THE NATIONAL BENCHMARK TESTS NATIONAL REPORT

2025 INTAKE CYCLE: DATA REPORT

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NBT
National Benchmark Tests Project

CEA
Centre for Educational Assessments

University of Cape Town · iYunivesithi yaseKapa · Universiteit van Kaapstad

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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

Executive Summary 7

1. Introduction 8

1.1 Test administration 8

1.2 The NBT benchmarks 8

2. Demographic characteristics of the NBT candidates: 2025 intake 10

2.1 Description of the sample 10

2.2 Considerations 10

3. Performance of the 2025 intake 12

3.1 Test performance of the NBT candidates: 2025 intake 12

3.2 NBT cohort by performance levels: 2025 intake 13

3.3 Performance on NBTs by intended faculty 14

3.4 Performance on NBTs by test language 15

3.5 Performance profile of South African and non-South African candidates 18

3.6 Performance on NBTs at the subdomain level 20

4. Comparison of NBT performance: 2025 intake 42

4.1 NBT performance by test language 42

4.2 Comparison of the 2025 intake results with the 2024 intake results 45

5. Performance of the NSC cohort in the NBT domains and in cognate NSC subjects: 2025 intake 49

5.1 Minimum requirements for admission to the Higher Certificate/Diploma and Bachelor's Degree 50

5.2 Notes on the sample used for the analysis in this section 51

5.3 Self-reported demographics 51

5.4 Descriptive statistics 53

5.5 NBT benchmarks 55

5.6 Associations between scores on NBTs and NSC Examination 56

References 60

Figures

Figure 1: NBT test scores: 2025 intake....12
Figure 2: NBT test scores distribution: 2025 intake....13
Figure 3: NBT performance levels for AL, QL and MAT: 2025 intake....13
Figure 4: NBT AL performance levels by intended faculty of study: 2025 intake....14
Figure 5: NBT QL performance levels by intended faculty of study: 2025 intake....14
Figure 6: NBT MAT performance levels by intended faculty of study: 2025 intake....15
Figure 7: NBT AL performance levels by test language: 2025 intake....16
Figure 8: NBT QL performance levels by test language: 2025 intake....17
Figure 9: NBT MAT performance levels by test language: 2025 intake....17
Figure 10: NBT AL performance levels by citizenship: 2025 intake....19
Figure 11: NBT QL performance levels by citizenship: 2025 intake....19
Figure 12: NBT MAT performance levels by citizenship: 2025 intake....20
Figure 13: Allied Healthcare/Nursing AL subdomain performance: 2025 intake....22
Figure 14: Art and Design AL subdomain performance: 2025 intake....22
Figure 15: Business/Commerce/Management AL subdomain performance: 2025 intake....23
Figure 16: Education AL subdomain performance: 2025 intake....23
Figure 17: Engineering/Built Environment AL subdomain performance: 2025 intake....24
Figure 18: Health Sciences AL subdomain performance: 2025 intake....24
Figure 19: Hospitality/Tourism AL subdomain performance: 2025 intake....25
Figure 20: Humanities AL subdomain performance: 2025 intake....25
Figure 21: Information and Communication Technology AL subdomain performance: 2025 intake....26
Figure 22: Law AL subdomain performance: 2025 intake....26
Figure 23: Science/Mathematics AL subdomain performance: 2025 intake....27
Figure 24: Other AL subdomain performance: 2025 intake....27
Figure 25: Allied Healthcare/Nursing QL subdomain performance: 2025 intake....29
Figure 26: Art/Design QL subdomain performance: 2025 intake....29
Figure 27: Business/Commerce/Management QL subdomain performance: 2025 intake....30
Figure 28: Education QL subdomain performance: 2025 intake....30
Figure 29: Engineering/Built Environment QL subdomain performance: 2025 intake....31
Figure 30: Health Sciences QL subdomain performance: 2025 intake....31
Figure 31: Hospitality/Tourism QL subdomain performance: 2025 intake....32
Figure 32: Humanities QL subdomain performance: 2025 intake....32
Figure 33: Information and Communication Technology QL subdomain performance: 2025 intake....33
Figure 34: Law QL subdomain performance: 2025 intake....33
Figure 35: Science/Mathematics QL subdomain performance: 2025 intake....34
Figure 36: Other QL subdomain performance: 2025 intake3.6.3 The construct of the MAT test....34
Figure 37: Allied Healthcare/Nursing MAT subdomain performance: 2025 intake....36
Figure 38: Art/Design MAT subdomain performance: 2025 intake....36
Figure 39: Business/Commerce/Management MAT subdomain performance: 2025 intake....37
Figure 40: Education MAT subdomain performance: 2025 intake....37
Figure 41: Engineering/Built Environment MAT subdomain performance: 2025 intake....38

