

THE NATIONAL BENCHMARK TESTS NATIONAL REPORT

2026 INTAKE CYCLE: DATA REPORT

August 2026



CEA
Centre for
Educational
Assessments



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The National Benchmark Tests (NBTs) are conducted annually by the Centre for Educational Assessments (CEA) at the University of Cape Town (UCT).

This report is the combined effort of the National Benchmark Tests Project (NBTP) team at the Centre for Educational Assessments:

Tatiana Sango	Test Development Coordinator/ Interim Academic Director
Emlyn Balarin	Senior Operations Manager/ Interim Director
Sanet Steyn	Academic Literacy Research Lead
Precious Mudavanhu	Statistician
Peter Chifamba	Data Systems Manager
Wandile Mangengeza	Mathematics and Quantitative Literacy Research Lead
Estelle Murray	Logistics Manager
Zethu Mthetwa	Data Administrator
Hlamulo Makelane	Research Project Manager

We further acknowledge the contributions of the project administrative support: Shaunda Swarts, Juandre Alard, Melissa Peters, Carol Harrington, Rachelle Hanslo, Zethu Sibanyoni and Yusrie Ismail.

We are most grateful for and acknowledge the writers of the NBTs for the 2026 intake cycle.

Contact us:

+27 (21) 650 3523

www.nbt.ac.za || www.cea.uct.ac.za

nbt@uct.ac.za || <https://www.facebook.com/NationalBenchmarkTestSA>

ABBREVIATIONS

AL	Academic Literacy
ALL	Adult Literacy and Life skills
AQL	Academic and Quantitative Literacy
CAPS	Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement
CEA	Centre for Educational Assessments
DBE	Department of Basic Education
DHET	Department of Higher Education and Training
ENFN	English First Additional Language
ENHN	English Home Language
HESA	Higher Education South Africa
IRT	Item Response Theory
MAT	Mathematics (NBT)
MTHN	Mathematics (NSC)
MTLN	Mathematical Literacy
NBT	National Benchmark Test
NBT AL	National Benchmark Test in Academic Literacy
NSC	National Senior Certificate
NSC ENFN	National Senior Certificate English First Additional Language
NSC ENHN	National Senior Certificate English Home Language
NSC MTHN	National Senior Certificate Mathematics
NSC MTLN	National Senior Certificate Mathematical Literacy
NSC PSCN	National Senior Certificate Physical Sciences
QL	Quantitative Literacy
UCT	University of Cape Town
USAf	Universities South Africa

Table of Contents

2026 INTAKE CYCLE: DATA REPORT	1
FIGURES	4
TABLES	5
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	6
1. INTRODUCTION	7
1.1 Test administration	7
1.2 The NBT benchmarks	7
2. DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF THE NBT CANDIDATES: 2026 INTAKE.....	10
2.1 Description of the sample	10
2.2 Considerations	10
3. PERFORMANCE OF THE 2026 INTAKE.....	12
3.1 Test performance of the NBT candidates: 2026 Intake	12
3.2 NBT cohort by performance levels: 2026 Intake	13
3.3 Performance on NBTs by intended faculty	14
3.4 Performance on NBTs by test language	16
3.5 Performance profile of South African and non-South African candidates	19
3.6 Performance on NBTs at the subdomain level	21
4. COMPARISON OF NBT PERFORMANCE: 2026 INTAKE	43
4.1 NBT performance by test language	43
4.2 Comparison of the 2026 Intake results with the 2025 intake results	46
5. PERFORMANCE OF THE NSC COHORT IN THE NBT DOMAINS AND IN COGNATE NSC SUBJECTS: 2026 INTAKE	51
5.1 Minimum requirements for admission to the Higher Certificate/Diploma and	51
5.2 Notes on the sample used for the analysis in this section	52
5.3 Self-reported demographics	53
5.4 Descriptive statistics	55
5.5 NBT benchmarks	57
5.6 Associations between scores on NBTs and NSC Examination	58
REFERENCES	62

Figures

Figure 1: NBT test scores: 2026 Intake	12
Figure 2: NBT test scores distribution: 2026 Intake	13
Figure 3: NBT performance levels for AL, QL and MAT: 2026 Intake	13
Figure 4: NBT AL performance levels by intended faculty of study: 2026 Intake	14
Figure 5: NBT QL performance levels by intended faculty of study: 2026 Intake	15
Figure 6: NBT MAT performance levels by intended faculty of study: 2026 Intake	16
Figure 7: NBT AL performance levels by test language: 2026 Intake	17
Figure 8: NBT QL performance levels by test language: 2026 Intake	18
Figure 9: NBT MAT performance levels by test language: 2026 Intake	18
Figure 10: NBT AL performance levels by citizenship: 2026 Intake	20
Figure 11: NBT QL performance levels by citizenship: 2026 Intake	20
Figure 12: NBT MAT performance levels by citizenship: 2026 Intake	21
Figure 13: Allied Healthcare/Nursing AL subdomain performance: 2026 Intake	23
Figure 14: Art and Design AL subdomain performance: 2026 Intake	23
Figure 15: Business/Commerce/Management AL subdomain performance: 2026 Intake	24
Figure 16: Education AL subdomain performance: 2026 Intake	24
Figure 17: Engineering/Built Environment AL subdomain performance: 2026 Intake	25
Figure 18: Health Sciences AL subdomain performance: 2026 Intake	25
Figure 19: Hospitality/Tourism AL subdomain performance: 2026 Intake	26
Figure 20: Humanities AL subdomain performance: 2026 Intake	26
Figure 21: Information and Communication Technology AL subdomain performance: 2026 Intake	27
Figure 22: Law AL subdomain performance: 2026 Intake	27
Figure 23: Science/Mathematics AL subdomain performance: 2026 Intake	28
Figure 24: Other AL subdomain performance: 2026 Intake	28
Figure 25: Allied Healthcare/Nursing QL subdomain performance: 2026 Intake	30
Figure 26: Art/Design QL subdomain performance: 2026 Intake	30
Figure 27: Business/Commerce/Management QL subdomain performance: 2026 Intake	31
Figure 28: Education QL subdomain performance: 2026 Intake	31
Figure 29: Engineering/Built Environment QL subdomain performance: 2026 Intake	32
Figure 30: Health Sciences QL subdomain performance: 2026 Intake	32
Figure 31: Hospitality/Tourism QL subdomain performance: 2026 Intake	33
Figure 32: Humanities QL subdomain performance: 2026 Intake	33
Figure 33: Information and Communication Technology QL subdomain performance: 2026 Intake	34
Figure 34: Law QL subdomain performance: 2026 Intake	34
Figure 35: Science/Mathematics QL subdomain performance: 2026 Intake	35
Figure 36: Other QL subdomain performance: 2026 Intake	35
Figure 37: Allied Healthcare/Nursing MAT subdomain performance: 2026 Intake	37
Figure 38: Art/Design MAT subdomain performance: 2026 Intake	37
Figure 39: Business/Commerce/Management MAT subdomain performance: 2026 Intake	38
Figure 40: Education MAT subdomain performance: 2026 Intake	38
Figure 41: Engineering/Built Environment MAT subdomain performance: 2026 Intake	39
Figure 42: Health Sciences MAT subdomain performance: 2026 Intake	39
Figure 43: Hospitality/Tourism MAT subdomain performance: 2026 Intake	40
Figure 44: Humanities MAT subdomain performance: 2026 Intake	40
Figure 45: Information and Communication Technology MAT subdomain performance: 2026 Intake	41
Figure 46: Law MAT subdomain performance: 2026 Intake	41
Figure 47: Science/Mathematics MAT subdomain performance: 2026 Intake	42
Figure 48: Other MAT subdomain performance: 2026 Intake	42
Figure 49: NBT AL performance levels by intended faculty of study for Afrikaans writers: 2026 Intake	43
Figure 50: NBT AL performance levels by intended faculty of study for English writers: 2026 Intake	43
Figure 51: NBT QL performance levels by intended faculty of study for Afrikaans writers: 2026 Intake	44
Figure 52: NBT QL performance levels by intended faculty of study for English writers: 2026 Intake	44
Figure 53: NBT MAT performance levels by intended faculty of study for Afrikaans writers: 2026 Intake	45
Figure 54: NBT MAT performance levels by intended faculty of study for English writers: 2026 Intake	45
Figure 55: Performance in NBT AL: 2025 and 2026 Intake cycles	46

Figure 56: Performance in NBT QL: 2025 and 2026 Intake cycles	47
Figure 57: Performance in NBT MAT: 2025 and 2026 Intake cycles	47
Figure 58: NBT AL performance by test language: 2025 and 2026 Intake cycles	48
Figure 59: NBT QL performance by test language: 2025 and 2026 Intake cycles	48
Figure 60: NBT MAT performance by test language: 2025 and 2026 Intake cycles	49
Figure 61: NBT AL performance levels by citizenship: 2025 and 2026 Intake.....	49
Figure 62: NBT QL performance levels by citizenship: 2025 and 2026 Intake.....	50
Figure 63: NBT MAT performance levels by citizenship: 2025 and 2026 Intake	50
Figure 64: NBT/NSC scores distribution: 2026 Intake.....	56
Figure 65: NBT/NSC score frequencies: 2026 Intake.....	56
Figure 66: NSC cohort performance levels on NBT: 2026 Intake.....	57
Figure 67: Scatterplot NBT AL vs NSC ENHN: 2026 Intake.....	59
Figure 68: Scatterplot NBT AL vs NSC ENFN: 2026 Intake.....	59
Figure 69: Scatterplot NBT QL vs NSC MTHN: 2026 Intake.....	60
Figure 70: Scatterplot NBT QL vs NSC MTLN: 2026 Intake.....	60
Figure 71: Scatterplot NBT MAT vs NSC MTHN: 2026 Intake.....	61
Figure 72: Scatterplot NBT MAT vs NSC PSCN: 2026 Intake.....	61

Tables

Table 1: NBT 2025 Test administration: 2026 Intake.....	7
Table 2: NBT benchmark descriptors.....	7
Table 3: NBT benchmarks set in 2019 for Degree and Diploma/Higher Certificate study.....	8
Table 4: NBT Intermediate benchmarks and how they should be interpreted.....	9
Table 5: NBT self-reported demographic characteristics: 2026 Intake	10
Table 6: Descriptive statistics for NBT AL, QL and MAT: 2026 Intake	12
Table 7: NBT benchmark levels performance distribution: 2026 Intake.....	13
Table 8: NBT Test language: 2026 Intake	16
Table 9: Descriptive statistics for NBT AL, QL and MAT by test language: 2026 Intake.....	17
Table 10: Number of NBT test writers by citizenship: 2026 Intake	19
Table 11: NBT scores distribution by citizenship: 2026 Intake.....	19
Table 12: The performance distribution on the NBT AL subdomains: 2026 Intake.....	22
Table 13: NBT AL subdomains median (p50) performance indicator per faculty: 2026 Intake.....	22
Table 14: The performance distribution on the NBT QL subdomains: 2026 Intake.....	29
Table 15: NBT QL subdomains median (p50) performance indicator per faculty: 2026 Intake.....	29
Table 16: The performance distribution on the NBT MAT subdomains: 2026 Intake	36
Table 17: NBT MAT subdomains median (p50) performance indicator per faculty: 2026 Intake	36
Table 18: Scale of NSC achievement/level descriptors.....	51
Table 19: The higher education designated subject list.....	52
Table 20: NSC cohort for NBT self-reported demographics: 2026 Intake	53
Table 21: Descriptive statistics for NBTs and NSCs: 2026 Intake	55
Table 22: NBT benchmark levels for the NSC cohort: 2026 Intake	57
Table 23: Correlation matrix for the NSC and NBT results - Bachelor's degree: 2026 Intake	58
Table 24: Correlation matrix for the NSC and NBT results - Diploma/Higher Certificate: 2026 Intake	58

Executive Summary

The Centre for Educational Assessments provides a service to higher education institutions by offering additional information from the National Benchmark Test (NBT) to assist in the selection and placement of prospective students in appropriate curricular routes. This data report provides an initial analysis of the NBTs written by candidates for entry into higher education institutions in the 2026 academic year. Candidates considered in this report wrote the NBTs from May 2025 to April 2026. In the 2026 NBT intake cycle, 49 174 Academic Literacy (AL) test scores, 49 169 Quantitative Literacy (QL) test scores, and 39 143 Mathematics (MAT) test scores were obtained. All these scores are provided in the body of the report.

The report primarily presents (i) trends in test performance, (ii) performance across benchmark levels, and (iii) comparative analysis. This information forms an essential part of assessing the entry level of a candidate's academic skills in the three domains of AL, QL and MAT. The comparative analysis is intended to provide valuable insights into any significant variations or trends that may emerge, enabling the identification of areas that may require additional support or intervention for the 2026 Intake.

For those NBT candidates who also wrote the National Senior Certificate (NSC) examinations, the relationships between the NBT domains AL, QL and MAT and the cognate NSC subjects: Mathematics, Mathematical Literacy, Physical Science, English Home Language and English First Additional Language are examined.

1. Introduction

For more than 20 years, the Centre for Educational Assessments (CEA) has conducted research on the NBTs and the general preparedness of students for higher education studies. CEA's research is distributed to South African higher education institutions as well as institutions supporting or complementing higher education in South Africa (e.g., Umalusi, government departments, institutions other than higher education), which make use of the NBTs, e.g., those offering bursaries, and schools.

This report presents an initial data analysis of the National Benchmark Tests (NBTs) written by candidates seeking entry into higher education institutions for the 2026 academic year. Candidates considered in this report will have written the NBTs between May 2025 and April 2026, referred to as the NBT intake 2026.

1.1 Test administration

The NBT AQL and NBT MAT were administered in 23 national sessions, and these consist of 4 online sessions across the cycle and 19 paper-based sessions. The online tests were administered under standardised conditions as set out in a Test Administration Manual, and the procedures are available from the CEA at UCT. The CEA team has published some research on the transition into offering these two modes of administration (Sango *et al.* 2022, Prince, 2024) and continues to conduct analyses and put measures in place to ensure comparability across various test sessions. Approximately 11% of the candidates for the NBT AL, NBT QL and NBT MAT (Table 1) wrote in the online sessions in this cycle (2026 Intake).

Table 1: NBT 2025 Test administration: 2026 Intake

Test Administration	Wrote AL		Wrote QL		Wrote MAT	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Online	5 663	11.52	5 663	11.52	3 927	10.03
Pencil & Paper	43 511	88.48	43 506	88.48	35 216	89.97
Total	49 174	100	49 169	100	39 143	100

During the 2025 testing cycle (2026 Intake), the test sessions were offered in pencil-and-paper and online modes. In the national sessions, the 88 317 NBT tests were offered to candidates. Candidates may take the NBT multiple times; therefore, the reported candidate numbers include individuals who may have taken the test more than once. A total of 49 174 candidates wrote the AL tests, 49 169 candidates wrote the QL tests, and 39 143 candidates wrote the MAT tests.

1.2 The NBT benchmarks

The NBTP aims to deliver information against benchmarked levels of performance for formal study at institutions of higher learning. Table 2 provides a description of benchmark levels and what institutional response to candidates performing at these levels should be. A more detailed description of benchmark levels for each of the NBT domain tests is available on request from the CEA Test Development Coordinator.

Table 2: NBT benchmark descriptors

Proficient	Performance in domain areas suggests that academic performance will not be adversely affected in cognate domains. If admitted, students should be placed on regular programmes of study.
------------	--

Intermediate	Challenges in domain areas identified which suggest that academic progress in cognate domains will be affected. If admitted, students' educational needs should be met in a way deemed appropriate by the institution (e.g. extended or augmented programmes special skills provision).
Basic	Serious learning challenges identified. Students are unlikely to cope with mainstream university study.

The most recent NBT Standard Setting study was conducted in October 2023, in two separate three-day workshops for the Degree and Diploma panels respectively. Standard setting for the NBTs is repeated approximately every three to four years, and its purpose is to establish minimum, or threshold, scores that classify test takers into distinct performance levels - that is, the score a candidate must reach to cross into a given performance level. The benchmarks resulting from this study were implemented for the first time in 2025.

A modified Angoff method (Brandon, 2004; Cizek, 2012; Hambleton & Pitoniak, 2006; Plake & Cizek, 2012) was used for the standard setting. This is a probability-based judgement method in which panellists estimate the likelihood that a borderline candidate would answer each multiple-choice item correctly. ETS research and standard-setting experts recommended the modified Angoff methodology for the NBTs after considering alternative approaches (Pitoniak, 2008); it was first piloted in 2008 with the Academic Literacy test (Pitoniak, 2008).

Table 3 shows the benchmarks for Degree study as well as those for Diploma/Higher Certificate study, which were set in 2023 by panels drawn from across the country comprising academics engaged in mainstream teaching relevant to the domain, and were used to determine the level of proficiency of the 2026 intake candidates.

Table 3: NBT benchmarks set in 2019 for Degree and Diploma/Higher Certificate study

Proficient	Test performance suggests that future academic performance will not be adversely affected (students may pass or fail at university, but this is highly unlikely to be attributable to strengths or weaknesses in the domains tested). If admitted students may be placed into regular programmes of study. Degree: AL [71%]; QL [70%]; MAT [69%] Diploma/Certificate: AL [63%]; QL [64%]; MAT [62%]
Intermediate	The challenges identified are such that it is predicted that academic progress will be adversely affected. If admitted students' educational needs should be met as deemed appropriate by the institution (e.g. extended or augmented programmes special skills provision). Degree: AL [35%]; QL [38%]; MAT [35%] Diploma/Certificate: AL [32%]; QL [34%]; MAT [33%]
Basic	Test performance reveals serious learning challenges. It is predicted that students will not cope with degree-level study without extensive and long-term support perhaps best provided through bridging programmes (i.e. non-credit preparatory courses special skills provision) or FET provision. Institutions admitting students performing at this level would need to provide such support themselves.

In addition, the Intermediate performance band is divided into Intermediate Upper and Intermediate Lower as shown in Table 4. The Intermediate band represented most of the candidates' pool and this is the pool for which educational institutions should be prepared to

address educational needs with extended or augmented support programmes to enable students to succeed in their degree studies.

Table 4: NBT Intermediate benchmarks and how they should be interpreted

	Intermediate Upper	Assessment of need	Intermediate Lower	Assessment of need
AL	Degree: [53-70] Diploma/Certificate: [48-62]	Students are likely to need complementary support (additional tutorials, workshops, augmented courses, language intensive work).	Degree: [35-52] Diploma/Certificate: [32-47]	Students need to be placed in an extended programme.
QL	Degree: [54-69] Diploma/Certificate: [49-63]		Degree: [38-53] Diploma/Certificate: [34-48]	
MAT	Degree: [52-68] Diploma/Certificate: [48-61]		Degree: [35-51] Diploma/Certificate: [33-47]	

2. Demographic characteristics of the NBT candidates: 2026 Intake

2.1 Description of the sample

The data used for the 2026 report is from the 2026 NBT testing cycle which includes all NBT candidates who took the tests between May 2025 and April 2026. Section 5 focuses on a subset of the NBT candidates' pool specifically candidates who also have the NSC results. More detailed information about this specific group is provided in that section.

2.2 Considerations

The results reported here are influenced by the following factors:

- o Candidates are asked to indicate their first, second and third choice of faculty to which they have applied or will apply. Only the first choice of intended faculty was used in this analysis. The data is self-reported and might not reflect the actual placement in the university.
- o NBT candidates do not indicate whether they intend to study at a degree or diploma level. Therefore, apart from section 5 where NSC data is used all results are benchmarked against degree-level criteria.
- o Data are not collected by the NBTP on the actual placement of all the candidates in faculties or institutions. Caution should therefore be used when drawing conclusions based on the results from the intended faculty of study.
- o Candidates writing the NBTs for the 2026 Intake provided demographic information through self-reporting except for the gender data, which was extracted from the SA national IDs for SA ID holders. Demographic information is provided when the candidates write the actual tests.
- o Candidates who wrote more than once are considered as one in the self-reported demographic table.

Selected self-reported demographic characteristics are reported in Table 5. The table reflects the frequencies based on candidates of each test. For example, the candidates who wrote AL comprised 66.65% females and 71.02% who indicated their population group as black.

Table 5: NBT self-reported demographic characteristics: 2026 Intake

	Wrote AL		Wrote QL		Wrote MAT	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
GENDER						
Male	16 019	33.32	16 018	33.32	13 279	34.51
Female	32 048	66.65	32 045	66.65	25 192	65.47
Unspecified	14	0.03	14	0.03	7	0.02
Total	48 081	100	48 077	100	38478	100
POPULATION GROUP						
Black	34 148	71.02	34 147	71.03	28 185	73.25
Coloured	5 385	11.2	5 384	11.2	3 267	8.49
Indian/Asian	3 570	7.42	3 569	7.42	3 215	8.36
White	4 683	9.74	4 682	9.74	3 598	9.35

Other	199	0.41	199	0.41	155	0.40
Unspecified	96	0.20	96	0.20	58	0.15
Total	48 081	100	48 077	100	38 478	100
CITIZENSHIP						
South African	45 770	95.19	45 766	95.19	36 653	95.26
SADC countries	1 278	2.66	1 278	2.66	978	2.54
Other African countries	648	1.35	648	1.35	526	1.37
Other	381	0.79	381	0.79	320	0.83
Unspecified	4	0.01	4	0.01	1	0
Total	48 081	100	48 077	100	38478	100
GR 12 LANGUAGE						
Afrikaans	2 095	4.36	2 094	4.36	1 410	3.66
English	44 305	92.15	44 302	92.15	35 632	92.60
Other	1 680	3.49	1 680	3.49	1 435	3.73
Unspecified	1	0.00	1	0.00	1	0.00
Total	48 081	100	48 077	100	38 478	100
HOME LANGUAGE						
Afrikaans	2 186	4.55	2 185	4.54	1 498	3.89
English	16 202	33.70	16 200	33.7	12 157	31.59
isiNdebele	374	0.78	374	0.78	334	0.87
isiXhosa	7 208	14.99	7 207	14.99	5 337	13.87
isiZulu	7 167	14.91	7 167	14.91	6 069	15.77
Sesotho	2 844	5.92	2 844	5.92	2 397	6.23
Sesotho sa Leboa	3 605	7.50	3 605	7.50	3 255	8.46
Setswana	2 589	5.38	2 589	5.39	2 171	5.64
siSwati	959	1.99	959	1.99	826	2.15
Tshivenda	1 864	3.88	1 864	3.88	1 725	4.48
Xitsonga	1 904	3.96	1 904	3.96	1 730	4.50
Other Language	1 088	2.26	1 088	2.26	926	2.41
Unspecified	91	0.19	91	0.19	53	0.14
Total	48 081	100	48 077	100	38 478	100
PROVINCE						
Eastern Cape	4 210	8.76	4 210	8.76	3 296	8.57
Free State	2 216	4.61	2 216	4.61	1 871	4.86
Gauteng	14 753	30.68	14 752	30.68	12 515	32.53
KwaZulu Natal	7 210	15	7 210	15	6 057	15.74
Limpopo	5 137	10.68	5 137	10.68	4 770	12.4
Mpumalanga	1 509	3.14	1 509	3.14	1 383	3.59
Northwest	928	1.93	928	1.93	796	2.07
Northern Cape	418	0.87	418	0.87	321	0.83
Western Cape	10 852	22.57	10 849	22.57	6 891	17.91
International	400	0.83	400	0.83	281	0.73
Unknown	448	0.93	448	0.93	297	0.77
Total	48 081	100	48 077	100	38 478	100

3. Performance of the 2026 Intake

3.1 Test performance of the NBT candidates: 2026 Intake

For the 2026 Intake cycle registration opened on 1 April 2025. The NBT tests were made available in both English and Afrikaans the two official languages of instruction at South African higher education institutions for the 2026 Intake cycle.

The scores indicated below are those of candidates who wrote the NBTs for the 2026 Intake cycle. The NBT candidates include both those who wrote as part of their application for tertiary study and those who wrote for placement purposes after admission. This section reports the descriptive statistics for the three NBT scores as well as the frequency tables for the benchmark bands. Table 6 shows the descriptive statistics for the NBT 2026 Intake cohort. The distributions of both the QL and the MAT test scores were positively skewed (see the histograms in Figure 2 and box-and-whisker plots in Figure 1).

3.1.1 Descriptive statistics

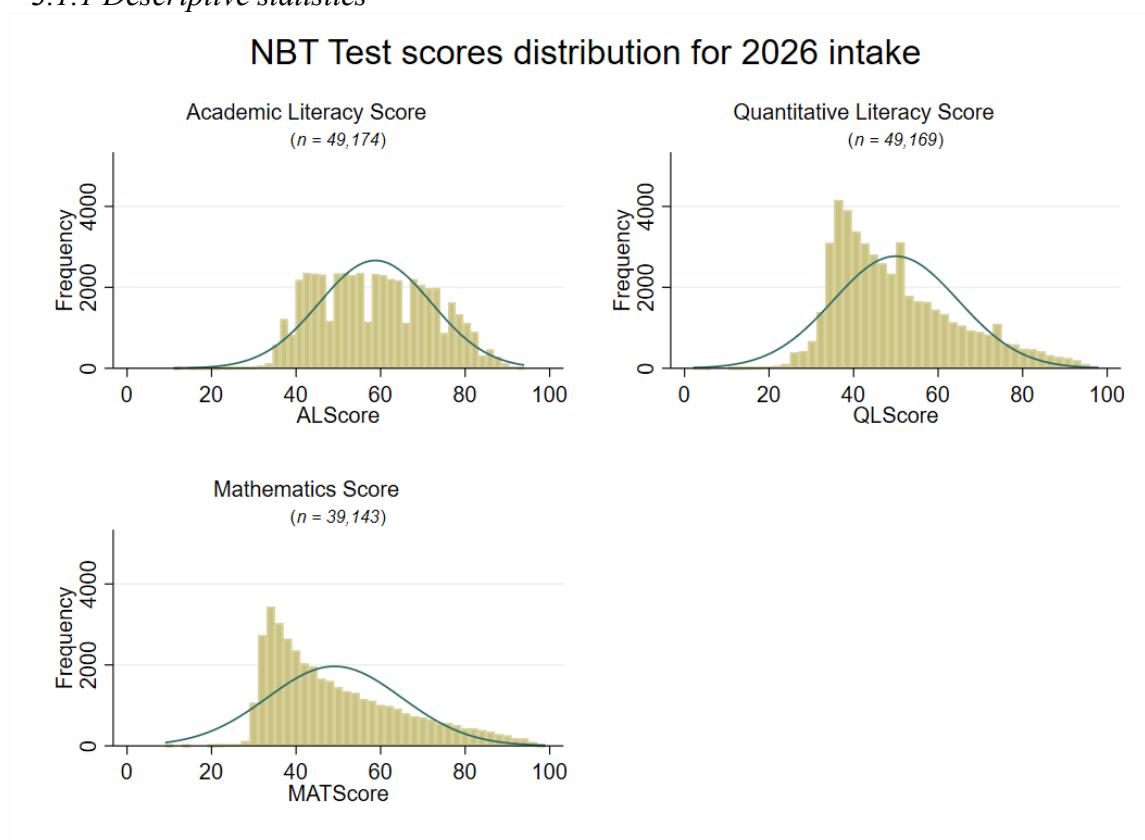


Figure 1: NBT test scores: 2026 Intake

Table 6: Descriptive statistics for NBT AL, QL and MAT: 2026 Intake

NBT Test	n	Mean	SD	Minimum	1st Quartile	Median	3rd Quartile	Maximum
AL	49 174	58.75	13.29	11	48	58	69	94
QL	49 169	49.98	14.79	2	38	46	59	98
MAT	39 143	49.09	15.90	9	36	45	59	99

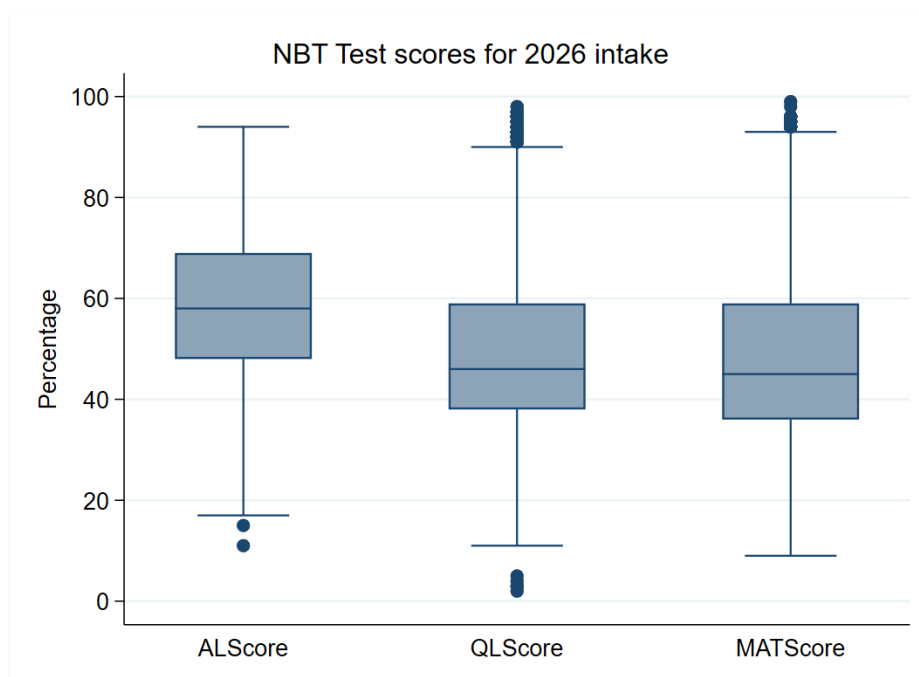


Figure 2: NBT test scores distribution: 2026 Intake

3.2 NBT cohort by performance levels: 2026 Intake

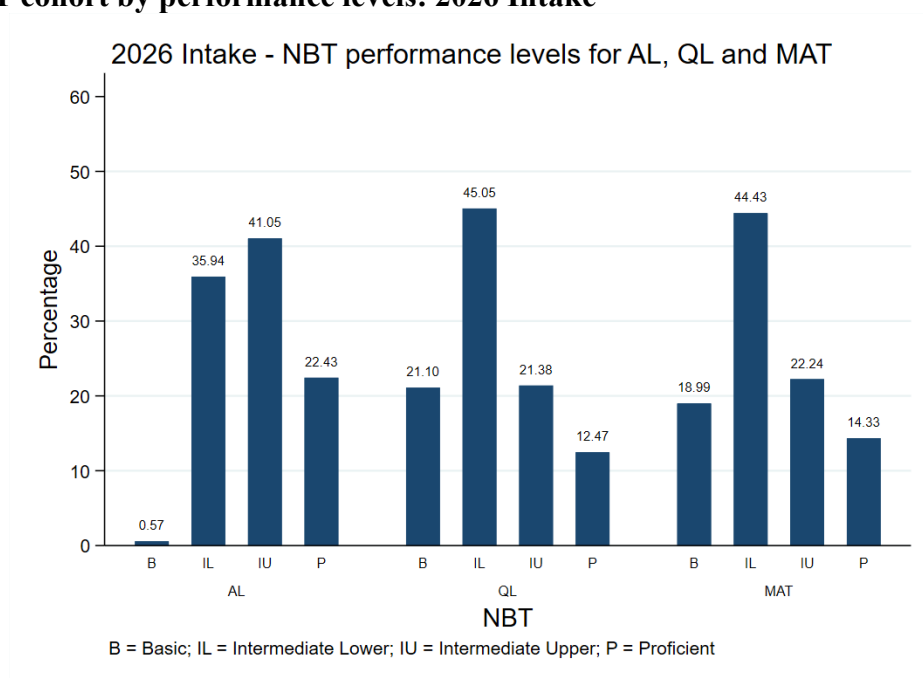


Figure 3: NBT performance levels for AL, QL and MAT: 2026 Intake

Table 7: NBT benchmark levels performance distribution: 2026 Intake

NBT tests	Basic	Intermediate Lower	Intermediate Upper	Proficient	Total (n)
AL	282 (0.57%)	17 674 (35.94%)	20 188 (41.05%)	11 030 (22.43%)	49 174
QL	10 376 (21.10%)	22 149 (45.05%)	10 514 (21.38%)	6 130 (12.47%)	49 169
MAT	7 435 (18.99%)	17 390 (44.43%)	8 707 (22.24%)	5 611 (14.33%)	39 143

3.3 Performance on NBTs by intended faculty

Candidates are asked to indicate their first, second and third choice of faculty to which they have applied or will apply. Only the first choice of intended faculty was used in this analysis. The data is self-reported and might not reflect the actual placement in the university.

3.3.1 AL performance by intended faculty

The AL performance of candidates across all the faculties is presented in Figure 4.

