



NEW ZEALAND QUALIFICATIONS AUTHORITY
MANA TOHU MĀTAURANGA O AOTEAROA

QUALIFY FOR THE FUTURE WORLD
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Understanding NCEA

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CHAPTER 1

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 comes in three levels on the New Zealand Qualifications Framework: Level 1, Level 2 and Level 3 which students usually work through from Years 11 to 13 (usually 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 a student is taking, NCEA can help them achieve their goal. Students can also complete 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 providers (including universities) and employers often use NCEA results to see whether an applicant has the mix of skills and knowledge they require.

For secondary school students, schools register students in NCEA and tell them when to pay fees.

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, so the mix of assessment varies for every student depending on the subjects 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 a student's teacher. External assessment is carried out through national examinations at the end of each year.

The tests and assessments that happen throughout the year are graded by teachers and quality assured by NZQA.

The mix of external and internal assessment enables students to demonstrate what they actually know and what they can do, and they get assessed on their level of ability in doing these tasks – for example, presenting a speech or carrying out an experiment, as well as working under the constraints 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 that 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 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, people will be able to look at NCEA results, see the qualifications a student has obtained, their grades and what courses they did well in.

NCEA is internationally recognised by many countries. Each year students who have achieved NCEA go on to study at universities around the world. (Entry criteria varies between countries). ●



CHAPTER 2

How to gain NCEA

With NCEA, subjects are divided into all the things students need to know and be able to do. These are called standards and they assess different areas of knowledge and skills. Each standard is worth credits, which contribute towards gaining NCEA at Level 1, Level 2 and Level 3.

Each level of NCEA requires 80 credits. At levels 2 and 3, 20 of the 80 credits can be from another level (see the infographic below). For example, a student 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 level qualification, and this can happen over more than one school year.

The Level 1 literacy and numeracy requirements must also be met to achieve NCEA at every level. This involves obtaining a minimum of 10 credits in literacy and 10 credits in numeracy. 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).

NCEA Level	Credits required	Literacy and Numeracy credits required
Level 3	80 credits: 60 at Level 3 or above plus 20 at Level 2 or above	Level 1 10 literacy, 10 numeracy (only need to be achieved once and can count towards every NCEA qualification)
Level 2	80 credits: 60 at Level 2 or above plus 20 at any level	
Level 1	80 credits: At Level 1 or above	

How to achieve standards

When a student studies a course of mathematics for example, their work is assessed against a set of standards. 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 (quality assured by NZQA), and 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 (also throughout the year) and usually assess a vocational based skill. They are quality assured by NZQA or the industry responsible.

Both sets of standards 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	ASSESSMENT	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.

Schools may allow students to study a mix of standards at different levels, depending on a student's ability. For example, a Year 12 student 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, an English Year 11 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

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

There are a number of specified standards across a range of curriculum subjects that students can be assessed against to earn the literacy and numeracy credits they need. These standards are selected because they provide students with the opportunity to demonstrate reading, writing, speaking and listening skills (literacy) and number, measurement and statistical skills (numeracy).

Endorsements recognise higher achievement

NCEA qualifications can be endorsed with Merit or Excellence, to reflect high achievement.

There are two types of endorsement:

Course Endorsement when a student gains 14 or more credits at Excellence in a course in a single year, they will be awarded an Excellence endorsement in that course. If a student gains 14 or more credits at a mix of Merit and Excellence levels, they 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).

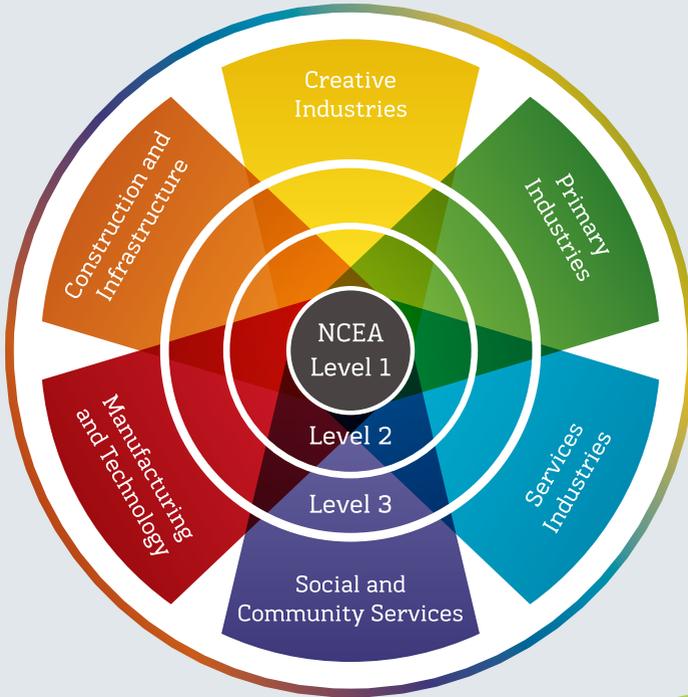
Certificate Endorsement when a student gains 50 or more credits at Excellence level over all the courses they are studying, their NCEA certificate will be endorsed with Excellence. If a student gains 50 or more credits at a mix of Merit and Excellence levels, then their NCEA certificate will be endorsed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

