



# NCEA and recognising excellence

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## Who is this factsheet for?

Students, parents and whānau, within New Zealand and overseas; people considering teaching in New Zealand and employers.

## Achievement standards and unit standards

The National Certificates of Educational Achievement (NCEA) system is a standards-based system which recognises high levels of performance through a number of different mechanisms. In NCEA, if a student is assessed as meeting the requirements of a standard, then they are awarded the standard irrespective of other students' performance. Standards-based assessment sets NCEA apart from qualifications systems that use a predetermined distribution of grades.

There are two types of assessment standards – achievement standards and unit standards. Both can contribute to NCEA. Each standard assesses a different area of knowledge and skills and students get a separate result for each standard that is assessed.

Achievement standards are either assessed internally by teachers during the year or the standard is assessed externally, generally through an examination at the end of the year. Unit standards are all assessed internally.

Each student leaves school with a unique New Zealand Record of Achievement – a full profile of their achievements, and potentially an important part of their Curriculum Vitae.

## Assessment grades – recognising high levels of performance

In achievement standards, students can gain one of four grades – Not Achieved, Achieved, Merit and Excellence. Merit represents very good performance and Excellence represents outstanding performance as measured against the criteria of the standard. Merit and Excellence grades are not available for most unit standards.

## Certificate Endorsement

Certificate endorsements encourage students to achieve Merit and Excellence grades. Certificate endorsements can be gained at NCEA Levels 1, 2 and 3. There are two grades of endorsement:

- NCEA with Excellence – a completed NCEA qualification that includes 50 credits at Excellence level.
- NCEA with Merit – a completed NCEA qualification that includes 50 credits at Merit or better (this can be a mix of Merit and Excellence).

A certificate endorsement appears in a student's New Zealand Record of Achievement and indicates overall commitment and success, generally across a full school year or more. There is no set limit on the number of students who can get Excellence or Merit certificate endorsements.

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## Course Endorsement

Course endorsements recognise exceptional achievement in an individual course. Schools establish courses around the needs of the individual. To gain a course endorsement:

- students must gain 14 or more credits at Merit and/or Excellence within a school course, and
- there must be a mix of internally and externally assessed credits - at least 3 credits from each (except in Physical Education, Religious Studies and Level 3 Visual Arts).

Course endorsements are also shown on students' Record of Achievement and indicate consistently high levels of performance in a particular area of learning.

Tertiary education organisations and employers value higher NCEA grades.

Tertiary education organisations and employers find the detailed NCEA results useful in selecting school leavers for tertiary programmes and jobs.

Some universities offer guaranteed entry to some programmes, based on a student's results. Students with more Merit and Excellence grades will achieve a higher Guaranteed Entry Score (GES) than students with mainly Achieved results. See Factsheet #5: NCEA and University Entrance for more information.

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## New Zealand Scholarship

New Zealand Scholarship is a valued and prestigious part of the New Zealand education system. It is aligned with the New Zealand Curriculum and Te Marautanga o Aotearoa. Results do not contribute to NCEA. A New Zealand Scholarship recognises and financially rewards high-achieving students. Students who enter for this separate assessment are usually in Year 13. Approximately 3 per cent of Year 13 students studying each subject at Level 3 are awarded Scholarship. For more information, see New Zealand Scholarship.



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## More about NCEA

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

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

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