



# NCEA – choosing a course or subjects at school



## Who is this factsheet for?

This fact sheet is for students, parents and whānau who are new to NCEA.

## NCEA is a flexible qualification

NCEA is a flexible, standards-based system. Because there are no compulsory curriculum courses in years 11–13, it is important that students select their courses and standards carefully so that their NCEA qualification can support their preferred future pathways.

Students do not have to complete an NCEA within a single academic year. Some students can achieve an NCEA in less than a year, while other students may need more than a year to gain a qualification.

Students do not need to complete an NCEA qualification at a lower level before beginning the next level. Students can also undertake assessment of standards at different levels in the same year. For example, a student could be assessed against a Level 2 standard in one course at the same time as they are undertaking assessment of standards at Level 1 or Level 3 in another course.

## Choices at NCEA Levels 1–3

In general, Year 11 students undertaking NCEA Level 1 should be taking a broad range of courses that can lead on to more specialised areas of learning in Years 12 and 13.

Year 12 students will in general be undertaking NCEA Level 2. These results can be used as part of the selection process by universities, other tertiary education providers and employers. The **Vocational Pathways** and the **University Entrance requirements** pages on our website provide helpful information on the skills and knowledge that employers and tertiary education providers are seeking for.

By Year 13, students undertaking NCEA Level 3 who are wishing to go on to university or other degree level courses should be paying close attention to the University Entrance requirements (and any other university or programme specific entry requirements).

Students are more likely to do well and achieving the standards assessed in their courses when they enjoy the subjects, or have a natural talent for them. These are the subjects a student should look at when choosing a course.

Many schools provide opportunities in Year 9 or Year 10 to sample a variety of subjects. Doing this gives students some experience of the subject, to see if it suits them.

Students should also choose subjects and courses that relate to what they want to do after they leave school. Many careers or qualifications have special requirements.

For example, in order to be a motor mechanic it makes sense to consider one of the technology subjects. Or, for a career in medicine, students should do science subjects like chemistry and physics.

For students unsure about what they want to do, the best path is to take as broad a range of subjects as possible, to keep the options open.

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## The school's role

Schools can offer valuable advice to students, parents and whanau on course and standard choices. There are many ways for schools to use NCEA's flexibility to deliver innovative and interesting courses:

- Schools can offer whole subjects or they can develop other purposeful courses to suit the needs of their students. In either case, the school can select the relevant standards for assessing the student's achievements.
- Typically, a course that is timetabled for four hours a week can be assessed using a mix of standards that total between 18 to 20 credits. Care needs to be taken to ensure the course load is manageable and not larger than necessary.



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## More about NCEA

Find out more about how NCEA works on our website at [www.nzqa.govt.nz/how-ncea-works](http://www.nzqa.govt.nz/how-ncea-works), where you can also watch a short animated video on how NCEA works or download our brochure 'Understanding NCEA'. NCEA is well-recognised overseas - see [www.nzqa.govt.nz/international-recognition-of-ncea](http://www.nzqa.govt.nz/international-recognition-of-ncea) for more information.

International students can also download the 'Study in New Zealand' booklet on the **brochures and videos page**. The booklet is available in English and translated into six languages.

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