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.

Vocational Pathways provide new ways to achieve NCEA Level 2. The pathways show students how learning and achievement will be valued in the workplace. They also suggest the types of study options and job opportunities available to learners.

Vocational Pathways



The Vocational Pathways are a tool that provide a clear framework for vocational options, linking education decisions and future employment aspirations to six broad sectors of industry:

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

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

Overview

To get vocational pathways awarded, you need to achieve:



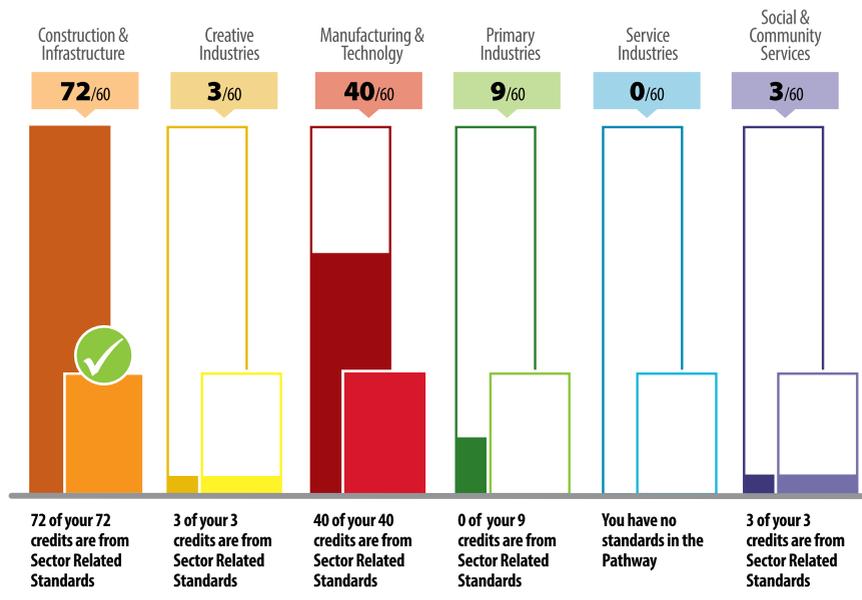
NCEA Literacy



NCEA Numeracy



NCEA Level 2



The Vocational Pathways Profile is a visual graph (example above) that 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. A Vocational Pathways Award can be viewed by students 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.

How work is assessed

Assessment measures student performance against standards – if a student's work meets the requirements of the standard, the standard is achieved and the student gains 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 assessed by independent subject experts.

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

Internal assessment is carried out throughout the year and is usually assessed by a student's teacher.

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

By using a mix of external and internal assessment, students get to demonstrate their strengths through having the opportunity to be assessed on a range of skills beyond those assessed in a written examination.

What are grades?

Results for each standard tell students how many credits they've earned and include a letter next to each one known as a grade, which shows how well a student did in reaching the standard. The grades are:

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

How do end of year external examinations work?

Towards the end of each school year (normally between 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 examinations, students are required to complete a range of tasks under pressure. Every student across the country does the same examination papers at the same time under the same conditions.

Once examinations are marked and student results are entered into NZQA's system, they are released online so that students can view their final NCEA results for the year – this happens in mid-January.

Examination answer booklets are returned to students – this normally happens in late January each year. Students can contact NZQA as part of the review and reconsideration process 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

NZQA administers NCEA and holds a database of all results. Students can access results by logging in to the learner home page on the NZQA website, www.nzqa.govt.nz/learner-login by using a 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.
- New Zealand Scholarship examination results in February.
- University Entrance, if achieved.

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

- NCEA certificates including certificate endorsement (with Merit or Excellence). These certificates 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 Vocational Pathways Awards and University Entrance. The ROA grows as students gain new standards through further tertiary study and industry training.

