

NEW ZEALAND QUALIFICATIONS

AUTHORITY



NEW ZEALAND QUALIFICATIONS AUTHORITY  
MANA TOHU MĀTAURANGA O AOTEAROA

# Understanding NCEA

# CONTENTS

---

## CHAPTER 1: WHAT IS NCEA? 1

Features of NCEA 2

---

## CHAPTER 2: HOW TO GAIN NCEA 3

HOW TO ACHIEVE STANDARDS 4

Multi-level study 5

Literacy and numeracy 5

Endorsements 6

Youth Guarantee 6

Vocational Pathways 7

HOW WORK IS ASSESSED 8

What are grades? 8

How do end of year examinations work? 9

NCEA results and what they show 10

---

## CHAPTER 3: MAKING USE OF NCEA 11

It is important to have a plan 11

How to support your child's study – top tips 12

Recognising high achievement 13

Glossary 15

Notes 17

Find out more 18



## 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: 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.

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.

Schools enter 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.

NCEA involves a mix of both internal and external assessment. The type of assessment varies across subjects and NCEA levels, so the mix of assessment varies for every student depending on the courses the school offers and the subjects the student chooses to study.

In addition to national examinations, there are also tests and assessments that happen in school throughout the year which are graded by a student's teacher 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 pressure in 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 subjects 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, courses 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, made up of a certain number of credits at certain levels. Credits gained at one level can count towards more than one NCEA 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 Level 1 and 2, and from 2014 NCEA Level 3. This involves obtaining a minimum of 10 credits in literacy and 10 credits in numeracy. Once the literacy and numeracy requirements have been met, 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 1	80 credits: At Level 1 or above	10 literacy, 10 numeracy
Level 2	80 credits: 60 at Level 2 or above plus 20 at any level	10 literacy, 10 numeracy
Level 3	80 credits: 60 at Level 3 or above plus 20 at Level 2 or above	10 literacy, 10 numeracy (from 2014)

# How to achieve standards

When a student studies a course like mathematics for example, their work is assessed against a set standard. Teachers will explain to their students how the standard will be assessed and can tell students if they are on the right track.

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 in school throughout the year (quality assured by NZQA), and by external assessment which is assessed by NZQA at the end of the year.

**Unit Standards** are assessed internally in school or the workplace and usually assess a more vocational based skill. They lead to more specific qualifications, e.g. trade and apprenticeships and are quality assured by NZQA.

An assessment programme for a mathematics course at Level 1 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 specified standards.

There are a number of selected standards across a range of 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:

**Certificate Endorsement** is where 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 Merit or Excellence, then their NCEA certificate will be endorsed with Merit. Credits can be earned over more than one year.

**Course Endorsement** is where 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; or a Merit endorsement if they gain 14 or more credits at Merit (or a mix of Merit and Excellence). At least three of these credits 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).

### Youth Guarantee

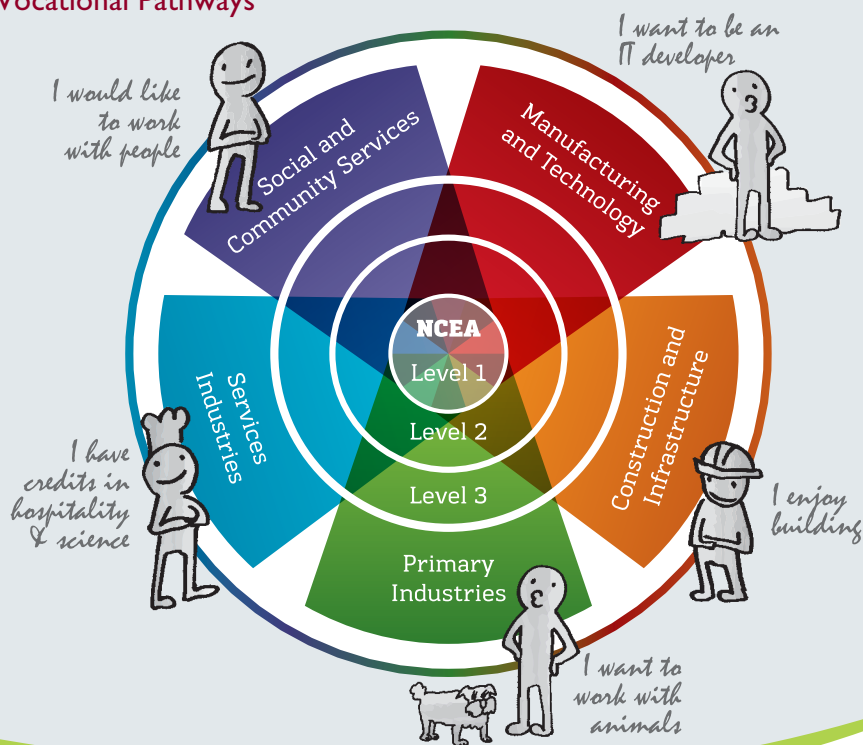
The Youth Guarantee initiative is all about providing students with more choices about how and where to achieve NCEA qualifications. It aims to make sure young people have the skills they need to achieve NCEA and transition to further education or participate in the workplace.