Figure 42: Health Sciences MAT subdomain performance: 2025 intake 38
Figure 43: Hospitality/Tourism MAT subdomain performance: 2025 intake 39
Figure 44: Humanities MAT subdomain performance: 2025 intake 39
Figure 45: Information and Communication Technology MAT subdomain performance: 2025 intake 40
Figure 46: Law MAT subdomain performance: 2025 intake 40
Figure 47: Science/Mathematics MAT subdomain performance: 2025 intake 41
Figure 48: Other MAT subdomain performance: 2025 intake 41
Figure 49: NBT AL performance levels by intended faculty of study for Afrikaans writers: 2025 intake 42
Figure 50: NBT AL performance levels by intended faculty of study for English writers: 2025 intake 42
Figure 51: NBT QL performance levels by intended faculty of study for Afrikaans writers: 2025 intake 43
Figure 52: NBT QL performance levels by intended faculty of study for English writers: 2025 intake 43
Figure 53: NBT MAT performance levels by intended faculty of study for Afrikaans writers: 2025 intake 44
Figure 54: NBT MAT performance levels by intended faculty of study for English writers: 2025 intake 44
Figure 55: Performance in NBT AL 2024 and 2025 intake cycles 45
Figure 56: Performance in NBT QL 2024 and 2025 intake cycles 45
Figure 57: Performance in NBT MAT 2024 and 2025 intake cycles 46
Figure 58: NBT AL performance by test language 2024 and 2025 intake cycles 46
Figure 59: NBT QL performance by test language 2024 and 2025 intake cycles 47
Figure 60: NBT MAT performance by test language 2024 and 2025 intake cycles 47
Figure 61: NBT AL performance levels by citizenship 2024 and 2025 intake 48
Figure 62: NBT QL performance levels by citizenship 2024 and 2025 intake 48
Figure 63: NBT MAT performance levels by citizenship 2024 and 2025 intake 49
Figure 64: NBT/NSC scores distribution: 2025 intake 54
Figure 65: NBT/NSC score frequencies: 2025 intake 54
Figure 66: NSC cohort performance levels on NBT: 2025 intake 55
Figure 67: Scatterplot NBT AL vs NSC ENHN: 2025 intake 57
Figure 68: Scatterplot NBT AL vs NSC ENFN: 2025 intake 57
Figure 69: Scatterplot NBT QL vs NSC MTHN: 2025 intake 58
Figure 70: Scatterplot NBT QL vs NSC MTLN: 2025 intake 58
Figure 71: Scatterplot NBT MAT vs NSC MTHN: 2025 intake 59
Figure 72: Scatterplot NBT MAT vs NSC PSCN: 2025 intake 59