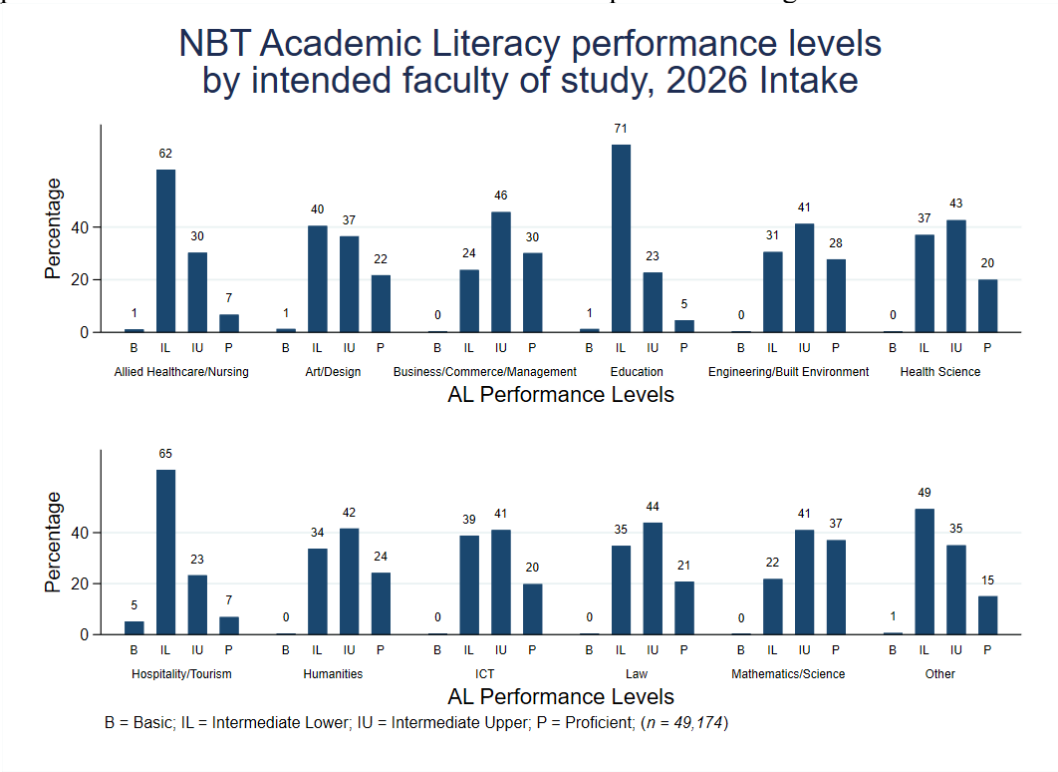


Figure 4: NBT AL performance levels by intended faculty of study: 2026 Intake

3.3.2 QL performance by intended faculty

The QL performance of candidates across all the faculties is presented in Figure 5.

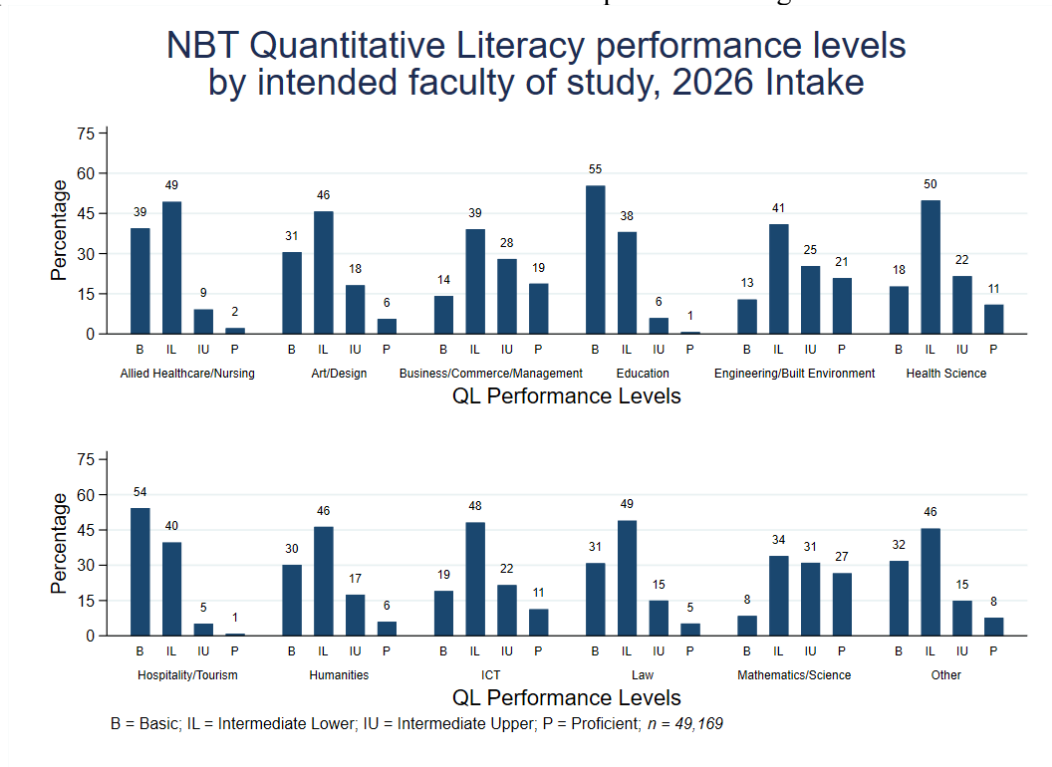


Figure 5: NBT QL performance levels by intended faculty of study: 2026 Intake

3.3.3 MAT performance by intended faculty

The performance levels in MAT are presented in Figure 6.

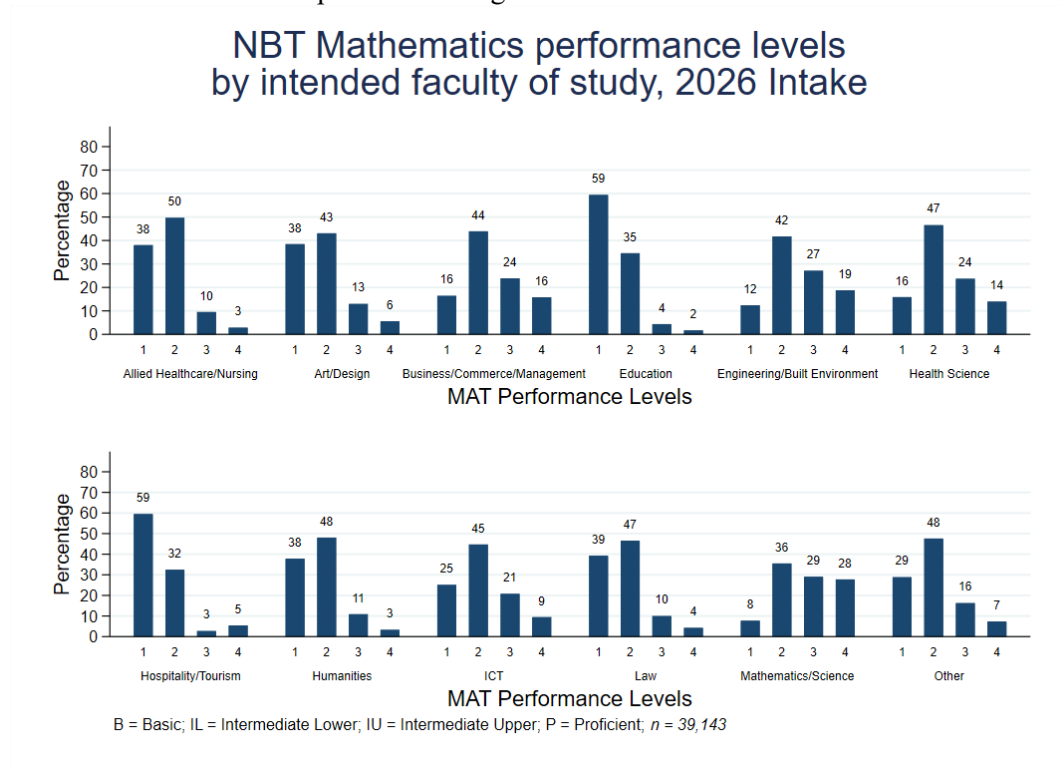


Figure 6: NBT MAT performance levels by intended faculty of study: 2026 Intake

3.4 Performance on NBTs by test language

This section reports a comparison in performance by candidates who wrote the NBTs in English and Afrikaans. Table 8 below shows that 47 725 candidates (97.05%) wrote the NBT AL in English, while 47 720 candidates (97.05%) wrote the QL in English. Additionally, 38 122 candidates (97.39%) wrote the NBT MAT in English. In contrast, the number of candidates who wrote the NBTs in Afrikaans is very low: 1 449 candidates (2.95%) wrote the NBT AL, 1 449 candidates (2.95%) wrote the NBT QL, and 1 021 candidates (2.61%) wrote the NBT MAT.

Table 8: NBT Test language: 2026 Intake

AQL/MAT test language	Wrote AL		Wrote QL		Wrote MAT	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Afrikaans	1 449	2.95	1 449	2.95	1 021	2.61
English	47 725	97.05	47 720	97.05	38 122	97.39
Total	49 174	100	49 169	100	39 143	100

Table 9 presents the descriptive statistics for each NBT test categorised by test language.

Table 9: Descriptive statistics for NBT AL, QL and MAT by test language: 2026 Intake

NBT Test	Test language	n	Mean %	SD %	Min. %	1st Quartile %	Median %	3rd Quartile %	Max. %
AL	Afrikaans	1 449	58.76	11.64	30	50	59	68	86
	English	47 725	58.75	13.33	11	48	58	69	94
	Total	49 174	58.75	13.29	11	48	58	69	94
QL	Afrikaans	1 449	52.66	15.05	19	40	50	64	96
	English	47 720	49.90	14.77	2	38	46	59	98
	Total	49 169	49.98	14.79	2	38	46	59	98
MAT	Afrikaans	1 021	52.26	17.85	22	37	49	65	96
	English	38 122	49.01	15.83	9	36	45	59	99
	Total	39 143	49.09	15.90	9	36	45	59	99

3.4.1 AL performance on tests written in Afrikaans and English

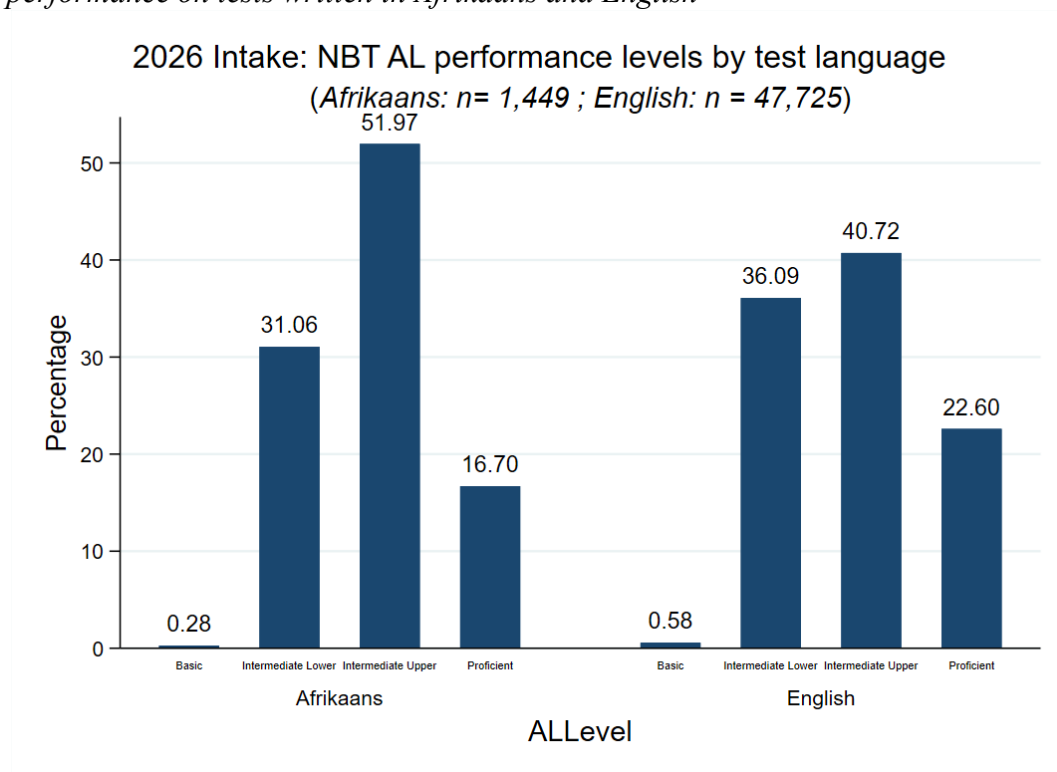


Figure 7: NBT AL performance levels by test language: 2026 Intake

3.4.2 QL performance on tests written in Afrikaans and English

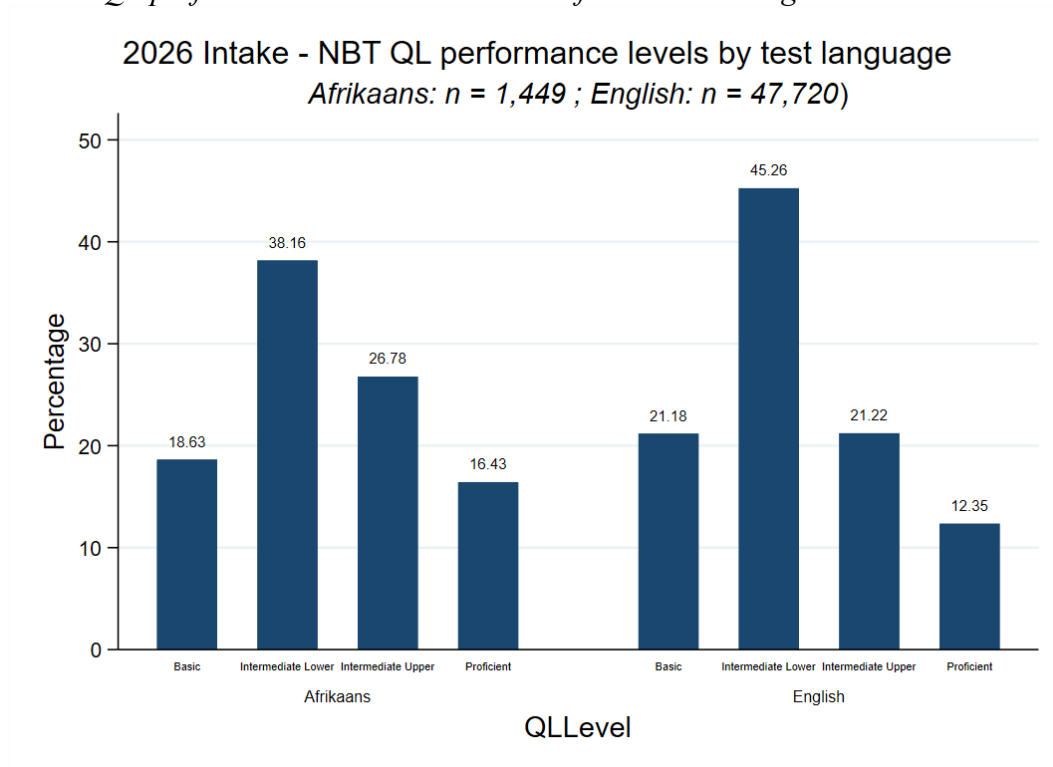


Figure 8: NBT QL performance levels by test language: 2026 Intake

3.4.3 MAT performance on tests written in Afrikaans and English

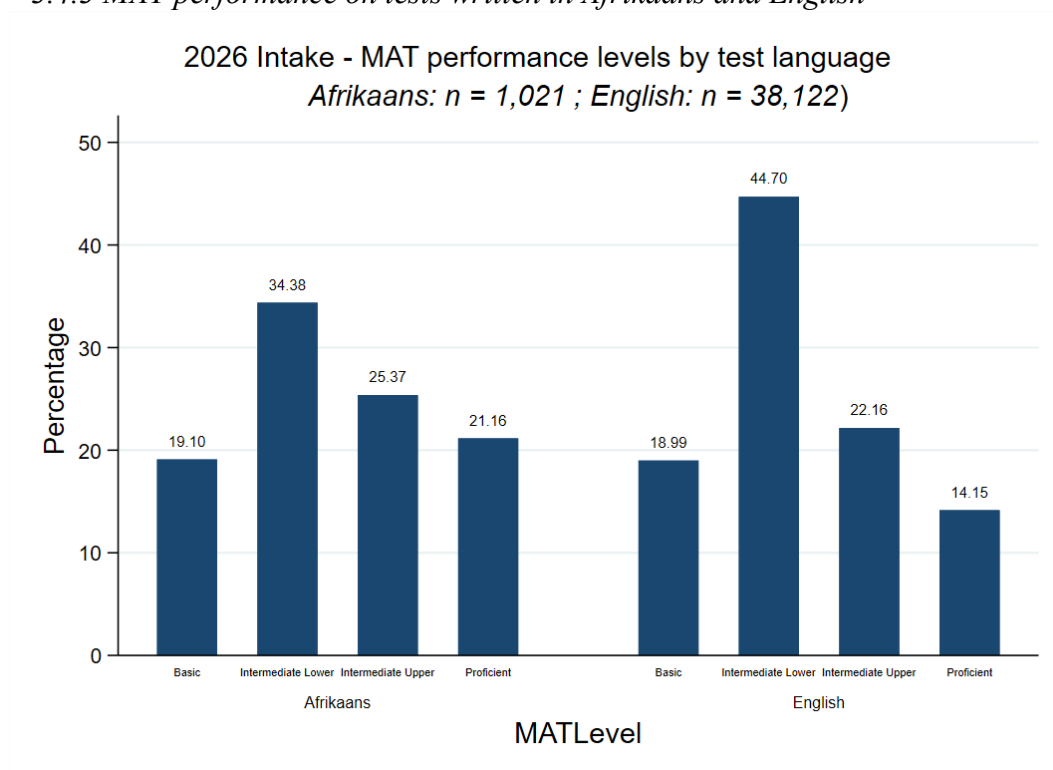


Figure 9: NBT MAT performance levels by test language: 2026 Intake

3.5 Performance profile of South African and non-South African candidates

Table 10: Number of NBT test writers by citizenship: 2026 Intake

	Wrote AL		Wrote QL		Wrote MAT	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
South African	46 796	95.16	46 791	95.16	37 276	95.23
Non-South African	2 374	4.83	2 374	4.83	1 866	4.77
Unspecified	4	0.01	4	0.01	1	0
Total	49174	100	49 169	100	39 143	100

Table 11: NBT scores distribution by citizenship: 2026 Intake

NBT Test	Citizenship	n	Mean %	SD %	Min. %	1st Quartile %	Median %	3rd Quartile %	Max. %
AL	South African	46 796	58.53	13.3	11	47	58	69	94
	Non-South African	2 374	63.18	12.22	22	54	64	73	90
	Unspecified	4	50.5	14.34	32	41.5	51.5	59.5	67
	Total	49 174	58.75	13.29	11	48	58	69	94
QL	South African	46 791	49.75	14.7	2	38	46	58	98
	Non-South African	2 374	54.68	15.71	11	41	53	66	97
	Unspecified	4	24.75	4.99	21	21.5	23	28	32
	Total	49 169	49.98	14.79	2	38	46	59	98
MAT	South African	37 276	48.89	15.79	9	36	44	59	99
	Non-South African	1866	53.06	17.34	21	38	51	65	96
	Unspecified	1	67	.	67	67	67	67	67
	Total	39 143	49.09	15.9	9	36	45	59	99

3.5.1 AL performance by citizenship

A higher proportion of the non-South African candidates (32.69%) scored in the Proficient band compared to the South African candidates (21.91%). Also, South African candidates had a slightly higher proportion of scores (0.59%) in the Basic band compared to the non-South African candidates 0.13%). For the Intermediate bands (Intermediate Upper and Lower), most of the scores for each category fell within these two groups; 77.49% of South African candidates' scores, and 67.19% of the non-South African candidates' scores (Figure 10). These percentages should be interpreted with consideration of the differences in the size of these two groups.

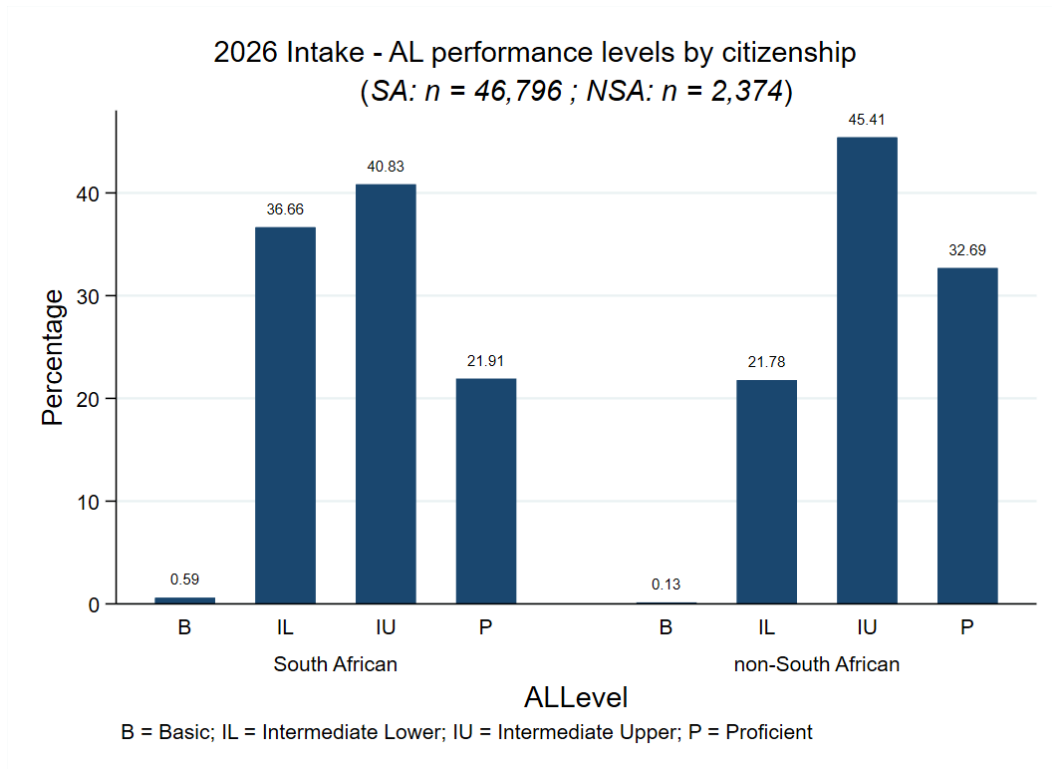


Figure 10: NBT AL performance levels by citizenship: 2026 Intake

3.5.2 QL performance by citizenship

Figure 11 shows the performance of non-South African and South African candidates in QL. Non-South African candidates had a higher proportion of scores in the Proficient band, with 19.80% compared to 12.10% for South African candidates. In the Basic band, 21.46% of South African candidates and 13.86% of non-South African candidates scored in this category. These results suggest that both groups may need additional QL support.

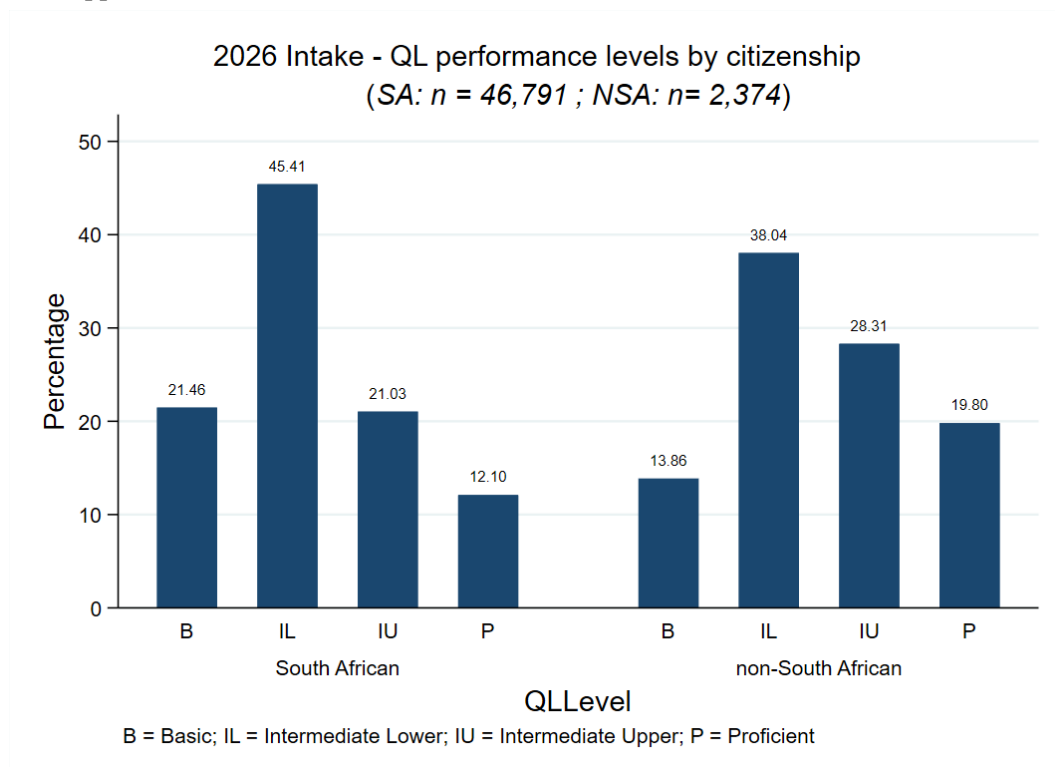


Figure 11: NBT QL performance levels by citizenship: 2026 Intake

3.5.3 MAT performance by citizenship

Figure 12 presents the performance of Non-South African and South African candidates in MAT. Non-South African candidates had a higher proportion of scores in the Proficient band, with 20.2% compared to 14.0% for South African candidates. In the Basic and Intermediate Lower bands combined, over 70% of scores across all categories fell within these bands. These results suggest that all groups may require additional MAT support.

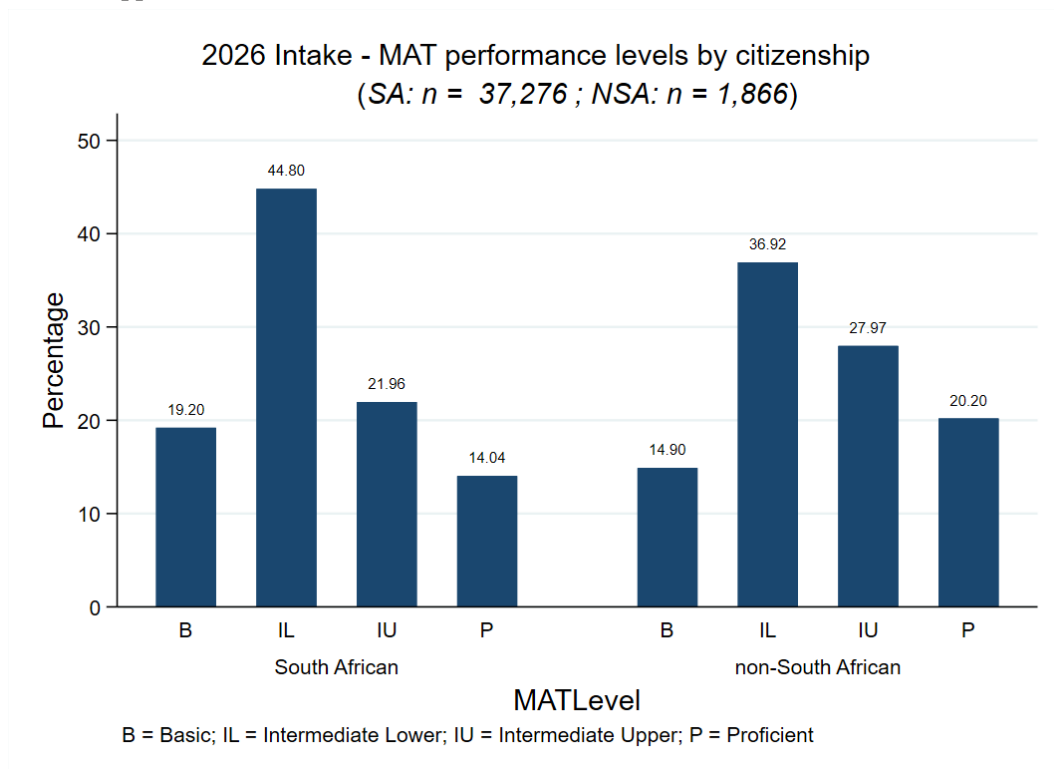


Figure 12: NBT MAT performance levels by citizenship: 2026 Intake

3.6 Performance on NBTs at the subdomain level

3.6.1 The construct of the AL test

AL1 - Cohesion

The ability to identify and use anaphoric and cataphoric links and other mechanisms that connect parts of a text.

AL2 – Communicative function

The ability to identify and understand the function of different parts of sentences/ discourse.

AL3 – Discourse relations

The ability to understand the structure and organisation of discourse and argument.

AL4 – Distinction making (Essential/non-essential)

The ability to make distinctions, classify, categorise and compare, such as unpacking cause and effect relationships or sorting facts from opinions.

AL5 – Grammar / Syntax

The ability to understand and analyse the grammatical and syntax structures in academic language and to know how this affects meaning and interpretation.

AL6 – Inferencing

The ability to draw conclusions and apply insights either on the basis of what has been stated directly in texts or on what is implied in these texts.

AL7 – Metaphorical expressions

The ability to understand and use non-literal language use such as metaphor, wordplay or language connotation.

AL8 – Text genre

The ability to perceive the “audience” in a text, the purpose of writing or understanding the appropriate use of register and tone.

AL9 – Vocabulary

The ability to derive the meaning of words and terms from the context.

Table 12 provides a detailed summary of the distribution for each AL subdomain.

