



Demographic and Statistical Analysis Unit

Māori Achievement and Achievement at Māori Immersion & Bilingual Schools

High Level Analysis

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Purpose

The purpose of this paper is to provide an overview of achievement by Māori candidates in New Zealand secondary schools, and achievement by candidates at Māori immersion and bilingual schools. This paper focuses on 2003 data, with some comparison to 2002 data.

The paper begins with key findings, some background information and a description of the populations used in the analysis. The topics covered in the analysis include: attainment of National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA) qualifications; the literacy and numeracy requirements of NCEA level 1; achievement by number and level of credits; excellence in achievement; and subject participation.

This paper is part of a wider analysis project looking at 2002 and 2003 National Qualifications Framework (NQF) data. The main themes of the analysis project are achievement in Māori-medium education, Pasifika achievement and achievement in mathematics.

Key Findings

Māori Achievement

- The proportion of Māori candidates gaining qualifications is increasing faster than for non-Māori, though Māori candidates are still less likely than non-Māori candidates to gain a qualification. The proportion of Māori Year 11 candidates who gained an NCEA qualification grew from 36% in 2002 to 41% in 2003 – an increase of 5 percentage points.
- Just over half of the Year 11 Māori candidates who did not gain a qualification in 2002 stayed on at school and either completed a qualification or gained more credits towards a qualification in 2003.
- When compared with non-Māori, a disproportionate number of Māori Year 11 level 1 candidates did not meet the literacy and numeracy requirements for level 1 NCEA.

Achievement at Māori Immersion and Bilingual Schools

- Year 11 candidates at bilingual schools were very successful in meeting the literacy and numeracy requirements for an NCEA level 1.
- Year 11 immersion school candidates were not as successful at gaining both requirements as bilingual school candidates. However, they had a very high rate of meeting the literacy requirements.
- Over half of all candidates at immersion and bilingual schools gained an NCEA qualification.

Background

The National Qualifications Framework (NQF) defines what standards-based qualifications can be awarded by New Zealand educational institutions. The main qualification on the NQF available to secondary school students is the National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA). NCEA level 1 was first available in 2002. Similarly, NCEA level 2 was first available in 2003, and NCEA level 3 is widely available from 2004 onwards. Please refer to the appendix for more information on the NQF and NCEA qualifications and terminology.

Population

This paper reports on results for candidates. A candidate is a student who has achieved at least one credit on the NQF. The number of candidates is therefore smaller than the cohort of secondary students who could take part in gaining credits.

The measure of candidates is used because not all schools appear to have reported students who attempted but did not achieve internally assessed credits. Including these students would therefore make the analysis outcomes unreliable. Candidates is the standard measure used in Ministry of Education analysis of NZQA senior secondary school data.

This paper discusses Year 11 and Year 12 candidates. These years of schooling are the typical years at which students first participate in gaining NCEA level 1 and level 2¹ respectively.

The results in the Māori Achievement section of this paper are reported on an ethnicity basis. Candidates who did not report their ethnicity are excluded from this analysis².

All candidates at Māori immersion and bilingual schools are reported in the Achievement at Māori Immersion and Bilingual Schools section. The number of candidates is too small to report on an ethnicity basis³.

¹ NCEA Level 3 was also available in 2003. However, level 3 achievement standards were first available in 2004 and hence University Bursary was the main qualification for Year 13 students in 2003. Candidates who gained an NCEA Level 3 qualification in 2003 did so with unit standards only.

² Candidates with no specified ethnicity account for around 6% of all Year 11 and Year 12 candidates. There were 3,257 Year 11 candidates and 2,431 Year 12 candidates with no specified ethnicity in 2003.

³ Additionally, a surprisingly high proportion (18%) of all Year 11 and Year 12 candidates at immersion and bilingual schools had no specified ethnicity in the 2003 NZQA data. However, the ethnicity data collected in the 2003 Ministry of Education school roll returns indicate that, although there were very small numbers of students from other ethnic groups, almost all students (91-100%) at these schools were Māori.

Māori Achievement

Qualifications attained

Gaining qualifications is an important step at senior secondary school. School qualifications provide students with pathways to higher qualifications and to employment opportunities in adult life. The proportion of Māori candidates gaining qualifications is increasing faster than for other ethnic groups, but Māori candidates are still less likely than non-Māori candidates to gain a qualification.

