondent)

Kāhui Ako are one vehicle that has supported NEX operating at a local level. One survey respondent reflected on the impact of the disestablishment of the Kāhui Ako initiative:

If plans proceed to transform Kāhui Ako, NEX will need to think carefully about how they maintain/increase local support. This is based on evidence that we have collected that demonstrates: connecting locally is an effective mechanism for impact/change; and teachers want to connect with others beyond their school turf to learn from and share inspiring best practice. (Survey respondent)

## TDA adds value and enhances the NEX initiative

A question in the survey asked respondents to indicate the extent to which they agreed with four statements about the NEX model, described as enablers in the ToC. Three of these relate to TDA's function as Network Hub: strong leadership and co-ordination; opportunities to network with other NEX; and a focus on evaluation (Figure 3).

Please indicate to what extent you agree with these statements about the NEX model

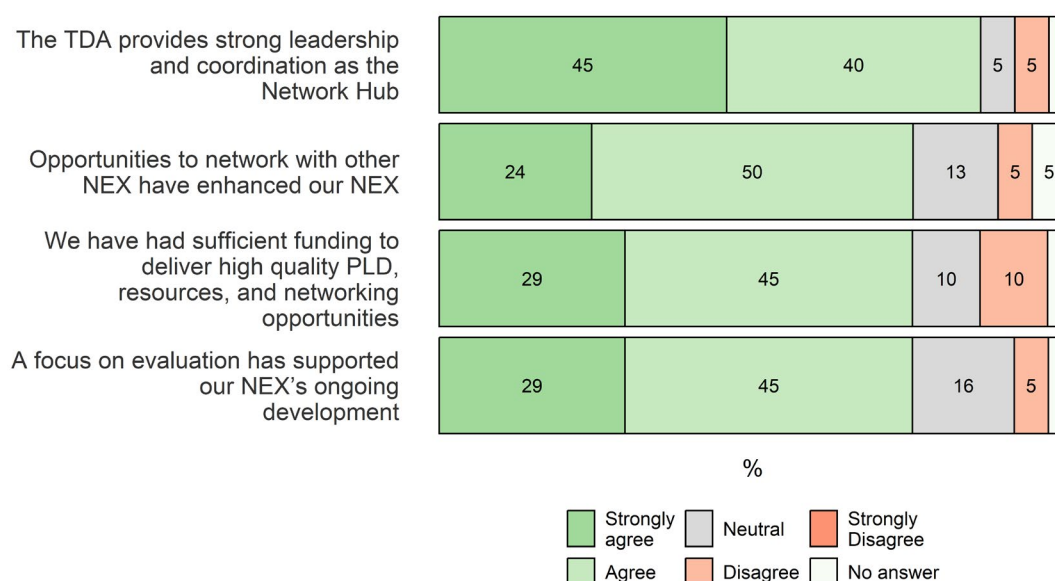


FIGURE 3 Level of agreement with statements about potential enablers in the NEX model (n = 38)

Enabler: TDA provides strong leadership and co-ordination as the Network Hub.

Figure 3 shows that 85% of respondents agreed that TDA provides strong leadership and co-ordination as the Network Hub: 45% strongly agreed, and 40% agreed. In the NEX leader focus group, TDA was described as a “conduit”. Qualitative responses highlighted that support from TDA had developed and improved over time:

TDA has really improved the support they offer NEX in the past 3 years or so. They now seem more present, visible and proactive in their support and engagement with us. (Survey respondent)

[TDA] have really grown themselves in how they have supported and worked with the network of NEX. They have responded to needs and leveraged network opportunities across the different networks. This should be noted in any evaluation of NEX. (Survey respondent)

A factor in this improved support from TDA may be that each of the three TDA teams now have an ongoing relationship with one-third of the NEX, bringing continuity. This year, TDA has also created a webinar series aimed at providing accessible, actionable PLD tailored specifically for the NEX leaders.

Activity: TDA provides opportunities for NEX to connect with each other.

TDA brings NEX leaders together, virtually and in person, through a shared online platform, webinars, and an annual summit. Three-quarters (74%) of respondents to the survey agreed or strongly agreed that these opportunities to network had enhanced their NEX (Figure 3).