Table 12: The performance distribution on the NBT AL subdomains: 2026 Intake

Skill Assessed	n	Mean %	SD %	Min. %	1st Quartile %	Median %	3rd Quartile %	Max. %
Cohesion (AL1)	49 174	71.10	19.65	0	57	71	86	100
Communicative function (AL2)	49 174	61.78	21.36	0	50	63	78	100
Discourse relations (AL3)	49 174	62.02	23.59	0	50	67	83	100
Essential/ non-essential (AL4)	49 174	59.52	19.32	0	45	60	73	100
Grammar/ syntax (AL5)	49 174	64.04	29.48	0	50	75	100	100
Inferencing (AL6)	49 174	55.63	19.15	0	42	56	69	100
Metaphorical expression (AL7)	49 174	55.93	23.47	0	40	56	75	100
Text genre (AL8)	49 174	47.41	26.31	0	25	50	67	100
Vocabulary (AL9)	49 174	53.81	20.62	0	43	57	70	100

Table 13: NBT AL subdomains median (p50) performance indicator per faculty: 2026 Intake

Faculty	AL1	AL2	AL3	AL4	AL5	AL6	AL7	AL8	AL9
Allied Healthcare/Nursing	67	50	50	50	50	46	40	40	43
Art/Design	71	63	60	58	67	54	56	50	50
Business/Commerce/Management	75	67	67	64	75	62	63	50	57
Education	57	50	50	46	50	38	40	40	43
Engineering/Built Environment	73	67	67	63.5	75	62	60	50	57
Health Science	71	63	67	60	75	54	50	50	50
Hospitality/Tourism	57	50	50	45	50	38	33	33	43
Humanities	71	67	63	60	75	57	60	50	57
ICT	71	63	60	60	67	56	56	50	57
Law	71	63	60	60	75	54	60	50	57
Mathematics/Science	80	70	71	67	75	63	67	50	57
Other	67	60	57	55	50	50	50	50	50
Unspecified	71	67	67	60	67	55	56	50	57
Total	71	63	67	60	75	56	56	50	57

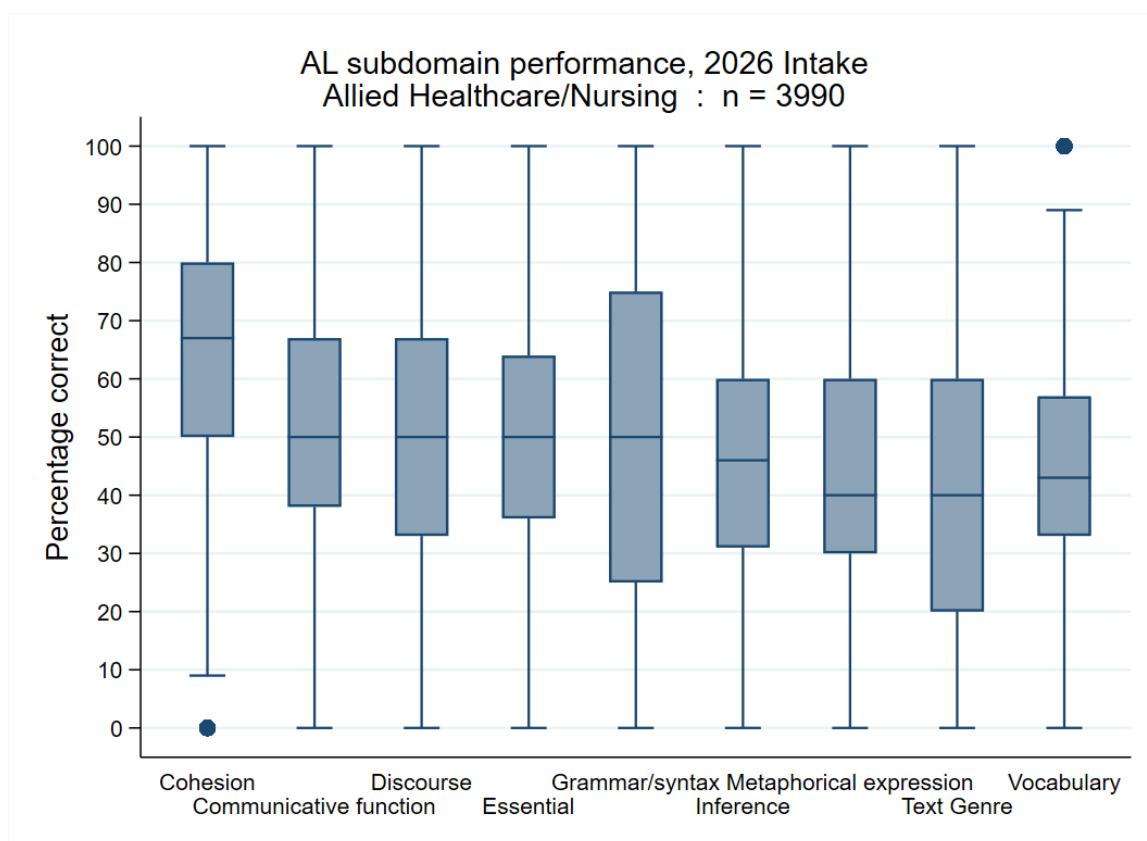


Figure 13: Allied Healthcare/Nursing AL subdomain performance: 2026 Intake

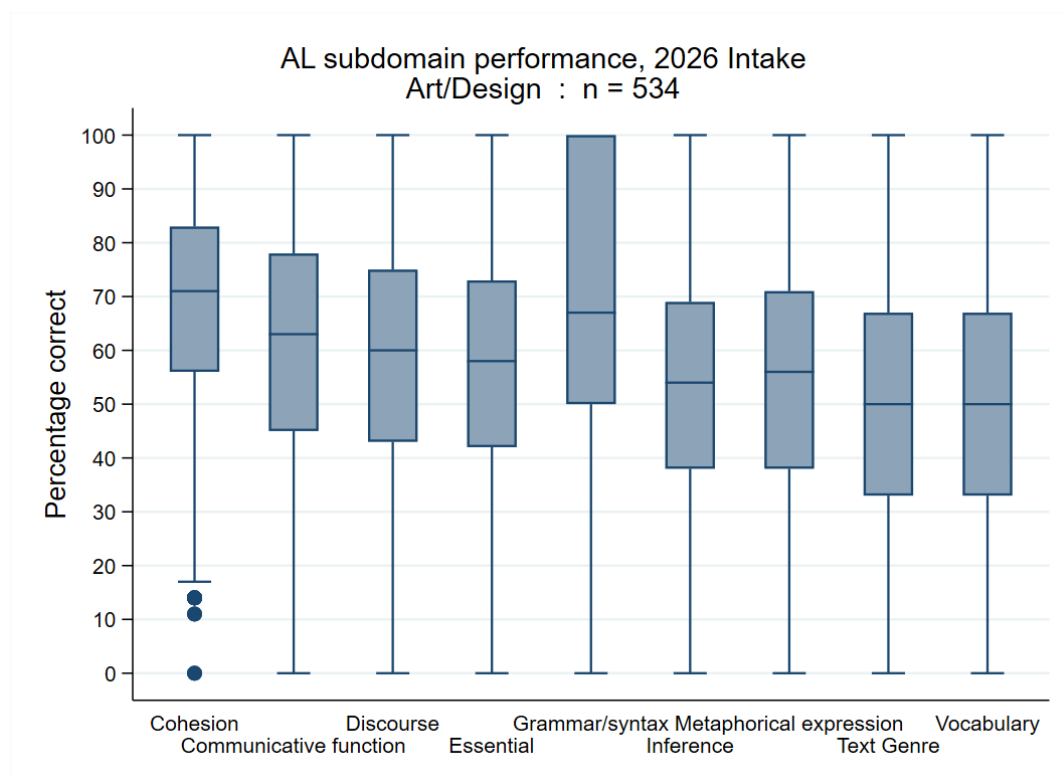


Figure 14: Art and Design AL subdomain performance: 2026 Intake

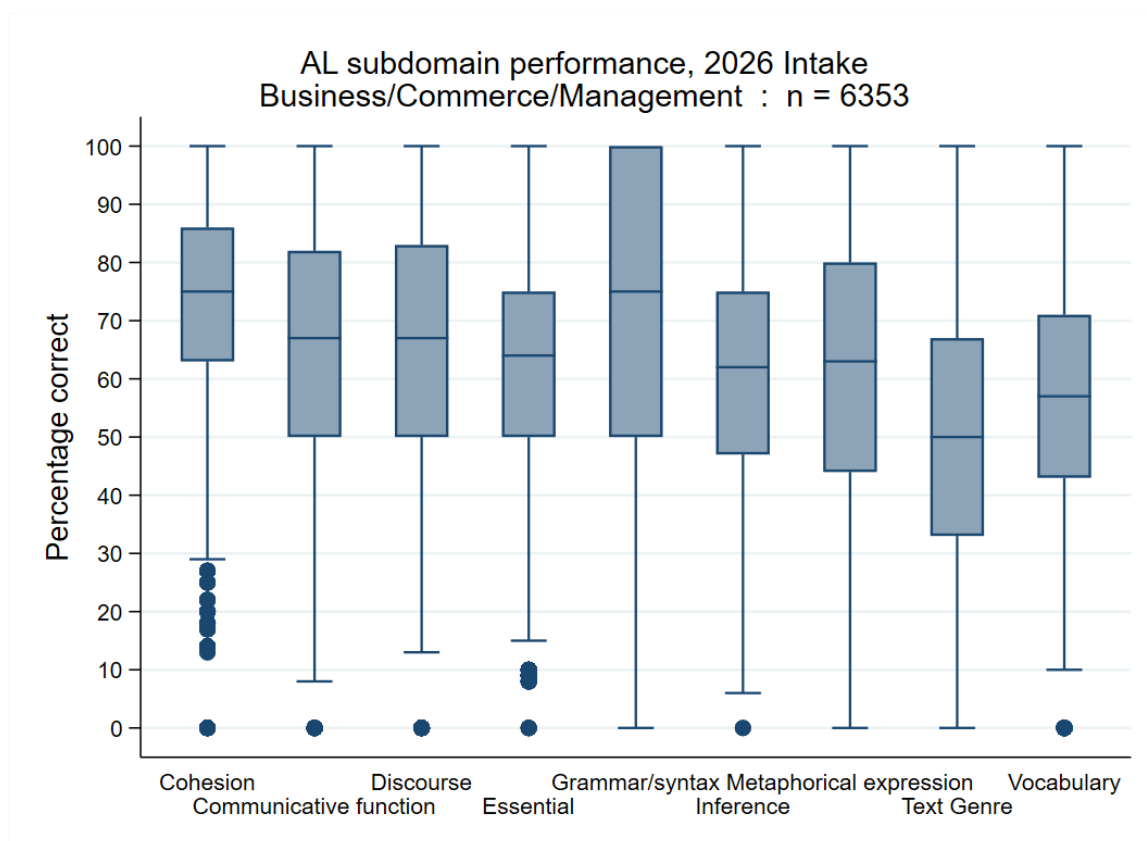


Figure 15: Business/Commerce/Management AL subdomain performance: 2026 Intake

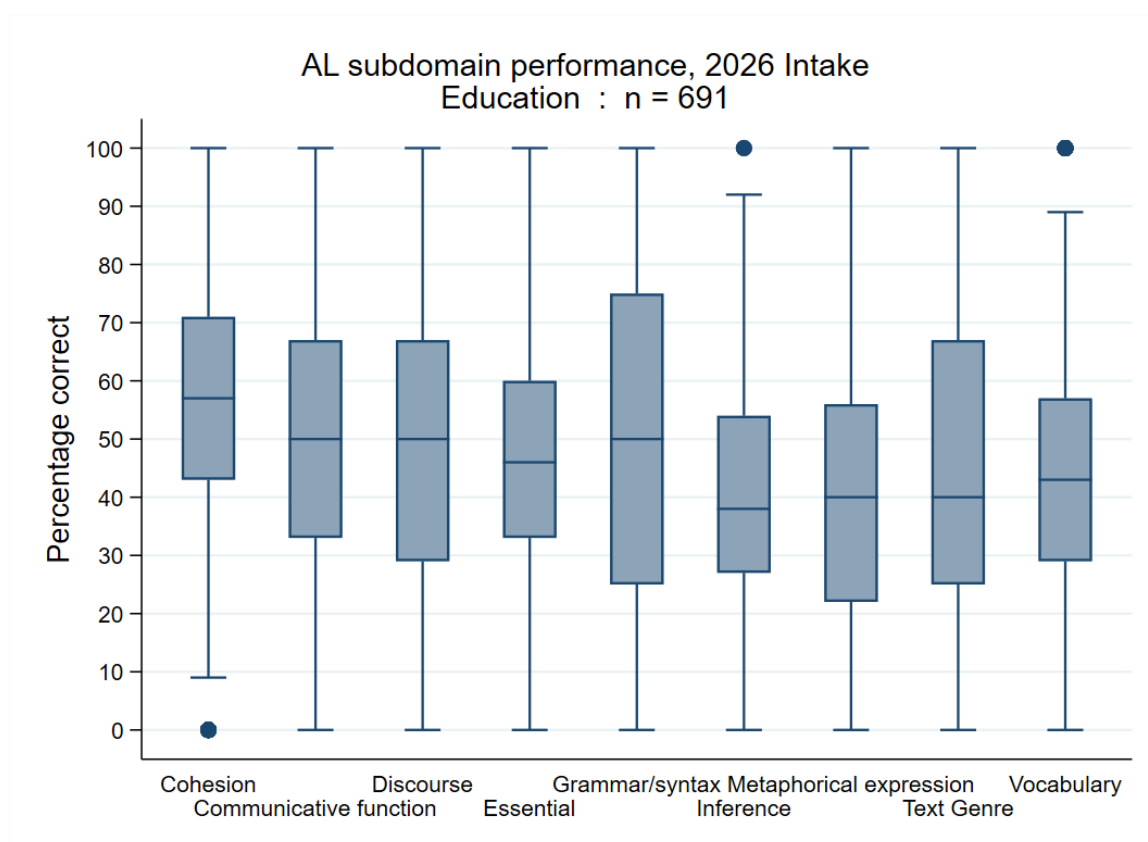


Figure 16: Education AL subdomain performance: 2026 Intake

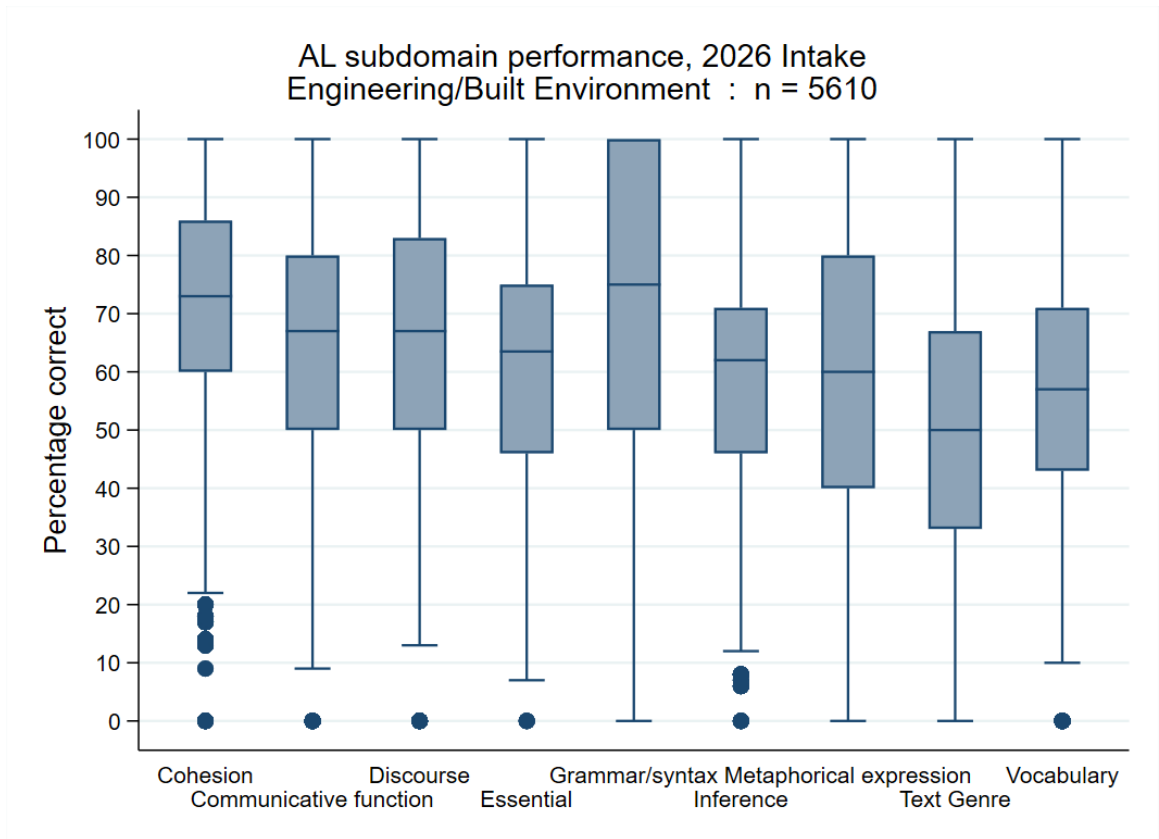


Figure 17: Engineering/Built Environment AL subdomain performance: 2026 Intake

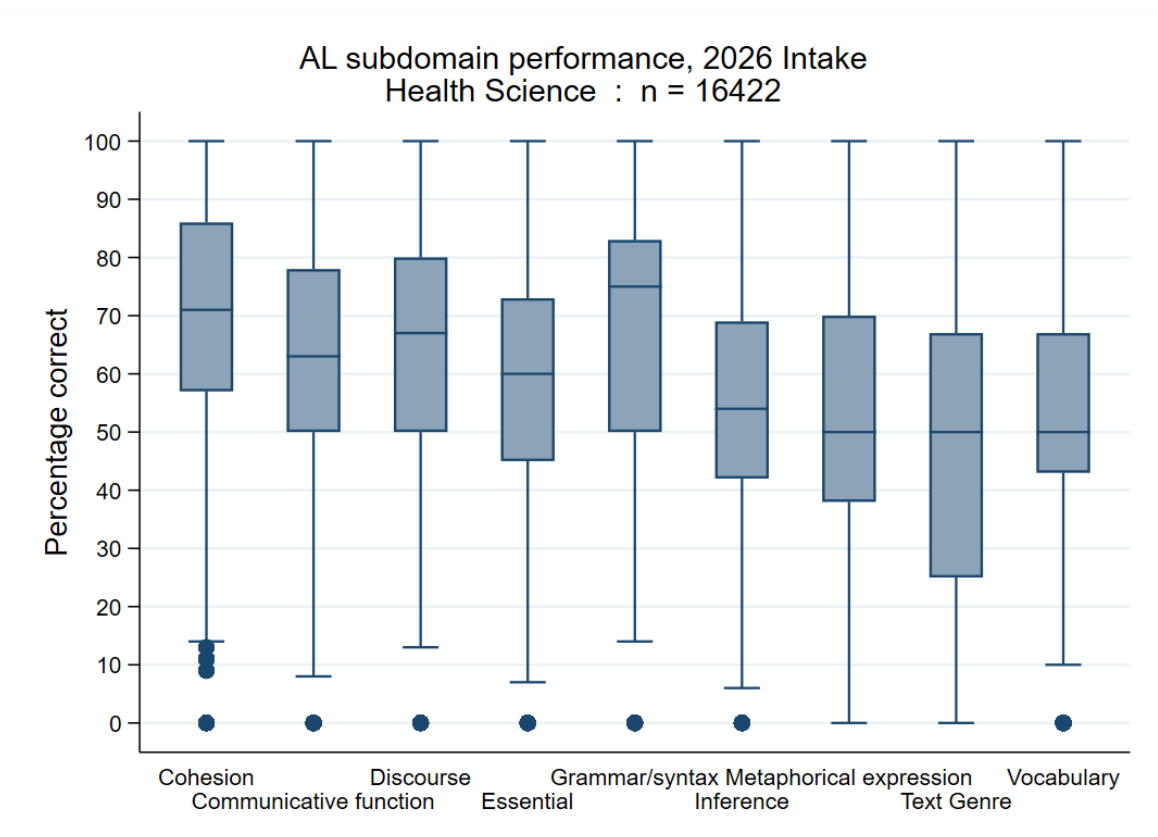


Figure 18: Health Sciences AL subdomain performance: 2026 Intake

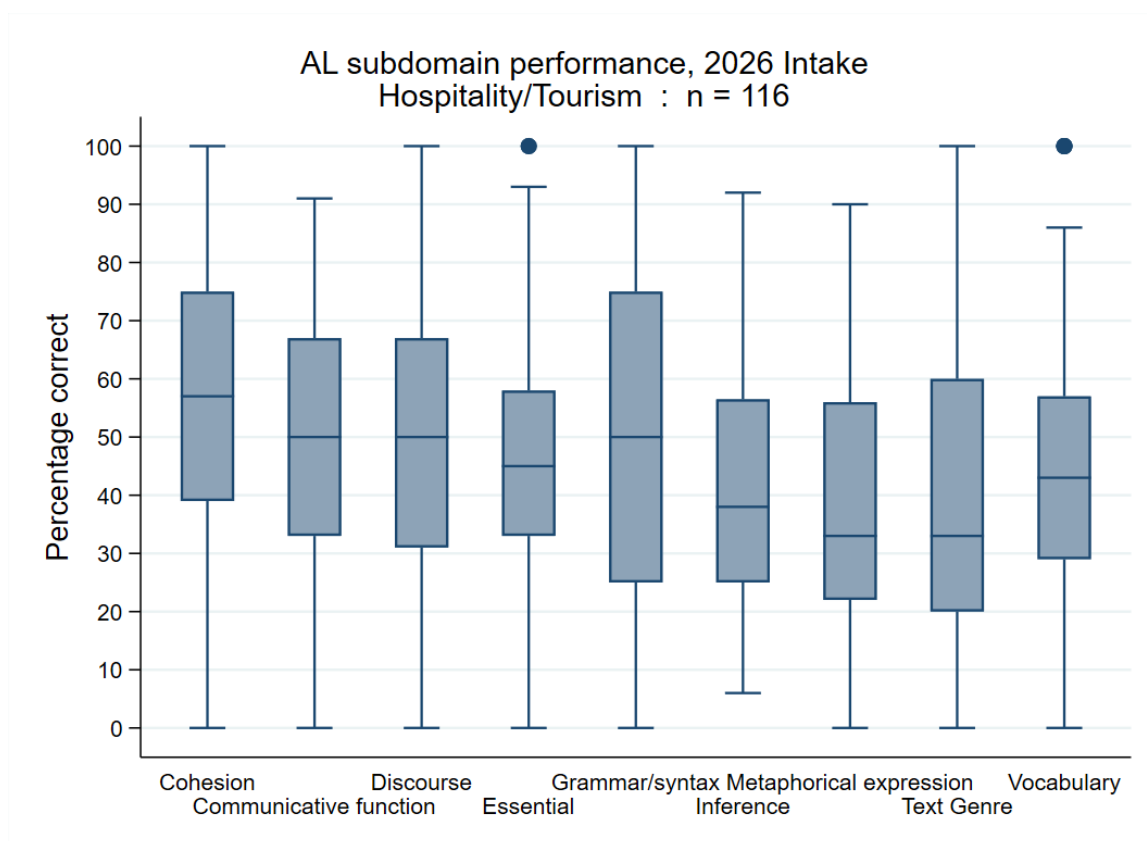


Figure 19: Hospitality/Tourism AL subdomain performance: 2026 Intake

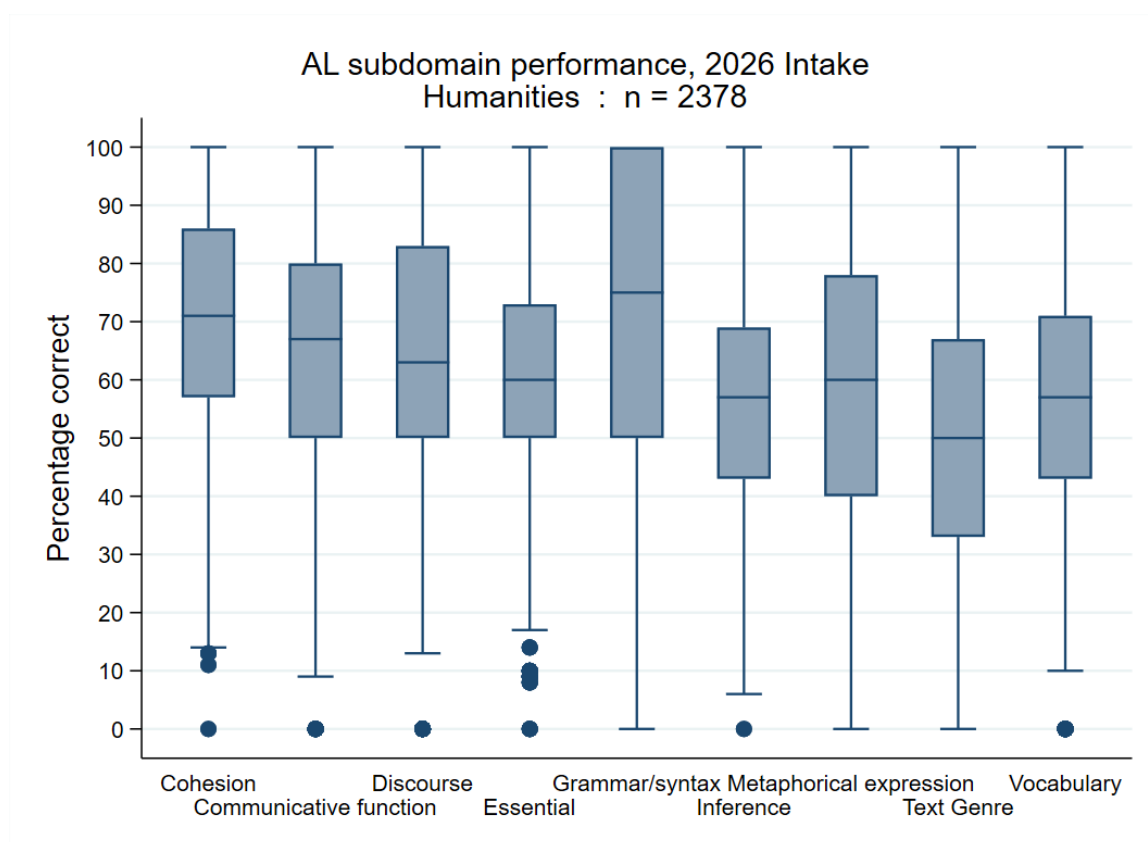


Figure 20: Humanities AL subdomain performance: 2026 Intake

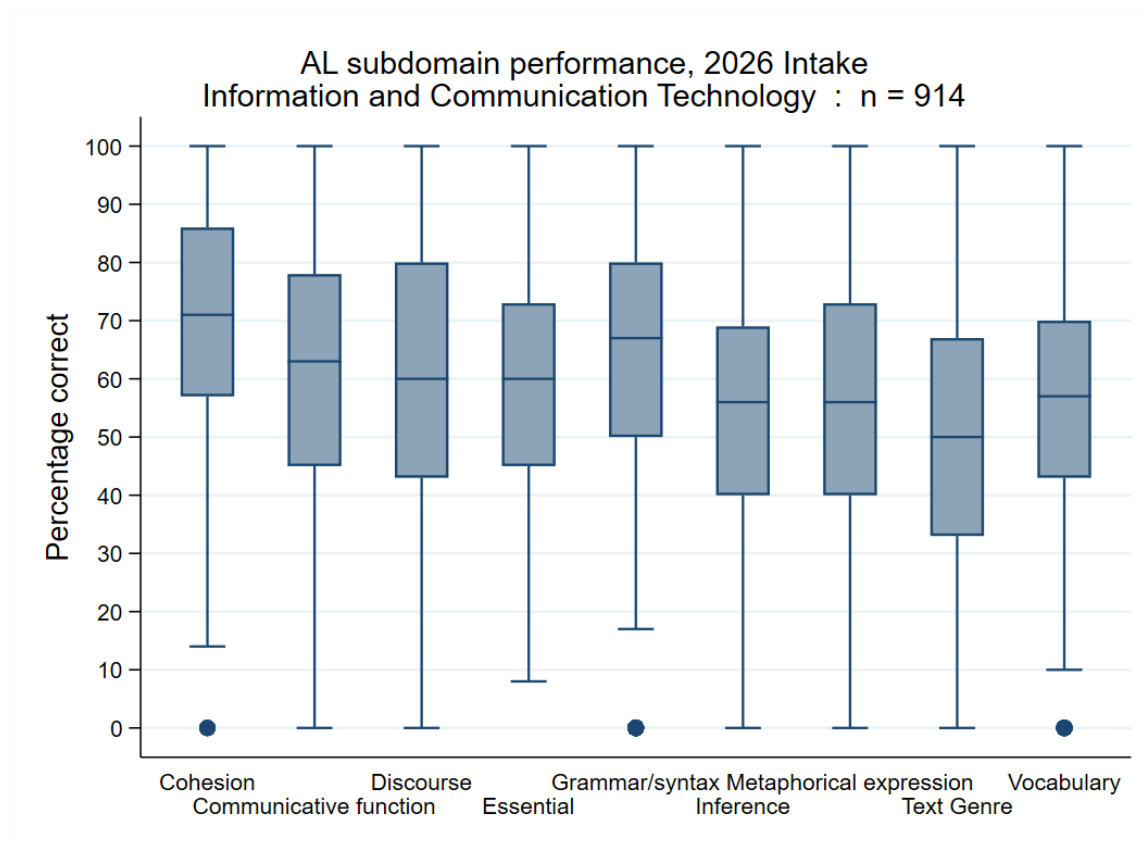


Figure 21: Information and Communication Technology AL subdomain performance: 2026 Intake

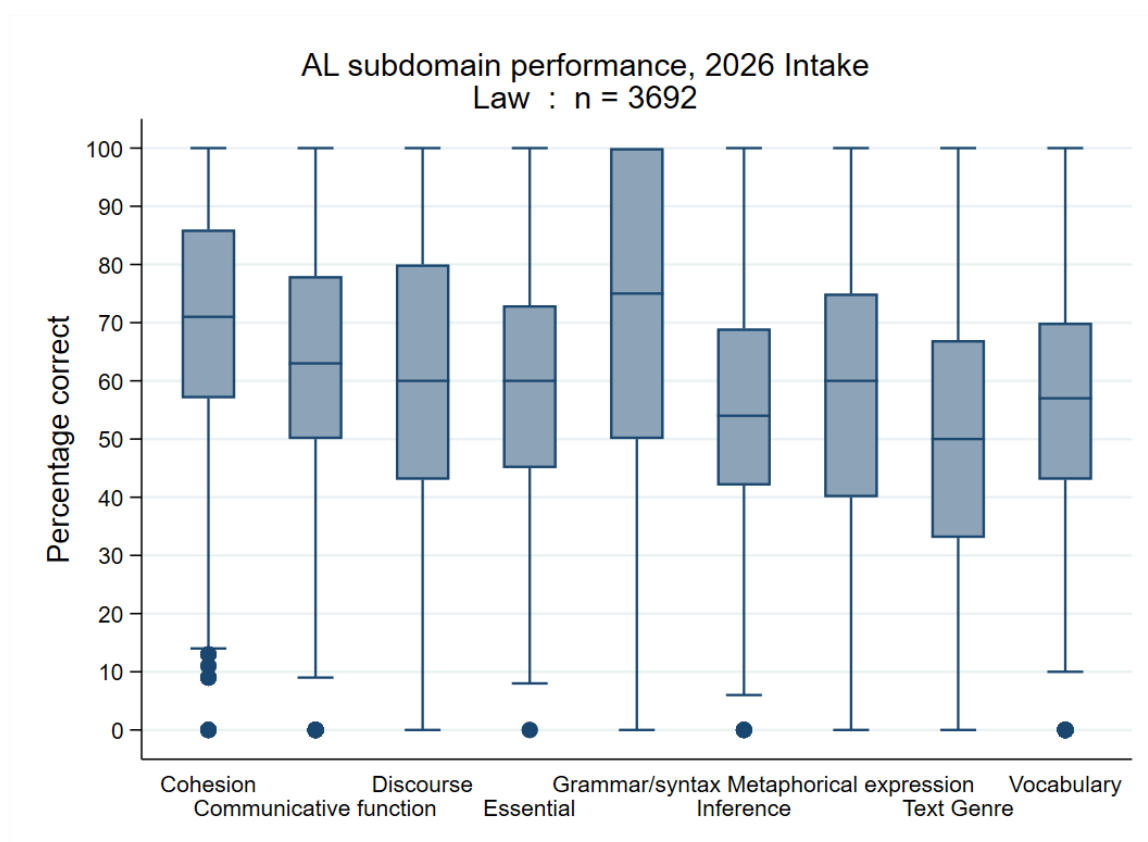


Figure 22: Law AL subdomain performance: 2026 Intake

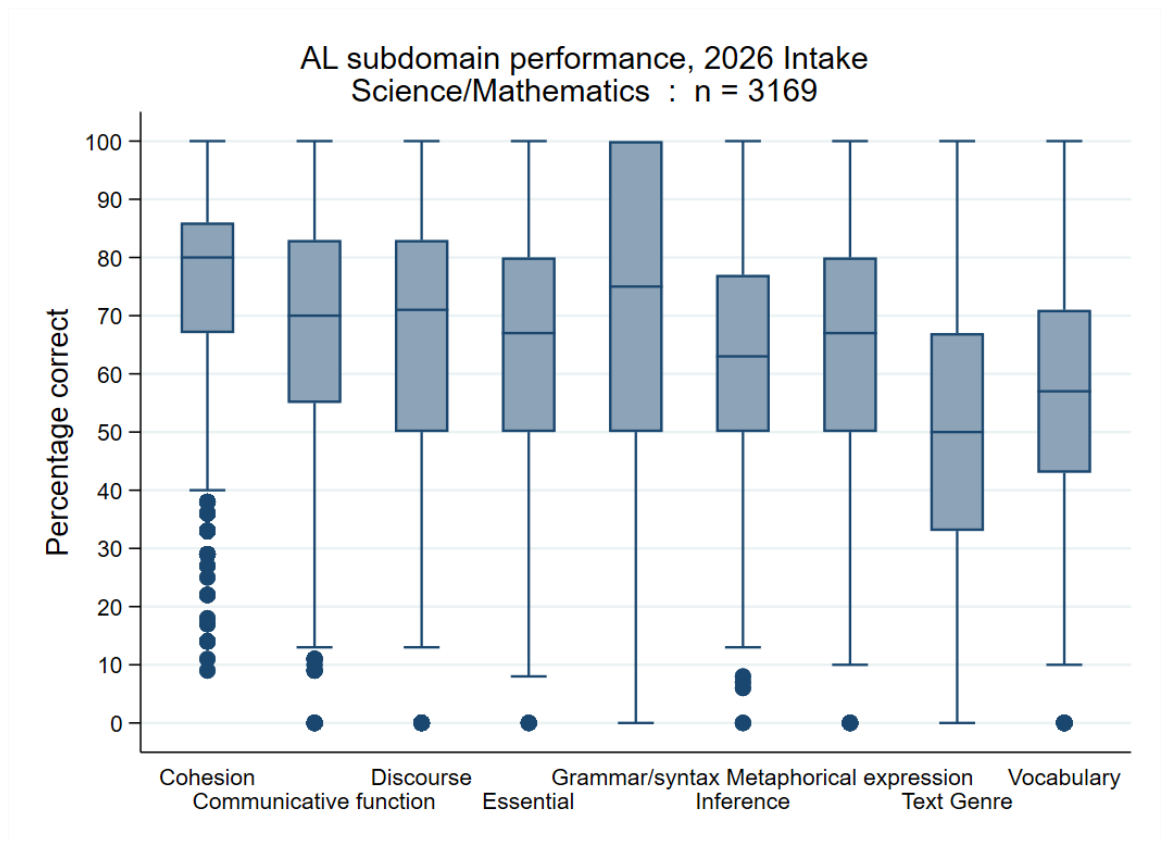


Figure 23: Science/Mathematics AL subdomain performance: 2026 Intake

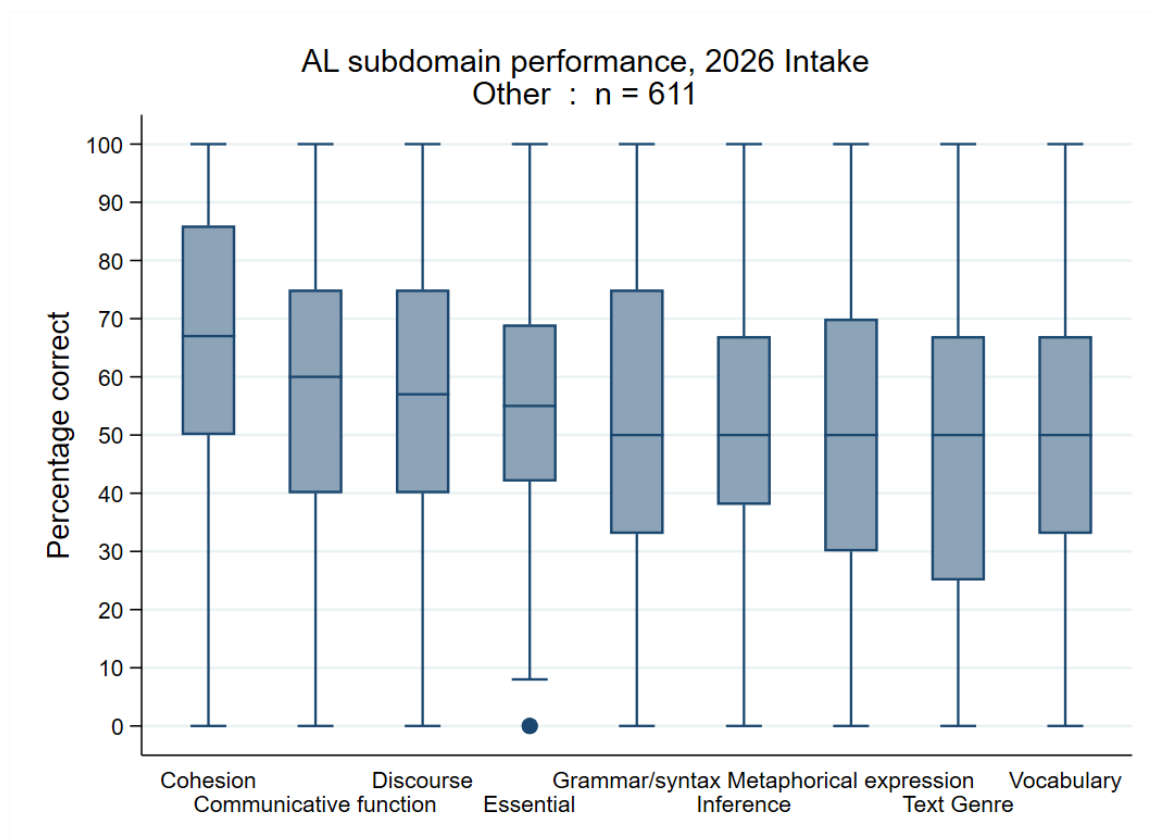


Figure 24: Other AL subdomain performance: 2026 Intake

3.6.2 The construct of the QL test

NBT QL subdomains

QL1/QLC - Change and rates

Involves distinguishing between absolute and relative changes, quantifying and reasoning about changes, calculating average rates of change and interpreting graph curvature in terms of rate changes.

