



Understanding NCEA

A guide for students, parents
and communities

NZQA

NEW ZEALAND QUALIFICATIONS AUTHORITY
MANA TOHU MĀTAURANGA O AOTEAROA

QUALIFY FOR THE FUTURE WORLD
KIA NOHO TAKATŪ KI TŌ AMŪA AO!

Contents

What is NCEA?	1
Features of NCEA	2
How to gain NCEA	3
How to achieve standards	4
Multi-level study	5
Literacy and numeracy	5
How work is assessed	6
Grades	6
Endorsements recognise higher achievement	7
End of year external examinations	7
NCEA results and what they show	8
Making use of NCEA	9
It is important to have a plan	9
Youth Guarantee	10
Recognising high achievement	12
University Entrance (UE)	12
New Zealand Scholarship	12

What is NCEA?

NCEA stands for the National Certificate of Educational Achievement. It is the main qualification for secondary school students in New Zealand and it is available at three levels on the New Zealand Qualifications Framework; Level 1, Level 2 and Level 3, which most students work through from Years 11 to 13 (usually between the ages 15–18).

NCEA is for all students. Some may be heading for university, others may be planning to do an apprenticeship, still others may want to learn practical skills and get a job after leaving school. The important thing to remember is that whatever path students are taking, NCEA will help them achieve their goal. Students can

also complete their NCEA at tertiary organisations, or by undertaking study across their secondary school and a tertiary organisation.

NCEA is an important and well regarded qualification. NCEA Level 2 is often an entry-level requirement for jobs and some tertiary courses. Tertiary organisations (including universities) and employers use NCEA results to see whether an applicant has the mix of skills and knowledge they require.

Read our Introducing NCEA pocket guide or view our How NCEA Works animation to learn the basics about the NCEA journey.

www.nzqa.govt.nz



**START
HERE**



Features of NCEA

One of the main features of NCEA is that it is a very flexible qualification.

The type of assessment varies across courses and NCEA levels. The mix of assessment varies for every student depending on the courses the school or tertiary organisation offers and which ones the student chooses to study.

NCEA involves a mix of both internal and external assessment. Internal assessment is carried out throughout the year and is assessed by teachers. The tests and assessments that happen throughout the year are graded by teachers and quality assured by NZQA. External assessment is carried out through national examinations at the end of each year, or the submission of a portfolio of work. NZQA runs external assessments.

The mix of external and internal assessment enables students to demonstrate what they know and what they can do. They are assessed on their level of achievement in these tasks – for example, presenting a speech or carrying out a science experiment – as well as working under the conditions of an external examination.

To gain NCEA at each of the three levels, students need to achieve a specified number of credits. Credits can be built up during the year – or even over more than one year – and they last forever. It means students can keep earning credits while at school and afterwards through more study or by learning some new skills at work.



It is easy for students to keep track online of how many credits they've earned, so they know when they have met the requirements for an NCEA qualification. When applying for a job or a place on a tertiary course, their NCEA results will show the qualifications they have obtained, their grades and what courses they did well in.

NCEA is recognised in many countries. Each year students who have achieved NCEA go on to study at universities around the world (but university entry criteria vary between countries).

How to gain NCEA

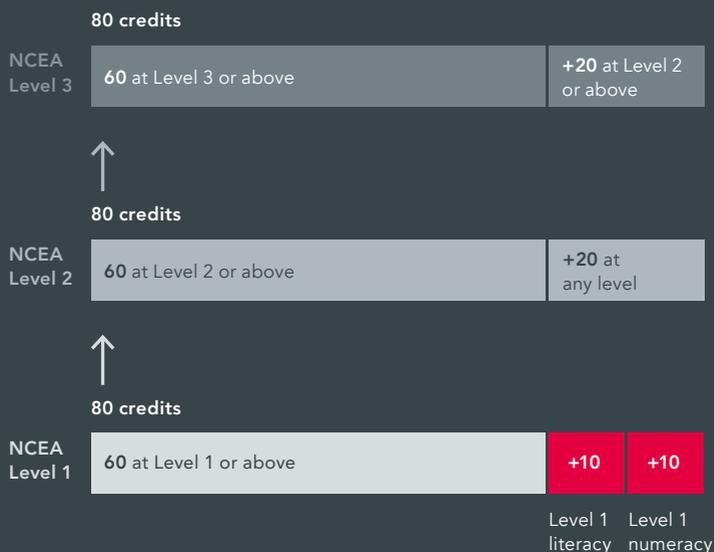
With NCEA, subjects are divided into standards that assess all the things students need to know and show they can do. Standards assess the different areas of knowledge and skills within that subject. Each standard is worth credits that contribute towards gaining NCEA at Level 1, Level 2 and Level 3.

To achieve each level of NCEA, students must gain 80 credits. Literacy and numeracy requirements must also be met to achieve NCEA at every level.