For TDA, the value in the cross-network activity is that it has fostered discussion across leaders from different learning areas, which they observed had developed over time as relationships had grown. They pondered whether, without these opportunities, connections across learning areas would wane and return to being siloed.

NEX leaders at the focus group discussed the online platform that TDA use to communicate with NEX (e.g., posting announcements, documents, webinars) and to encourage cross-NEX discussion and collaboration. This platform was also referred to in comments from survey respondents. There were mixed views on the platform, with some leaders engaging with it more than others. The utility of the platform is an area that TDA could investigate further:

Continue to work on collaborative/online/networking tools that NEX can use to share what is happening with each other and encourage effective use of funding and time. The current Circle platform is designed to do this, but only some people are engaging with it, which means it becomes redundant after a while. Not sure what the solution to this would be, other than ensuring NEX are reminded to use it or seeking feedback about why it's not being used. (Survey respondent)

Enabler: Effective evaluation supports ongoing development.

Medium-term outcome: Individual NEX and TDA can demonstrate impact.

A core part of TDA's role is to promote and support development of evaluative capability, and provide consistent, accurate, and impact-focused reporting from NEX to MoE. TDA has partnered with NZCER to support evaluation capability, and, as part of this, we have facilitated PLD for NEX leaders and TDA on topics such as "What works well and how do you know?", "Asking good questions", and "Analysing and using data".<sup>4</sup> NZCER also supported TDA to scaffold NEX leaders from collecting and reporting data on outputs (e.g., membership, PLD events) to data on outcomes and consideration of impact on teachers:

I think we'd all agree there's been a significant shift. They're now actually focusing on real impact. (TDA)

I think that the milestone reports and the shift ... [to] that data-informed approach. The strengthening and increasing the level of robust expectation, I've really appreciated. (NEX leader, focus group)

Three-quarters (74%) of survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed that a focus on evaluation had supported their NEX's ongoing development (16% selected the neutral option, and 5% disagreed) (Figure 3, above).

Progress towards the medium-term outcome that individual NEX can demonstrate impact is evident in Figure 4, which shows the range of data that NEX collect about their impact on teachers. Nearly all survey respondents said their NEX collected data about whether teachers had gained knowledge and understanding (97%) and increased confidence (95%). Most also collected data on changes in teacher practice (87%), access to teaching and learning support (82%), collegial collaboration (76%), and access to assessment support (66%).

<sup>4</sup> We acknowledge our "insider-outsider" positionality, particularly for this theme within the report.

### 3. Findings

Our NEX collects data about whether, as a result of their engagement with our NEX, teachers have ...