QL2/QLD - Data representation and analysis

Includes deriving and using information from contextualised data representations, interpreting various charts and diagrams, and representing data in simple tables and charts.

QL3/QLP - Chance and uncertainty

Entails understanding and quantifying the probability of uncertain events using empirical data and representing probability as a number between 0 and 1.

QL4/QLQ – Quantity, number and operations

Involves ordering quantities, performing calculations, expressing numbers in alternative forms, interpreting ratios and working with numerical representations in various contexts.

QL5/QLR – Relationships, pattern and permutation

Focuses on recognising, interpreting, and representing relationships and patterns through graphs, tables, words, symbols, and manipulating simple algebraic expressions.

QL6/QLS – Shape, dimension and space

Encompasses understanding measurement conventions for 2D and 3D objects and performing calculations for areas, perimeters and volumes of simple shapes.

Table 14: The performance distribution on the NBT QL subdomains: 2026 Intake

Skill Assessed	n	Mean %	SD %	Min. %	1st Quartile %	Median %	3rd Quartile %	Max. %
Change and rates (QL1)	49 169	36.84	27.61	0	25	33	50	100
Data representation and analysis (QL2)	49 169	50.92	19.89	0	38	50	64	100
Chance and uncertainty (QL3)	49 169	53.52	31.50	0	33	67	67	100
Quantity number and operations (QL4)	49 169	47.57	22.10	0	33	45	64	100
Relationships pattern and permutation (QL5)	49 169	51.43	23.68	0	33	50	71	100
Shape dimension and space (QL6)	49 169	51.65	22.26	0	38	50	67	100

Table 15: NBT QL subdomains median (p50) performance indicator per faculty: 2026 Intake

Faculty	QL1	QL2	QL3	QL4	QL5	QL6
Allied Healthcare/Nursing	25	40	33	33	43	38
Art/Design	25	44	33	42	43	44
Business/Commerce/Management	50	56	67	50	57	50
Education	25	33	33	33	29	38
Engineering/Built Environment	40	55	67	50	57	57
Health Science	33	50	67	45	57	50
Hospitality/Tourism	25	36	33	27	29	38
Humanities	25	46	33	42	43	43
ICT	33	50	67	45	50	50
Law	25	45	33	42	43	43
Mathematics/Science	50	60	67	58	63	63
Other	25	45	33	42	43	44
Unspecified	25	47	67	45	43	50
Total	33	50	67	45	50	50

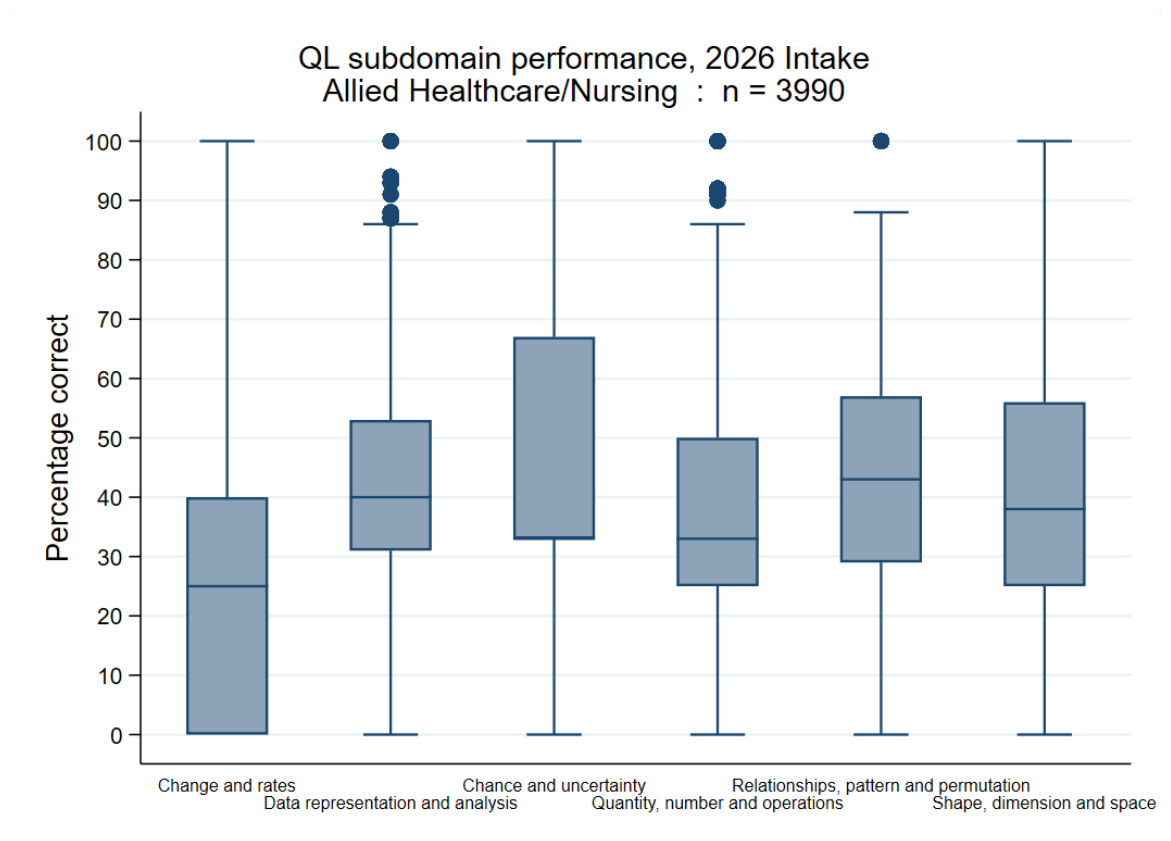


Figure 25: Allied Healthcare/Nursing QL subdomain performance: 2026 Intake

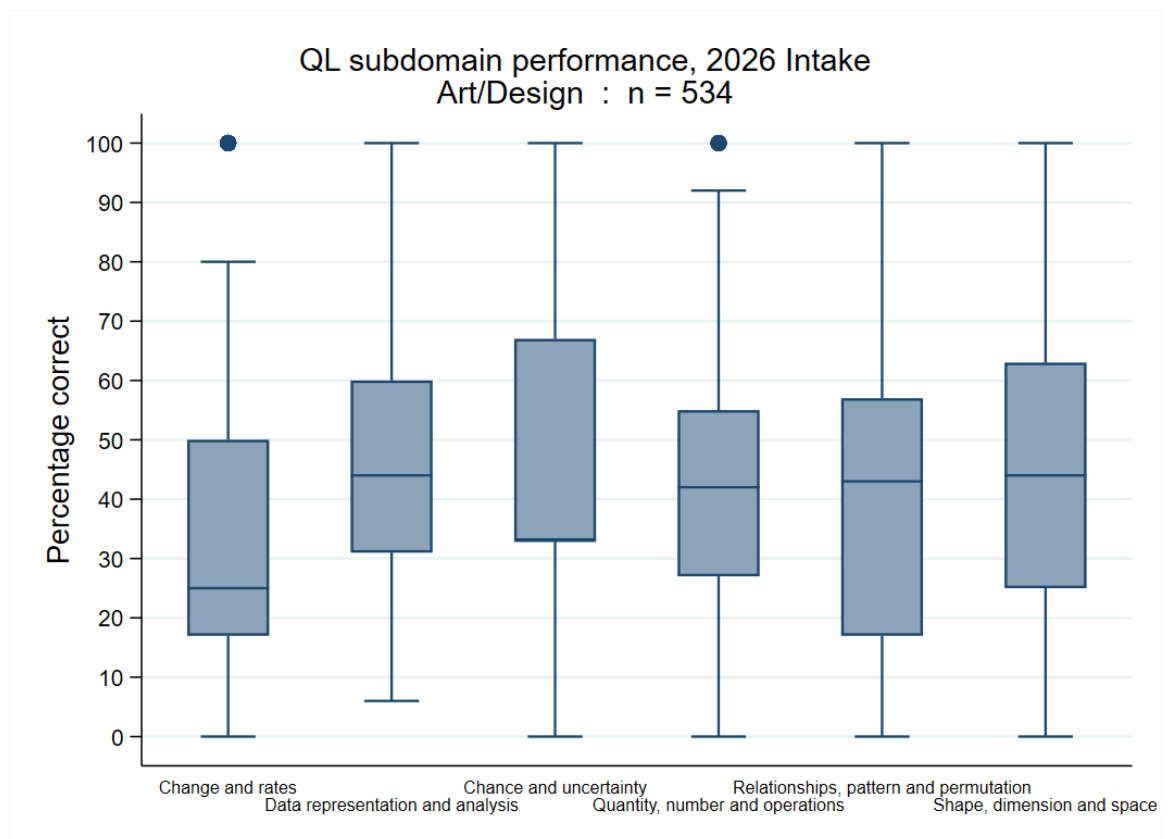


Figure 26: Art/Design QL subdomain performance: 2026 Intake

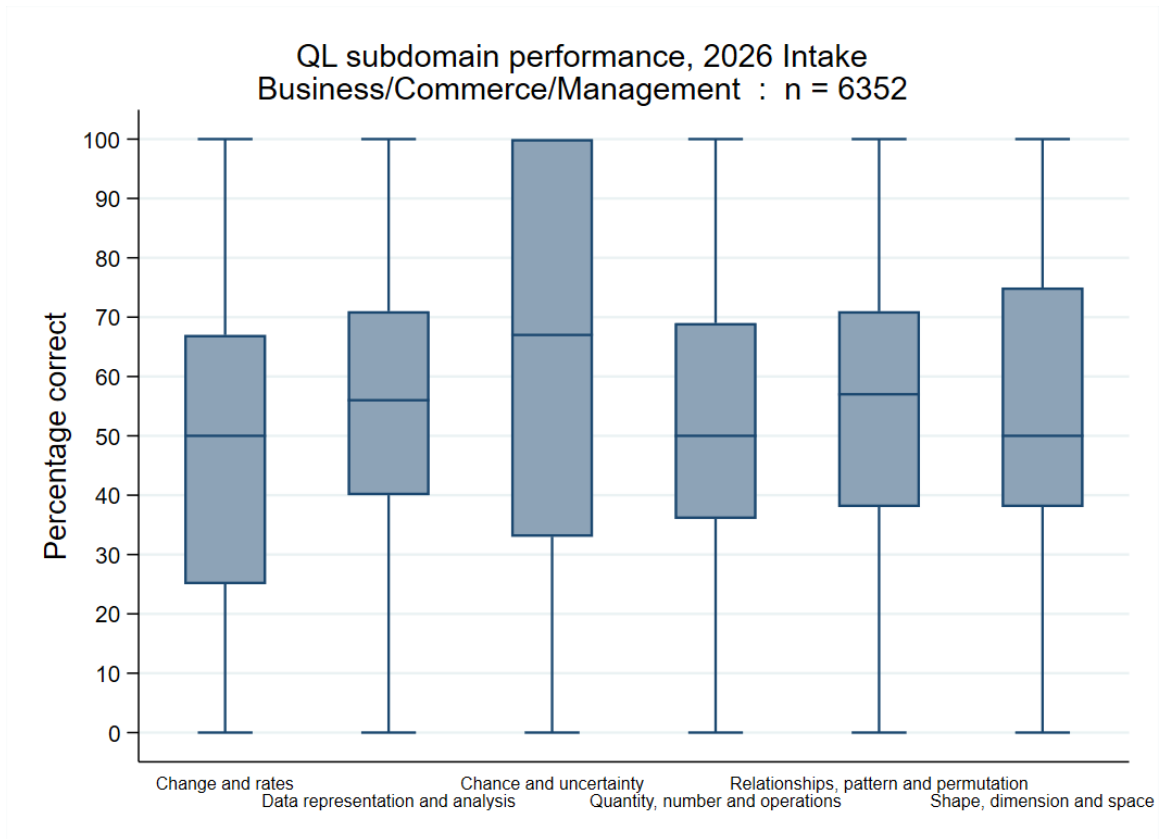


Figure 27: Business/Commerce/Management QL subdomain performance: 2026 Intake

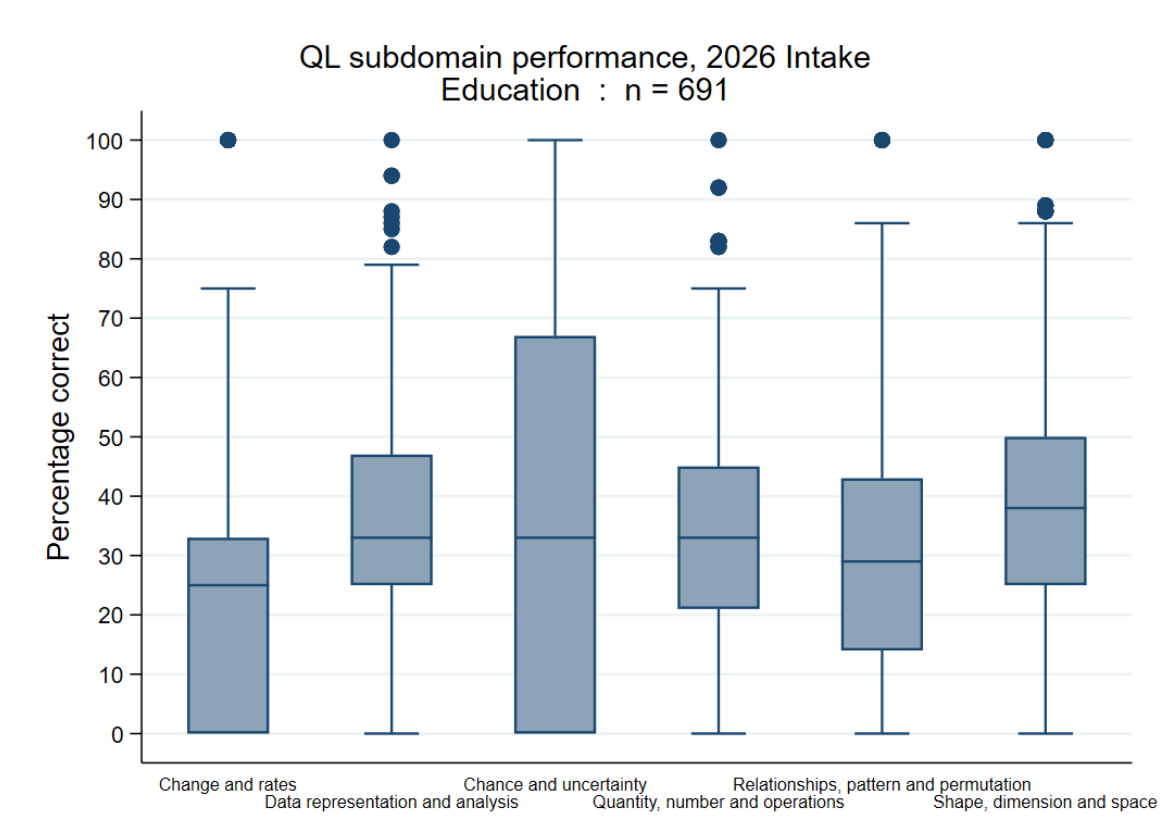


Figure 28: Education QL subdomain performance: 2026 Intake

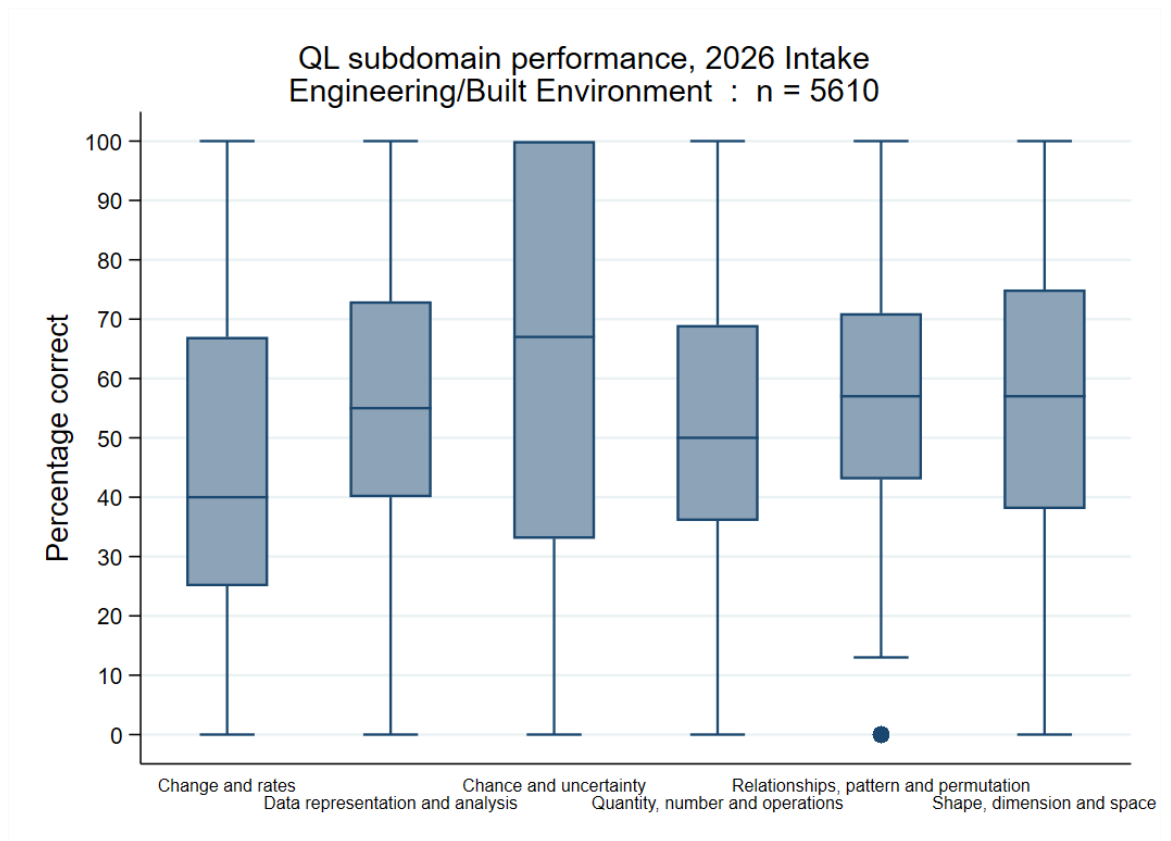


Figure 29: Engineering/Built Environment QL subdomain performance: 2026 Intake

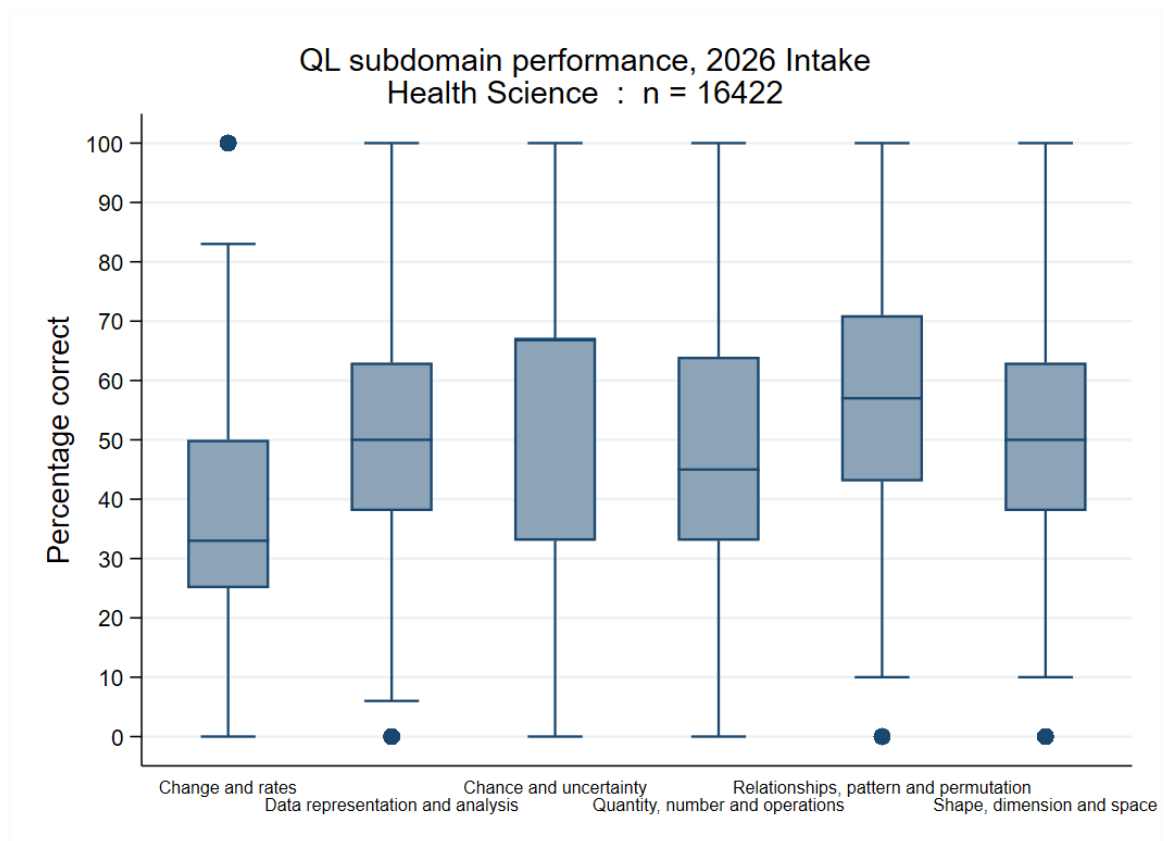


Figure 30: Health Sciences QL subdomain performance: 2026 Intake

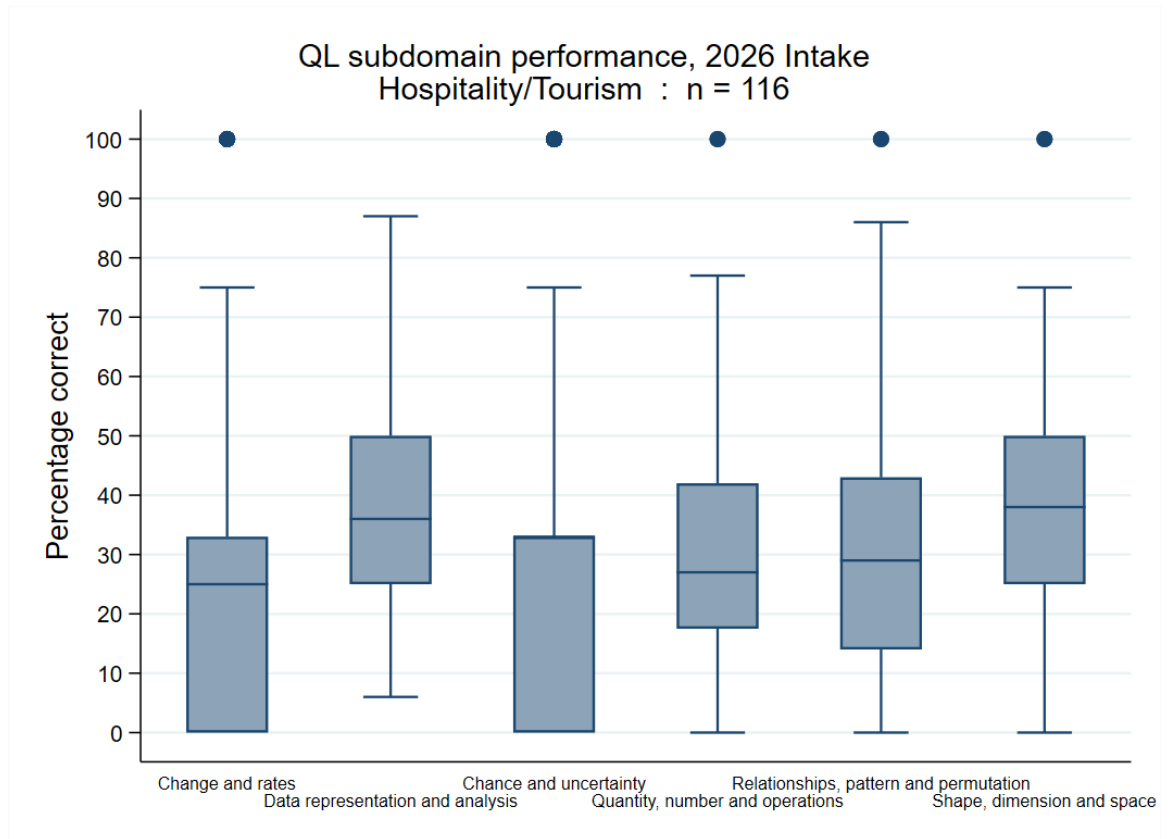


Figure 31: Hospitality/Tourism QL subdomain performance: 2026 Intake

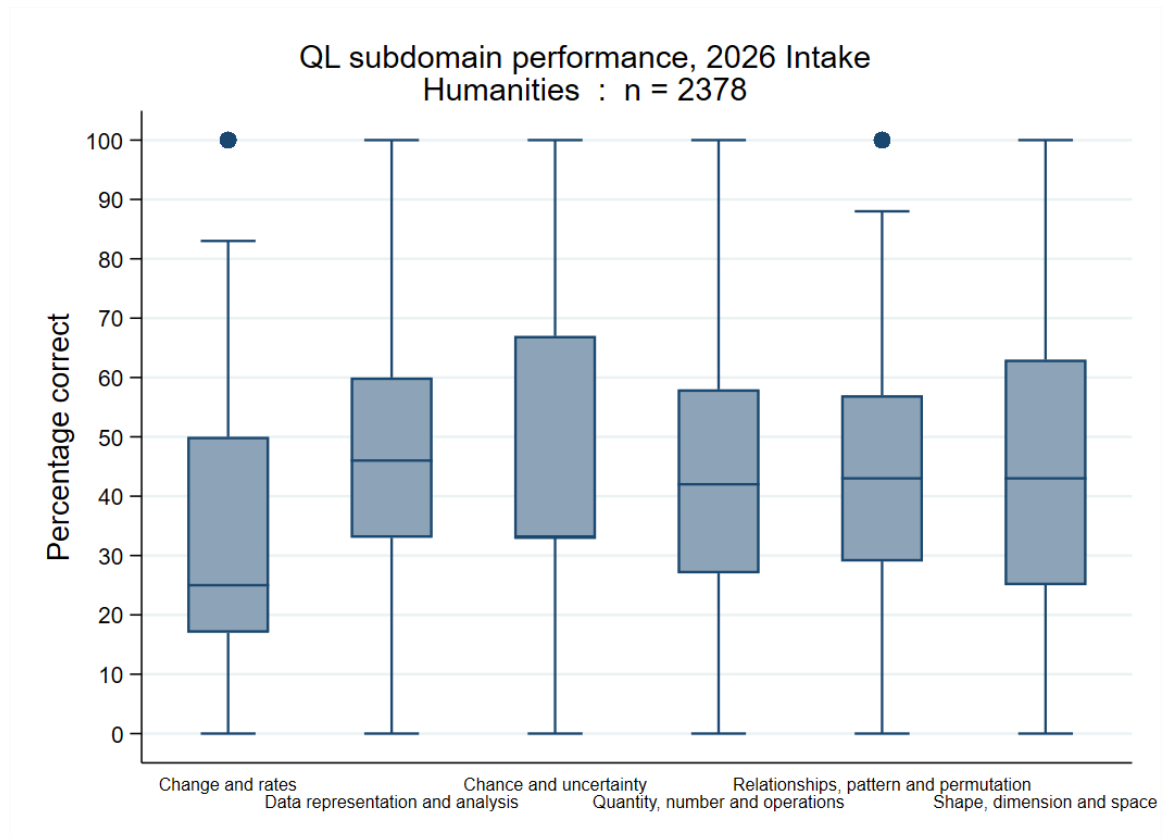


Figure 32: Humanities QL subdomain performance: 2026 Intake

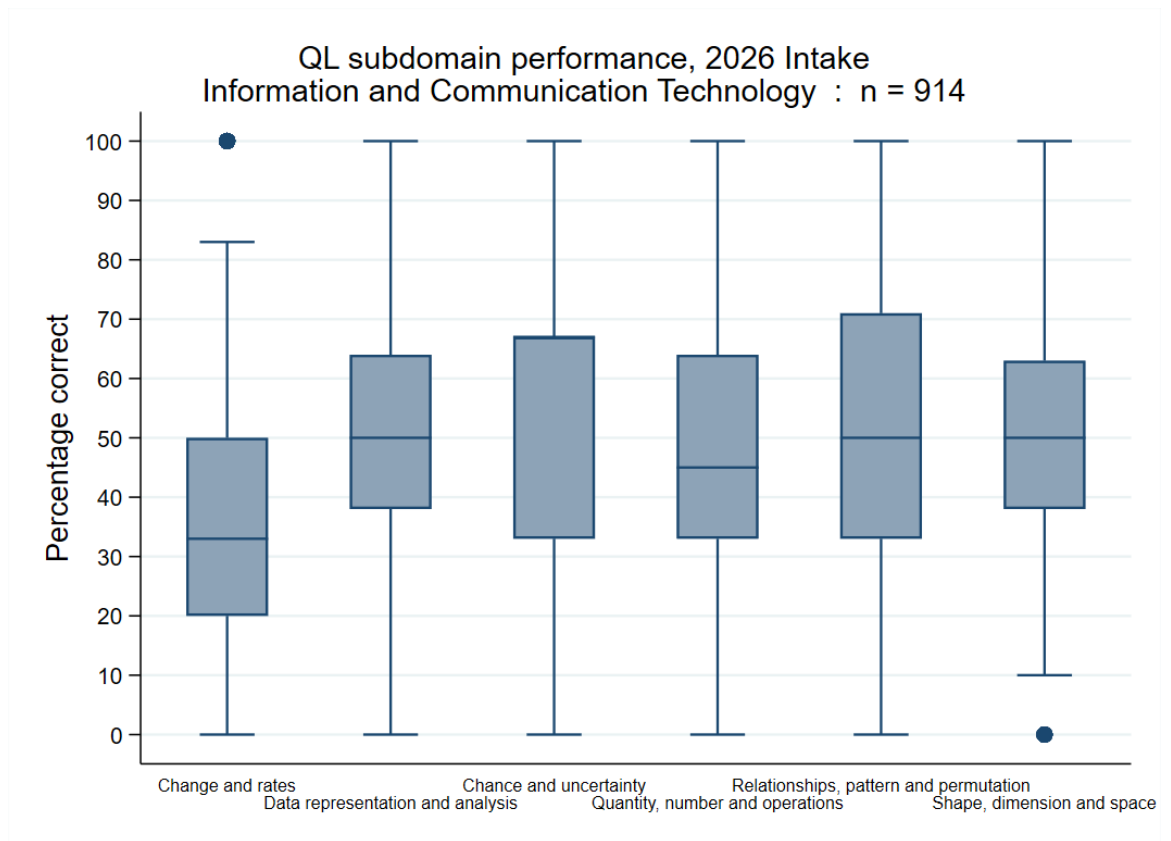


Figure 33: Information and Communication Technology QL subdomain performance: 2026 Intake