At levels 2 and 3, 20 of the 80 credits can be from another level (see diagram below). For example, students can

achieve NCEA Level 2 by gaining 60 credits at Level 2 plus 20 credits at Level 1. Credits gained at one level can count towards more than one NCEA qualification, and this can happen over more than one school year.

The literacy and numeracy criteria require students to achieve a minimum of 10 credits in literacy and 10 credits in numeracy from specified standards. Once the literacy and numeracy requirements have been met at Level 1 they can count toward every NCEA qualification gained (i.e. they only need to be achieved once).



Only need to be achieved once and can count towards every NCEA qualification

NCEA CREDITS REQUIRED

How to achieve standards

Students' work is assessed against a set of standards in each course they are studying. Teachers will explain to their students how each standard will be assessed and can let students know how they are progressing.

Each standard is worth a number of credits – usually between three and six.

There are two types of standards that schools assess:

Achievement Standards can be assessed by internal assessment, which takes place throughout the year and is marked by teachers and checked by NZQA. They can also be assessed by external assessment,

which is assessed by NZQA at the end of the year. Achievement standards are based on the New Zealand Curriculum and Te Marautanga o Aotearoa (the Māori curriculum).

Unit Standards are assessed internally in school, a tertiary organisation, or the workplace (throughout the year) and usually assess a vocational based skill. Field Māori unit standards assess a range of Mātauranga Māori-based skills and knowledge. Assessment of unit standards is checked by NZQA or the industry responsible for the particular standards.

Both sets of standards contribute towards NCEA and can also lead to more specific qualifications.

A list of the standards being assessed in a curriculum subject (for example, Mathematics) may look like this:

Standard number	Assessment type	Name of standard	Credits
91026	Internal	Apply numeric reasoning in solving problems	4
91027	External	Apply algebraic procedures in solving problems	4
91028	External	Investigate relationships between tables, equations and graphs	4
91031	External	Apply geometric reasoning in solving problems	4
91038	Internal	Investigate a situation involving elements of chance	3
Total			19

Multi-level study

Most Year 11 students start at Level 1, and progress to Level 2 in Year 12, and Level 3 in Year 13.

Students can sometimes study a mix of standards at different levels, depending on their ability. For example, Year 12 students may do most courses at Level 2, but start a new course at Level 1 or study another course at Level 3 because they are good at it.

Students can also study courses with standards that are assessed at more than one level. For example, a Year 11 English course may contain both Level 1 and Level 2 standards.

These standards can contribute to both an NCEA Level 1 and NCEA Level 2 qualification.

Literacy and numeracy

Students must achieve 10 credits for literacy and 10 credits for numeracy from a range of standards in order to be awarded an NCEA. Once the literacy and numeracy requirements have been met at Level 1 (or through higher level study if necessary) they can count toward each NCEA qualification (i.e. they only need to be achieved once).

There are a number of specified standards across a range of curriculum subjects that provide students with the opportunity to demonstrate reading, writing, speaking and listening skills (literacy) and number, measurement and statistical skills (numeracy). Achievement of these standards provides students with the literacy and numeracy credits they need. There are also three literacy unit standards and three numeracy unit standards available. Students can use either of these pathways (curriculum or unit standards) to meet the NCEA literacy and numeracy requirements.



How work is assessed

Assessment measures students' performance against standards. Students whose work meets the requirements of the standard gain credits towards their NCEA qualification.

Assessment is carried out either externally or internally. External assessment is carried out through national examinations at the end of each year, which are run by NZQA. Students' work in these examinations is assessed by independent subject experts.

For some subjects, like Technology and Visual Arts, students submit a portfolio of work completed at school (or tertiary organisations) for external assessment.

Internal assessment of student work is carried out throughout the year and is usually assessed by the students' teachers.

Internal assessment often assesses skills such as practical experiments, building something, doing a presentation or performance, or delivering a speech, which cannot be easily assessed in a written examination.



Grades

Results for each standard tell students how well they have done and how many credits they've earned. The grade shows how well a student did in reaching the standard. The grades are:

- N** Not Achieved
- A** Achieved
- M** Merit
- E** Excellence

Endorsements recognise higher achievement

Students should aim to earn NCEA qualifications that are endorsed with Merit or Excellence, to reflect high achievement.

There are two types of endorsement:

Course Endorsement: when students gain 14 or more credits at Excellence in a course in a single year, they will be awarded an Excellence endorsement in that course. Students who gain 14 or more credits at a mix of Merit and Excellence levels in a single year, will be awarded a Merit endorsement. At least three of the credits that contribute to Course Endorsement must be from externally assessed standards, and three from internally assessed standards.

(Note: Physical Education, Religious Studies and Level 3 Visual Arts courses are exempt from this condition).