Tables

Table 1: NBT 2024 Test administration: 2025 intake....8
Table 2: NBT benchmark descriptors....8
Table 3: NBT benchmarks set in 2019 for Degree and Diploma/Higher Certificate study....9
Table 4: NBT Intermediate benchmarks and how they should be interpreted....9
Table 5: NBT self-reported demographic characteristics: 2025 intake....10
Table 6: Descriptive statistics for NBT AL, QL and MAT: 2025 intake....12
Table 7: NBT benchmark levels performance distribution: 2025 intake....13
Table 8: NBT Test language: 2025 intake....15
Table 9: Descriptive statistics for NBT AL, QL and MAT by test language: 2025 intake....16
Table 10: Number of NBT test writers by citizenship: 2025 intake....18
Table 11: NBT scores distribution by citizenship: 2025 intake....18
Table 12: The performance distribution on the NBT AL subdomains: 2025 intake....21
Table 13: NBT AL subdomains median (p50) performance indicator per faculty: 2025 intake....21
Table 14: The performance distribution on the NBT QL subdomains: 2025 intake....28
Table 15: NBT QL subdomains median (p50) performance indicator per faculty: 2025 intake....28
Table 16: The performance distribution on the NBT MAT subdomains: 2025 intake....35
Table 17: NBT MAT subdomains median (p50) performance indicator per faculty: 2025 intake....35
Table 18: Scale of NSC achievement/level descriptors....50
Table 19: The higher education designated subject list....50
Table 20: NSC cohort for NBT self-reported demographics: 2025 intake....51
Table 21: Descriptive statistics for NBTs and NSCs: 2025 intake....53
Table 22: NBT benchmark levels for the NSC cohort: 2025 intake....55
Table 23: Correlation matrix for the NSC and NBT results - Bachelor's degree: 2025 intake....56
Table 24: Correlation matrix for the NSC and NBT results - Diploma/Higher Certificate: 2025 intake 56

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 2025 academic year. Candidates considered in this report wrote the NBTs from May 2024 to April 2025. In the 2025 NBT intake cycle 51 226 Academic Literacy (AL) test scores 51 220 Quantitative Literacy (QL) test scores, and 40 118 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 2025 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 15 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 2025 academic year. Candidates considered in this report will have written the NBTs between May 2024 and April 2025, referred to as the NBT intake 2025.

1.1 Test administration

The NBT AQL and NBT MAT were administered in 25 national sessions, and these consist of 5 online sessions across the cycle and 20 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 20% of the candidates for the NBT AL, NBT QL and NBT MAT (Table 1) wrote in the online sessions in this cycle (2025 intake).

Table 1: NBT 2024 Test administration: 2025 intake

	Wrote AL		**Wrote QL**		**Wrote MAT**	
Test Administration	**n**	**%**	**n**	**%**	**n**	**%**
Online	10 408	20.32	10 408	20.32	8 159	20.34
Pencil & Paper	40 818	79.68	40 812	79.68	31 959	79.66
Total	51 226	100	51 220	100	40 118	100

During the 2024 testing cycle (2025 intake), the test sessions were offered in pencil-and-paper and online modes. In the national sessions, the 91 344 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 51 226 candidates wrote the AL tests, 51 220 candidates wrote the QL tests, and 40 118 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.

Table 3 shows the benchmarks for Degree study as well as those for Diploma/Higher Certificate study, which were set in 2019 by panels drawn from across the country comprising academics engaged in mainstream teaching relevant to the domain, and were used to determine the proficiency of the 2025 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 [69%]; QL [70%]; MAT [69%] Diploma/Certificate: AL [61%]; QL [66%]; MAT [63%]
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 [40%]; MAT [37%] Diploma/Certificate: AL [33%]; 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: [52-68] Diploma/Certificate: [47-60]	Students are likely to need complementary support (additional tutorials, workshops, augmented courses, language intensive work).	Degree: [35-51] Diploma/Certificate: [33-46]	Students need to be placed in an extended programme.
QL	Degree: [55-69] Diploma/Certificate: [50-65]		Degree: [40-54] Diploma/Certificate: [34-49]	
MAT	Degree: [53-68] Diploma/Certificate: [48-62]		Degree: [37-52] Diploma/Certificate: [33-47]	

2. Demographic characteristics of the NBT candidates: 2025 intake

2.1 Description of the sample

The data used for the 2025 report is from the 2024 NBT testing cycle which includes all NBT candidates who took the tests between May 2024 and April 2025. 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:

- 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.
- 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.
- 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.
- Candidates writing the NBTs for the 2025 intake provided demographic information through self-reporting except for the gender data which was extracted from the SA national IDs. Gender data for non-South African countries was not reported for this cycle. The demographic information is provided when the candidates write the actual tests.
- 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 69.86% who indicated their population group as black.