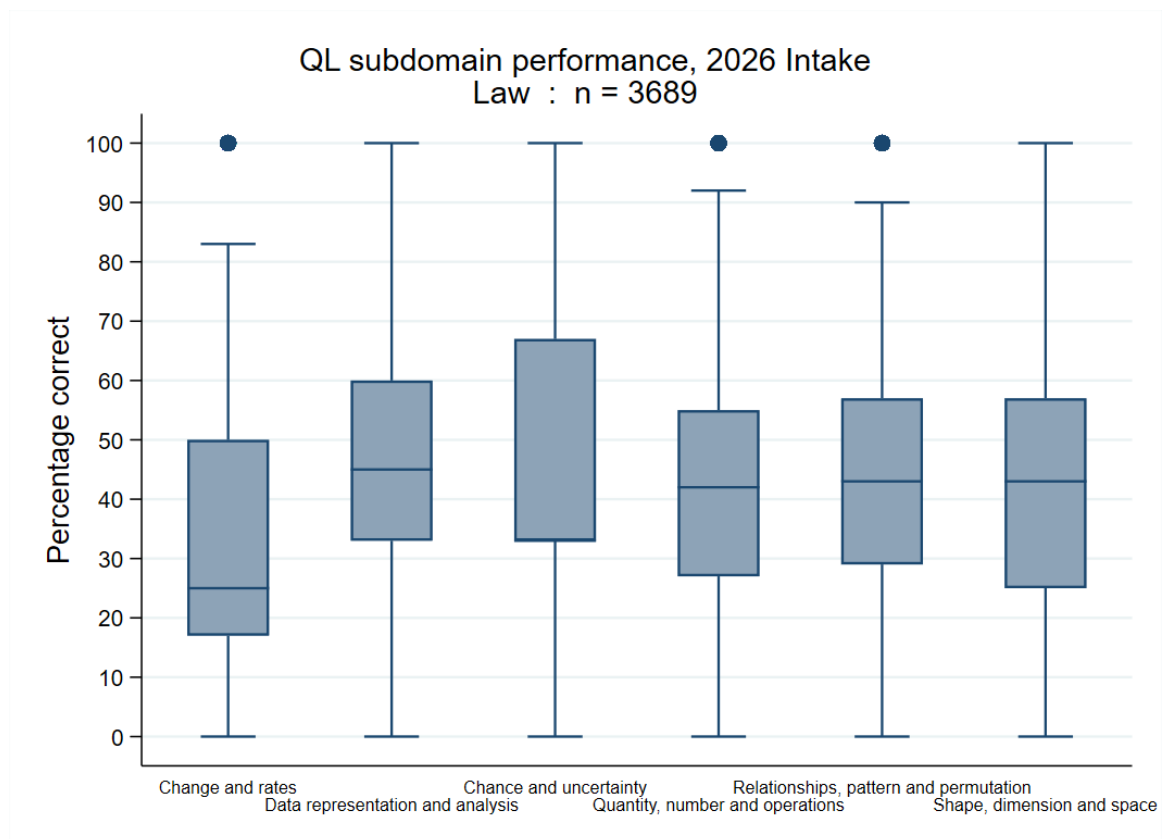


Figure 34: Law QL subdomain performance: 2026 Intake

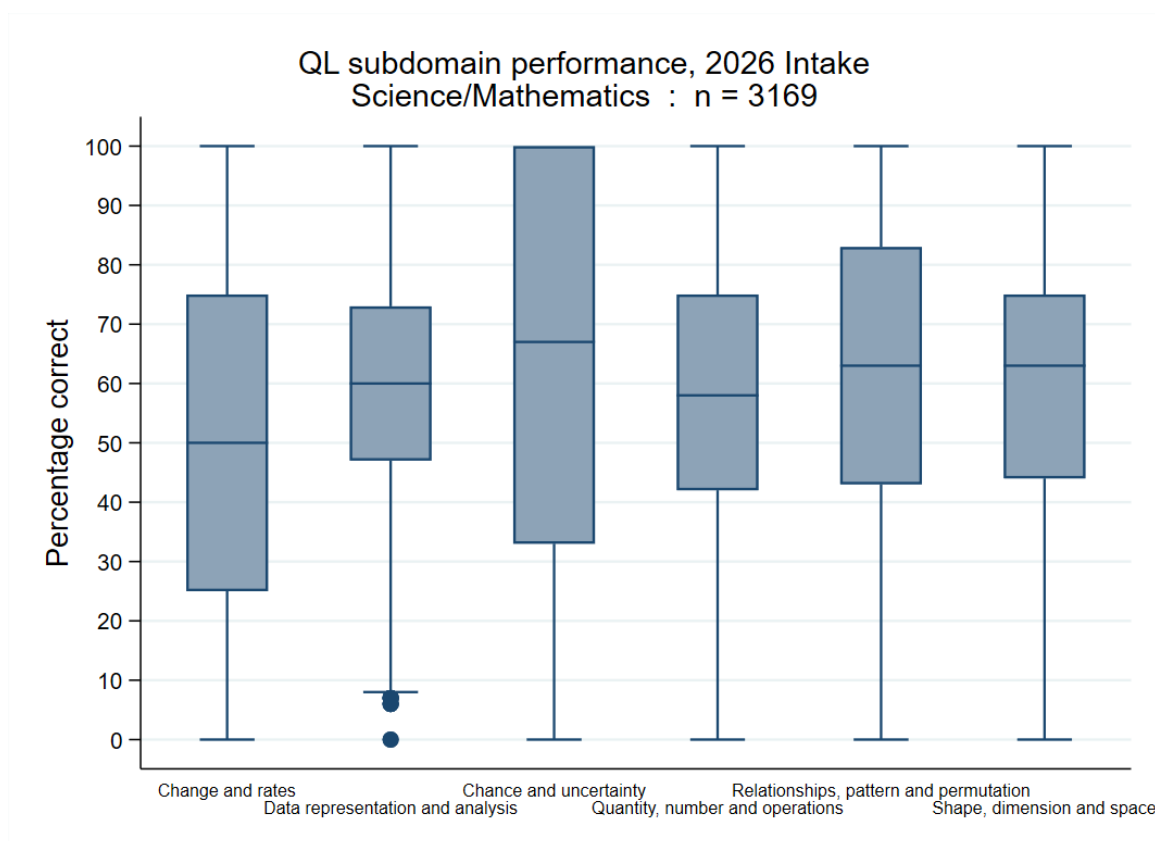


Figure 35: Science/Mathematics QL subdomain performance: 2026 Intake

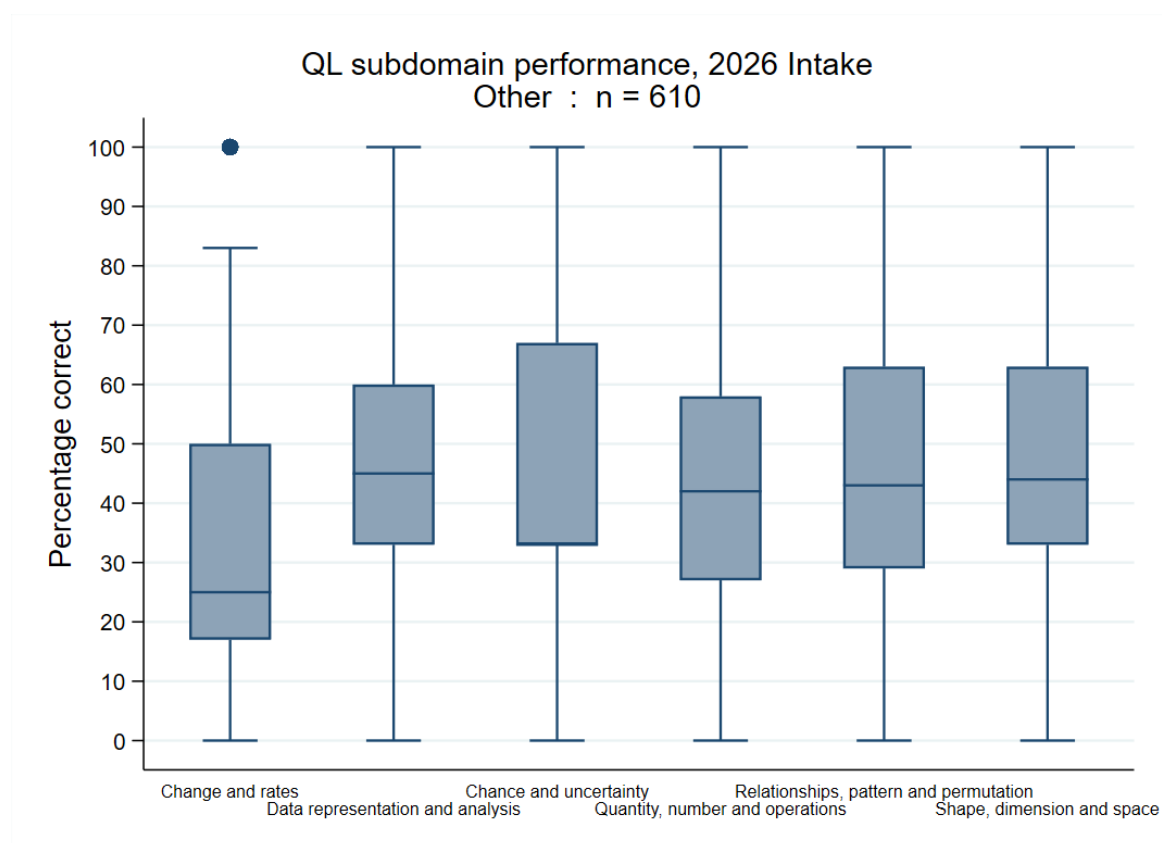


Figure 36: Other QL subdomain performance: 2026 Intake

3.6.3 The construct of the MAT test

MAT subdomains: MAT M1 – MAT M5

MAT M1 - Algebraic processing

Involves recognising and manipulating patterns, sequences and algebraic expressions, solving exponential equations and interpreting measurement-related problems.

MAT M2 - Number sense

Encompasses operations with various types of numbers, understanding number systems and performing financial and probability calculations without the need for calculators.

MAT M3 - Functions and graphs

Focuses on understanding and analysing functions and their properties, interpreting and solving related graph problems, and applying principles of differential calculus.

MAT M4 - Trigonometric functions and graphs

Involves solving trigonometric equations, understanding trigonometric identities and applying trigonometric concepts to two- and three-dimensional problems.

MAT M5 - Geometric reasoning

Includes understanding properties of shapes, calculating perimeter, area and volume, and linking geometric properties with algebraic concepts.

Table 16: The performance distribution on the NBT MAT subdomains: 2026 Intake

Skill Assessed	n	Mean %	SD %	Min. %	1st Quartile %	Median %	3rd Quartile %	Max. %
Algebraic processing (MAT M1)	39 143	50.66	22.02	0	33	47	67	100
Number sense (MAT M2)	39 143	38.64	27.72	0	20	40	60	100
Functions and graphs (MAT M3)	39 143	51.92	22.97	0	33	50	67	100
Trigonometric functions and graphs (MAT M4)	39 143	49.43	23.40	0	30	50	67	100
Geometric reasoning (MAT M5)	39 143	41.90	22.69	0	25	38	58	100

Table 17: NBT MAT subdomains median (p50) performance indicator per faculty: 2026 Intake

Faculty	MAT M1	MAT M2	MAT M3	MAT M4	MAT M5
Allied Healthcare/Nursing	36	20	38	36	27
Art/Design	40	25	42	33	33
Business/Commerce/Management	53	40	50	50	42
Education	29	20	33	32	25
Engineering/Built Environment	53	40	58	50	45
Health Science	50	40	50	50	42
Hospitality/Tourism	29	25	31	22	25
Humanities	40	25	36	33	29
ICT	47	33	45	40	33
Law	38	25	38	36	27
Mathematics/Science	60	40	64	56	50
Other	40	25	42	40	33
Unspecified	50	40	50	50	42
Total	47	40	50	50	38

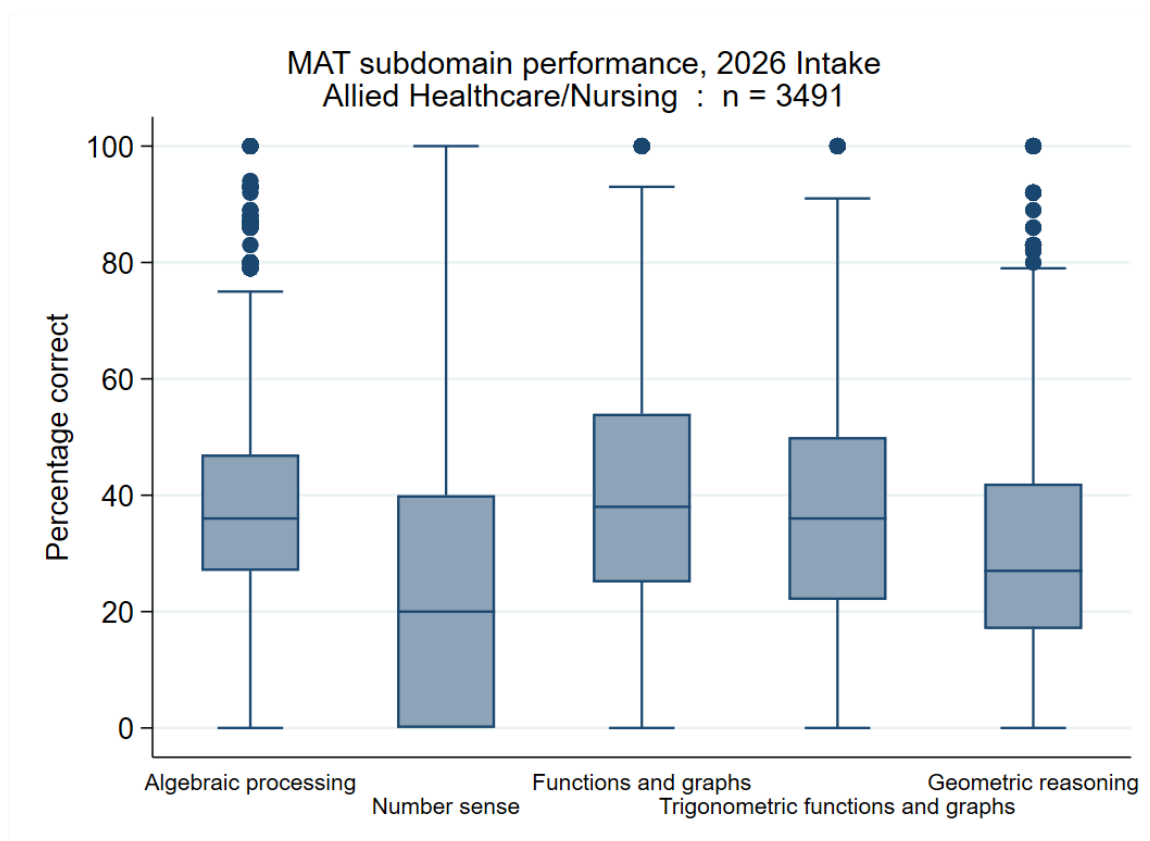


Figure 37: Allied Healthcare/Nursing MAT subdomain performance: 2026 Intake

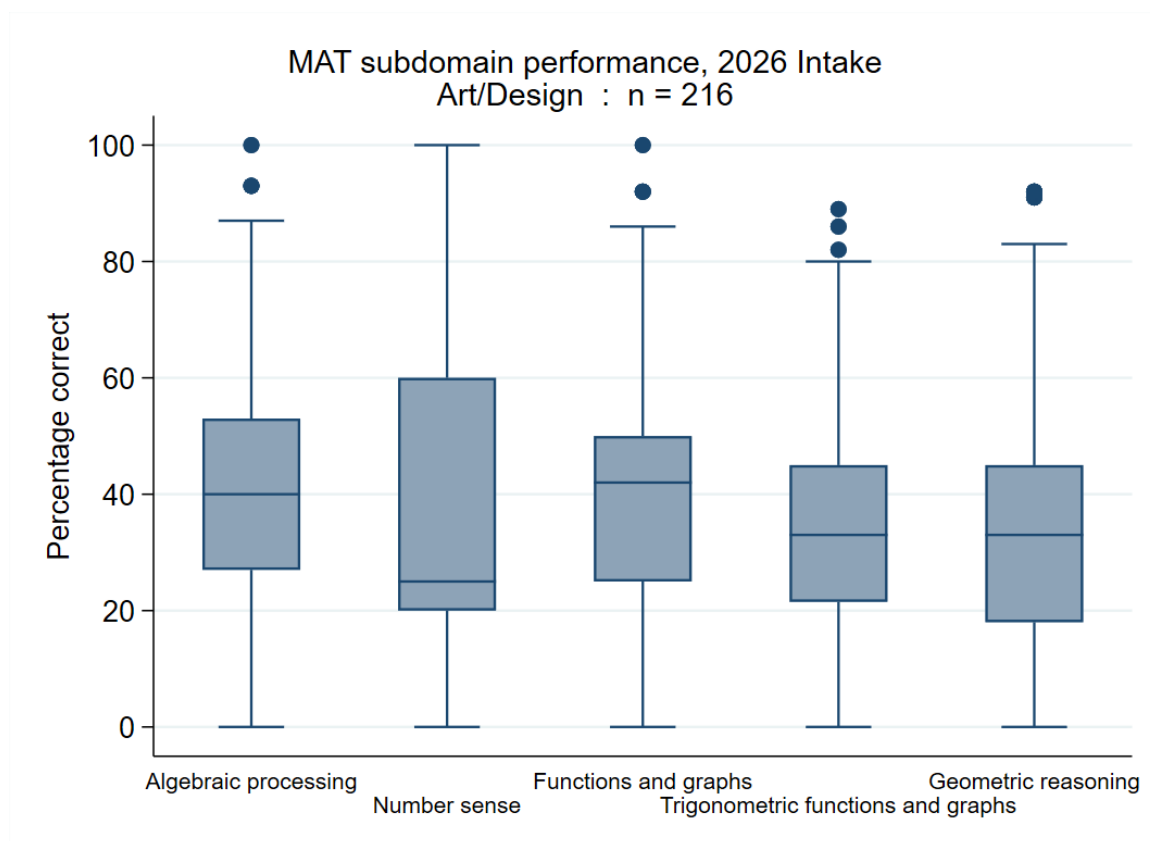


Figure 38: Art/Design MAT subdomain performance: 2026 Intake

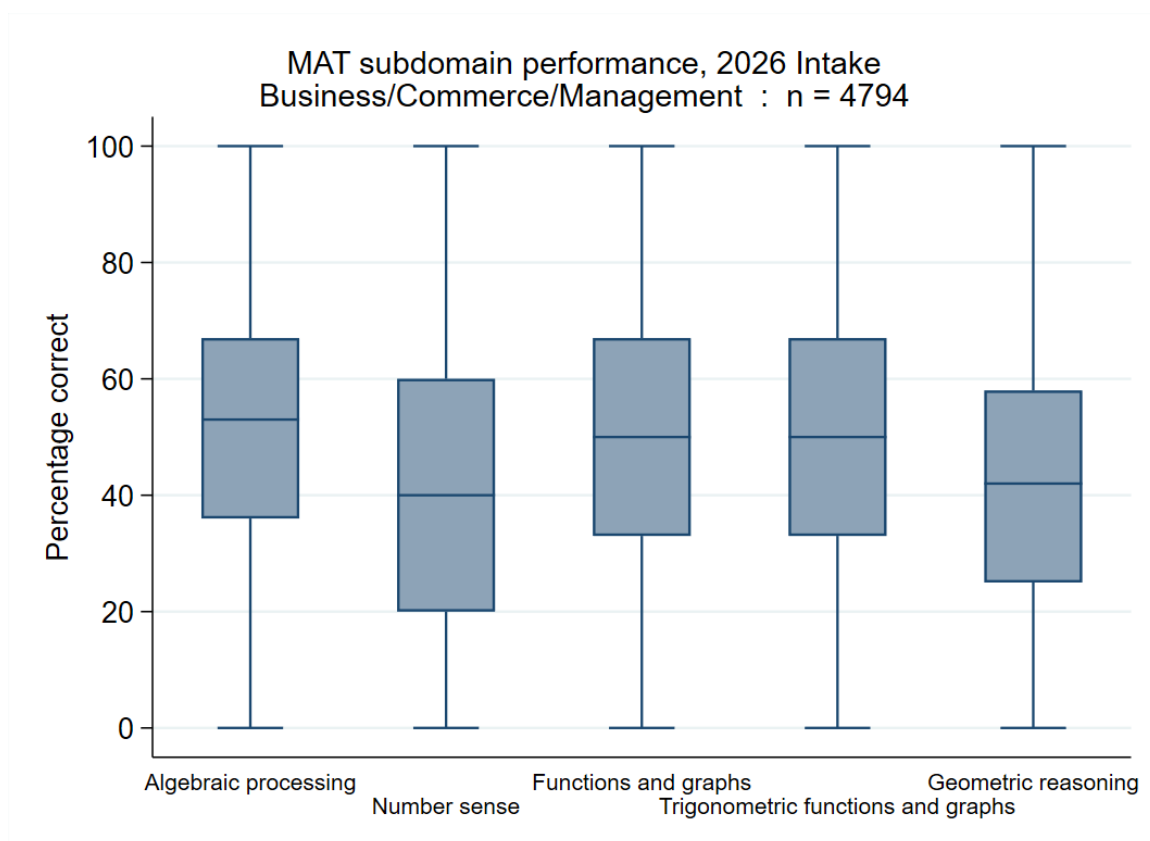


Figure 39: Business/Commerce/Management MAT subdomain performance: 2026 Intake

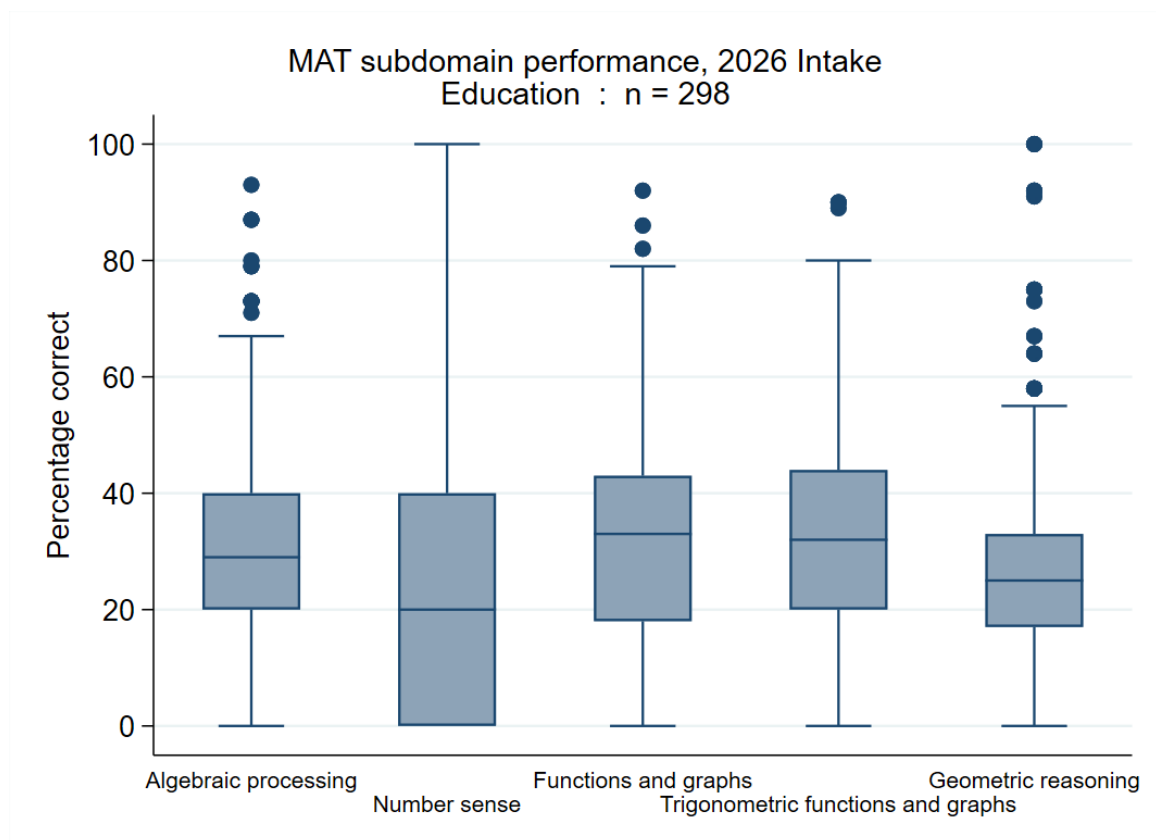


Figure 40: Education MAT subdomain performance: 2026 Intake

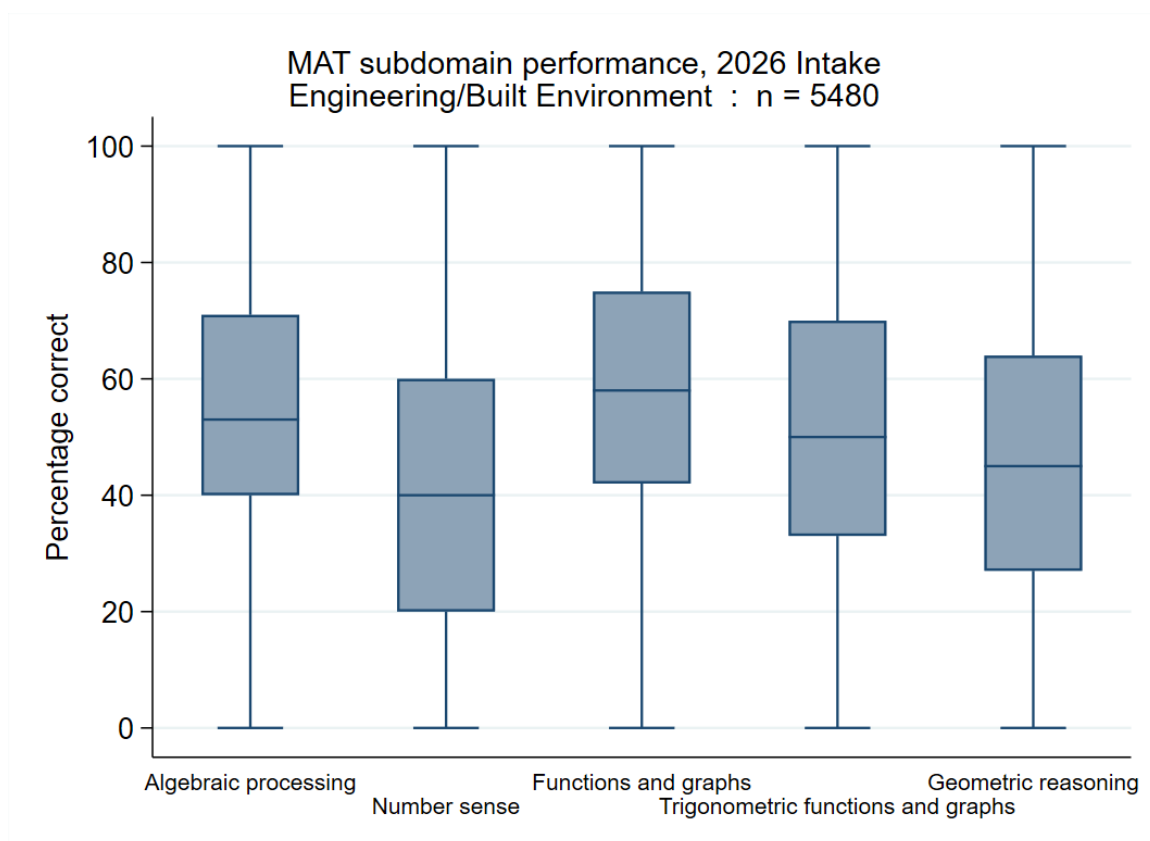


Figure 41: Engineering/Built Environment MAT subdomain performance: 2026 Intake

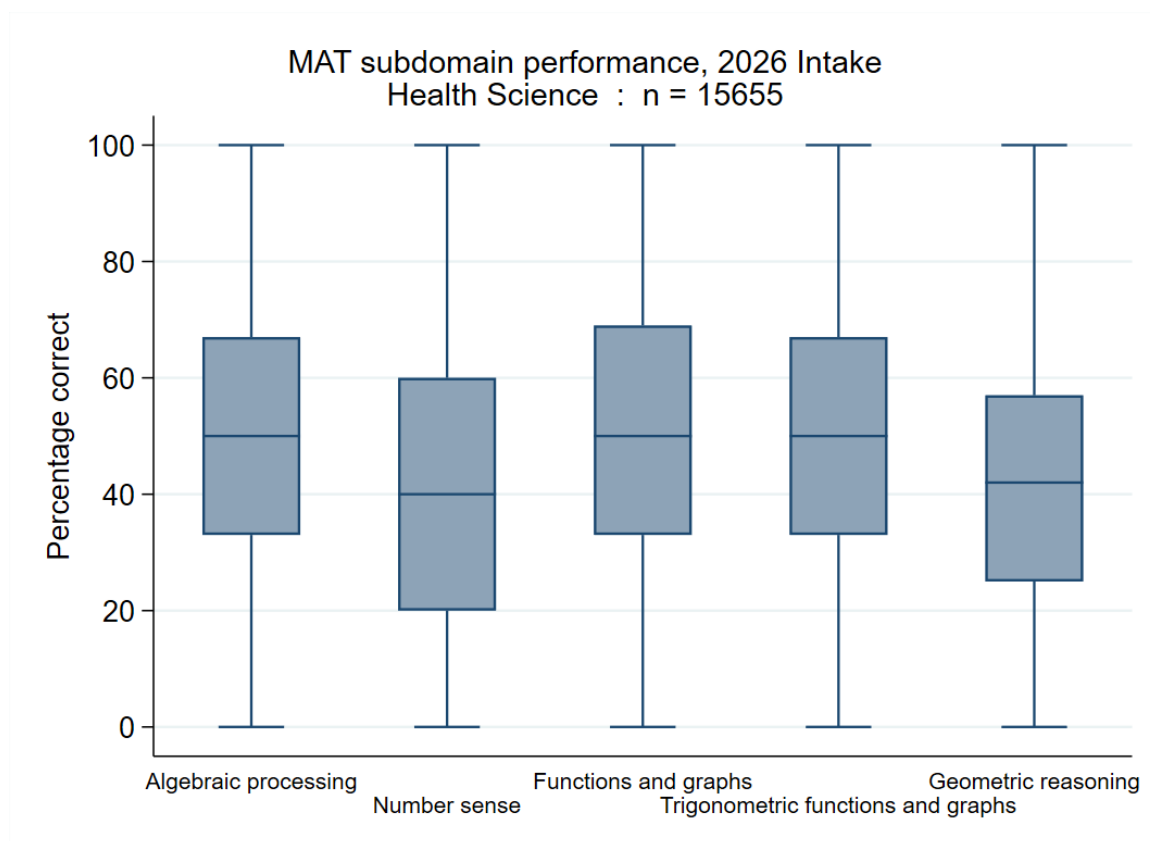


Figure 42: Health Sciences MAT subdomain performance: 2026 Intake

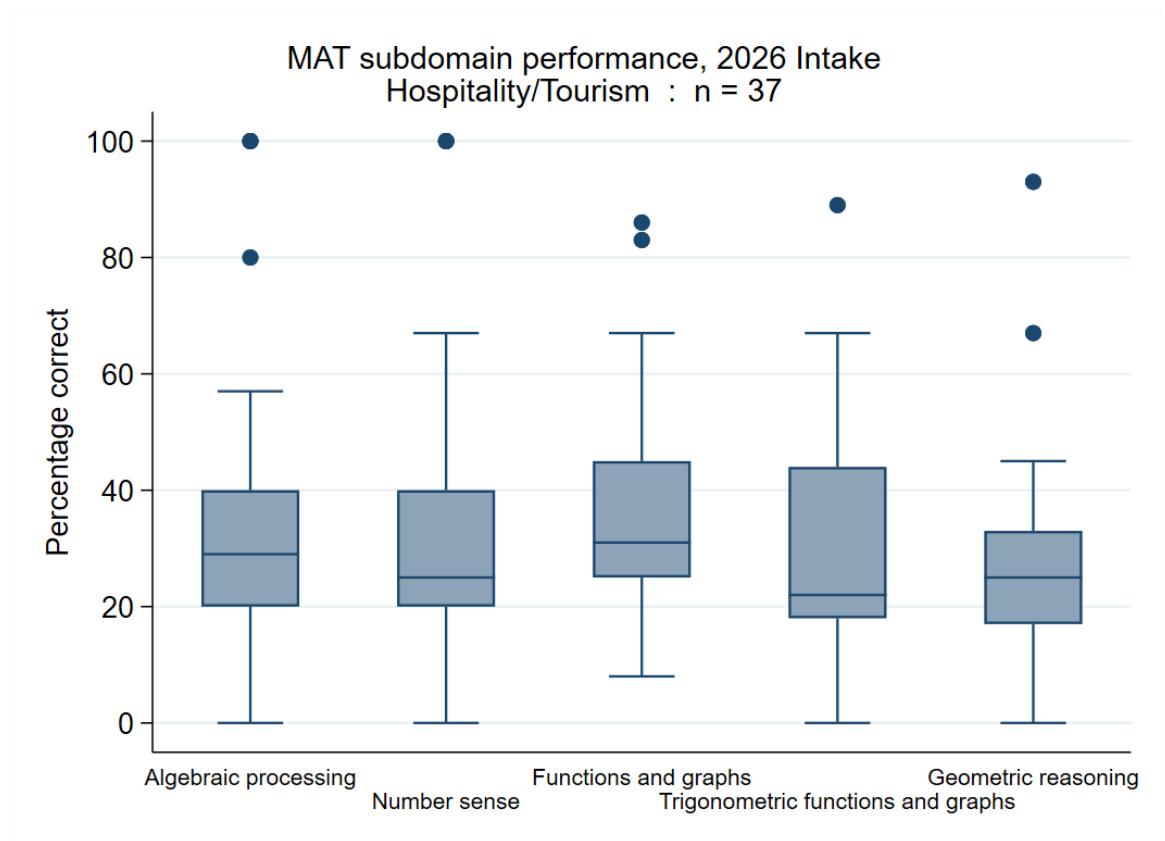


Figure 43: Hospitality/Tourism MAT subdomain performance: 2026 Intake

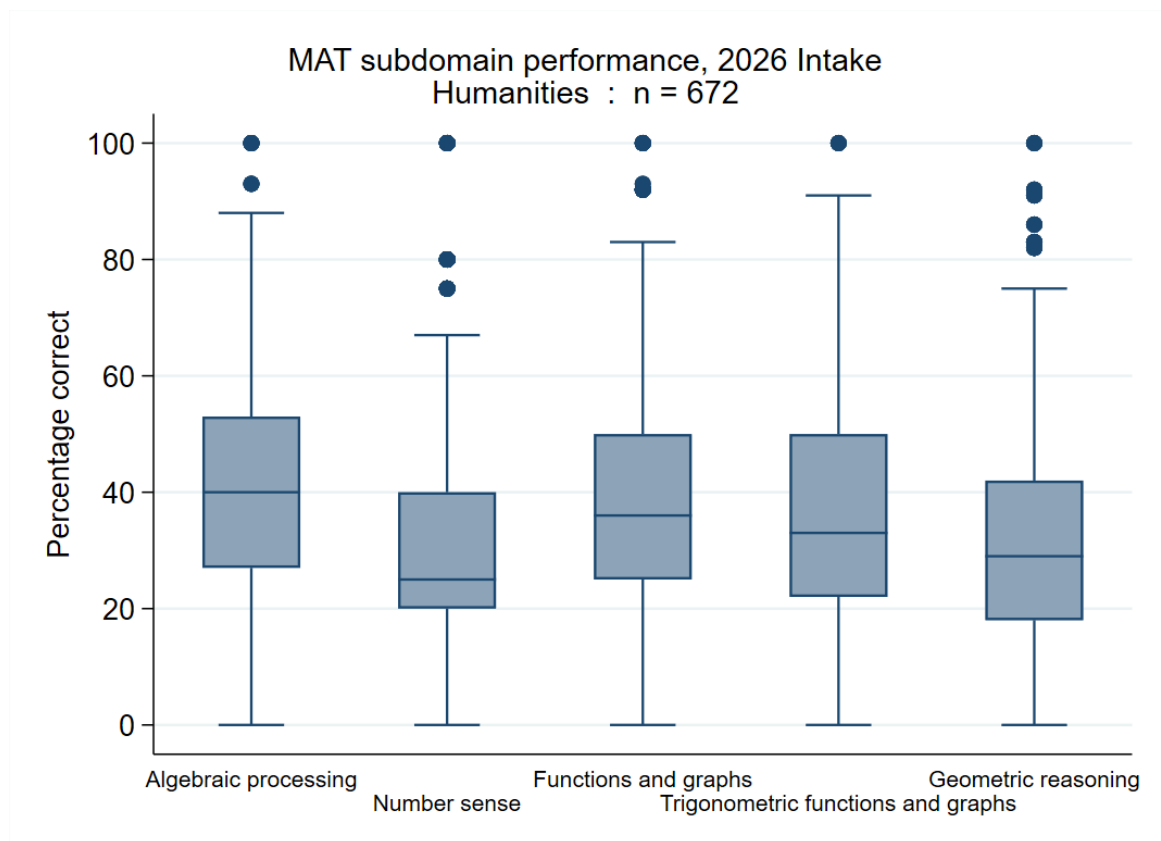


Figure 44: Humanities MAT subdomain performance: 2026 Intake

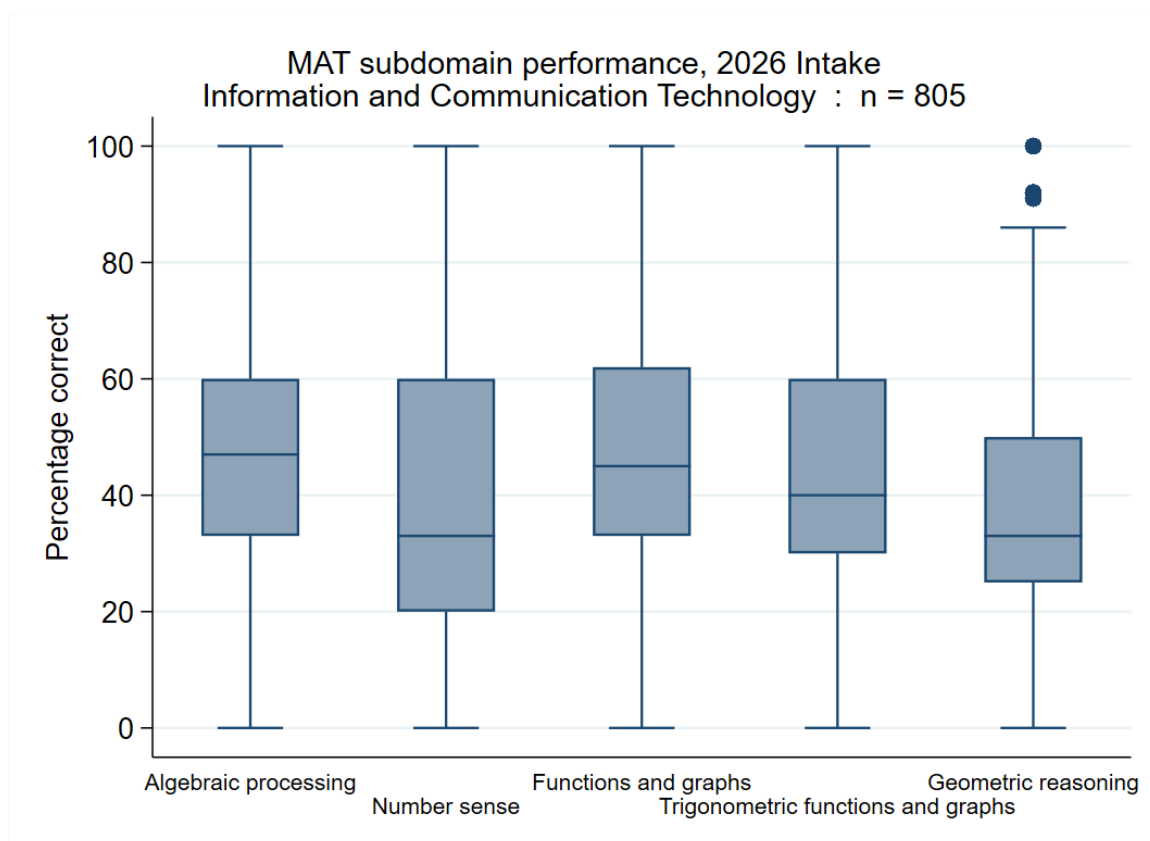


Figure 45: Information and Communication Technology MAT subdomain performance: 2026 Intake