Less than half (41%) of Māori Year 11 candidates gained an NCEA qualification in 2003, which is considerably lower than the proportion of non-Māori Year 11 candidates (65%) who gained an NCEA in that year (illustrated in table 1). However, the 2003 results for Māori Year 11 candidates were an improvement over the results for Māori Year 11 candidates the previous year. In 2002, 36% of Māori Year 11 candidates gained an NCEA qualification.

A slightly higher proportion of non-Māori Year 11 candidates gained an NCEA qualification in 2003 than in 2002, but the improvement in achievement was not as large for non-Māori as for Māori. In 2002, 63% of non-Māori Year 11 candidates gained an NCEA qualification.

Table 1: Year 11 & 12 Candidates who achieved an NCEA qualification by highest level of qualification achieved, 2003

		Total number of candidates	Proportion of candidates achieving level 1	Proportion of candidates achieving level 2	Total proportion achieving an NCEA qualification
Year 11	Māori	6,733	40%	1%	41%
	Non-Māori	40,765	64%	1%	65%
Year 12	Māori	4,432	21%	40%	62%
	Non-Māori	32,795	10%	61%	72%

Note: Percentages in the table may not add to the total due to rounding.

At 62%, the proportion of Māori Year 12 candidates who gained an NCEA qualification was closer to the non-Māori proportion of 72% than many other measures of achievement, such as number and level of credits gained. However, Māori Year 12 candidates were more likely to gain a lower level NCEA qualification than their non-Māori counterparts. Other analysis has shown that Māori students who gain level 1 credits but not a qualification in Year 11, are returning and completing a level 1 qualification in Year 12.

Meeting literacy and numeracy requirements for NCEA level 1

A candidate gains an NCEA qualification by achieving a certain number of credits at specified levels. For NCEA level 1 there is also a literacy and numeracy requirement to the qualification. This section explores patterns of achievement for literacy and numeracy requirements for Year 11 candidates. The following section looks at achievement patterns of the number of credits as they relate to NCEA levels 1 and 2.

The literacy requirement for NCEA level 1 involves achieving 8 credits from specified literacy standards. Similarly, the numeracy requirement involves gaining 8 credits from specified numeracy standards. Achieving the literacy and numeracy requirements are important milestones in achieving an NCEA level 1 qualification.

Table 2: Year 11 Candidates who met and did not meet the literacy and numeracy requirements for NCEA level 1, 2003

	Year 11 Level 1 Candidates	Met both the literacy and numeracy requirements		Did not meet both of the literacy and numeracy requirements	
	Number	Number	% of level 1 candidates	Number	% of level 1 candidates
Māori	6,719	3,888	58%	2,831	42%
Non-Māori	40,719	30,583	75%	10,136	25%

When compared with non-Māori, a disproportionate number of Māori Year 11 level 1 candidates did not meet the literacy and numeracy requirements for level 1 NCEA (illustrated in table 2). However, the lower proportion of Māori achieving NCEA level 1 is largely a result of candidates who neither have enough credits, nor have met the literacy and numeracy requirements.

Some of the candidates who did not meet both the literacy and numeracy requirements gained one but not the other. Overall, 32% of Māori Year 11 candidates did not meet the literacy requirements and 25% did not meet the numeracy requirements. This compares to 18% of non-Māori Year 11 candidates not achieving the literacy requirements and 14% not meeting the numeracy requirements.

Table 3: Year 11 level 1 candidates who did not meet literacy requirements for NCEA level 1, 2003

		Year 11 Level 1 Candidates	Did not meet literacy requirements	
		Number	Number	% of level 1 candidates
Māori	Male	3,125	1,184	38%
	Female	3,594	964	27%
Non-Māori	Male	20,299	4,869	24%
	Female	20,420	2,560	13%

Table 4: Year 11 level 1 candidates who did not meet numeracy requirements for NCEA level 1, 2003

		Year 11 Level 1 Candidates	Did not meet numeracy requirements	
		Number	Number	% of level 1 candidates
Māori	Male	3,125	778	25%
	Female	3,594	872	24%
Non-Māori	Male	20,299	3189	16%
	Female	20,420	2463	12%

The gender patterns in literacy and numeracy achievement (illustrated in tables 3 & 4) were similar for Māori and non-Māori. A higher proportion of males than females did not meet the literacy requirements. There was little gender difference in the achievement of the numeracy requirements. Interestingly, a higher proportion of students in all groups achieved the numeracy requirements than the literacy requirements.