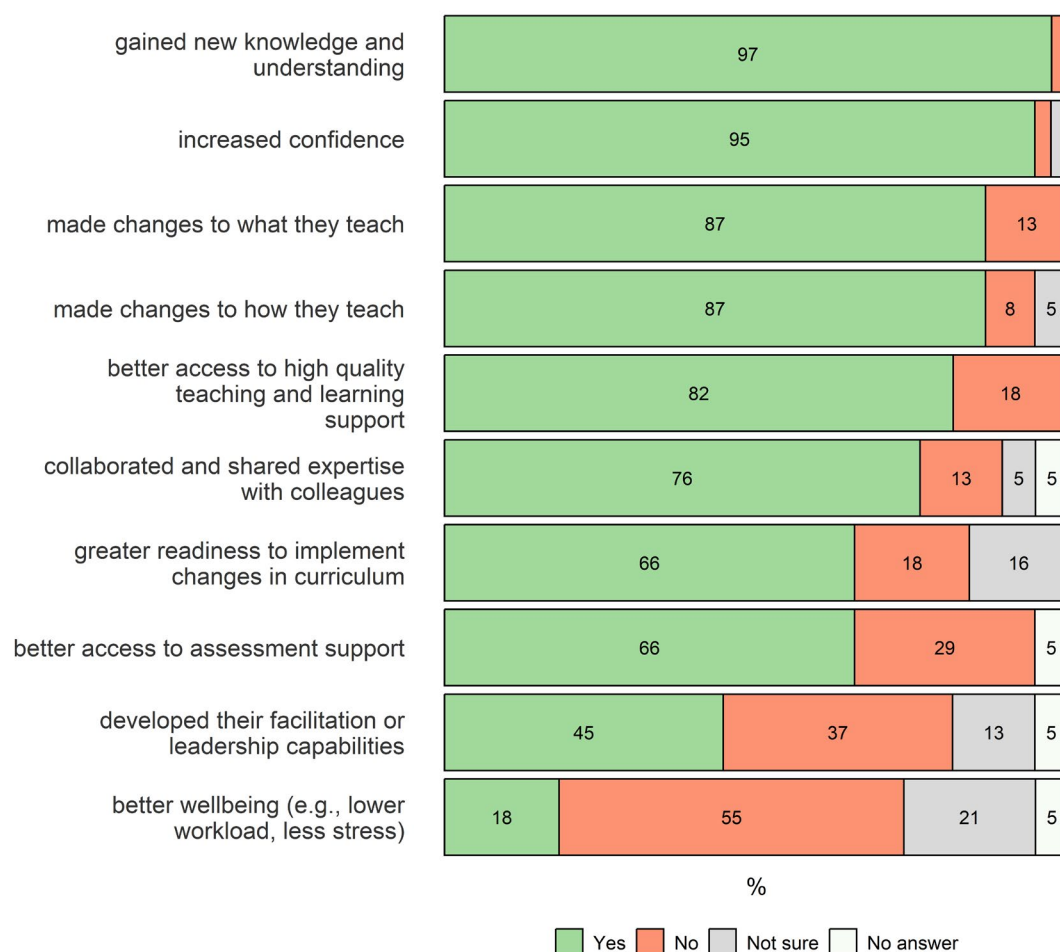


FIGURE 4 Data collected by NEX about outcomes for teachers (n = 38)

## Sufficient and stable funding enables NEX to deliver high-quality PLD and resources

Enabler: Sufficient funding is shared across NEX and provided for TDA.

Funding was highlighted by many NEX leaders and TDA as a feature that enabled the initiative to be successful. People noted not only the level of funding, but also the importance of stability and continuity of funding. Stable funding such as occurred 2021–23 and for 2025 enabled NEX to plan, maintain momentum of delivery, and focus on sustainability:

The first time we went through the contract extension we lost a number of kaiārahi ... They didn't have job certainty, so they left. So, you lose people and it takes time to get back to that level ... And then that extension of the 15 months, I think that was what helped to get back on track, because then they did have the certainty for 2025. (TDA)

Longer-term certainty of funding would be really helpful. Fund or don't fund, but don't keep rolling things over 6 months at a time. It is really difficult to create sustainable progress. (Survey respondent)

A NEX leader who had been involved in their subject association for a number of years prior to NEX funding reflected on what they had been able to achieve with sufficient funding:

And when we're thinking back to like the very first pre-NEX funding meetings we'd have, we'd have all these dreams and big ideas, and they just sat on the shelf because there was nothing we could do about it. And now ... we're getting through the list. It's such a good feeling to be 7 years on the committee and go, 'You know what, all those dreams we had 7 years ago? We're doing them. How cool!' (NEX leader, focus group)

## Qualitative data highlight the value of the model

It was beyond the scope of this small project to evaluate the value for investment of the NEX initiative. However, we looked for "value" as a theme within the data. Qualitative data from NEX leaders in the survey and focus group highlighted the value of the initiative, and perceived cost-effectiveness of the model. One factor emphasised was the volunteer time that underpinned the work of groups such as subject associations that receive NEX funding:

It is such a cost-effective model. I want MoE and the Minister to understand just how much we achieve with a fraction of the budget that the big PLD providers receive. We also have been told on many occasions how much better our PLD is than those companies. If we had more funding, over a longer period guaranteed, we could have incredible impact. (Survey respondent)

I'd really like MoE to understand the impact that their funding has. For a relatively small amount, it's enabled us to pay expert teachers for the first time, to provide support for our sector. This has created a level of cohesion and unity that we had not had before then. (Survey respondent)

I think they're getting very good value for money, because they've still got a whole lot of people working behind that money on a voluntary capacity, who are passionate, knowledgeable. (NEX leader, focus group)

## What changes would improve the model for the future?

The final evaluation question looks ahead to ask, "What changes would improve the model for the future?"