Table 5: NBT self-reported demographic characteristics: 2025 intake

	Wrote AL		**Wrote QL**		**Wrote MAT**	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
GENDER						
Male	15 953	33.35	15 949	33.35	12 872	34.15
Female	31 883	66.65	31 881	66.65	24 825	65.85
Total	47 836	100	47 830	100	37 697	100
POPULATION GROUP						
Black	34 804	69.86	34 799	69.86	28 090	71.69
Coloured	5 497	11.03	5 496	11.03	3 394	8.66
Indian/Asian	3 400	6.82	3 400	6.83	3 054	7.79
White	5 018	10.07	5 018	10.07	3 854	9.84

Other	191	0.38	191	0.38	138	0.35
Unspecified	907	1.82	907	1.82	653	1.67
Total	49 817	100	49 811	100	39 183	100
CITIZENSHIP						
South African	47 060	94.47	47 054	94.47	37 121	94.74
SADC countries	1 237	2.48	1 237	2.48	912	2.33
Other African countries	610	1.22	610	1.22	497	1.27
Other	317	0.64	317	0.64	252	0.64
Unspecified	593	1.19	593	1.19	401	1.02
Total	49 817	100	49 811	100	39 183	100
GR 12 LANGUAGE						
Afrikaans	2 297	4.61	2 296	4.61	1 587	4.05
English	4 4715	89.76	44 712	89.76	35 448	90.47
Other	1 556	3.12	1 555	3.12	1 265	3.23
Unspecified	1 249	2.51	1 248	2.51	883	2.25
Total	49 817	100	49 811	100	39 183	100
HOME LANGUAGE						
Afrikaans	2 478	4.97	2 477	4.97	1 724	4.4
English	15 981	32.08	15 978	32.08	11 967	30.54
isiNdebele	356	0.71	356	0.71	312	0.8
isiXhosa	7 551	15.16	7 551	15.16	5 427	13.85
isiZulu	7 137	14.33	7 136	14.33	5 998	15.31
Sesotho	3 139	6.3	3 139	6.3	2 524	6.44
Sesotho sa Leboa	3 736	7.5	3 735	7.5	3 369	8.6
Setswana	2 592	5.2	2 592	5.2	2 089	5.33
siSwati	1 059	2.13	1 059	2.13	879	2.24
Tshivenda	1 747	3.51	1 747	3.51	1 592	4.06
Xitsonga	1 836	3.69	1 836	3.69	1 633	4.17
Other Language	959	1.93	959	1.93	788	2.01
Unspecified	1 246	2.5	1 246	2.5	881	2.25
Total	49 817	100	49 811	100	39 183	100
PROVINCE						
Eastern Cape	3 921	7.87	3 921	7.87	3 090	7.89
Free State	2 614	5.25	2 614	5.25	1 980	5.05
Gauteng	9 555	19.18	9 554	19.18	8 029	20.49
KwaZulu Natal	6 484	13.02	6 483	13.02	5 456	13.92
Limpopo	4 762	9.56	4 762	9.56	4 420	11.28
Mpumalanga	1 088	2.18	1 088	2.18	990	2.53
North West	921	1.85	921	1.85	792	2.02
Northern Cape	302	0.61	302	0.61	229	0.58
Western Cape	9 969	20.01	9 965	20.01	6 260	15.98
Unknown	10 201	20.48	10 201	20.48	7 937	20.26
Total	49 817	100	49 811	100	39 183	100

3. Performance of the 2025 intake

3.1 Test performance of the NBT candidates: 2025 intake

For the 2025 intake cycle registration opened on 1 April 2024. 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 2025 intake cycle.