Certificate Endorsement: when a student gains 50 or more credits at Excellence level over all the courses they are studying, their NCEA certificate will be endorsed with Excellence. If a student gains 50 or more credits at a mix of Merit and Excellence levels, then their NCEA certificate will be endorsed with Merit. Credits can be earned over more than one year.

In addition to achievement standards, there are a range of unit standards with Merit and Excellence grades that can contribute towards endorsements.

End of year external examinations

Towards the end of each school year (normally in November and December), national NCEA examinations take place. Examination timetables can be found on the NZQA website.

In these examinations, students are assessed against standards in three hour examinations for each subject. There are usually around 120 different examinations.

In mid-January, once examinations are marked and results are entered into NZQA's database, they are released online so students can view their final NCEA results for the year.

Examination answer booklets are returned to students, usually in late January each year. If they have concerns about how their work was marked, students can apply to NZQA to have their answer booklets checked or marked again. More information about this is available on the NZQA website at www.nzqa.govt.nz.

NCEA results and what they show

Students can access their results by logging in to the Learner login page on the NZQA website, www.nzqa.govt.nz/learner-login using their unique National Student Number (NSN) and a password.

Students will be able to see:

- results of internal assessments as they are completed and sent to NZQA by schools (or tertiary organisations)
- results of external assessment in January
- University Entrance, if achieved, in January
- New Zealand Scholarship examination results in February.

There are a number of documents available that record student results:

- NCEA certificates, including certificate endorsement (with Merit or Excellence) are printed on request and sent to students.
- The School Results Summary (SRS) lists all standards for which students have been assessed, with the results grouped by year, course and level. It also shows any national qualifications and endorsements, University Entrance and New Zealand Scholarship.

- The Record of Achievement (ROA) is an official transcript of standards and qualifications achieved, including awards like Vocational Pathways and University Entrance. The ROA grows as students gain new standards and qualifications through further tertiary study and industry training.

Students can log in to the NZQA website and print their own Record of Achievement or School Results Summary. An official copy of their ROA can be printed on request and sent to students.

To check NSN numbers and passwords, or for further information, students can also contact NZQA by phoning **0800 697 296**.

Making use of NCEA

It is important to have a plan

NCEA is for all students – if they're heading to university, interested in gaining a trade qualification or completing an apprenticeship, or getting a job after leaving school – doing well in NCEA will help students in their chosen path. Students can also complete NCEA at tertiary organisations, or by undertaking study across their secondary school and a tertiary organisation.

Students need to know that the courses they are studying are taking them in the direction they want to go. It's a bit like planning a trip; it helps to have an idea of where you want to go, and a map so that you know how to get there.

It is never too early for students, parents and whānau to start planning by sitting down and talking about aspirations and career goals. The earlier these conversations start, the better, because the subject/course choices students make for their NCEA will play a big role in their further study and job options.

When helping students choose courses, parents and whānau should encourage them to take a broad range of subjects at Level 1, but to start thinking about what areas they might focus on for future study or a future career at Levels 2 and 3.

Subject choice is important – Science, English and Mathematics are the basis for many jobs and taking these core subjects from Level 1 will provide the groundwork needed for study in more specialised areas – such as nursing, engineering, or carpentry – in later years. A wide range of other subjects is available, from Accounting to Health, Māori Performing Arts, Technology and the languages.

NCEA Level 2 results are often used as part of the selection process for entry to some tertiary courses, as well as by employers.

Students must achieve particular Level 3 standards as an entry requirement for university and other tertiary study.

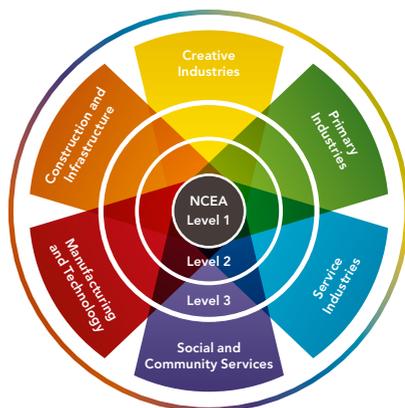
Teachers and school careers advisors can provide advice on the subjects and grades needed to help school students achieve their goals.

Some simple questions parents and whānau can ask students to start a conversation about career aspirations may be:

- What are your strengths?
- What are your interests?
- What's your goal when you leave school?
- What qualifications will you need to achieve this goal?
- Are you taking the right subjects to help you get to this goal?

The more parents and whānau know about NCEA, the more they are able to help their student to succeed.

Teachers are always happy to help students, parents and whānau with any questions about NCEA and explain how it can help individual students to achieve their goals.



Youth Guarantee

The Youth Guarantee initiative is all about providing 16–19 year olds with more options and choices to gain a New Zealand Qualifications Framework Level 1–3 qualification (including NCEA) and go on to further education and training.

