

Frequently asked questions about Qualifications:

What is NCEA?

NCEA is a qualification on New Zealand's National Qualifications Framework (NQF). It sits alongside more than 800 other national qualifications used throughout tertiary education and industry training. Students at school can attain many of these specialist qualifications as they complete NCEA.

How does NCEA work?

NCEA is achievement-based. National standards have been set in each area of learning. When students achieve these standards they earn credits toward their NCEA qualification. In school curriculum subjects they can do more than achieve a standard — they can achieve with merit or excellence grades.

In each area of learning, different aspects of skills, knowledge and understanding are assessed separately. Each aspect can earn a different number of credits. So results about each student's efforts are detailed, giving a profile of their achievements. The assessments are designed to suit the skill or knowledge being assessed.

In school curriculum subjects, at least half of the assessment is by end of year examinations run by the Qualifications Authority. Schools can also use other standards on the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) to tailor courses for the particular needs and requirements of their students. In this way they can prepare all students for careers in areas of their choice.

Why the change from the “old system”?

Students are staying at school longer, learning a broader range of subjects and learning in different ways, including outside the classroom. Under the old system, schools tended to teach one-year courses that were set nationally. Often this was limiting for schools and students.

For a long time, schools have been trying to offer senior programmes that meet the needs of students and their tertiary and workplace pathways – they have introduced new courses, established links with tertiary courses and increased work-related programmes. Now assessments from all learning can count towards national qualifications.

Under the new system schools can still run one-year courses in traditional school subjects. But they can also run shorter courses, combine levels and link with industry-based national assessments. Schools know which courses will best suit their students.

What are national standards?

National standards have been set in each area of learning. In school curriculum subjects these are achievement standards. You can view achievement standards here. Challenge is provided for students at all levels of ability and in all subject areas, in and beyond school. The excellence standards are tough and academically demanding.

Less able students (who might have gained 30% in a current award) will probably achieve standards for some aspects of a subject. Schools can offer courses that combine standards at different levels (whereas previous awards required uniform one-year courses).

What is standards-based assessment?

Credits towards an NCEA can be gained from "achievement standards" and "unit standards". Both unit standards and achievement standards set objectives for what students should know, understand, and be able to do at the end of teaching.

What are "achievement standards"?

Achievement standards have been developed for the "conventional" school subjects which are currently assessed by exams, plus new subjects that have been introduced as a result of changes to the New Zealand Curriculum. Students will be awarded a credit, merit, or excellence grade. However, greater detail is given. For example, in English, instead of a percentage mark or overall grade for the entire course, actual achievement for creative writing, research, or public speaking can be reported.

What are "unit standards" ?

Unit standards indicate whether students are either competent or not yet competent. They are used to assess non-traditional, vocational subjects, such as metal work. Unit standards are internally assessed as opposed to achievement standards, which are both internally and externally assessed.

What is the mix of external and internal assessment ?

That depends on the courses students take. At least half of the achievement standards for any conventional subject must be assessed externally. External assessment is when performance is "marked" outside the school, for example, a written examination, art portfolio, or visiting external assessors (Te Reo Maori, music).

Other achievement standards will be assessed internally (by the teacher). Schools already deal with internal assessment but will now apply nationally agreed standards.

What about internal assessment?

Teachers are skilled at managing internal assessment. They have been assessing speeches, research and performances in class for many years. Schools/Heads of Department check that teachers are marking fairly and consistently. You can be sure that your school is assessing at the same standard as other schools because each school's assessments are checked to make sure everything is fair and consistent across the nation.

- First of all, the standards, explaining what students have to do to earn credits, are on the NCEA website. Teachers also have web access to samples of student work that meet standards, samples of assessment activities they can use, and they have been trained in this style of assessment.
- National Assessment Panels check a sample of the student work marked in every subject in every school. This checks that the standards in your school and the school down the road are equal and fair.
- Finally, NZQA has a team of school relationship managers who visit each school to monitor and advise. All of this ensures that no matter which school you go to, your NCEA will be nationally recognised.