### Funding decisions

As discussed above, sufficient funding that is shared across NEX is a key enabler within the model. The following funding-related considerations were identified for improving the model for the future:

- Contract NEX with time frames that enable them to plan, deliver, and measure impact:  
Long-term contracts so we have security and can employ teachers to do the NEX work and build on what we have started. We'd love a 5-year term so we can really plan and implement the ToC. (Survey respondent)
- All NEX need sufficient baseline funding to implement key success features (e.g., employing a kaiārahi and paying for administrative support to reduce the burden on volunteer leaders). This is an equity and sustainability issue, particularly for smaller NEX.
- Fund new NEX to fill gaps in current provision. NEX for teachers of te reo Māori, and with an AI focus were highlighted.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> The 2024 NZCER national survey of primary schools found that "using AI" was the second-highest priority topic that primary teachers wanted PLD on (after "effective teaching of mathematics") (Li et al., forthcoming, 2025).

#### **Strategic co-ordination and relationships**

Other than funding considerations, three inter-related recommendations dominated NEX leaders' responses to what would improve the model for the future: better co-ordination of PLD at a system level; greater visibility of the NEX initiative within this system; and better access to key information and people, particularly within MoE.

##### ***Better co-ordination of the PLD at a system level***

NEX leaders would like confidence that PLD delivery across MoE funding streams is co-ordinated to avoid overlap and to maximise the benefit for teachers:

Partnership with MoE and the opportunity to work alongside other PLD initiatives and with MoE personnel. This would make sure that we aren't working over the top of each other. (Survey respondent)

There needs to be greater discussion between MoE, NZQA, and our association so that PLD is targeted and coordinated to benefit the largest number of teachers possible. Often, we plan for and train to provide PLD and then MoE come in and offer a similar workshop/webinar which is frustrating OR we get told to pause what we are doing as MoE has changed its expectations. (Survey respondent)

##### ***Greater visibility of NEX within the PLD system***

Related to co-ordination, NEX leaders would like the initiative to have greater visibility within the PLD system, and for it to be promoted to schools and across the sector:

I don't think MoE has promoted NEXs and what they offer in any useful way. Many schools have not heard of NEX support, and that it's free. (Survey respondent)

Providing all associations' details to all New Zealand school management and encouraging them to have at least one teacher in every school signed up as members to the associations of subjects they teach to offer support and resources and show all subject areas are valued. (Survey respondent)

##### ***Better access to key information and people***

NEX leaders expressed frustration with trying to keep up with changes that impacted on their work. To avoid keeping up in "ad hoc" ways, they wanted closer relationships with relevant people in MoE:

Kaiārahi need a direct link with somebody within MoE, so they know what is going on. Because at the moment they're relying on either looking for changes on education.govt.nz, or they happen to be in a writing group or in a focus group. They just happen to be there, so they're getting information. (NEX leader, focus group)

We have a wonderful relationship with NZQA, and it's only improving ... but MoE has never got there with us, and I think TDA could be that conduit. (Survey respondent)

## **Conclusion**

In their review of research literature on teacher PLD in Aotearoa New Zealand, McChesney et al. (2024) reflect that there has been increasing attention on "how to maximise the outcomes of PLD within the messy contexts of real-world school environments" (p. 468). This has brought a focus on monitoring implementation, monitoring impacts, and recognising the value in a broad range of PLD including online PLD, professional learning communities, use of social media, and online networks (McChesney et al., 2024). Research also highlights the importance of teacher collaboration, with opportunities for teachers to sustain their learning alongside their immediate colleagues, and the value of PLD with a subject-specific content focus (McChesney et al., 2024). This evaluation demonstrates how these factors are built into the NEX model, indicating that the initiative is well set up to maximise outcomes for teachers.

