

New Zealand Tertiary Education: Recent Trends and Developments prepared for Bologna Ministerial Policy Forum Vienna 2010

Background

Degree structure, access and progression

New Zealand's tertiary education system has a three cycle degree structure, with Bachelor, Master and Doctor as the major awards. On the 10 level New Zealand Register of Quality Assured Qualifications ('the Register') these are shown as levels 7 (Bachelor), 8 (postgraduate Certificate or Diploma) 9 (Master) and 10 (Doctor). All quality assured degrees are listed on the Register, along with the outcome statements for the degree, credit value and the name of the responsible quality assurance body. (www.kiwiquals.govt.nz) Legislation requires that programmes leading to these qualifications must be taught mainly by people engaged in research.

Of the 121,420 full time equivalent domestic students enrolled in degree programmes in 2008, 81% were enrolled in Bachelor programmes, 10% in Honours programmes, 5% in Masters programmes and 4% in Doctoral programmes. A further 17,170 full time equivalent international students are enrolled in degree programmes.

New Zealand operates a credit system based on 120 credits as the equivalent of a full time typical student learning year. A Bachelor's degree requires a minimum of 360 credits, with at a minimum of 72 credits at level 7, a Masters degree requires an accumulated minimum of 600 credits with a minimum of 40 credits at level 9, and 200 at level 8, and a doctorate requires at least 240 credits of advanced research at level 10.

Access to Bachelor degree programmes is generally through successful completion of the required components of the National Certificate in Educational Achievement (NCEA) Level 3, usually gained in the final year of schooling, or through an open entry policy for those aged 20 and over. For the latter group where there is not evidence of a strong academic background, institutions frequently require completion of a foundation programme.

Progression to the next level is primarily through successful completion of a relevant programme at the preceding level, although each individual institution operates its own statutes, including those for recognition of prior or experiential learning.

National structures

The major national structures involved in higher education are:

- Ministry of Education: provides policy advice to the Minister of Education, including on the Tertiary Education Strategy
- Tertiary Education Commission: responsible for funding tertiary education to fulfil the government's policy objectives as set out in the Tertiary Education Strategy
- New Zealand Vice Chancellors Committee (NZVCC): responsible for quality assurance in universities and for university programmes

- New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA): responsible for quality assurance of degree programmes in all institutes of technology, wānanga and private training enterprises.

Quality Assurance

NZVCC exercises its quality assurance responsibilities in two complementary ways. Its Committee on University Academic Programmes (CUAP) applies inter-university course approval, accreditation and moderation procedures, The New Zealand Universities Academic Audit Unit (NZUAAU) established by the NZVCC as an independent body, conducts institutional audits based on institutional self-reviews and concentrating on the enhancement of the universities' own programmes of continuous improvement.

NZQA is responsible for approval, accreditation and monitoring of degree programmes offered by non university institutions. It also undertakes an external evaluation and review of private training establishments and wānanga.

Recent Reforms

During 2009 the government strengthened the performance of institutes of technology and polytechnics, by reshaping the nature of their governing Councils and introducing a new approach to quality assurance.

The new investment-based approach to quality assurance and monitoring approach will expect and reward high performance. An assessment of the organisation's performance, and assurance of its quality, will increasingly inform the Tertiary Education Commission's investment decisions. The quality assurance and performance monitoring system will have an increased focus on outcomes. There will be greater transparency in the performance of the tertiary education system, and of tertiary education organisations within the system, as the quality of performance information improves and is made more available to students and the public.

Current priorities

In December 2009, the Minister for Tertiary Education released the Tertiary Education Strategy for 2010 – 2015. The Strategy identifies the approach the government wishes the tertiary education sector to take to achieve its long-term vision. This will involve

- a) Targeting priority groups
 - Increasing the number of young people (aged under 25) achieving qualifications at level four and above, particularly degrees
 - Increasing the number of Māori students enjoying success at higher levels
 - Increasing the number of Pasifika students achieving at higher levels
 - Increasing the number of young people moving successfully from school into tertiary education.

- b) Improving system performance
 - Improving the educational and financial performance of providers
 - Enhancing quality assurance
 - Providing better incentives for providers to respond to students and market signals, by
 - o Making provider-level performance information publicly available
 - o Linking funding more closely to performance
 - Supporting and encouraging student performance
 - Strengthening collaboration and shared resources for greater efficiency
 - Continuing to build international linkages.

- c) Supporting high-quality research that helps to drive innovation
 - Strengthening research outcomes.

The government also details the roles of various types of institutions involved in higher education, namely:

Universities

- Undertake research that adds to the store of knowledge
- Provide a wide range of research-led degree and postgraduate education that is of an international standard
- Act as sources of critical thinking and intellectual talent.

Institutes of Technology and Polytechnics

- Deliver vocational education that provides skills for employment
- Undertake applied research that supports vocational learning and technology transfer
- Assist progression to higher levels of learning or work through foundation education.

Wānanga

- Provide quality education in accordance with kaupapa Māori according to Māori philosophies, principles and approaches
- Undertake teaching and research that maintains, advances and disseminates knowledge and develops intellectual independence, and assists the application of knowledge regarding āhuatanga Māori according to tikanga Māori
- Contribute towards the survival and wellbeing of Māori as a people.

The Strategy will now guide the Tertiary Education Commission's investment decisions to maximise tertiary education's contribution to New Zealand.

Further information

Further information on New Zealand's education system, including the Tertiary Education Strategy 2010-2015 can be found at www.minedu.govt.nz.