Are there still exams?

Skills and knowledge that can be assessed by examination are included in normal end of year examinations run by NZQA. These exams are currently three hours in length, with assessments written and graded outside the school. Most internal assessment involves skills such as giving a speech, making a product, carrying out research or laboratory work (i.e. not suitable to assess under examination conditions).

How do I enter for qualifications? Your school will help you enter for your qualifications. The NZQA Liaison Teacher in your school will tell you if the school is using an electronic system or an entry booklet system.

- If your school is using the electronic system, you will be given a confirmation slip. You should check the details before the school sends the information to NZQA.
- If your school is using the entry booklet system, you will be given an entry form to complete. Write all of your details on the form and return it to the school.
- If you are studying any courses with the Correspondence School you will need to indicate this on your entry.

Do students have to complete a course?

Flexibility is enhanced for students, schools and other providers. Credits from all national standards (both school curriculum and industry) count for NCEA. There are no prescribed national courses, so schools may choose to run shorter courses, combine subjects and combine levels. Schools can also offer courses that lead to specialist National Certificates (for example, automotive engineering, drama, outdoor recreation, travel and tourism, electrotechnology) and all of these credits also count towards NCEA.

What do NCEA results look like?

A standards-based system produces a full profile of each student's achievements. NCEA results show a student's credits and grades for each standard. Results show how each student performed compared with all other students across the country. Finally, they provide a grade average for each subject or area of learning. You can view an example of an NCEA result notice on the NZQA web site.

How do students complete a qualification?

There are three NCEA qualifications: Level 1 (replaced School Certificate), Level 2 (replacing Sixth Form Certificate) and Level 3 (replaced University Bursaries). These are the first three levels of the NQF's 10 levels. For a student to be awarded NCEA Level 1 they must achieve 80 credits. Of these, eight credits must be in literacy standards and eight credits in numeracy standards.

For a student to be awarded NCEA Level 2 they must achieve 80 credits, of which a minimum of 60 credits is at level 2 or above, from anywhere on the National Qualifications Framework (NQF). There are no literacy or numeracy requirements for this qualification.

For a student to be awarded NCEA Level 3 they must achieve 80 credits, of which 60 must be at level 3 or above and 20 at level 2 or above, from anywhere on the National Qualifications Framework (NQF).

How do I gain entry to University?

You will be qualified for entrance to a university in New Zealand if you have obtained:

- a minimum of 42 credits at level 3 or higher on the National Qualifications Framework, including a minimum of 14 credits at level 3 or higher in each of two subjects from an [approved subject list](#), with a further 14 credits at level 3 or higher taken

- from no more than two additional domains on the National Qualifications Framework or approved subjects
- a minimum of 14 credits at level 1 or higher in Mathematics or Pāngarau on the National Qualifications Framework
 - a minimum of 8 credits at level 2 or higher in English or Te Reo Māori; 4 credits must be in Reading and 4 credits must be in Writing. The literacy credits will be selected from a schedule of approved achievement standards and unit standards.

Is NCEA recognised internationally?

NCEA is New Zealand's national qualification for school learners. It is recognised by universities and other tertiary providers in New Zealand.

- NCEA Level 1 is broadly equivalent to the English General Certificate of Education (GCE).
- Level 3 is equivalent to English A Levels and Australia's Higher School Certificate.
- The University Entrance standard (required for entrance to university by school leavers) is based on NCEA credits. Polytechnics and other tertiary institutions will use NCEA results when enrolling students.

What is the New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA) and what does it do?

The NZQA administers national qualifications and provides quality assurance. It oversees the exam system and develops the National Qualifications Framework. The NZQA is a government agency, responsible to the Minister of Education. It is run by a board whose members come from industry, community and education sectors.

What is the National Qualifications Framework (NQF)? The NQF is a government policy for New Zealand senior secondary school students. There are eight levels of the NQF which cover all areas of learning from senior secondary school through to post-graduate tertiary study. Under the NQF, students can obtain credits towards the National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA). Students can choose alternatives to traditional school subjects while studying towards this award.