The scores indicated below are those of candidates who wrote the NBTs for the 2025 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 2025 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

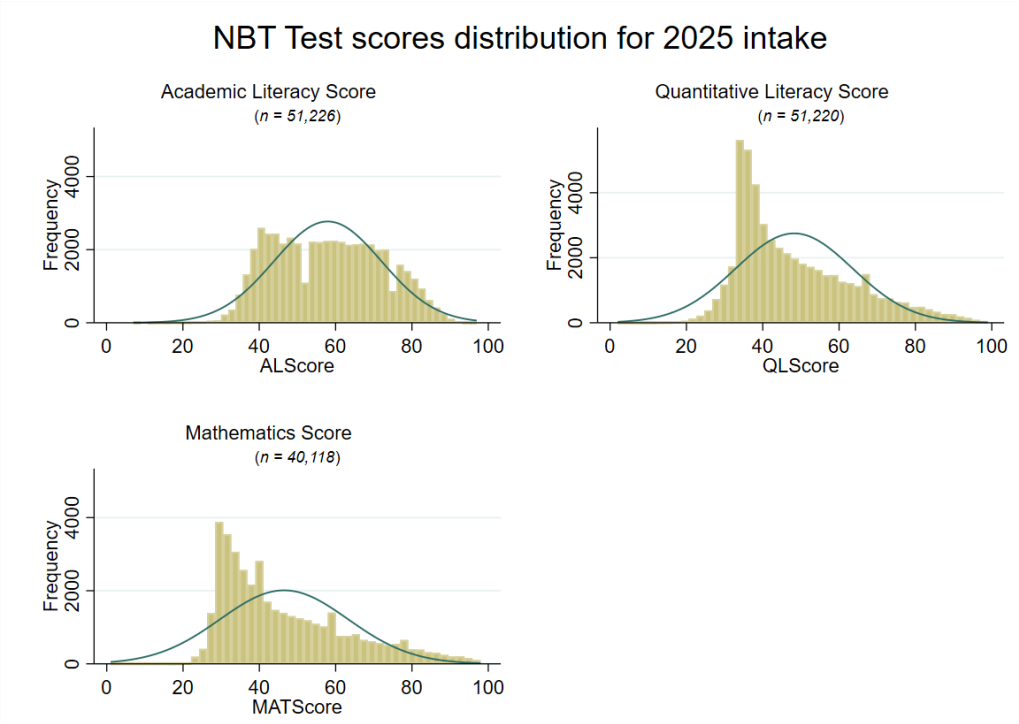

Figure 1: NBT test scores: 2025 intake

Table 6: Descriptive statistics for NBT AL, QL and MAT: 2025 intake

NBT Test	n	Mean	SD	Minimum	1st Quartile	Median	3rd Quartile	Maximum
AL	51 226	57.94	14.12	7	46	57	69	97
QL	51 220	48.23	15.34	2	36	44	58	99
MAT	40 118	46.49	16.78	1	33	41	57	98