Number and level of credits attained

The NQF offers schools and students more flexibility in gaining qualifications. If a candidate does not obtain a qualification in a given year, they can carry their credits over to the next year and do not need to repeat those areas of the curriculum. Candidates are also able to gain credits at more than one level in a single year, meaning that they can complete the requirements of the lower level qualification while starting to build credits for the next qualification. Another measure of achievement therefore is the number of credits gained by candidates.

Table 5: Year 11 candidates by achievement at all levels, 2003

	TOTAL ALL LEVELS	Candidates who gained 1-39 credits all levels		Candidates who gained 40-79 credits all levels		Candidates who gained 80-119 credits all levels		Candidates who gained 120+ credits all levels	
		No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Māori	6,733	1,400	21	2,459	37	2,101	31	773	11
Non-Māori	40,765	4,232	10	9,037	22	14,660	36	12,836	31

To gain an NCEA level 1 candidates need to achieve 80 or more credits at level 1 or above, including the literacy and numeracy requirements.

The proportion of Māori Year 11 candidates who gained between 80 and 119 credits is similar to the proportion of non-Māori (illustrated in table 5). However, a much higher proportion of non-Māori Year 11 candidates gained over 120 credits. This means that overall the proportion of Māori Year 11 candidates who gained sufficient credits for an NCEA level 1 in 2003 was lower than that for non-Māori.

Almost all Year 11 candidates gained at least some of their credits at level 1, with a high proportion (60%) gaining all of their credits at level 1. As a comparison, 55% of Māori Year 11 candidates and 61% of non-Māori Year 11 candidates gained all their credits at level 1. This suggests that Māori Year 11 candidates were slightly more likely to gain credits at multiple levels than non-Māori candidates. However, for most of the Year 11 candidates who gained credits at more than one level, level 1 credits still made up the bulk of their total credits.

Table 6: Year 12 candidates by number of credits attained at level 2 and above, 2003

	TOTAL ALL LEVELS	Candidates who gained 1-29 credits level 2+		Candidates who gained 30-59 credits level 2+		Candidates who gained 60-89 credits level 2+		Candidates who gained 90+ credits level 2+	
		No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Māori	4,432	1,324	30	1,296	29	996	22	641	14
Non-Māori	32,795	5,835	18	6,834	21	8,228	25	11,170	34

To gain an NCEA level 2 a candidate needs to gain 60 credits or more at level 2 or above.

As was the case with Year 11 candidates, a similar proportion of Māori and non-Māori Year 12 candidates gained at or just above the number of credits required to achieve an NCEA level 2 (shown in table 6). However, the higher proportion of non-Māori Year 12 candidates who gained over 90 credits at level 2 or above meant that a higher proportion of non-Māori than Māori Year 12 candidates gained enough credits for an NCEA level 2.

Year 12 candidates were more likely than Year 11 candidates to gain credits at multiple levels. Although most Year 12 candidates gained credits at level 2, only 18% of Māori Year 12 candidates and 34% of non-Māori Year 12 candidates gained all their credits at level 2.

Many Year 12 candidates gained level 1 credits. Level 1 credits are not shown in table 6. 77% of Māori Year 12 candidates and 59% of non-Māori Year 12 candidates gained some credits at level 1. Most of these candidates gained fewer than 40 credits, indicating that they were building on the level 1 credits they gained as Year 11 candidates in 2002.

Māori Year 12 candidates were more likely to gain credits at level 3 or above than non-Māori Year 12 candidates. A third of all Māori Year 12 candidates gained level 3 credits, and a small number gained credits at levels 4, 5 and 6. Overall, 34% of Māori Year 12 candidates gained credits at level 3 or above, whereas 29% of non-Māori Year 12 candidates were achieving at level 3 or above in 2003.

Excellence in Achievement

Excellence can be measured in many ways under the qualification framework. One possible measure of excellence is performing above the level typical for a candidate's year of schooling. This is touched on in the section above. Candidates can also gain achievement standards with 'excellence'. In 2003, 57% of all Year 11 candidates and 47% of all Year 12 candidates gained some credits 'with excellence'. But these candidates did not necessarily gain a qualification in 2003.