There are a range of Youth Guarantee Networks around the country which consist of education providers, employers and community groups who are working together to ensure students have more learning opportunities and more choice about what and where to learn.

There is a range of information and helpful resources available at [www.youthguarantee.net.nz](http://www.youthguarantee.net.nz)



## Vocational Pathways



The Vocational Pathways are part of the Government's wider Youth Guarantee initiative and are a tool that provides a clear framework for vocational options, linking education decisions and future employment aspirations to five broad sectors of industry:

- Manufacturing and Technology
- Construction and Infrastructure
- Primary Industries
- Social and Community Services
- Service Industries
- Creative Industries (this sixth sector will be added in 2014).

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

Using the Vocational Pathways, students are able to identify the courses and subjects required to achieve a vocational pathway and identify the standards valued by industry. Students can visit [www.careers.govt.nz](http://www.careers.govt.nz) or [www.youthguarantee.net.nz](http://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.

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

Internal assessment often assesses skills that cannot be assessed in a written examination, such as practical experiments, building something, doing a presentation 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 simply a written examination.

### What are grades?

Results for each standard tell students how many credits they've earned – but results also include a letter next to each one known as grades, which show how well a student did in reaching the standard.

<b>E</b>	Excellence
<b>M</b>	Merit
<b>A</b>	Achieved
<b>N</b>	Not Achieved



## How do end of year external examinations work?

Towards the end of each school year (normally over three weeks between November and early 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 examination sessions.

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, all results are released online so that students can view their final NCEA results for the year – this happens in mid-January.

New Zealand is the only country in the world that returns all examination answer booklets 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 remarked again – more information about this is available on the NZQA website.

## 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](http://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.
- Results of external assessment from 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 include 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 the award of University Entrance. The ROA grows as students gain new standards through 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. ●



## 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 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 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 choose for their NCEA will play a big role in their options after secondary school.

When helping students choose subjects, parents should encourage them to take a broad range 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 – English, mathematics and science 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 and employers. Students may also need to take particular Level 3 courses and standards as an entry requirement for tertiary programmes.

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





Some simple questions parents and caregivers can ask students to start a conversation about 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 know about NCEA, the more they are able to help their children 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, when 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 make 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 credits in subjects/ courses that are on the list of approved subjects for University Entrance. Students also need to meet 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](http://www.nzqa.govt.nz).

### **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.
- Internal assessment: Assessment that takes place in school throughout the year.

---

**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 at Level 2 have been gained).

---



---

**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 through tertiary study and industry training.

---

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

---

**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:** Subjects are divided into things students need to know and do. Standards are the building blocks towards creating a qualification.

---

**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.

---



## Notes

# 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"><li>• Subject information</li><li>• Subject resources</li><li>• Examination timetables</li></ul>	<a href="http://www.nzqa.govt.nz">www.nzqa.govt.nz</a> 0800 697 296
Ministry of Education	Information on education in New Zealand	<a href="http://www.minedu.govt.nz">www.minedu.govt.nz</a>
Youth Guarantee	Information about possible vocational pathways (careers)	<a href="http://www.youthguarantee.net.nz">www.youthguarantee.net.nz</a>
Careers NZ	Career advice and information	<a href="http://www.careers.govt.nz">www.careers.govt.nz</a> 0800 222 733
Study it	NCEA study tips and skills	<a href="http://www.studyit.org">www.studyit.org</a>

New Zealand Qualifications Authority

**P** 0800 697 296

**E** [helpdesk@nzqa.govt.nz](mailto:helpdesk@nzqa.govt.nz) | [www.nzqa.govt.nz](http://www.nzqa.govt.nz)

Published 2013