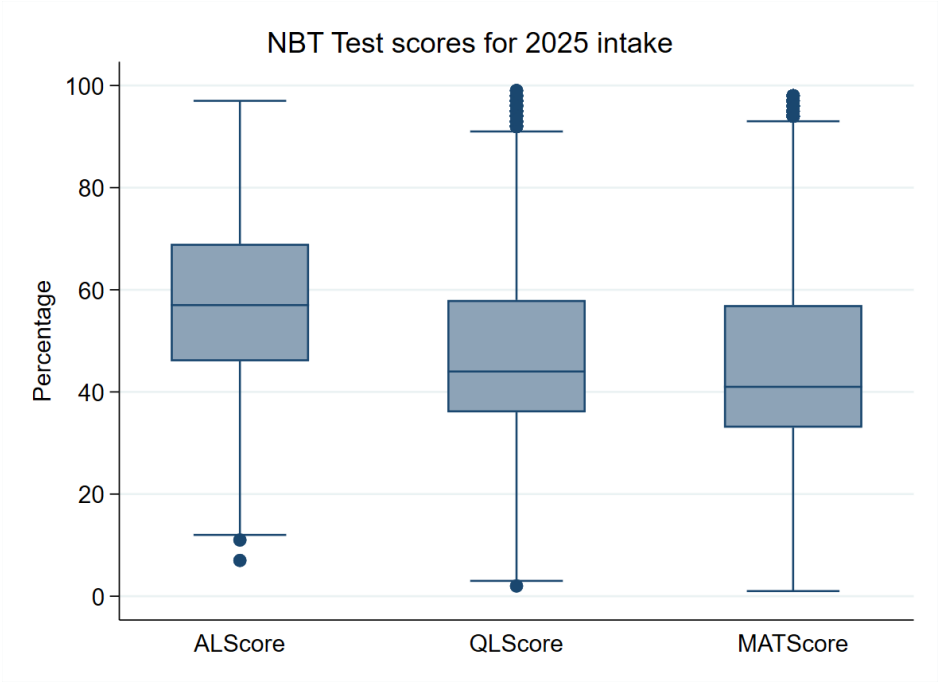

Figure 2: NBT test scores distribution: 2025 intake

3.2 NBT cohort by performance levels: 2025 intake

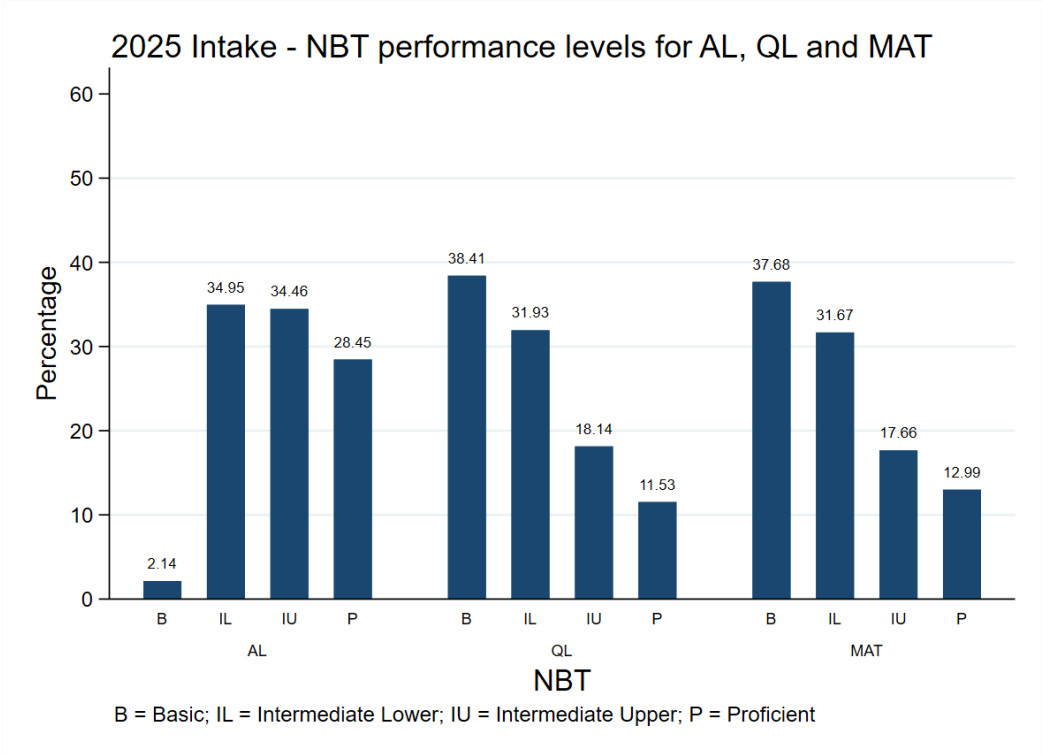

Figure 3: NBT performance levels for AL, QL and MAT: 2025 intake

Table 7: NBT benchmark levels performance distribution: 2025 intake

NBT tests	Basic	Intermediate Lower	Intermediate Upper	Proficient	Total (n)
AL	1 095 (2.14%)	17 904 (34.95%)	17 651 (34.46%)	14 576 (28.45%)	51 226
QL	19 674 (38.41%)	16 353 (31.93%)	9 289 (18.14%)	5 904 (11.53%)	51 220
MAT	15 117 (37.68%)	12 706 (31.67%)	7 083 (17.66%)	5 212 (12.99%)	40 118

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.