There is good evidence from NEX leaders and TDA that the initiative is achieving its core outcomes, as outlined in the ToC—growing teachers’ knowledge and confidence, leading to changes in practice, and increased capability to provide high-quality teaching and learning and respond to curriculum and pedagogical change and strategic shifts in the system. Overall, NEX are reaching teachers across settings, including those who may have specific unmet PLD needs due to isolation, sector, or career stage. There is potential for the initiative to give more attention to the PLD needs in the primary and early learning sectors.

High-quality resources and PLD provided “for kaiako by kaiako” underpin the NEX model, and more NEX using their funding to employ kaiārahi has increased the capacity for personalised support for teachers. The forming and fostering of communities of practice at national, regional, and local levels is also a key feature that enables NEX to make a difference to teachers. These features should be retained and fostered.

The evaluation findings show the value added by TDA as Network Hub. This function adds value and enhances the NEX initiative, particularly by providing opportunities for NEX to network with other NEX, and a focus on building evaluative capability. TDA has built considerable knowledge of the mechanisms of the initiative, with institutional knowledge that is not held elsewhere due to ongoing personnel changes.

Three inter-related recommendations dominated NEX leaders’ responses to what would improve the model for the future: better co-ordination of PLD at a system level; greater visibility of the NEX initiative; and better access to key information and people. Stable funding, as occurred 2021–23 and in 2025, enabled NEX to plan, maintain momentum of delivery, and achieve outcomes. The evaluation recommends that the future funding model considers stability, equity, and sustainability.

This evaluation has drawn on the perspectives of leaders from two-thirds of NEX and the team at TDA team to assess whether the initiative is achieving desired outcomes, identify key success features that should be retained, and consider changes to enhance the model. Although NEX leaders used data they had collected from teachers as evidence, the evaluation did not directly garner teachers’ perspectives.

However, nationally representative data on PLD captured directly from teachers in the 2021 NZCER national survey of secondary schools found that teachers spent a median of 20 hours engaged in formal PLD, with three-quarters of this spent on topics that teachers had not chosen for themselves. It also reported that 60% of secondary teachers agreed (40%) or strongly agreed (20%) with the statement “I have found my subject association useful” (28% gave a neutral response), and that just over half (52%) of secondary teachers surveyed agreed that they could “easily access a helpful network of teachers who are interested in similar things to me” (Alansari et al., 2022). The next cycle of the secondary survey (likely to be in 2026) can repeat these items to see whether there has been any change in teachers’ participating in PLD on topics they have chosen themselves and whether teachers have found their subject association useful. This will add to the evidence about the impact of the NEX initiative.

NEX leaders highlighted the value of the initiative and perceived the model to be cost-effective. NEX leaders and TDA reflected on how far they’d all come, and their readiness to build on what has been established to do even more to build teachers’ capability:

I just want to say that NEX has been an absolute game changer for us, absolutely, and it’s giving us a voice at a time of great uncertainty. We really appreciate that. Totally raised our profile. Given mana to our learning area, developed a beautiful Network of Expertise. (NEX leader, focus group)