Students can login 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. ●



CHAPTER 3

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 and 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, technology, 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 or carpentry – in later years.

NCEA Level 2 results are often used as part of the selection process by universities, tertiary organisations, industry and employers. Students must achieve particular Level 3 courses and standards as an entry requirement for further tertiary study.



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

Some simple questions parents and caregivers 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 teen to succeed. Discuss your student's needs and aspirations with teachers – they are there to help.

How to support your child's study – top tips

- **Meet with the school regularly** Teachers know their students best. They know what their students are studying and how each student is progressing. They know all about NCEA and can answer any questions you have. Teachers can also advise on the most suitable courses for a student to take.
- **Know the internal assessment schedule and examination timetable** With NCEA, students work throughout the year. Schools produce an internal assessment calendar – ask for a copy, mark down key dates and activities, and leave it somewhere handy to measure progress across the year.



Be sure to know when NCEA examinations are being sat and where, so that support can be provided to students beforehand.

- **Provide a suitable study environment** Students need a quiet, organised and well lit space to study throughout the year, not just at examination time, and they need to take the time to study.

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 also give a good indication of what subject areas students did particularly well in and show the quality of work produced.

Endorsement also recognises high achievement and provides a good indication to employers and course providers that a student has achieved good academic results and performed at a consistently high level.

There are two types of endorsement (Certificate Endorsement and Course Endorsement – more information on page 6) and both can 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 L3. This must include achieving credits in subjects/ courses that are on the list of approved subjects for University Entrance. They must also meet the 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 qualification in New Zealand and provides recognition and monetary reward to top students.

Students enter New Zealand Scholarship through their secondary school. 🍷



Glossary of terms

Assessment: Way to measure a student's performance in a course. There are two types:

- External assessment: National examinations or the submission of a portfolio of work completed at school or with the school and a tertiary organisation, assessed by NZQA.
 - Internal assessment: Assessment that takes place throughout the year, assessed by teachers in school.
-

Credits: Each standard is worth credits that count towards NCEA. Credits allocated to a standard reflect the learning time it takes on average to achieve the standard. Credits can be built up and, once earned, they last forever.

Endorsements: Course Endorsement recognises high achievement in an individual course. Certificate Endorsement recognises overall high achievement at a NCEA Level (for example students can get NCEA Level 2 Certificate Endorsement, which shows high grades have been gained at Level 2 across a range of subjects).



Literacy: Reading, writing, speaking and listening skills.

National Student Number (NSN): A unique number code identifying each student.

NCEA: National Certificate of Educational Achievement.

Numeracy: Number, measurement and statistical skills.

Quality Assurance: A process completed by NZQA to monitor assessment methods, consistency, and quality.

Record of Achievement (ROA): An official transcript of standards and qualifications achieved. The ROA grows as students gain new standards and qualifications through tertiary study and industry training.

Results: Results for each standard include a letter demonstrating how well the student has done in reaching that standard: E (Excellence), M (Merit), A (Achieved), N (Not Achieved).

Reviews and Reconsiderations: Following the release of external NCEA examination results, students can apply for a reconsideration if they think their answer booklet has not been assessed correctly, or apply for a review if they think their results have not been correctly recorded.

School Results Summary: Lists all standards for which students have been assessed with the results, including Not Achieved results, grouped by year, course and level.

Standards: Standards describe what a student who has achieved the standard knows and can do. Subjects are divided into sets of standards.

Subjects: These are groups of standards put together by schools or tertiary organisations, and offered to students. For example science, technology, English and mathematics. Sometimes subjects are called courses – particularly if they assess a range of standards from interrelated subjects.

University Entrance (UE): UE is the minimum requirement to be admitted for enrolment at a New Zealand university. Generally students qualify for UE in Year 13.

Find Out More

Guide to organisations, resources and websites for more information on NCEA

New Zealand Qualifications Authority	Information about NCEA including: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Subject information• Subject resources• Examination timetables• Innovation and the future of assessment	www.nzqa.govt.nz 0800 697 296
Ministry of Education	Information on education in New Zealand	www.education.govt.nz
Youth Guarantee	Information about possible vocational pathways (careers)	www.youthguarantee.net.nz
Careers NZ	Career advice and information	www.careers.govt.nz 0800 222 733
Study it	NCEA study tips and skills	www.studyit.org

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.



New Zealand Qualifications Authority

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Published February 2016

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