Another measure of excellence (illustrated in table 7) is to count those who gained a qualification and who also gained 25% of their credits at the level of the qualification with 'excellence'⁴.

⁴ Only achievement standards can be awarded with an excellence grade, but both achievement and unit standards count towards an NCEA qualification. The 25% is measured against the total number of credits regardless of whether they are from unit or achievement standards.

Table 7: Candidates who achieved an NCEA qualification and received a ‘with excellence’ result for at least 25% of their credits, 2003

		Number	Proportion of candidates
Year 11	Māori	127	2%
	Non-Māori	3669	9%
Year 12	Māori	81	2%
	Non-Māori	2608	8%

Very small proportions of both Māori and non-Māori Year 11 and 12 candidates gained a qualification with ‘excellence’ for 25% or more of their credits.

Subject participation and achievement

The proportion of candidates gaining credits by learning area is illustrated in table 8 (overleaf). There was little difference between the proportion of Māori and non-Māori gaining credits in most learning areas.

The proportion of Māori Year 11 and Year 12 candidates gaining credits in science, however, was markedly lower than for their non-Māori counterparts. There were fewer Māori Year 12 candidates gaining credits in science than in every other learning area apart from the arts. It is unclear whether this is due to Māori students being less likely to take science as a subject, or whether Māori were less likely to achieve credits in science.

Not surprisingly, Māori candidates had higher participation rates in Te Reo Māori than non-Māori. Te Reo Māori is part of the languages learning area. It was the only subject where Māori candidates actually outnumbered non-Māori candidates.

Future analysis will look in more depth at subject achievement, with particular emphasis on the mathematics learning area.

Table 8: Proportion of candidates gaining credits in learning areas (at all levels) as a proportion of all candidates, 2003

		Number of Candidates	Candidates gaining credits in learning areas as a proportion of all candidates								
			Languages-English	Languages-Te Reo	Languages-Other	Mathematics	Science	Social Sciences	The Arts	Health & PE	Technology
Year 11	Māori	6,733	90%	23%	4%	94%	72%	55%	36%	65%	49%
	Non-Māori	40,765	94%	1%	15%	96%	86%	64%	33%	57%	54%
Year 12	Māori	4,432	84%	16%	2%	73%	39%	63%	31%	62%	52%
	Non-Māori	32,798	87%	0%	9%	76%	55%	62%	28%	44%	49%

Note: English, Te Reo and Languages (other) are subsets of the learning area Languages.

Achievement at Māori Immersion and Bilingual Schools

Introduction

How achievement patterns of students involved in Māori-medium education differ from the total population is of interest to many groups, including school communities and policy makers. However, the small number of Māori-medium candidates makes comparison with the whole population of candidates difficult and sometimes misleading. This is because one or two high- or low-performing students can skew the results in a small population, whereas these effects are evened out in larger groups.

In this subset of schools, for example, there is one immersion school with a high proportion of high-achieving students. When the candidates from this school are removed, the results for immersion school candidates are similar to the national results for Māori candidates. This highlights the difficulty of drawing conclusions from small populations.

This section of the paper describes achievement of candidates at Māori immersion and bilingual schools and compares between these two groups. It does not attempt any comparisons with either Māori candidates or with the national candidate population. A more detailed paper will compare achievement of all candidates at immersion and bilingual schools with achievement of Māori candidates not at immersion and bilingual schools.

Definition of Māori Immersion and Bilingual Schools

Māori immersion is where 81-100% of all school instruction is given in the Māori language. An immersion school is where all students in the school receive 81-100% of their instruction in Māori. There were 19 Māori immersion schools that had NQF candidates in 2003. These schools had a total of 194 Year 11 and Year 12 candidates in 2003.

A bilingual school is where all students receive between 12-100% of their instruction in Māori. Most bilingual schools have a number of students involved in Māori immersion, but some do not. There were 9 bilingual schools that had NQF candidates in 2003. These schools had a total of 216 Year 11 and Year 12 candidates in 2003.

A subset of bilingual and immersion schools are kura kaupapa Māori (KKM) schools. KKM schools belong to Te Runanga Nui o Kura Kaupapa Māori o Aotearoa and follow a specific teaching philosophy. There were 19 KKM schools that had NQF candidates in 2003, 15 of which were immersion schools and four of which were bilingual schools. These schools are not separated out in the analysis in the following section.

