

#2 NCEA and education in New Zealand

Introduction

The New Zealand education system is acknowledged internationally as a high performing system. The New Zealand Curriculum is recognised overseas as a broad and enabling framework - and the NCEA is recognised as a flexible qualification designed to acknowledge diverse student achievement across a wide range of contexts and for a wide range of purposes.

The New Zealand Curriculum

The New Zealand Curriculum focuses on learning by inquiry, critical thinking, problem solving and processing information. Rote learning is no longer sufficient. School leavers should be able to transfer and adapt their knowledge and skills in international settings.

International benchmarking tells us that the New Zealand Curriculum and our approaches to teaching, learning and educational assessment are working:

Of the 65 countries and economies participating in the 2009 Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), New Zealand's 15-year-old students were ranked fourth out of 34 OECD countries on the overall reading scale. New Zealand also performed well above average on mathematics and science scales (view [2009 PISA results](#)).

In 2006, 77% of adults (between 25 and 64) had secondary or tertiary qualifications, well above the OECD average of 67%.

The New Zealand education system and NCEA

- NCEA is integrated with New Zealand's education system. The NCEA achievement standards assess learning goals derived from the [New Zealand Curriculum](#), while unit standards provide a link with technical and vocational training.

Comments from the sector

“We need to remember that NCEA grew out of a determination to encourage and provide life-long learning for all. The old examination-based system was focused on selecting the elite for entry to university. But education is really about equipping people for life-long learning – encouraging them to continue learning beyond the programmes they are in now. One of the important qualities of NCEA is that it gives schools the flexibility to do that for all students. A focus on life-long learning is just as important for young people who are heading for an academic career as it is for those who will transition more directly into the workplace.”

Emeritus Professor Gary Hawke Senior Fellow,
New Zealand Institute of Economic Research.
Formerly Head of the School of Government and
Professor of Economic History, Victoria University
of Wellington.

The New Zealand education system and NCEA CONT.

- Both Achievement and Unit standards can contribute to NCEA.
- The New Zealand Curriculum and NCEA are key elements of New Zealand's student-centred education system. They equip schools to provide for the diverse needs of learners and enable all students to gain qualifications that prepare them for a full range of learning pathways and employment beyond school.
- Achievement objectives take curriculum objectives and express them as standards that can be formally assessed.
- Unit standards are developed by national experts mainly in vocational areas. Most of them are connected with [polytechnics](#) or government-recognised [industry training organisations](#) (ITOs). From 2014 there will be no unit standards based on the New Zealand Curriculum.
- The NCEA system enables students to prepare for the full range of academic or vocational pathways. They can start to specialise while they are at school, or they can keep their options open.
- NCEA assessments require students to process information and demonstrate critical thinking and problem solving. In particular, internal assessment for NCEA encourages learning by inquiry.
- The Curriculum connection gives NCEA a built-in alignment with the education students receive before they enter senior secondary school (Years 11-13). There is a progression across the year levels in all subjects.

Comments from the sector

“Since national standards for secondary school pupils were introduced in 2002, the system has been a work in progress. Flaws related to internal-assessment marking inconsistencies, the potential for smaller, lower-decile schools in particular to skew results and the lack of incentive for the brightest students to push themselves have all been addressed. Understanding among parents and employers of how the National Certificate of Educational Achievement works has also, naturally, increased over the past decade.”

Nelson Mail editorial, 18 January 2011