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## Appendices

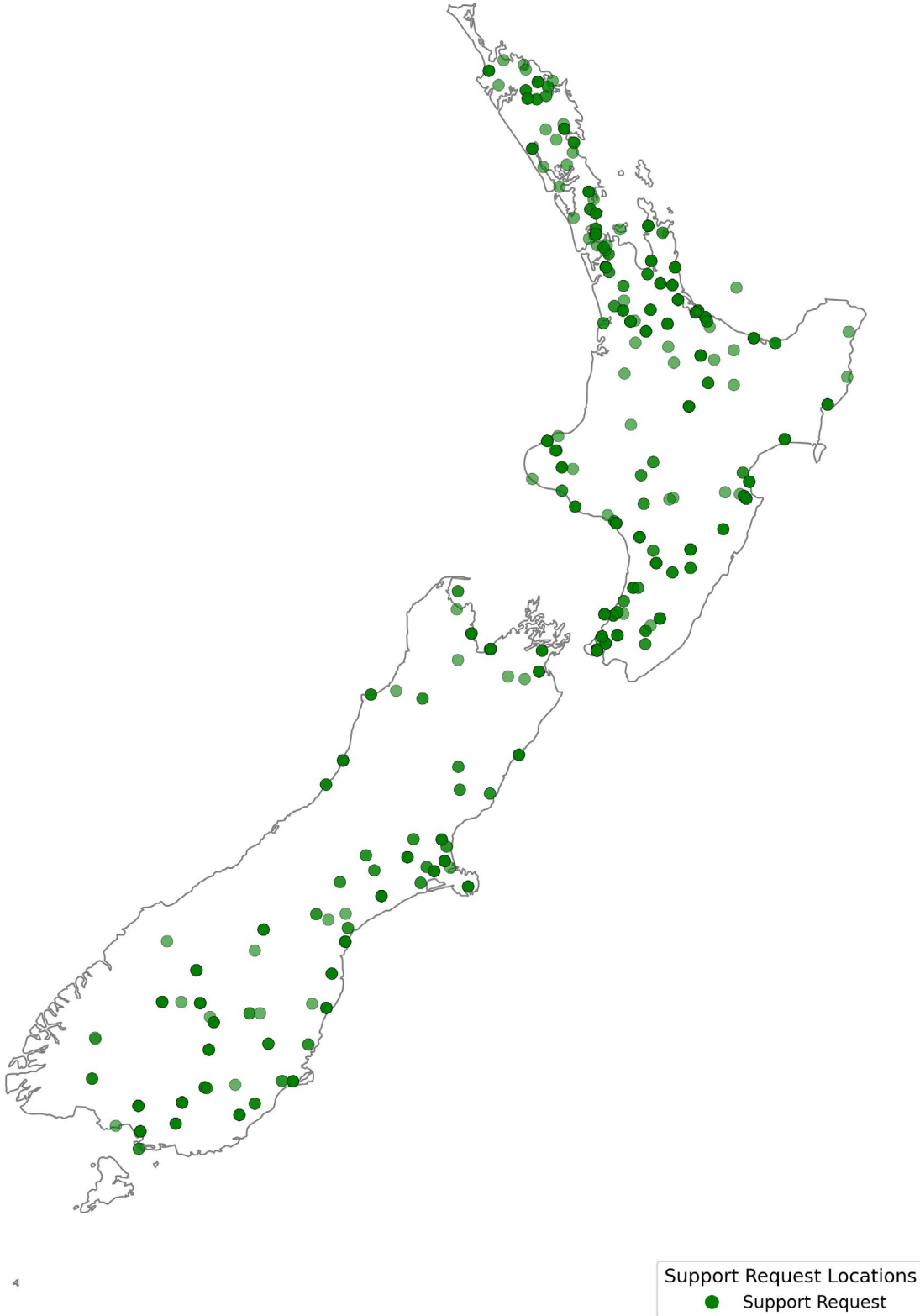
### APPENDIX A:

#### Outputs data for all 35 NEX (1 April 2024–31 March 2025)

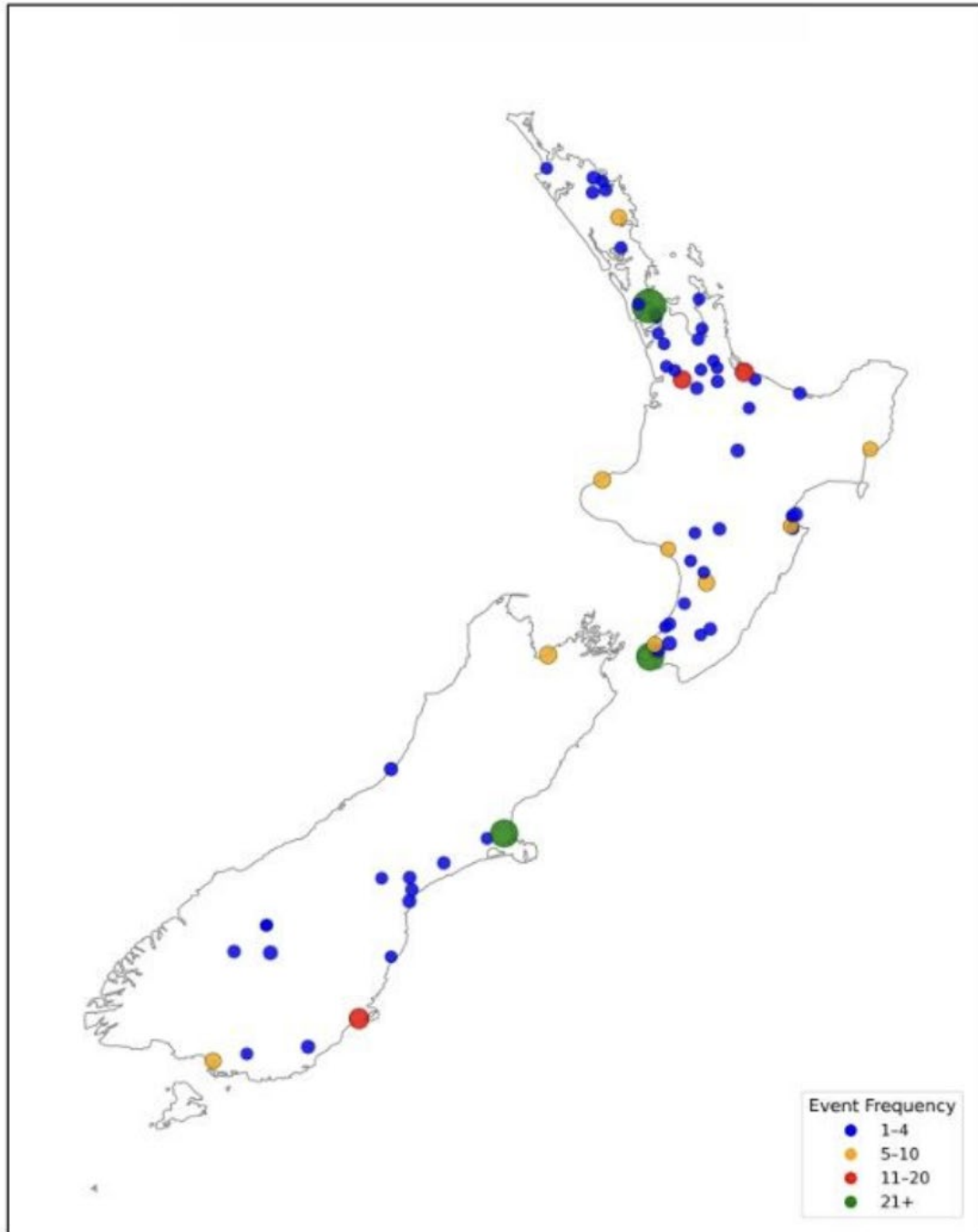
##### What have NEX delivered?

Data	Total for 12 months 1/4/24 to 31/3/25
Total number of NEX events	1,178
Total number of participants in online events	15,016
Total number of participants attendinng in-person events	22,878
Total number of participants attending NEX events	37,894
Total number of requests for help that were answered by NEX via email/phone/zoom or in-person	114,326
Number of resources produced by NEX	848
Number of views/downloads of NEX resources	152,716