In addition to immersion and bilingual schools, there are also students involved in Māori-medium education at immersion and bilingual units in mainstream schools. Although these students account for just under half the students involved in Māori-medium education, they are not included in the analysis in this section. This is because the Ministry of Education is unable to identify which students at these schools are in the immersion or bilingual units.

The candidates at immersion and bilingual schools are a subset of the candidates reported on in the section above on Māori achievement.

Qualifications attained

A high proportion of Year 11 and 12 candidates at immersion schools achieve qualifications at levels above the typical NQF level for their year of schooling (shown in table 9). 9% of Year 11 immersion school candidates achieved an NCEA level 2 or level 3 qualification, while a quarter of Year 12 immersion school candidates achieved NCEA level 3 in 2003.

Candidates at bilingual schools were very successful at gaining NCEA qualifications. In 2003, 74% of Year 11 bilingual school candidates and 79% of Year 12 bilingual school candidates gained an NCEA qualification. A high proportion of these were at the typical levels for their year of schooling.

Table 9: Year 11 & Year 12 candidates at Māori Immersion and Bilingual Schools by level of highest NCEA qualification achieved, 2003

		Total number of candidates	Proportion of candidates achieving level 1	Proportion of candidates achieving level 2	Proportion of candidates achieving level 3	Total proportion achieving an NCEA
Immersion School	Year 11	122	42%	7%	2%	51%
	Year 12	72	7%	32%	25%	64%
Bilingual School	Year 11	125	69%	5%	0%	74%
	Year 12	91	8%	67%	4%	79%

Meeting literacy and numeracy requirements for NCEA level 1

Year 11 candidates at bilingual schools were very successful in meeting the literacy and numeracy requirements for NCEA level 1 (illustrated in Table 10).

Although a lower proportion of Year 11 immersion candidates met both requirements, these candidates were very good at meeting the literacy requirement – 87% of Year 11 candidates at immersion schools met the literacy requirement (Table 10). This differs from the national picture, where both Maori and non-Maori Year 11 candidates are more likely to meet the numeracy than the literacy requirements.

Table 10: Year 11 Candidates at Māori immersion and bilingual schools who met and did not meet the literacy and numeracy requirements for NCEA level 1, 2003

	Total Number of Candidates	Met both the literacy & numeracy requirements		Met the literacy requirement only		Met the numeracy criteria only	
		No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Immersion School	122	68	56%	38	31%		
Bilingual School	125	105	84%	5	4%	8	6%

A small number of Year 11 candidates did not meet the requirements in 2003, yet gained an NCEA qualification in that year. Almost all of these candidates gained an NCEA level 2, for which there are no literacy or numeracy requirements.

Number and level of credits attained

A higher proportion of bilingual school Year 11 candidates gained sufficient credits for an NCEA level 1 than immersion school Year 11 candidates (illustrated in table 11). Although the proportion of candidates at immersion and bilingual schools gaining between 80 and 119 credits was similar, a higher proportion of bilingual school candidates gained 120 or more credits.

Table 11: Year 11 Candidates at Māori Immersion & Bilingual Schools by number of credits attained at all levels, 2003

	TOTAL ALL LEVELS	Candidates who gained 1-39 credits all levels		Candidates who gained 40-79 credits all levels		Candidates who gained 80-119 credits all levels		Candidates who gained 120+ credits all levels	
		No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Immersion School	122	23	19%	42	34%	37	30%	20	16%
Bilingual School	125	15	12%	22	18%	33	26%	55	44%

Almost all Year 11 candidates at immersion schools and all Year 11 candidates at bilingual schools gained some level 1 credits. 39% of Year 11 candidates at immersion schools and 15% of Year 11 candidates at bilingual schools gained all their credits at level 1. These candidates tended to gain less than 80 credits in total.

Most Year 11 candidates who gained credits at more than one level gained over half of their credits at level 1.

Table 12: Year 12 Candidates at Māori Immersion & Bilingual Schools by number of credits attained at level 2 or above, 2003

	TOTAL ALL LEVELS	Candidates who gained 1-29 credits at level 2+		Candidates who gained 30-59 credits at level 2+		Candidates who gained 60-89 credits at level 2+		Candidates who gained 90+ credits at level 2+	
		No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Immersion School	72	15	21%	10	14%	14	19%	21	29%
Bilingual School	91	15	16%	17	19%	20	22%	34	37%

Year 12 candidates at bilingual schools were more likely than Year 12 candidates at immersion schools to gain enough credits for an NCEA level 2 (illustrated in table 12). Of note is the proportion of Year 12 candidates who gained 90 or more credits at level 2 or above. Although the proportion of Year 12 immersion school candidates in this group is lower than the proportion of Year 12 bilingual school candidates, it is still relatively high compared with national Māori achievement results.

