

#5 New Zealand Scholarship challenges and rewards Level 3 students

Introduction

New Zealand Scholarship is designed to challenge, motivate and reward the most able students – assessments are demanding, even for the top students in each subject. Candidates are expected to demonstrate high-level critical thinking and the ability to generalise, and to apply knowledge, skills and understanding to complex situations.

For most subjects, assessment is by a three-hour written examination at the end of the school year. In some subjects students submit recorded performances or portfolios for assessment by external assessors.

The number of Level 3 students entering for Scholarship examinations has been rising, particularly over the last three years. There were nearly 18,000 subject entries in 2009 and nearly 19,000 in 2010.

Scholarship is competitive – there are a limited number of awards available

Approximately 3% of students studying each subject get Scholarships, and about 0.3% receive Outstanding Scholarships. (Percentages are based on the number of students entering at least 14 credits at Level 3.)

- The top five to ten candidates in the country receive **Premier Awards**. To be considered for a Premier Award, candidates must achieve at least three subject Scholarships at Outstanding Level. The number of awards is limited to the top students who meet this criterion.
- The next 40 to 60 candidates receive **Outstanding Scholar Awards**. To be considered for this award, candidates must achieve at least three subject Scholarships, including some at Outstanding level.

As well as the prestige attached to winning a Scholarship award, there are financial incentives – from \$2,000 to \$10,000 per year to support further study. All awards are received for up to three years, but only as long as candidates maintain a 'B' grade average in tertiary study at a New Zealand university.

Comments from the sector

“The Scholarship examination encourages our best and brightest to go above and beyond what they need to do in high school. They study very hard at a very high level. So as our young people approach the end of their schooling we have a system that very effectively enhances the intellectual capital of New Zealand. It does a brilliant job for the whole country.”

Professor Jeff Smith, University of Otago
 Formerly Associate Dean of the Graduate School of Education, Rutgers University, New Jersey, USA

Scholarship is competitive – there are a limited number of awards available CONT.

Most Scholarship candidates are Year 13 students who are also studying towards NCEA Level 3. Students select the subjects they want to enter – most enter one, two or three subjects.

In recent years, more students have been reaching the minimum level for Premier Awards – a sign that levels of performance are increasing among top students, and the very best students often enter in four or five subjects. In 2009, all students who received Premier Awards gained at least four Scholarship subjects at Outstanding level, or a total of five Scholarships with three at Outstanding level.

Comments from the sector

“The actual performance of the best Scholarship students each year is just staggering. Their work is extraordinarily impressive – their creative problem-solving is of the very highest order. And many of these students come from schools where we know there are small numbers of Scholarship candidates and few teachers with the expertise to work at this level. One of the great successes of Scholarship is that it motivates students to reach such high levels of cognitive thinking – and it has helped teachers to respond to the demands of highly able students.”

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.