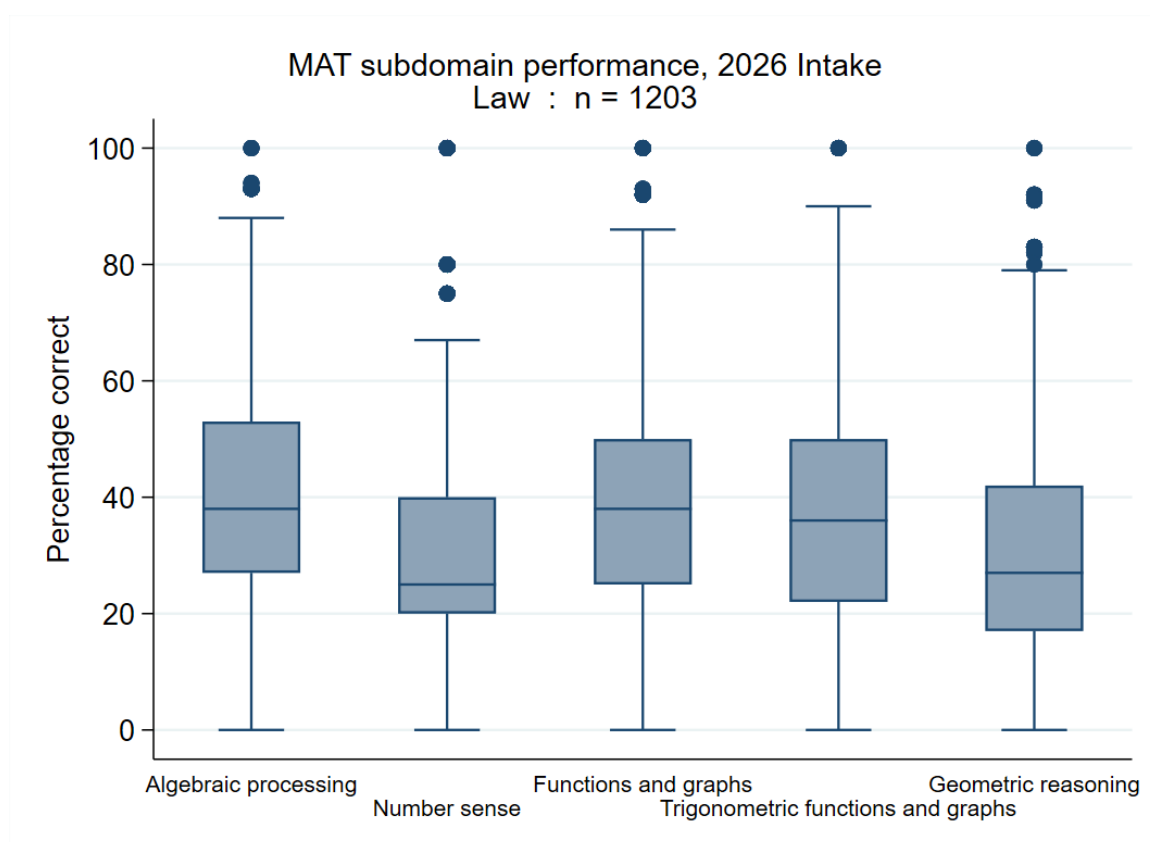


Figure 46: Law MAT subdomain performance: 2026 Intake

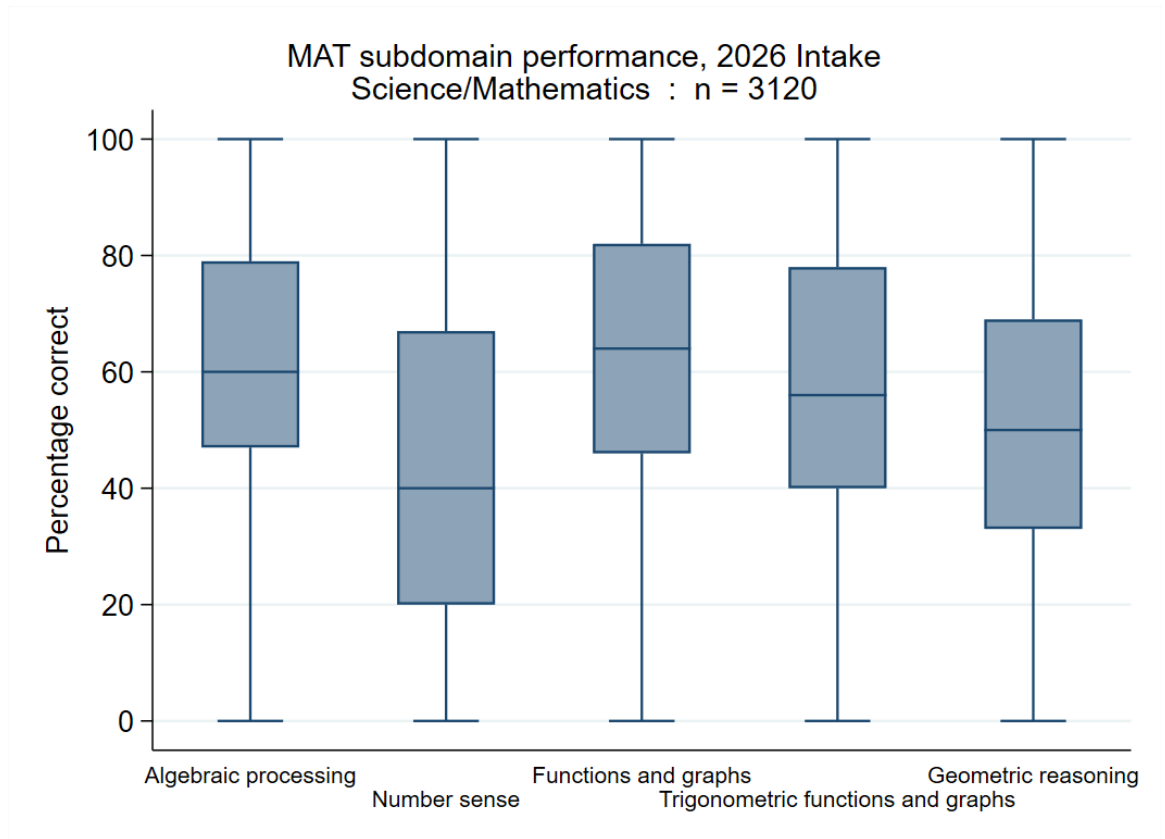


Figure 47: Science/Mathematics MAT subdomain performance: 2026 Intake

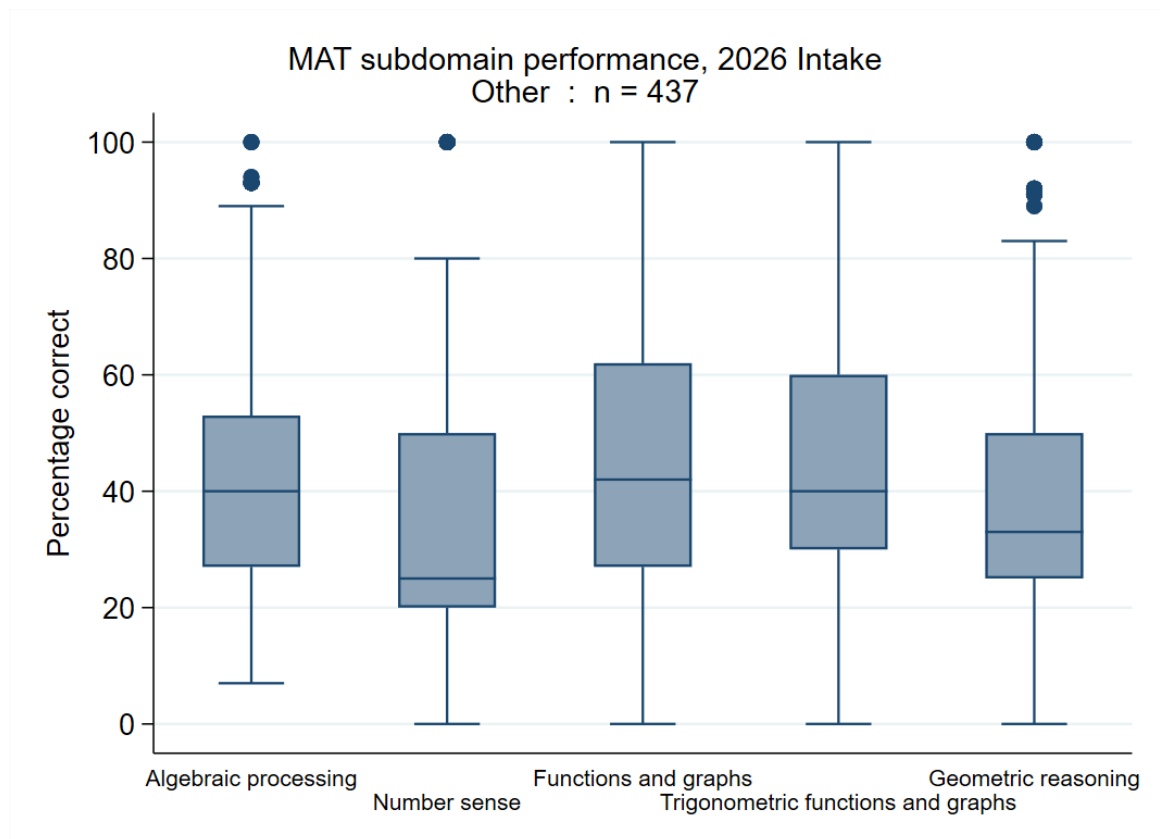


Figure 48: Other MAT subdomain performance: 2026 Intake

4. Comparison of NBT performance: 2026 Intake

4.1 NBT performance by test language

4.1.1 AL performance by intended faculty of study - tests written in English and Afrikaans

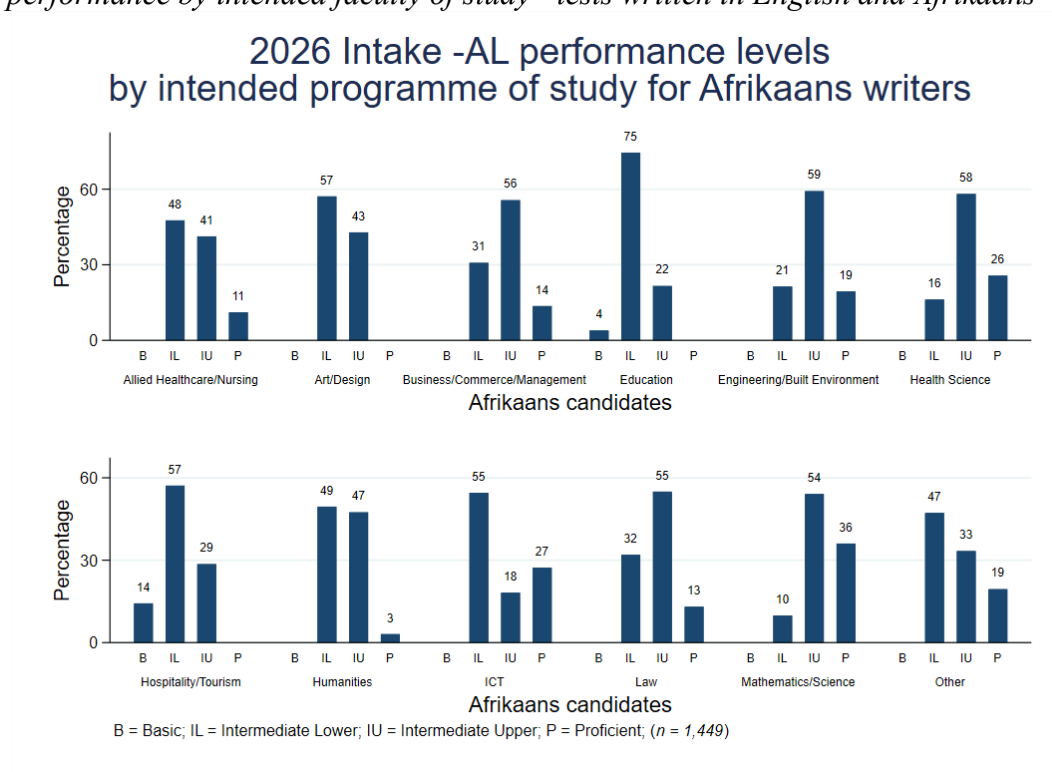


Figure 49: NBT AL performance levels by intended faculty of study for Afrikaans writers: 2026 Intake

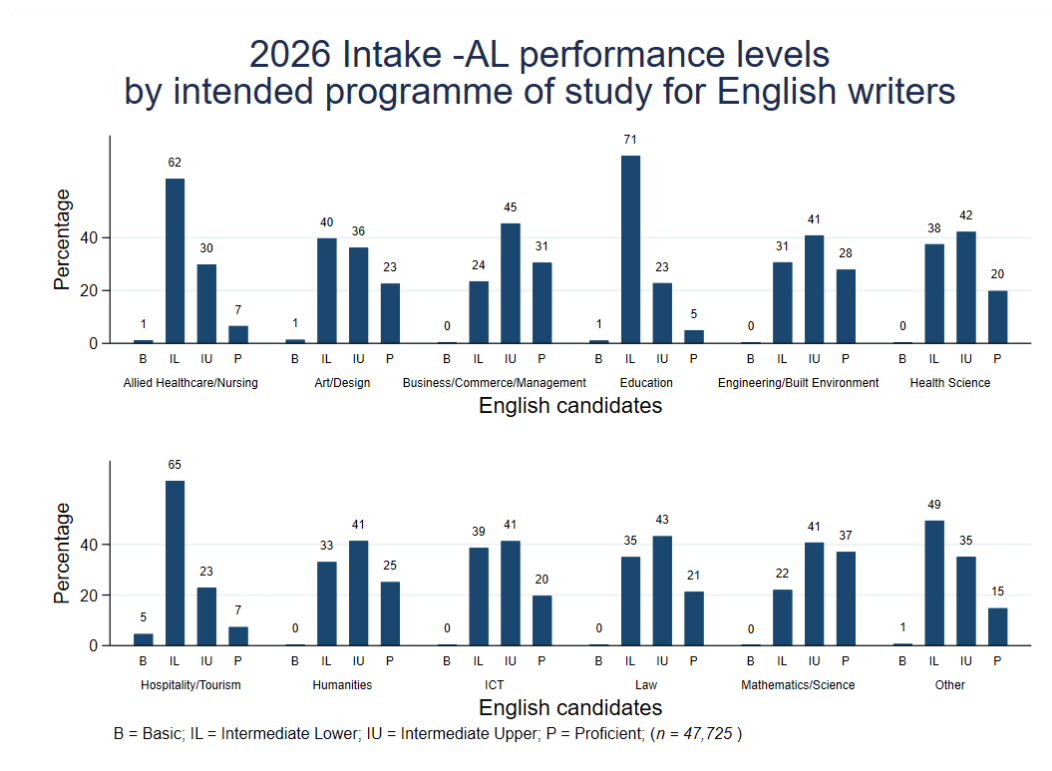


Figure 50: NBT AL performance levels by intended faculty of study for English writers: 2026 Intake

4.1.2 QL performance by intended faculty of study - tests written in English and Afrikaans

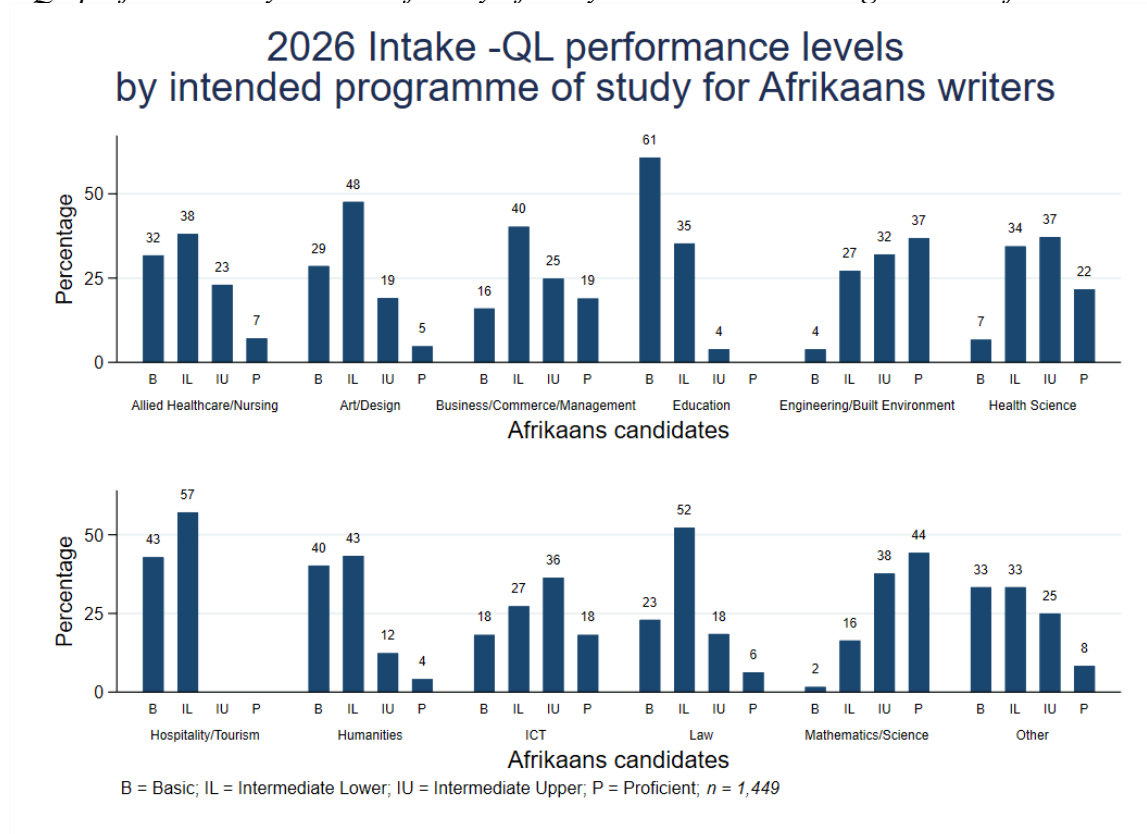


Figure 51: NBT QL performance levels by intended faculty of study for Afrikaans writers: 2026 Intake

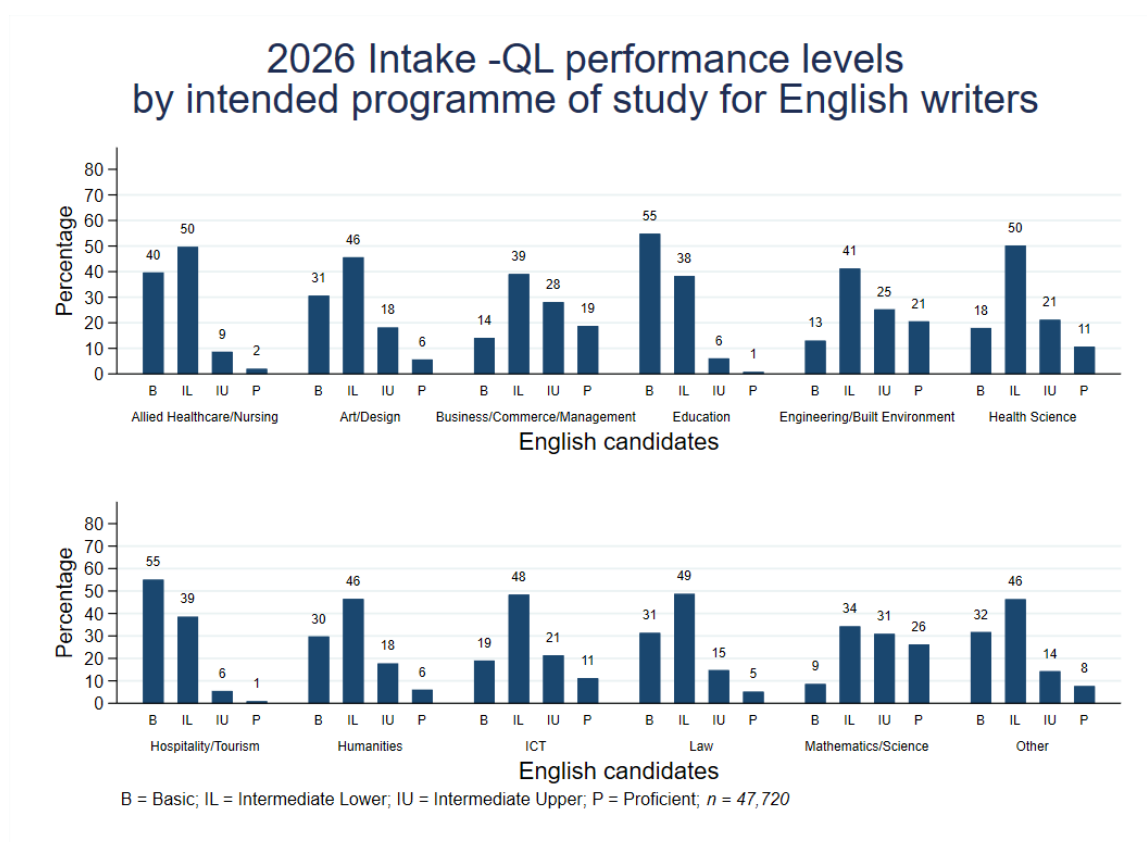


Figure 52: NBT QL performance levels by intended faculty of study for English writers: 2026 Intake

4.1.3 MAT performance by intended faculty of study - tests written in English and Afrikaans

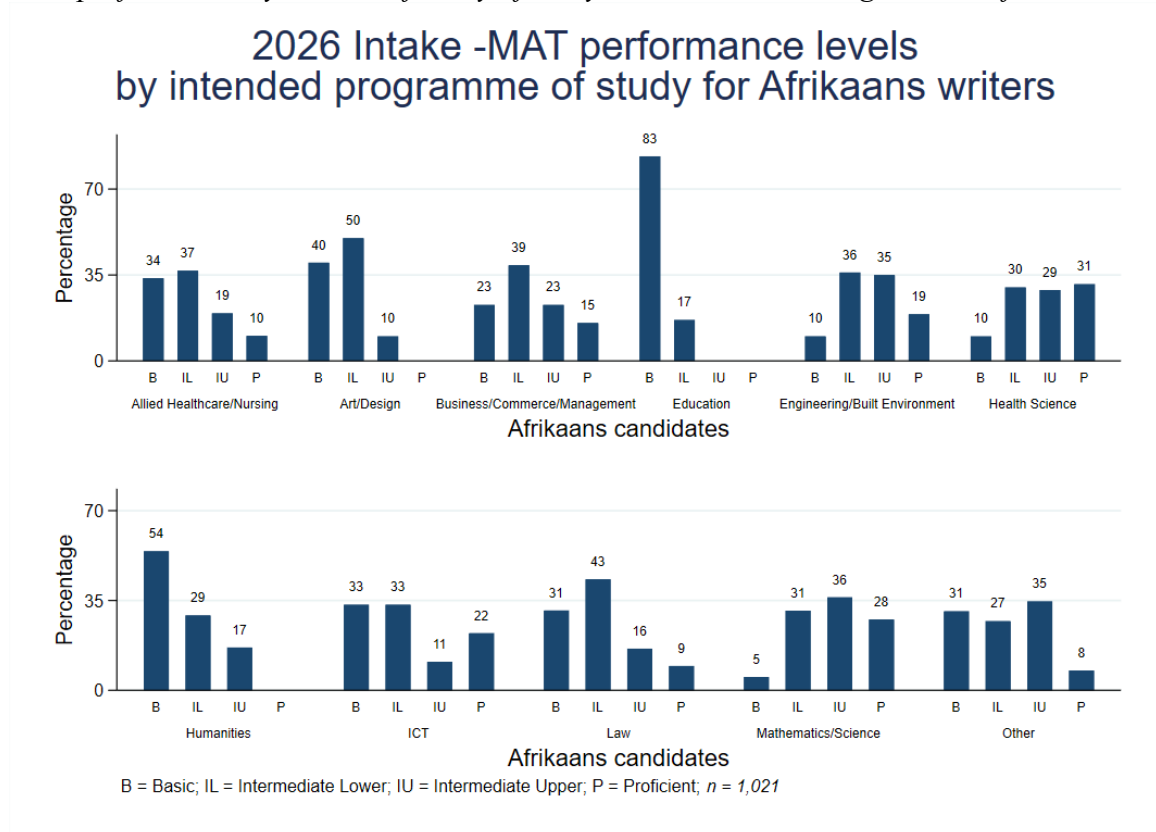


Figure 53: NBT MAT performance levels by intended faculty of study for Afrikaans writers: 2026 Intake

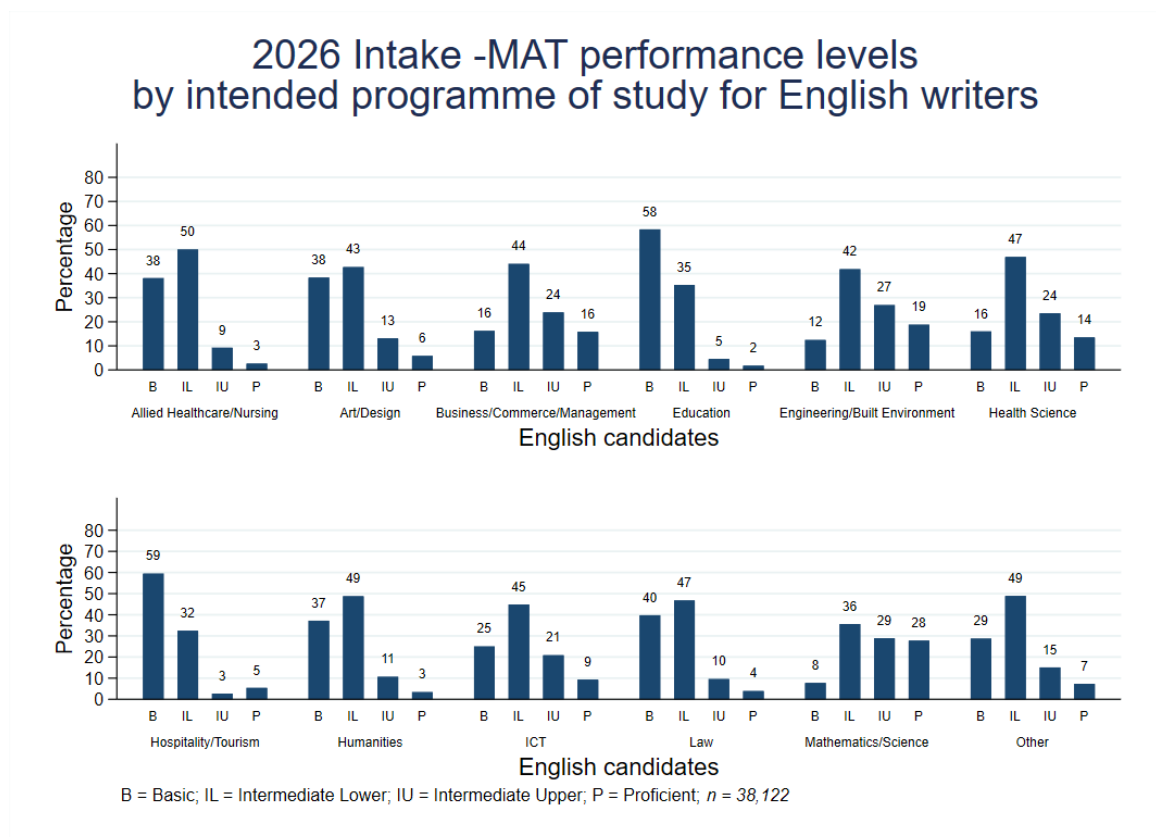


Figure 54: NBT MAT performance levels by intended faculty of study for English writers: 2026 Intake

4.2 Comparison of the 2026 Intake results with the 2025 intake results

4.2.1 Benchmark changes: Standard-setting 2019 vs Standard-setting 2023

DEGREE Benchmark Performance Levels

Benchmark Performance Levels	AL		QL		MAT	
	Minimum	Maximum	Minimum	Maximum	Minimum	Maximum
Proficient	69 → 71	100	70	100	69	100
Intermediate Upper	52 → 53	68 → 70	55 → 54	69	53 → 52	68
Intermediate Lower	35	51 → 52	40 → 38	54 → 53	37 → 35	52 → 51
Basic	0	34	0	39 → 37	0	36 → 34

