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**Talking About Transition**  
**An Exploration of the Secondary to**  
**Tertiary Transition Process for Music**  
**Students in a New Zealand Context**

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Victoria University of Wellington  
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Te Kōkī  
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## ABSTRACT

There are complex challenges facing music students majoring in performance in New Zealand as they transition from secondary to tertiary study. As a result of their pre-tertiary experiences, these students form identities and develop subjectivities that are often discordant with notions of a broadly conceived degree-level education. Through exploring transition using ethnographic and interpretive approaches, it is clear that significant numbers of performance students are not engaging with the more theoretical aspects of their music degrees and can in fact be actively resistant to acquiring knowledge in areas of the curriculum that they perceive as falling outside those necessary to become a performer. This research suggests that education systems in secondary schools in New Zealand contribute considerably to these student subjectivities as despite individual levels of knowledge that students bring to their tertiary studies, these systems result in significant homogenous subjectivities and approaches. More generally, secondary schools appear unable to consistently prepare music students for their tertiary music studies for reasons that include curricula that is: widely interpreted, compartmentalised, heavily weighted towards assessments, and, in terms of performance assessments, lacking in validity.

In ‘talking about transition’ within a New Zealand context, questions arise concerning pre-determined educational practices, which present unnecessary and prohibitive hurdles that can serve to culturally alienate our own students. For this reason and others, this research suggests these students will benefit from socio-culturally relevant pedagogical practice in addition to systems that provide accessible, manageable, and meaningful connections between secondary and tertiary levels of knowledge. Research findings also suggest that improved communication between education sectors and between institutions and students is key to empowering students with regard to their own learning.

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## **TERMINOLOGY, EXPLANATORY NOTES, and ACRONYMS**

### **New Zealand School Decile Ratings**

Every school in New Zealand has a decile rating (1 - 10) that corresponds to the economic wealth of the school's community. This system allows for additional funding from the government for low decile schools to help overcome barriers to learning facing students from low socio-economic households. The schools, students, and educators at the focus of this study are within the Wellington region; the decile ratings of the major secondary schools in this area do not drop below decile 8. I do not detail the decile ratings of the schools outside Wellington from which various students in this study have had their secondary education with the exception of the student case study detailed in chapter 3 where the South Auckland college described has a decile rating of 3.

### **New Zealand Secondary School Years**

New Zealand secondary school (also known locally as college or high school) years begin at Year 9 (Y9) or 3<sup>rd</sup> form and go to Year 13 (Y13) or 7<sup>th</sup> form. Student ages typically range from 13-17.

### **New Zealand Secondary School Qualifications:<sup>1</sup>**

- **NCEA:**

The National Certificate of Educational Achievement is the principal tertiary qualification offered in New Zealand secondary schools. The qualification is completed over three levels and three years:

Level 1 (L1) NCEA begins Year 11 (Y11) or 5<sup>th</sup> form.

Level 2 (L2) NCEA begins Year 12 (Y12) or 6<sup>th</sup> form.

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<sup>1</sup> This study is limited to discussing NCEA and IB qualifications. (Schools in NZ can offer Cambridge International AS and A2 exams however no students surveyed had studied Cambridge Music and no secondary schools in Wellington teach Cambridge Music).

Level 3 (L3) NCEA begins Year 13 (Y13) or 7<sup>th</sup> form.<sup>2</sup>

Students receive credits for ‘standards’ they sit, which can be assessed either internally by the school or externally by New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA). Papers are either ‘unit standards’ that are limited to pass or fail or ‘achievement standards’ which can be endorsed with Achieved (A), Merit (M) or Excellence (E).

The same A, M, or E grading is applied to Levels 1 to 3 as a whole. For example, a student can pass Level 3 NCEA endorsed with an overall ‘Excellence’ by achieving a high standard (50+ Excellence credits) across a variety of subjects.<sup>3</sup>

N.B. In the pages that follow, the words Achieved, Merit, or Excellence when referring to NCEA grading or standards will be capitalised.

#### NCEA Music Standards:

There are multiple standards within Levels 1 to 3 NCEA music curricula. The specific standards I refer to are:

- Music Works
- Score reading
- Harmony
- Composition
- Solo Performance
- Group Performance

#### ○ **IB:**

The International Baccalaureate diploma is a two-year qualification that certain schools (usually those privately funded) choose to run alongside NCEA. The IB course runs in the final two years of secondary school (Y12-13) and assessments are confined to the final year (Y13). Students who choose to do this qualification will typically have completed Level 1 NCEA in Y11.

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<sup>2</sup> It is possible for high achieving students to do ‘accelerated’ study. E.g. a student who is in year 11 may study L2 NCEA and year 12 students may study at L3 and so forth.

<sup>3</sup> For more detailed information about NCEA visit: <http://www.nzqa.govt.nz/qualifications-standards/qualifications/ncea/understanding-ncea/how-ncea-works/>

### IB Music Standards:

There are multiple components in the IB music curriculum. The specific standards I refer to are:

- Listening
- Composition
- Solo Performance
- Group Performance

### **University Entrance (with NCEA or IB):**

To gain University Entrance a student in New Zealand must have three approved L3 NCEA subjects, ten literacy credits at L2 or above, and ten numeracy credits at L1 or above. Alternatively, a student can gain university entrance by completing and passing the IB diploma.

### **First-Year University Requirements – BMus Classical Performance Students**

Based on first-year performance degree requirements at Institution A, the following details a typical workload for students in their first year of study:<sup>4</sup>

#### Four compulsory first year papers:

- Performance: Study/tuition in chosen instrument/voice
- Theory: Harmony and counterpoint, aural perception and keyboard studies
- Theory: Tonal music procedures, conventional forms, melodic and rhythmic dictation
- Musicology: Understanding Music Through the Lens of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> Centuries

#### At least two optional first-year papers:

- Musicology: e.g. Music history - Renaissance through to 21st century
- Performance: e.g. Accompanying, Large ensemble, or Dictation and language

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<sup>4</sup> This information is taken at the time of writing and course content is subject to yearly reviews and changes.

## **First-Year University Requirements – BMus Jazz Students**

### Six standard papers:

- Jazz performance: Competency in chosen instrument/voice, basic piano skills
- Jazz improvisation: Competency in improvisation skills and standard jazz language
- Jazz ensemble: Ensemble playing techniques, repertoire knowledge
- Musicology: Understanding Music Through the Lens of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> Centuries
- Jazz History: Political and social contexts
- Jazz Theory: Theoretical knowledge for composition, analysis, improvisation, and transposition

### **International Music Qualification Boards:**

- **ABRSM** – Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music
- **Trinity College** – Trinity College London

These two institutions are the British examination boards preferred by private music teachers in New Zealand. They offer both practical and theory examinations.

### **Additional Acronyms:**

**NZQA**      New Zealand Qualifications Authority

**NZSO**      New Zealand Symphony Orchestra

**NZSSC**     New Zealand Secondary Schools Choir

**SLS**        Student Learning Services

**H.O.D.**     Head of Department

**IRMT**      Institute of Registered Music Teachers