The Vocational Pathways framework helps students to plan their study or to move into further learning, skills training or the workplace.

The Vocational Pathways cover six broad sectors of industry:

- Manufacturing and Technology
- Construction and Infrastructure
- Primary Industries
- Social and Community Services
- Service Industries
- Creative Industries.

The Vocational Pathways Profile (example below) shows achievement against each of the Vocational Pathways. Students can see their progress and check that their course selections provide the pathways they need to achieve their goals.

A Vocational Pathways Award provides formal recognition of a student's completion of a particular pathway. Students can receive more than one award if they complete more than one Vocational Pathway. Students can show

how their achievement relates to the learning or skills training employers are seeking. Students can see their Vocational Pathways Award when they log in to the learner page of the NZQA website at www.nzqa.govt.nz/learner-login.

Students can also visit www.careers.govt.nz or www.youthguarantee.net.nz for tools to help plan their future study and work options.

Overview

To get vocational pathways awarded, you need to achieve:



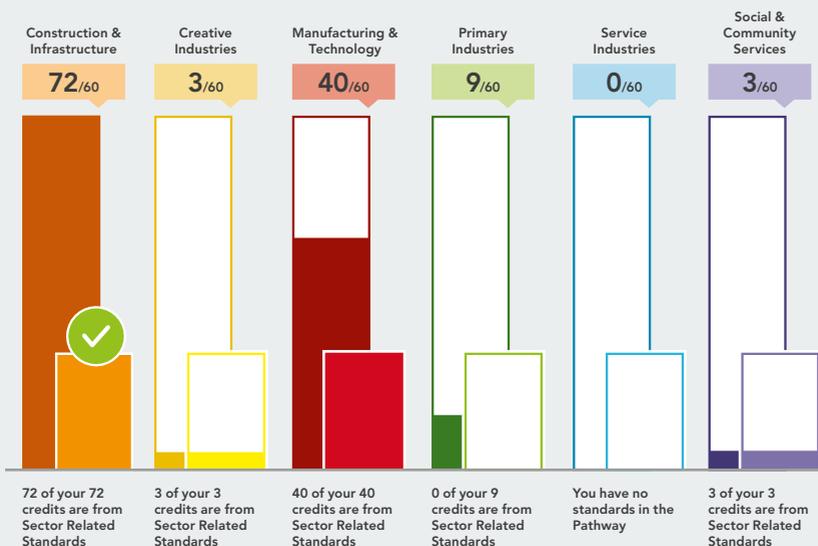
NCEA Literacy



NCEA Numeracy



NCEA Level 2



Recognising high achievement

NCEA results are important. It is worth aiming to get Merit or Excellence grades as they give extra recognition of a student's abilities. They give a good indication of subject areas that students did particularly well in and the quality of work produced.

Endorsement also recognises high achievement and indicates to employers and course providers when students have achieved good academic results and performed at a consistently high level.

The two types of endorsement (Certificate Endorsement and Course Endorsement) can both be used to select school leavers for tertiary programmes or jobs. Universities and other tertiary providers will be particularly interested in seeing endorsements when they are selecting students for programmes with restricted numbers.

University Entrance (UE)

UE is the minimum requirement needed for making an application to study at a New Zealand university.

To gain University Entrance, students need to achieve NCEA Level 3. This must include achieving standards that are on the list of approved subjects for University Entrance. They must also meet specific literacy and numeracy requirements. A full list of requirements and approved subjects for University Entrance is available on the NZQA website www.nzqa.govt.nz/ue.

New Zealand Scholarship

New Zealand Scholarship examinations provide a further challenge for the most able secondary school students. New Zealand Scholarship is the highest academic secondary school award in New Zealand and provides recognition and monetary reward to top students.

Students enter New Zealand Scholarship through their secondary school. More information about New Zealand Scholarship is on the NZQA website www.nzqa.govt.nz.

NCEA Apps from NZQA



NCEA Guide

The NCEA Guide App is for parents, whānau and employers and provides quick and easy access to key information about NCEA. The App is free to download from iTunes or the Google play store.



NCEA Student

There are a range of Apps available that support young people studying NCEA. The NCEA Student App helps students plan their study programme, set assessment reminders and track their progress. This App facilitates goal setting and can be customised.

Contact us:

Phone **0800 697 296**

Email **helpdesk@nzqa.govt.nz**

Web **www.nzqa.govt.nz**

We'd love to hear your views on this brochure.

Please go to: **www.nzqa.govt.nz/brochures** to complete a short survey.



NEW ZEALAND QUALIFICATIONS AUTHORITY
MANA TOHU HĀTAURANGA O AOTEAROA

QUALIFY FOR THE FUTURE WORLD
KIA NOHO TAKATŪ KI TŌ ĀMUA AO!



@NCEAexams



@NCEAexams

English
Published March 2017

New Zealand Government