4.2.2 AL, QL and MAT by performance benchmarks

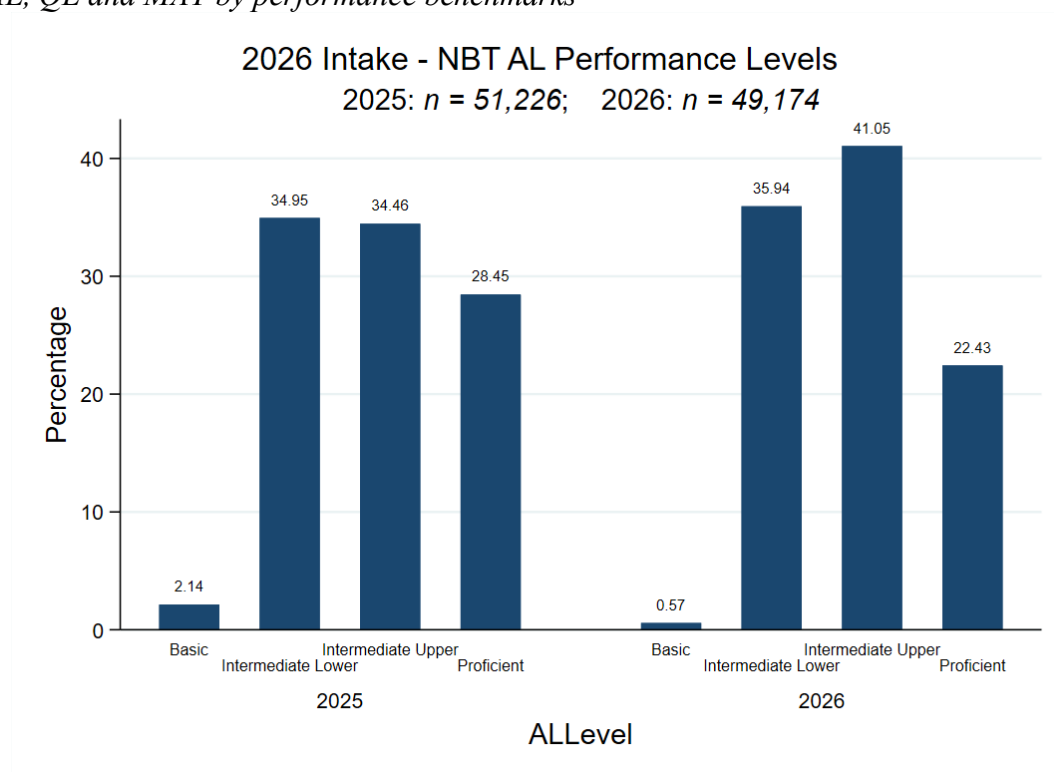


Figure 55: Performance in NBT AL: 2025 and 2026 Intake cycles

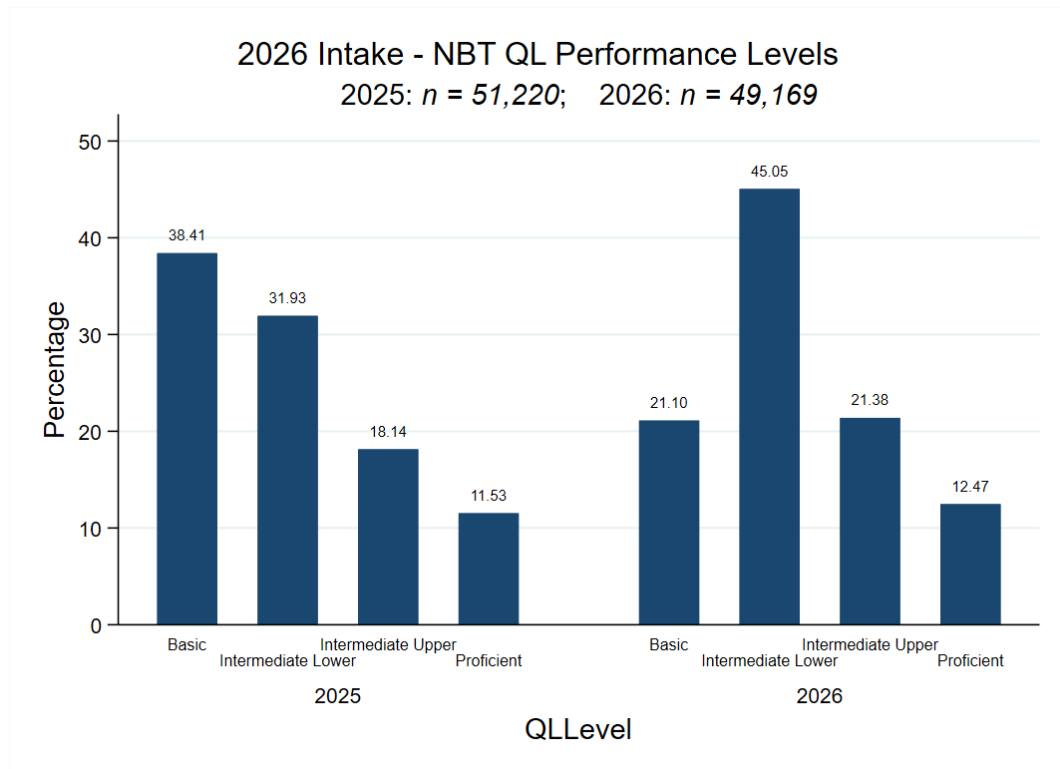


Figure 56: Performance in NBT QL: 2025 and 2026 Intake cycles

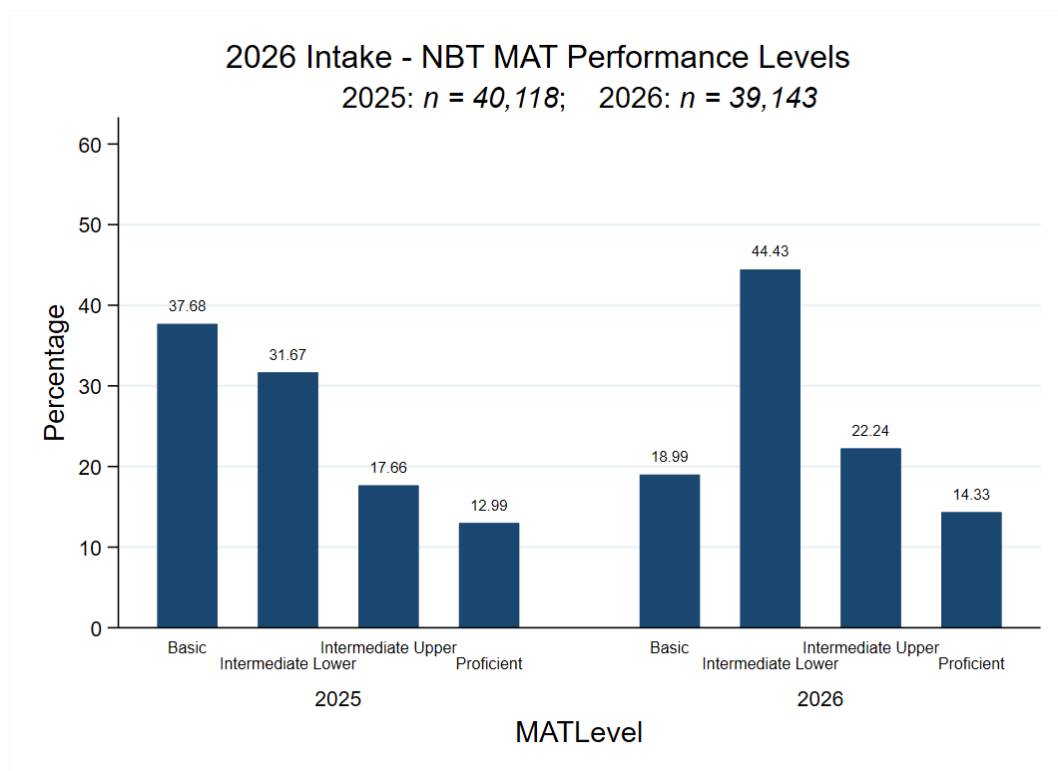


Figure 57: Performance in NBT MAT: 2025 and 2026 Intake cycles

4.2.3 AL, QL and MAT by test language

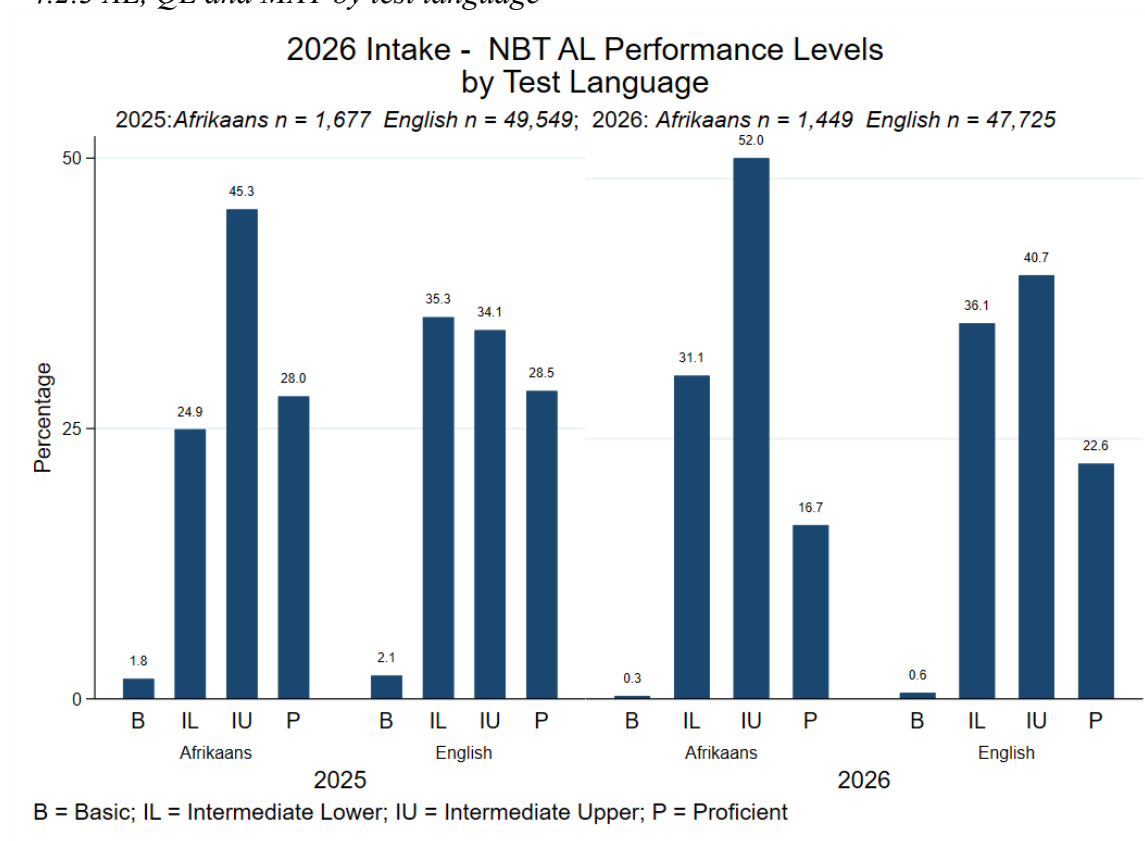


Figure 58: NBT AL performance by test language: 2025 and 2026 Intake cycles

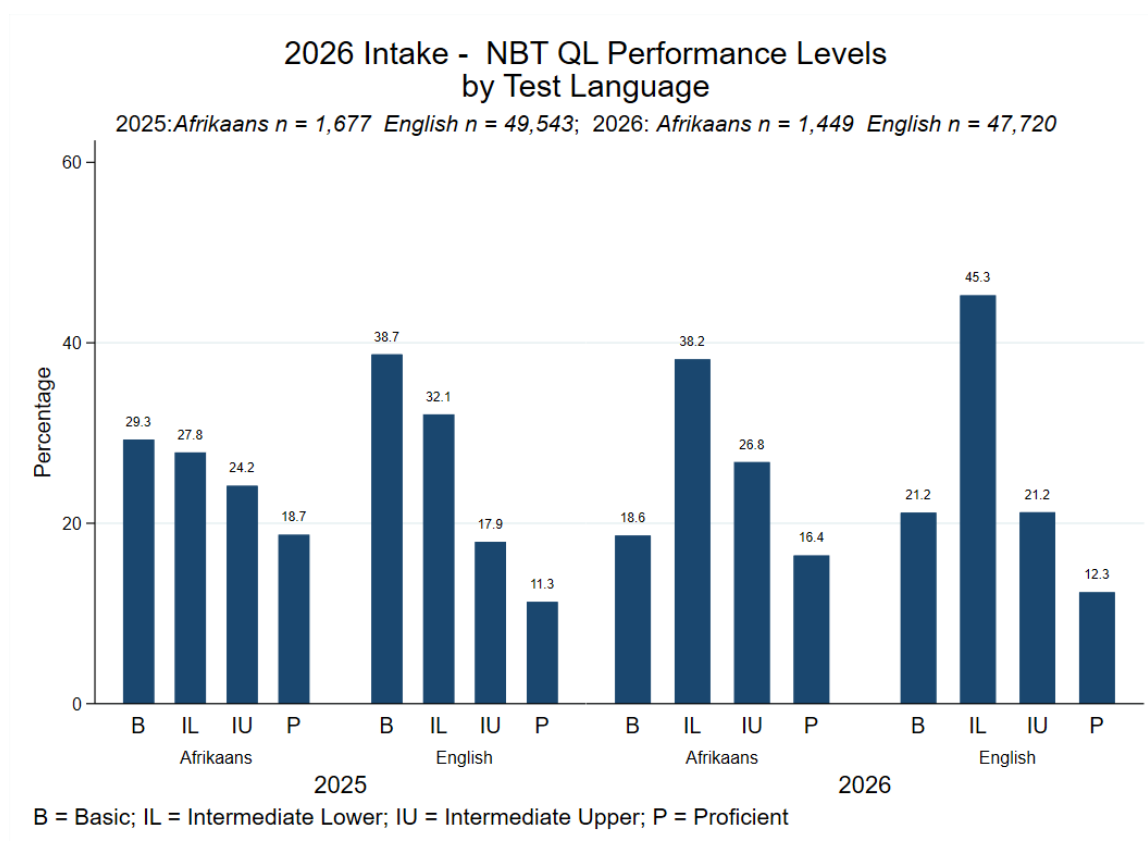


Figure 59: NBT QL performance by test language: 2025 and 2026 Intake cycles

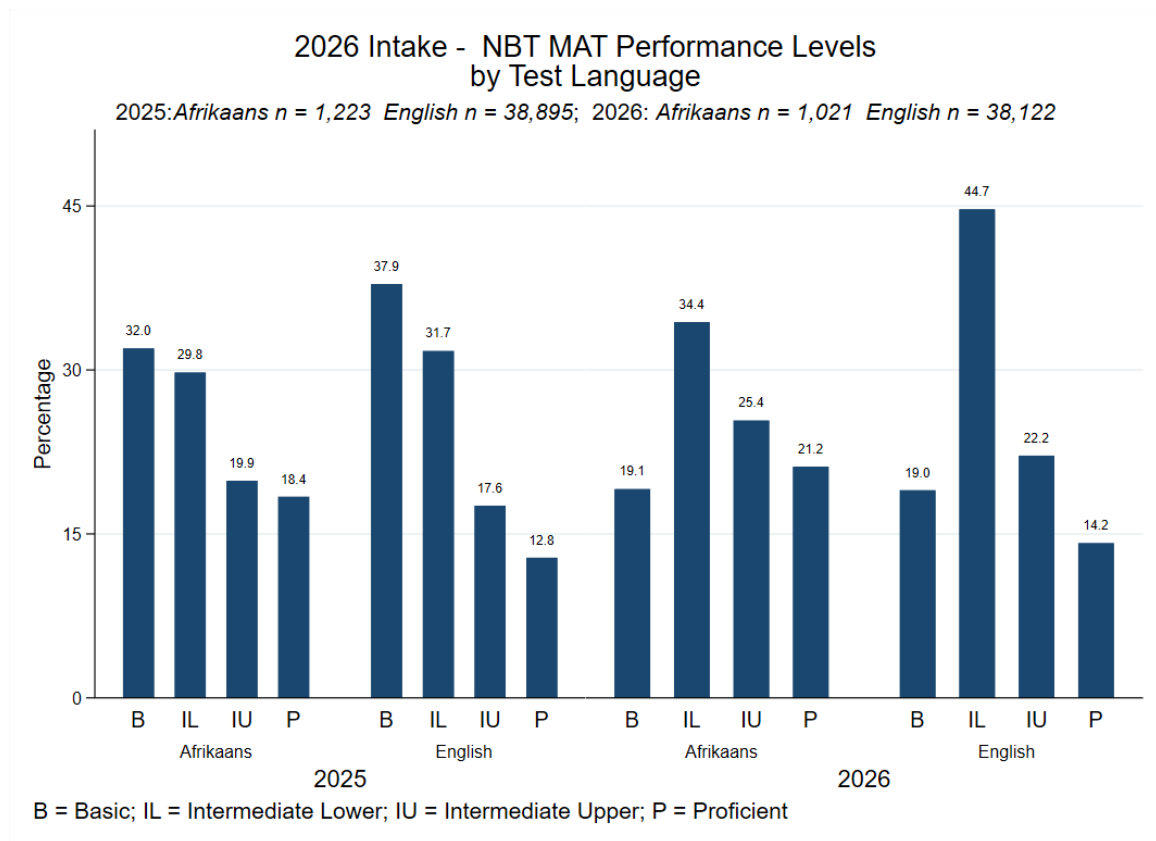


Figure 60: NBT MAT performance by test language: 2025 and 2026 Intake cycles

4.2.4 AL, QL and MAT by citizenship

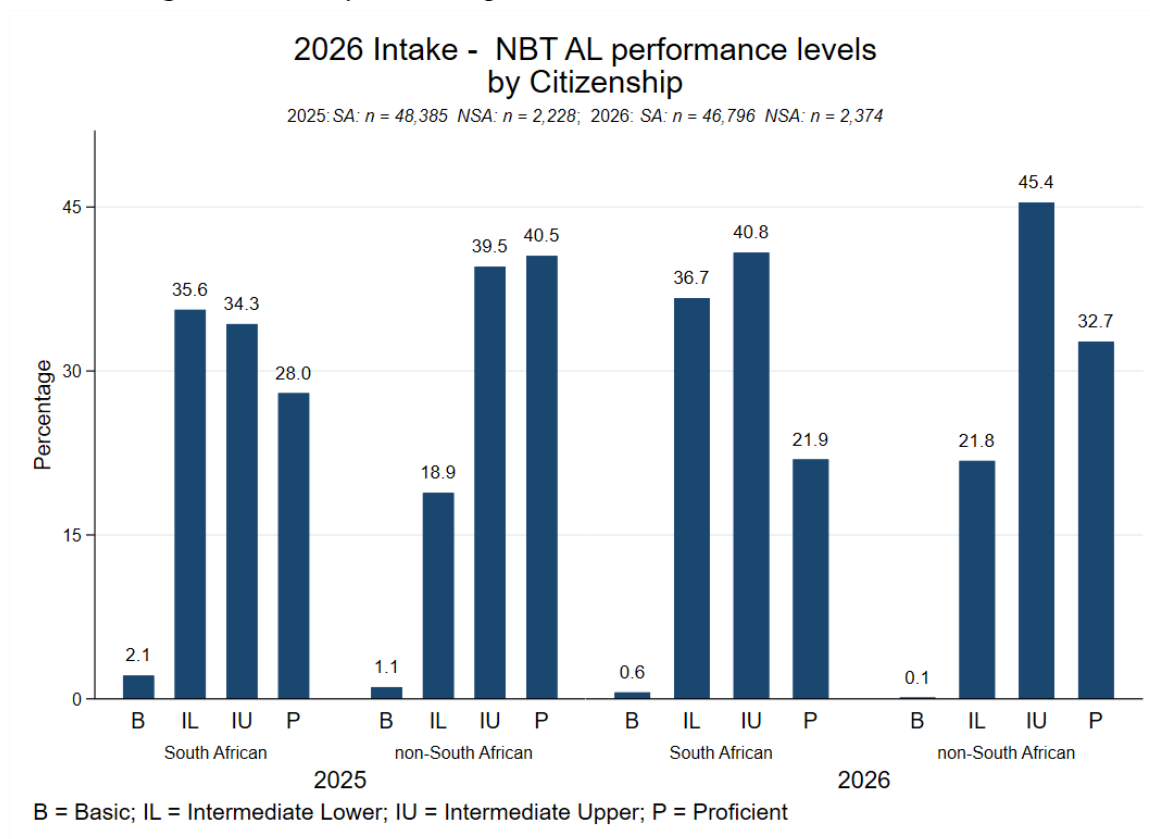


Figure 61: NBT AL performance levels by citizenship: 2025 and 2026 Intake

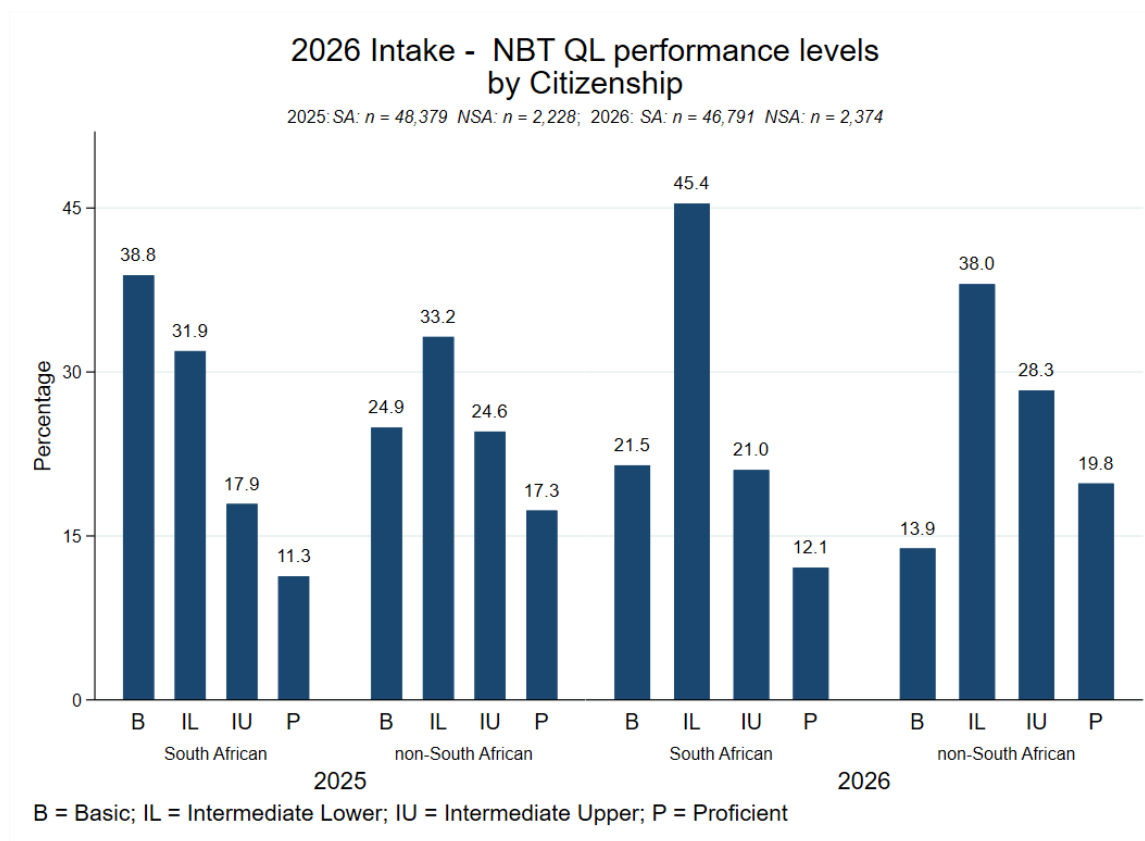


Figure 62: NBT QL performance levels by citizenship: 2025 and 2026 Intake

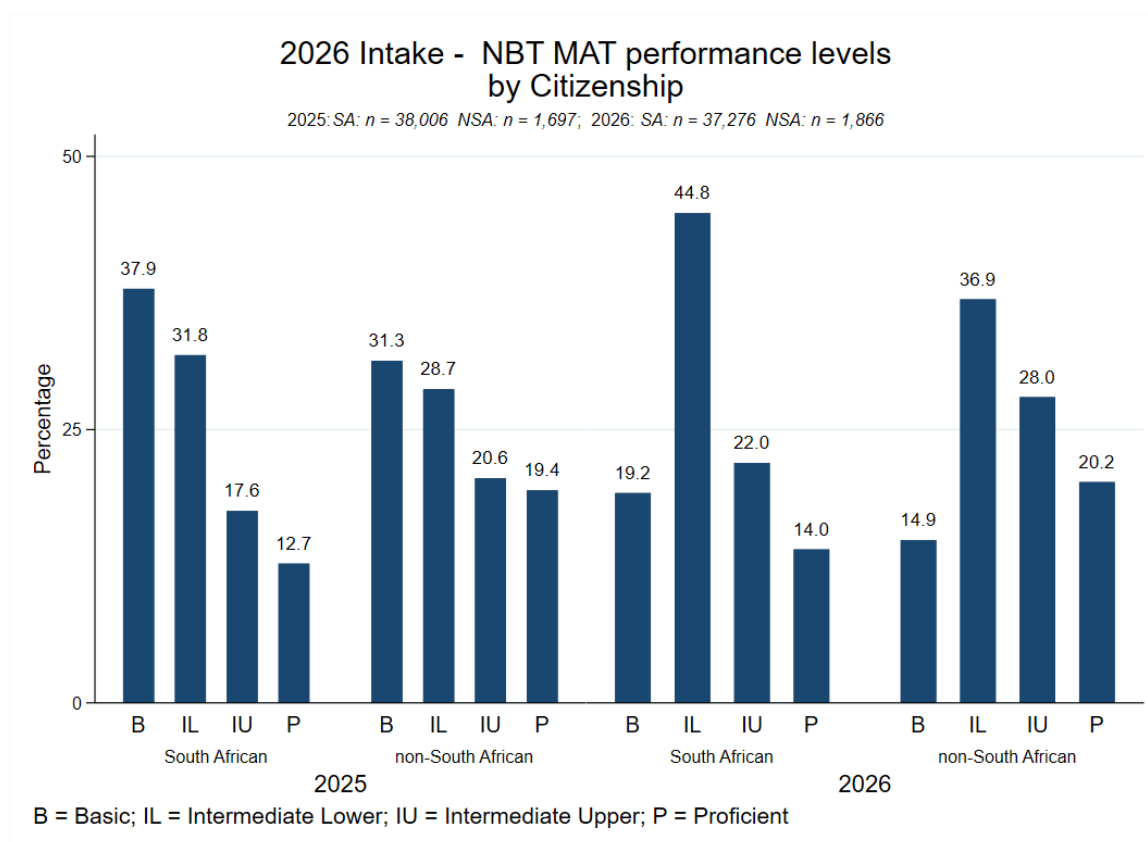


Figure 63: NBT MAT performance levels by citizenship: 2025 and 2026 Intake

5. Performance of the NSC cohort in the NBT domains and in cognate NSC subjects: 2026 Intake

This section of the report presents associations between the NSC examination and the NBTs. The aim is to examine the extent to which the NBTs might provide complementary information to that provided by the NSC about the school-leaving cohort wishing to enter higher education.

The NSC is structured according to specific categories of subjects and rules of combination. For a learner to obtain an NSC, the learner must offer seven approved subjects and provide full evidence of school-based assessments for each subject, and he or she must also:

- (a) complete the programme requirements for Grades 10, 11 and 12 separately and obtain the distinct outcomes and associated assessment standards of all three years;
- (b) comply with the internal assessment requirements for Grades 10, 11 and 12 and the external assessment requirements of Grade 12.

The minimum requirements to obtain an NSC are:

- (a) Achievement of 40% in three subjects, one of which is an official language at Home Language level;
- (b) Achievement of 30% in three other subjects; and
- (c) Full evidence in the school-based assessment component in the subject field.

Table 18: Scale of NSC achievement/level descriptors

Achievement level	Achievement description	Marks %
7	Outstanding achievement	80 – 100
6	Meritorious achievement	70 – 79
5	Substantial achievement	60 – 69
4	Adequate achievement	50 – 59
3	Moderate achievement	40 – 49
2	Elementary achievement	30 – 39
1	Not achieved	0 – 29

5.1 Minimum requirements for admission to the Higher Certificate/Diploma and Bachelor's Degree

Minimum higher education admission requirements, in accordance with the three levels of undergraduate programmes, are as follows:

(a) Higher Certificate

The minimum admission requirement is an NSC with a minimum of 30% in the language of learning and teaching of the higher education institution, as certified by Umalusi, the quality assurance council. Institutional and programme needs may require additional combinations of recognised NSC subjects and levels of achievement.

(b) Diploma

The minimum admission requirement is an NSC with a minimum of 30% in the language of learning

and teaching of the higher education institution, as certified by Umalusi, the quality assurance council, coupled with an achievement rating of 3 (Moderate Achievement 40%–49%) or better in four recognised NSC 20-credit subjects. Institutional and programme needs may require additional combinations of recognised NSC subjects and levels of achievement.

(c) Bachelor's Degree

The minimum admission requirement is an NSC with a minimum of 30% in the language of learning and teaching of the higher education institution, as certified by Umalusi, the quality assurance council, coupled with an achievement rating of 4 (Adequate achievement 50% – 59%) or better in four subjects chosen from the 20 credit-bearing NSC subjects. Some of these subjects are listed in Table 19.

Table 19: The higher education designated subject list

Accounting	Information Technology
Agricultural Science	Languages
Business Studies	Life Sciences
Consumer Studies	Mathematics
Dramatic Arts	Mathematical Literacy
Economics	Music
Engineering Graphics and Design	Physical Sciences
Geography	Religion Studies
History	Visual Arts

5.2 Notes on the sample used for the analysis in this section

Since it is not clear which result to keep if a candidate wrote the NBTs multiple times, the scores of all candidates who wrote the NBTs more than once were excluded from this subsample. Calculation of a correlation coefficient is based on the assumption that the data satisfy the assumption of independence of observations, i.e., observations are not influenced by each other. Repeated occurrences of one individual would be an example of observations that influence each other, and NSC results were then matched.

It should be noted that list-wise deletion was utilised when correlation coefficients were calculated and scatterplots were constructed. List-wise deletion means that candidates were excluded from analysis if any single value for a particular calculation was missing. The sample was further analysed separately by higher education admission type (Degree; Diploma/Higher Certificate).