### Support Request Locations - All 35 NEX

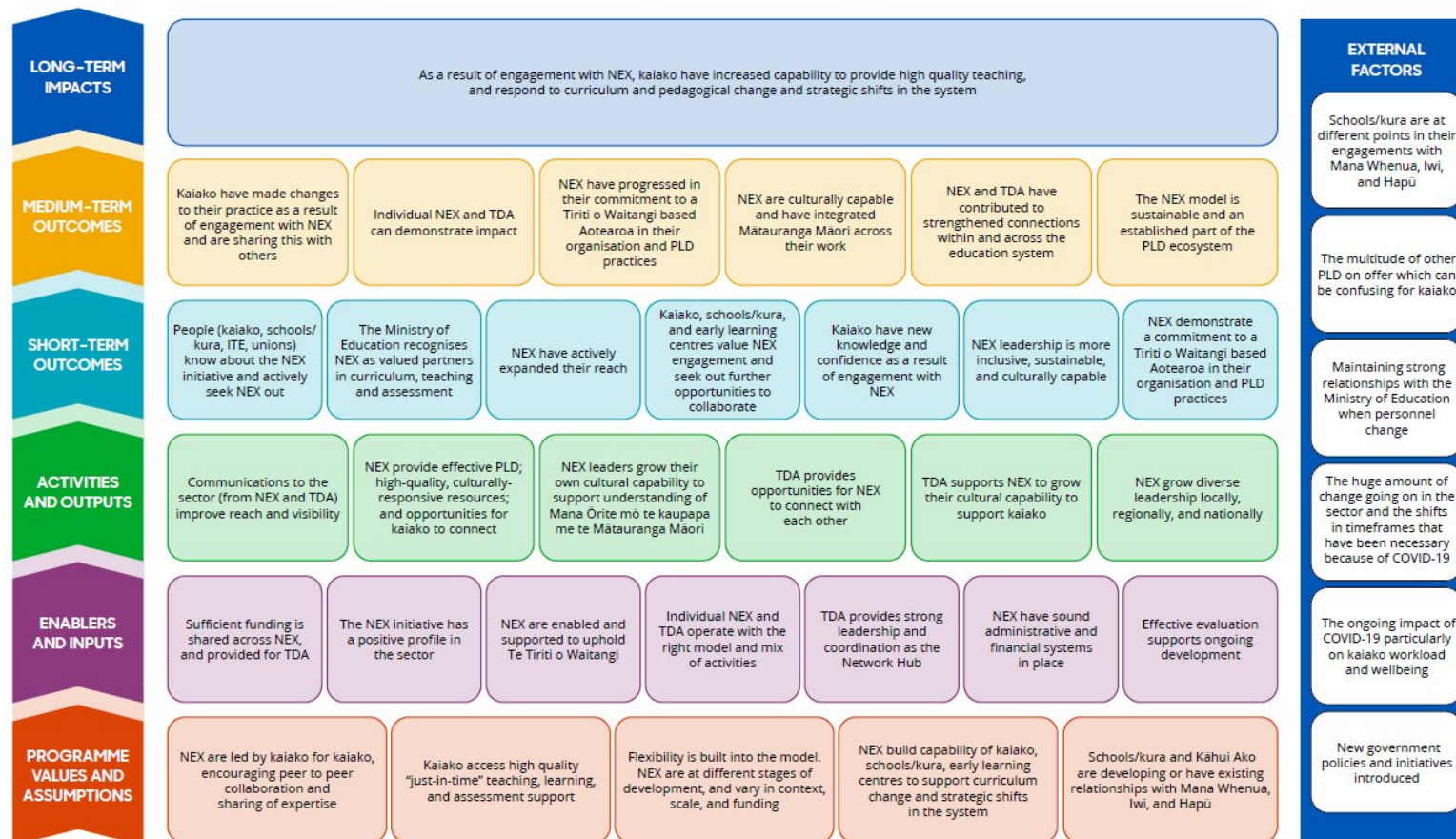


### Distribution and Frequency of In-Person Events in NZ for all NEX During Extension 4



## APPENDIX B: Theory of change

### Networks of Expertise Theory of Change



The Networks of Expertise (NEX) initiative is funded by the Ministry of Education to support kaiako-led networks to provide support across a range of subject, interest, and learning areas. Some NEX are funded to support the NCEA Change Programme and the implementation of the Aotearoa New Zealand's Histories curriculum. NEX sites alongside centrally and school-funded PLD as part of a system approach to PLD. Māori-medium settings are supported through the Kāhui Ako initiative. References to Te Tiriti o Waitangi, Mana Whenua, Iwi and Hapu have been developed in partnership with Ngāi Toa Rangitira. This Theory of Change is for the initiative as a whole (the NEX model), which includes individual NEX and TDA in their leadership and coordination as the Network Hub. While it is not intended as a Theory of Change for an individual NEX, it does show the direction of travel for individual NEX.

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