Almost all Year 12 candidates gained some credits at level 2, though only a very small number gained all their credits at level 2. For 61% of Year 12 candidates at immersion schools and 81% of Year 12 candidates at bilingual schools level 2 credits accounted for at least half of their total credits.

Many Year 12 candidates also gained some level 1 credits. Level 1 credits are not shown in table 12. 63% of Year 12 candidates at immersion schools and 93% of Year 12 candidates at bilingual schools gained some level 1 credits. All of these

candidates gained less than 80 credits at level 1. Most of them gained less than 40 level 1 credits and their level 1 credits accounted for only a small proportion of their total credits.

Dividing immersion and bilingual school candidates into credit bands makes an already small population even smaller. These proportions should therefore be used with caution. They should not be seen as definitive of achievement at immersion and bilingual schools. Data over a longer time period should indicate whether such achievement is typical at these schools.

Appendix: NCEA and NQF Definitions⁵

Achievement standards

Achievement standards were introduced with NCEA level 1 in 2002. They were developed to cover subjects previously offered as part of School Certificate, Sixth Form Certificate and University Bursary. Achievement standards can be assessed internally within a school, or externally through an examination. Achievement standards can be awarded with an 'achieved', 'merit' and 'excellence' grade. The number of credits awarded for a particular standard is fixed and is not affected by the grade awarded.

Level 1 achievement standards were first available in 2002. Similarly, level 2 standards were first available in 2003, and level 3 achievement standards were not available until 2004.

Unit standards

Unit standards were first introduced in 1992 (but only at schools since circa 1996). They cover virtually every area of sub-degree education and training. They are available at many tertiary providers as well as at secondary schools. Unit standards are developed in conjunction with industry groups and relevant tertiary providers. There are some unit standards that were developed for school curriculum subjects, but these may differ from equivalent achievement standards because they reflect industry and tertiary providers' expectations as well as the curriculum.

Unit Standards, unlike achievement standards, only have an 'achieved' grade associated with them. Unit standards are awarded at levels 1-6, whereas achievement standards are awarded at levels 1-3.

Both unit and achievement standards count towards NCEA qualifications.

Credits

NCEA qualifications are awarded according to the number of credits students have. Each unit and achievement standard is worth a certain number of credits. The number of credits attached to a standard may vary according to which aspect of the curriculum it relates to.

Requirements for NCEA qualifications

NCEA qualifications are standards-based and are on the National Qualifications Framework (NQF).

NCEA level 1 is awarded to people who are credited with a minimum of 80 credits at level 1 or above and who have met the literacy and numeracy requirements. A minimum of 8 credits in the specified literacy subfields and a minimum of 8 credits in the specified numeracy subfields are required to meet the literacy and numeracy requirements.

NCEA level 2 requires a minimum of 80 credits. Between 0-20 credits from an NCEA level 1 can be cross-credited towards an NCEA level 2 qualification. 60 or more of

⁵ The information in this appendix was sourced from the NZQA website (www.nzqa.govt.nz) and from NZQA staff.

the credits must be at level 2 or above. There is no literacy or numeracy requirement for NCEA level 2.

NCEA level 3 also requires a minimum of 80 credits. Between 0-20 credits from an NCEA level 2 can be cross-credited towards an NCEA level 3 qualification. 60 or more of the credits must be at level 3 or above. There is no literacy or numeracy requirement.

Non-NCEA qualifications available to secondary students

A broad range of National Certificates on the NQF are available to secondary students. Schools can choose which unit standards to offer and may have partnerships with tertiary providers who offer certain unit standards, so the types of National Certificates available to individual students varies from school to school.

The NQF defines all standards-based qualifications that can be awarded in New Zealand. The Register of Quality Assured Qualifications (the Register) defines all other qualifications that can be awarded in New Zealand, such as university degrees. The main qualification on the Register for secondary students is level 4 Scholarship, which is exam-based and was introduced in 2004.