The NSC subject codes are as follows:

MTHN = Mathematics

MTLN = Mathematical Literacy

ENHN = English Home Language

ENFN = English First Additional Language

PSCN = Physical Sciences

5.3 Self-reported demographics

Table 20: NSC cohort for NBT self-reported demographics: 2026 Intake

	Full Cohort		Bachelor's degree pass		Diploma or Higher Certificate pass	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
GENDER						
Male	11 793	33.36	10 996	33.28	797	34.52
Female	23 556	66.64	22 044	66.72	1512	65.48
Unspecified	1	0	1	0		
Total	35 350	100	33 041	100	2309	100
POPULATION GROUP						
Black	24 604	69.6	22 838	69.12	1 766	76.48
Coloured	4 094	11.58	3 726	11.28	368	15.94
Indian/Asian	2 909	8.23	2 774	8.4	135	5.85
White	3 581	10.13	3 551	10.75	30	1.3
Other	110	0.31	103	0.31	7	0.3
Unspecified	52	0.15	49	0.15	3	0.13
Total	35 350	100	33 041	100	2 309	100
CITIZENSHIP						
South African	34 973	98.93	32 676	98.9	2 297	99.48
SADC countries	115	0.33	111	0.34	4	0.17
Other African countries	142	0.4	139	0.42	3	0.13
Other	120	0.34	115	0.35	5	0.22
Total	35 350	100	33 041	100	2 309	100
GR 12 LANGUAGE						
Afrikaans	1 655	4.68	1 554	4.7	101	4.37
English	32 391	91.63	30 269	91.61	2 122	91.9
Other	1 303	3.69	1 218	3.69	85	3.68
Unspecified	1	0			1	0.04
Total	35 350	100	33 041	100	2 309	100
HOME LANGUAGE						
Afrikaans	1 669	4.72	1 573	4.76	96	4.16
English	11 931	33.75	11 220	33.96	711	30.79
isiNdebele	232	0.66	219	0.66	13	0.56
isiXhosa	5 249	14.85	4 785	14.48	464	20.1
isiZulu	5 541	15.67	5 237	15.85	304	13.17
Sesotho	2 019	5.71	1 850	5.6	169	7.32
Sesotho sa Leboa	2 769	7.83	2 598	7.86	171	7.41
Setswana	1 774	5.02	1 657	5.01	117	5.07
siSwati	588	1.66	562	1.7	26	1.13
Tshivenda	1 563	4.42	1 446	4.38	117	5.07
Xitsonga	1 513	4.28	1 414	4.28	99	4.29

Other Language	455	1.29	436	1.32	19	0.82
Unspecified	47	0.13	44	0.13	3	0.13
Total	35 350	100	33 041	100	2 309	100
PROVINCE						
Eastern Cape	3 264	9.23	3 024	9.15	240	10.39
Free State	1 565	4.43	1 418	4.29	147	6.37
Gauteng	10 644	30.11	10 099	30.57	545	23.6
KwaZulu Natal	6 015	17.02	5 731	17.35	284	12.3
Limpopo	4 255	12.04	3 968	12.01	287	12.43
Mpumalanga	1 171	3.31	1 079	3.27	92	3.98
North West	594	1.68	564	1.71	30	1.3
Northern Cape	323	0.91	298	0.9	25	1.08
Western Cape	7 426	21.01	6 780	20.52	646	27.98
International	2	0.01	2	0.01	0	0
Unknown	91	0.26	78	0.24	13	0.56
Total	35 350	100	33 041	100	2 309	100
HE ADMISSION						
Bachelors degree	33 041	93.47				
Diploma/Higher Certificate	2 309	6.53				
Total	35 350	100				

5.4 Descriptive statistics

Table 21: Descriptive statistics for NBTs and NSCs: 2026 Intake

	n	Mean %	SD %	Min. %	1st Quartile %	Median %	3rd Quartile %	Max. %
FULL COHORT								
ALScore	35 350	58.83	13.18	15	48	58	69	94
QLScore	35 348	50.44	14.77	5	39	47	59	98
MATScore	29 041	49.78	15.95	14	37	45	60	99
MTHN	30 305	60.90	17.26	3	49	62	74	100
MTLN	5 158	70.14	13.76	22	61	72	81	99
ENHN	21 371	72.05	9.08	38	66	72	78	99
ENFN	13 979	73.86	8.40	31	69	75	80	98
PSCN	26 054	60.62	15.50	10	49	61	72	99
BACHELOR'S DEGREE								
ALScore	33 041	59.54	13.04	15	49	59	70	94
QLScore	33 039	51.16	14.83	5	39	48	60	98
MATScore	27 331	50.69	15.90	14	38	47	61	99
MTHN	28 494	62.58	16.25	3	51	63	74	100
MTLN	4 680	72.13	12.25	29	64	73	81	99
ENHN	19 890	73.00	8.43	42	67	73	79	99
ENFN	13 151	74.67	7.72	44	70	75	80	98
PSCN	24 510	62.22	14.44	15	52	62	73	99
DIPLOMA/CERTIFICATE								
ALScore	2 309	48.72	10.90	17	40	46	56	86
QLScore	2 309	40.22	8.98	18	35	37	43	89
MATScore	1 710	35.26	7.26	22	32	33	36	95
MTHN	1 811	34.55	9.45	6	28	35	42	67
MTLN	478	50.62	12.47	22	41	49	60	84
ENHN	1 481	59.30	7.85	38	54	59	64	83
ENFN	828	60.97	8.23	31	55	61	66	87
PSCN	1 544	35.18	7.28	10	30	35	40	60

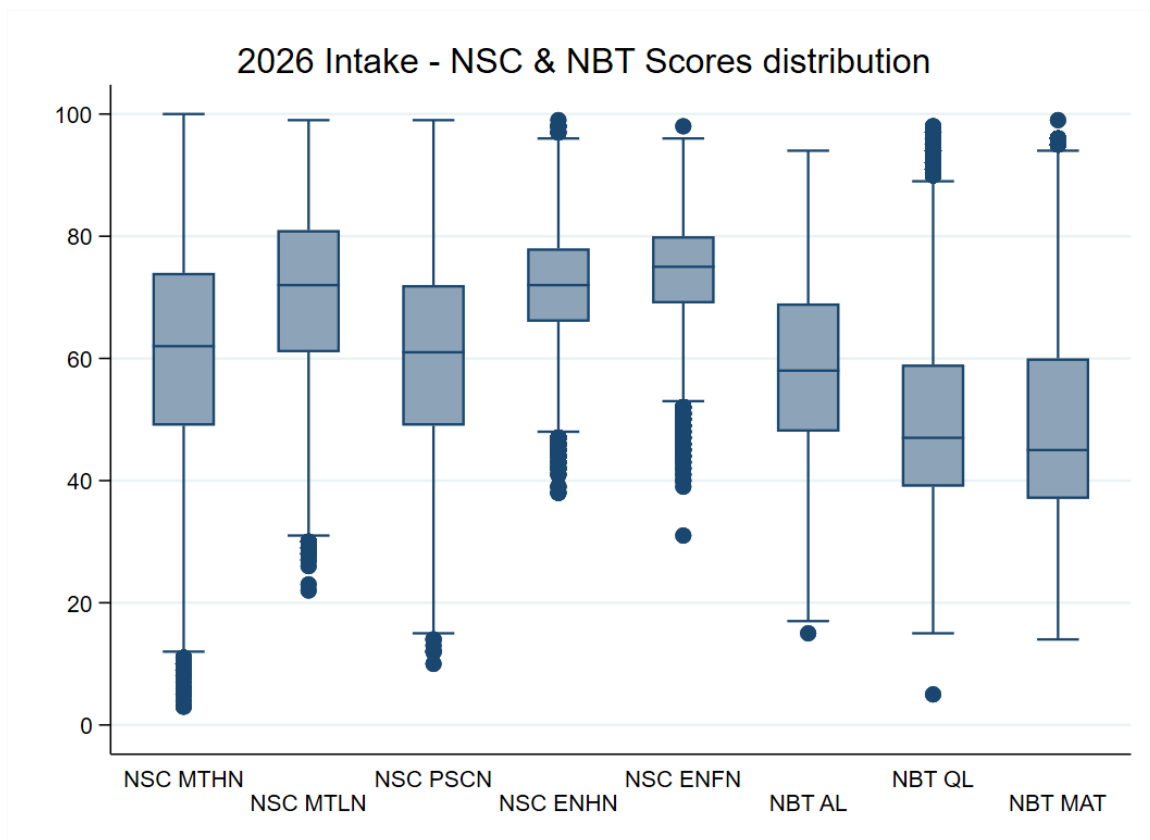


Figure 64: NBT/NSC scores distribution: 2026 Intake

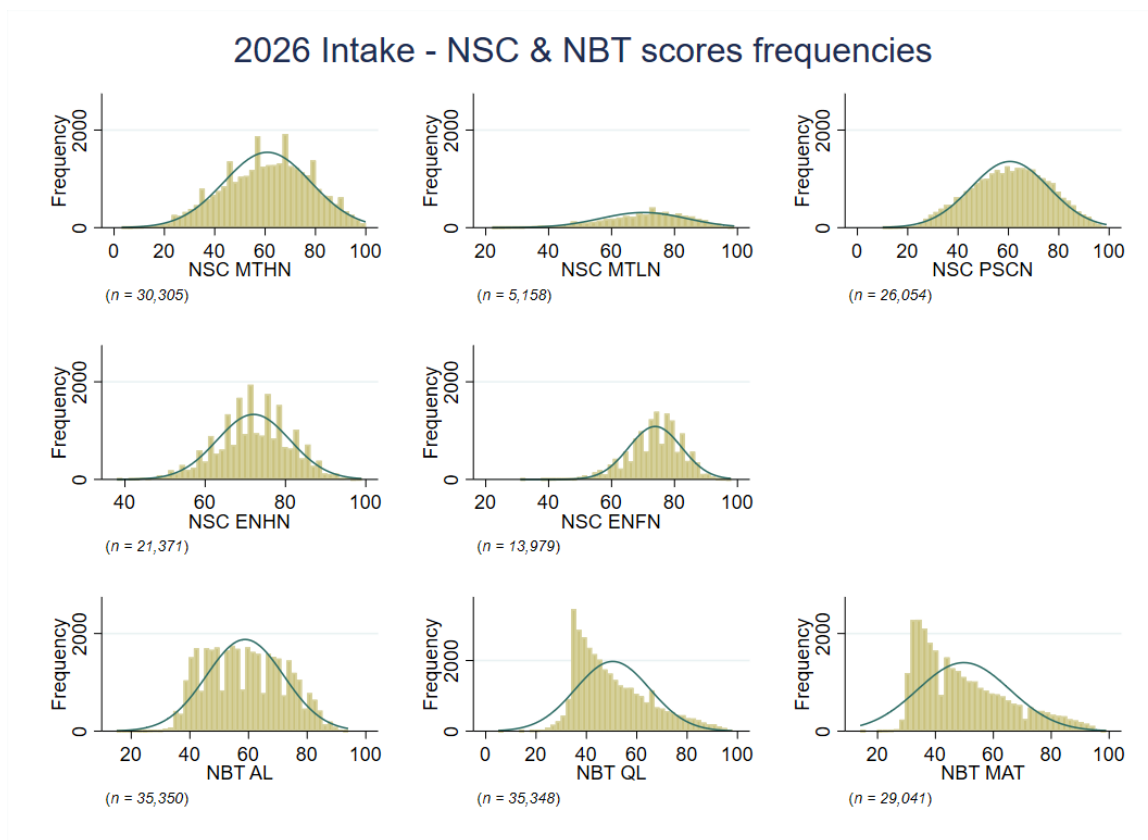


Figure 65: NBT/NSC score frequencies: 2026 Intake

5.5 NBT benchmarks

Table 22: NBT benchmark levels for the NSC cohort: 2026 Intake

	Basic		Intermediate Lower		Intermediate Upper		Proficiency		Total
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n
ACADEMIC LITERACY									
Bachelor's degree	129	0.36	11 059	31.28	14 055	39.76	7 798	22.06	33 041
Diploma/Higher Certificate	13	0.04	1282	3.63	704	1.99	310	0.88	2 309
QUANTITATIVE LITERACY									
Bachelor's degree	5 729	16.21	15 184	42.96	7 589	21.47	4 537	12.84	33 039
Diploma/Higher Certificate	328	0.93	1 629	4.61	285	0.81	67	0.19	2 309
MATHEMATICS									
Bachelor's degree	3 871	13.33	12 468	42.93	6 645	22.88	4 347	14.97	27 331
Diploma/Higher Certificate	639	2.2	992	3.42	54	0.19	25	0.09	1710

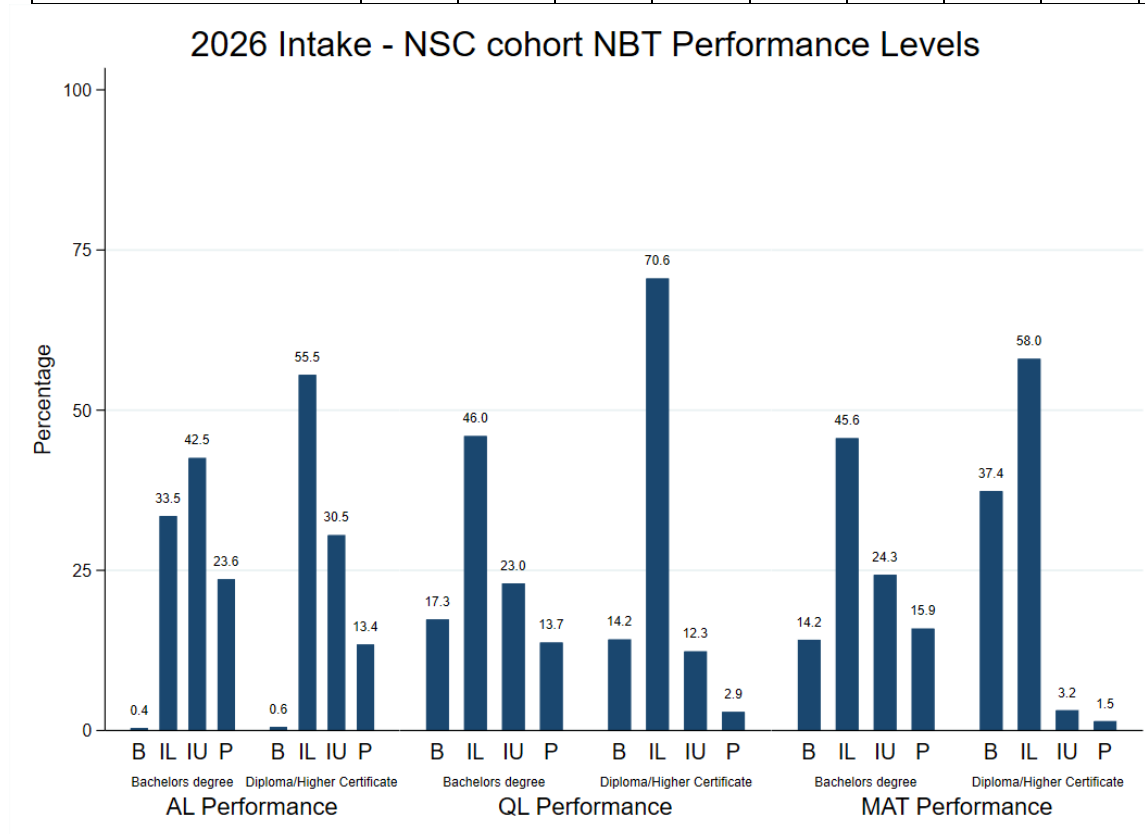


Figure 66: NSC cohort performance levels on NBT: 2026 Intake

5.6 Associations between scores on NBTs and NSC Examination

Table 23: Correlation matrix for the NSC and NBT results - Bachelor's degree: 2026 Intake

Bachelor's	NBT AL	NBT QL	NBT MAT	NSC MTHN	NSC MTLN	NSC ENHN	NSC ENFN	NSC PSCN
NBT AL	1							
	33 041							
NBT QL	0.6838	1						
	33 039	33 039						
NBT MAT	0.4901	0.6808	1					
	27 331	27 331	27 331					
NSC MTHN	0.3425	0.5658	0.7863	1				
	28 494	28 493	26 986	28494				
NSC MTLN	0.598	0.617	0.2517	0.5965	1			
	4 680	4 679	434	173	4 680			
NSC ENHN	0.6185	0.5107	0.4949	0.49	0.5615	1		
	19 890	19 888	15 551	16 430	3 618	19 890		
NSC ENFN	0.6029	0.442	0.4085	0.3958	0.5645	.	1	
	13 151	13 151	11 780	12 064	1 062	0	13 151	
NSC PSCN	0.2975	0.4763	0.7165	0.8661	.	0.5586	0.449	1
	24 510	24 510	23 925	24 510	0	13 156	11 354	24 510

Table 24: Correlation matrix for the NSC and NBT results - Diploma/Higher Certificate: 2026 Intake

	NBT AL	NBT QL	NBT MAT	NSC MTHN	NSC MTLN	NSC ENHN	NSC ENFN	NSC PSCN
NBT AL	1							
	2 309							
NBT QL	0.6387	1						
	2 309	2 309						
NBT MAT	0.315	0.4283	1					
	1 710	1 710	1 710					
NSC MTHN	0.0993	0.2377	0.2464	1				
	1 811	1 811	1 659	1 811				
NSC MTLN	0.4428	0.5016	0.0843	.	1			
	478	478	49	0	478			
NSC ENHN	0.4802	0.3047	0.0808	0.1167	0.2897	1		
	1 481	1 481	1 041	1 112	357	1 481		
NSC ENFN	0.5071	0.2637	0.0822	0.0031	0.2921	.	1	
	828	828	669	699	121	0	828	
NSC PSCN	-0.0061	0.0368	0.0691	0.5204	.	0.1056	0.0372	1
	1 544	1 544	1 453	1 544	0	891	653	1 544

5.6.1 Associations between scores on NBT Academic Literacy and NSC Examination

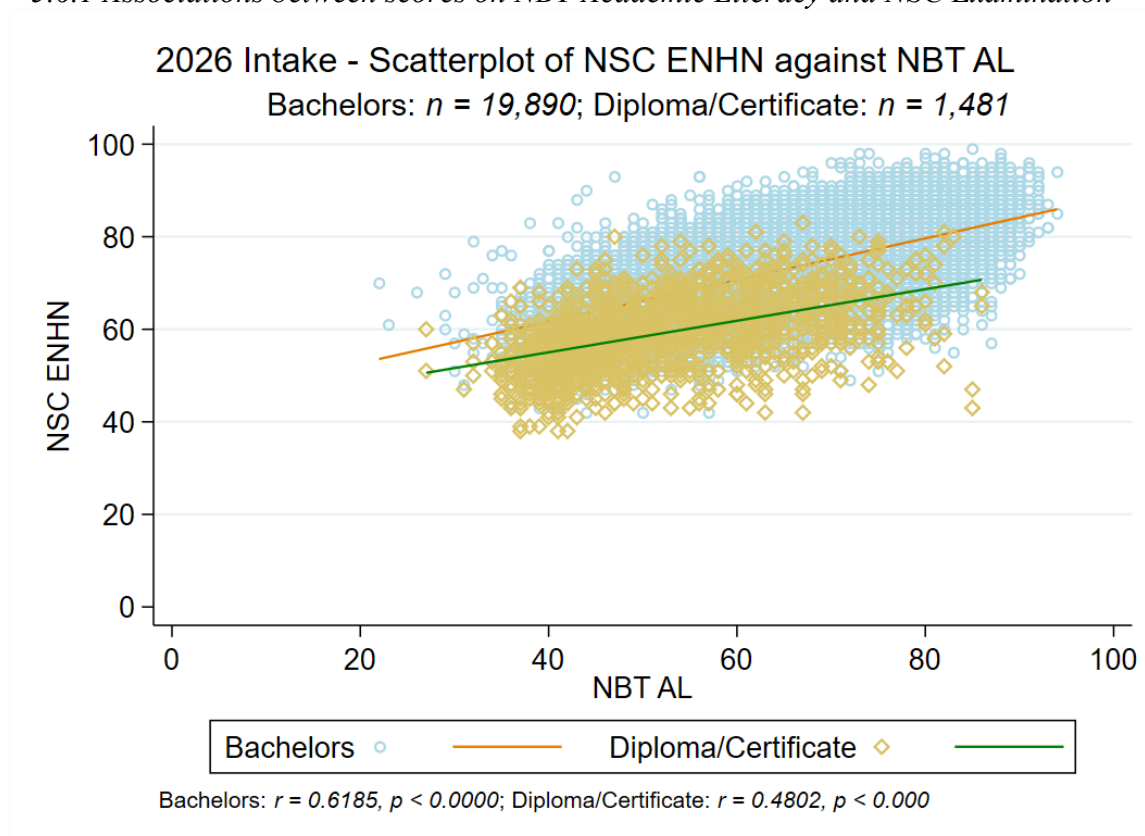


Figure 67: Scatterplot NBT AL vs NSC ENHN: 2026 Intake

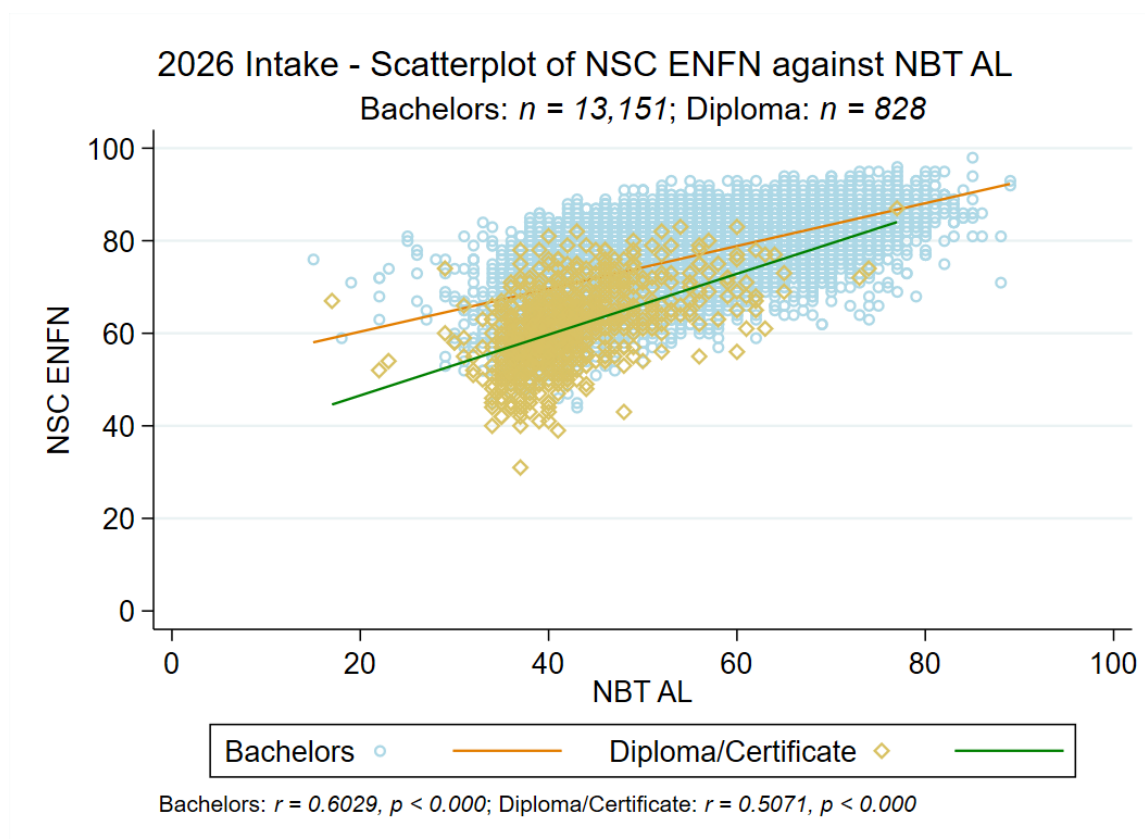


Figure 68: Scatterplot NBT AL vs NSC ENFN: 2026 Intake

5.6.2 Associations between scores on NBT Quantitative Literacy and NSC Examination

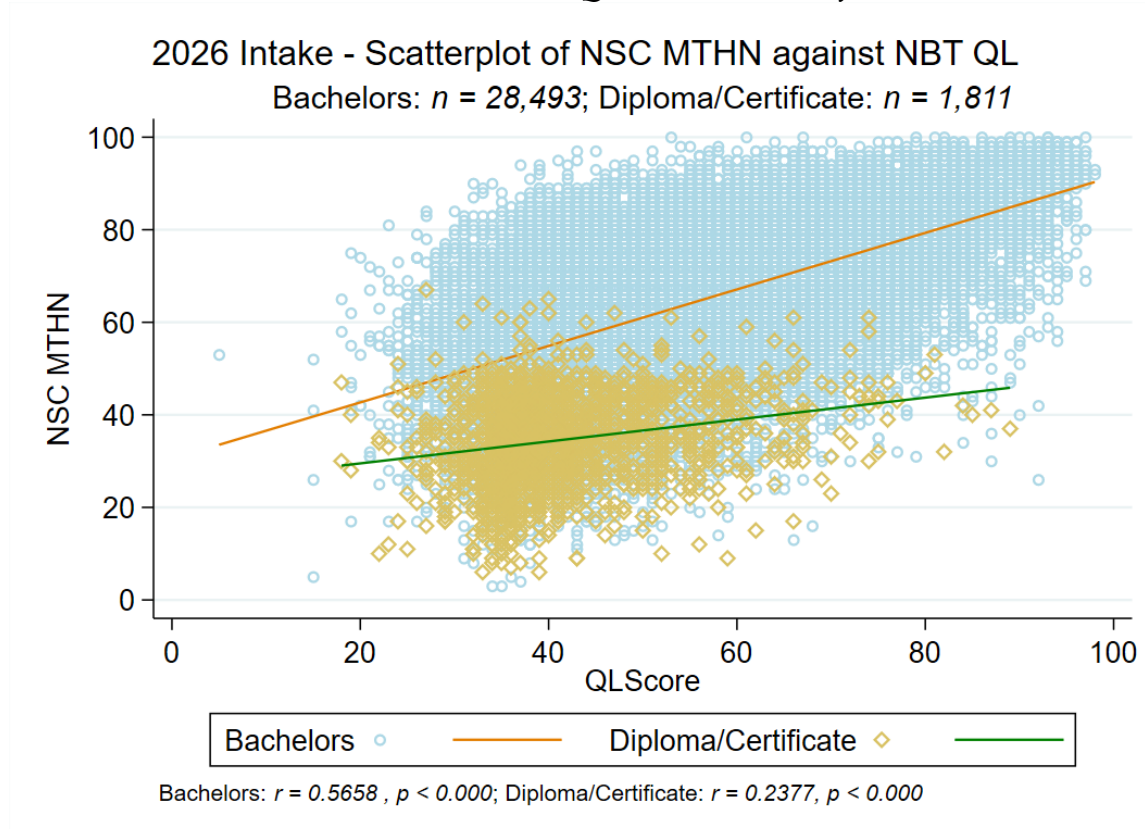


Figure 69: Scatterplot NBT QL vs NSC MTHN: 2026 Intake

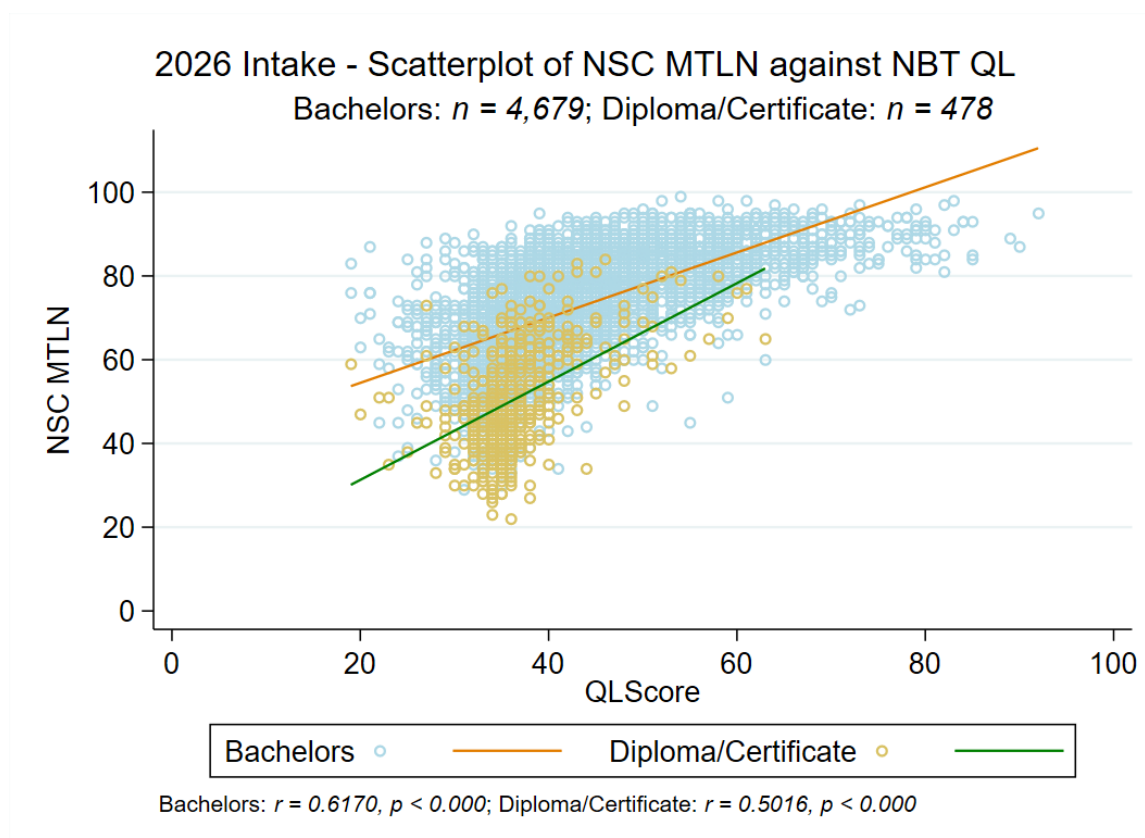


Figure 70: Scatterplot NBT QL vs NSC MTLN: 2026 Intake

5.6.3 Associations between scores on NBT Mathematics and NSC Examination

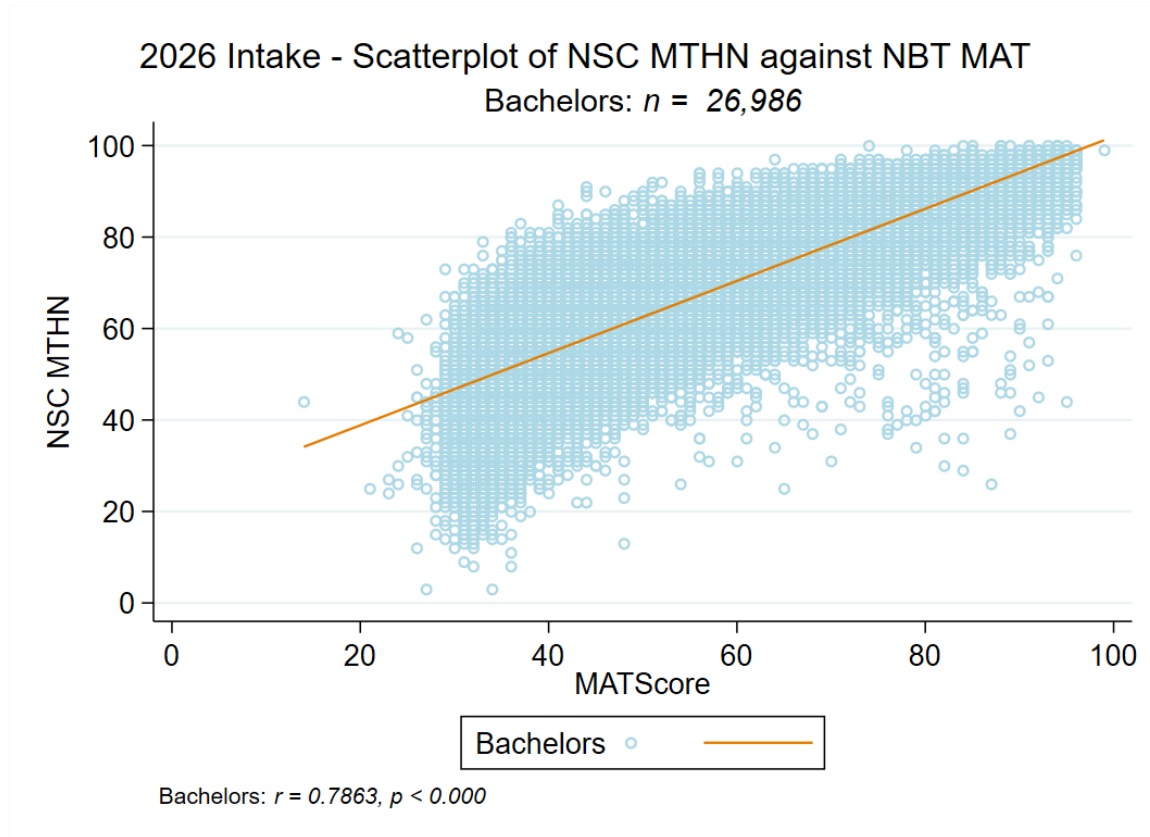


Figure 71: Scatterplot NBT MAT vs NSC MTHN: 2026 Intake

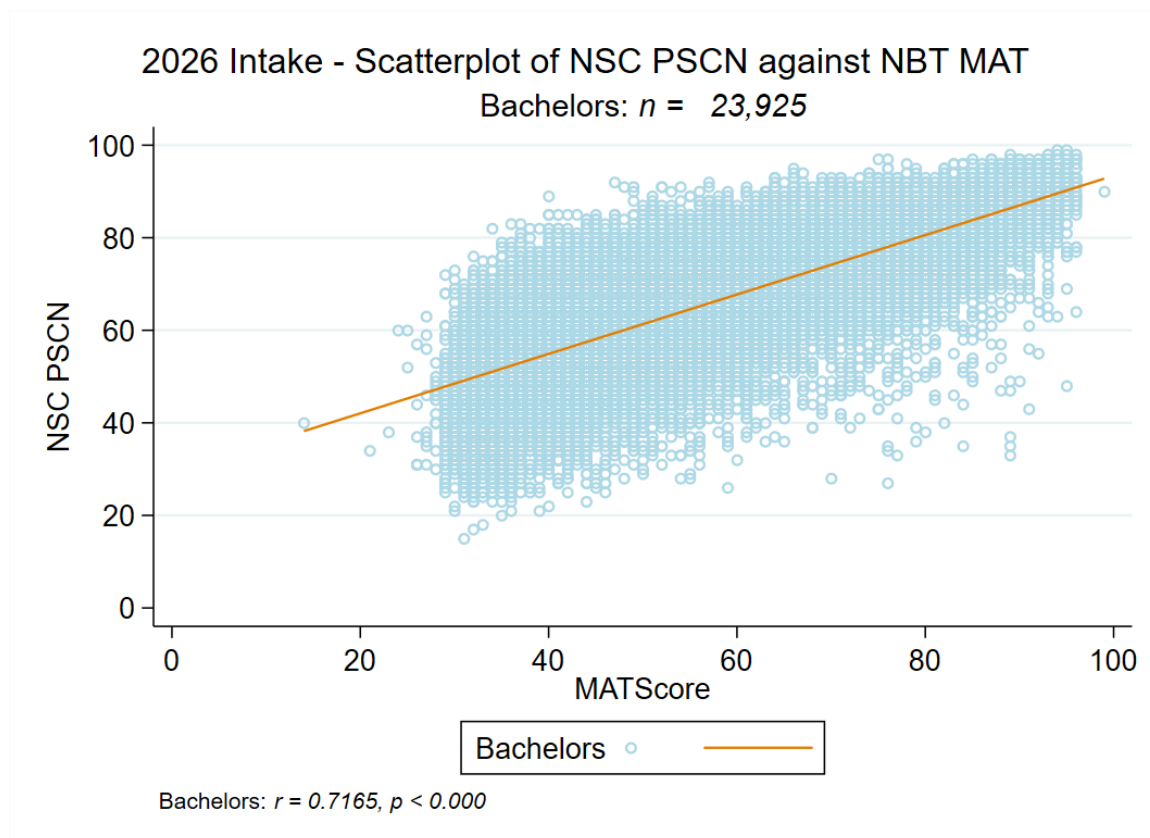


Figure 72: Scatterplot NBT MAT vs NSC PSCN: 2026 Intake

References

- Cliff, A. & Yeld, N. (2006). Test domains and constructs: academic literacy. In H. Griesel (Ed). *Access and entry level benchmarks: the National Benchmark Tests project*, pp. 19–27. Pretoria: Higher Education South Africa.
- Prince, R. (2024). Comparing National Benchmark Quantitative Literacy Paper-Based Tests Scores with its Computer-Based Counterparts. *Numeracy* 18, Iss. 1 (2025): Article 1.
<https://doi.org/10.5038/1936-4660.18.1.1464>
- Sango, T., Prince, R., Steyn, S., & Mudavanhu, P. (2022). High stakes online assessments: A case study of National Benchmark Tests during COVID-19. *Perspectives in Education*, 40(1), 212-233. <https://doi.org/10.18820/2519593X/pie.v40.i1.13>