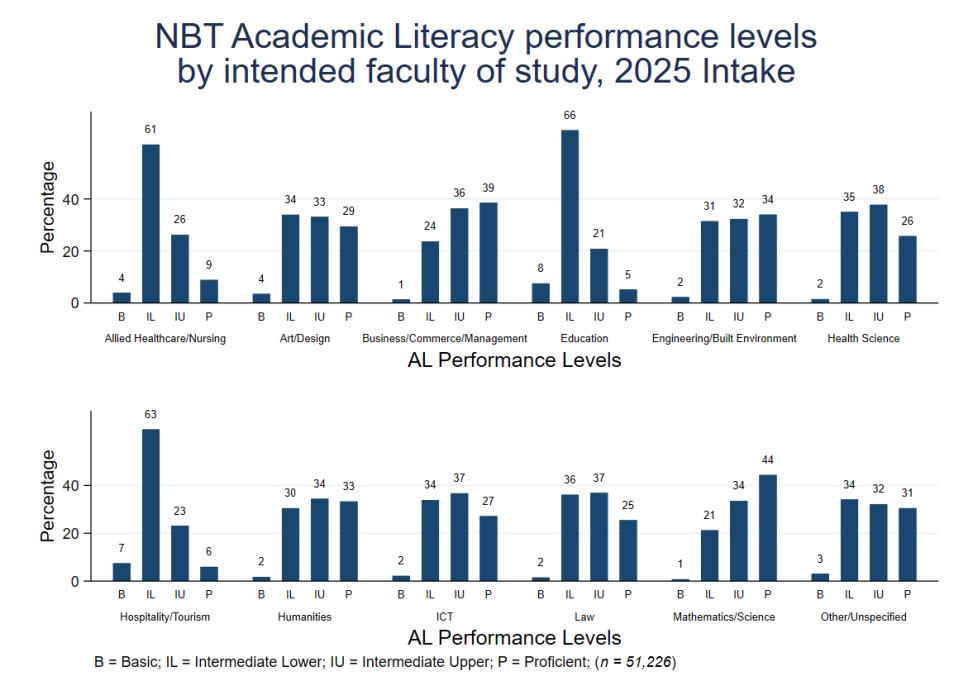

Figure 4: NBT AL performance levels by intended faculty of study: 2025 intake

3.3.2 QL performance by intended faculty

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

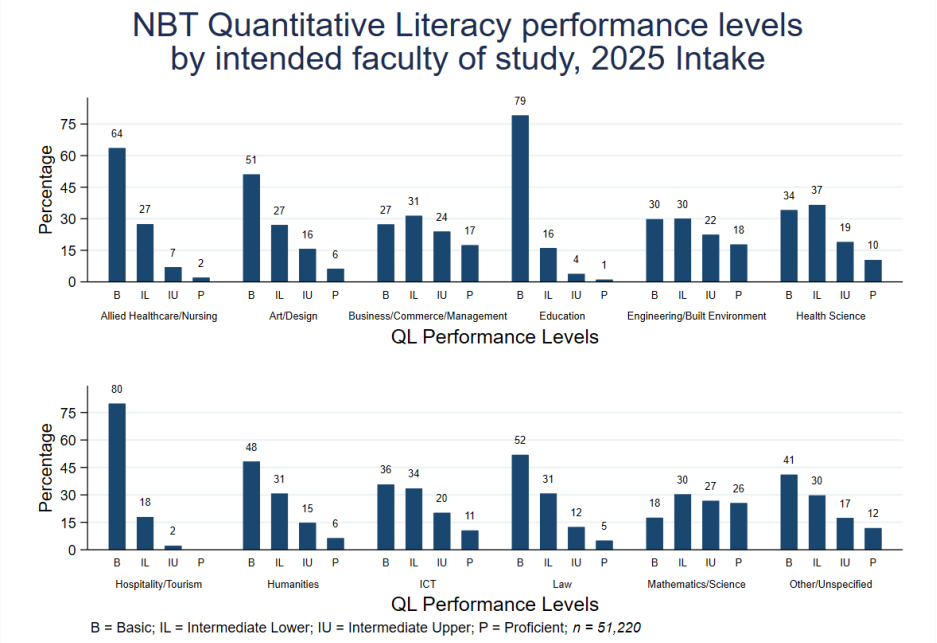

Figure 5: NBT QL performance levels by intended faculty of study: 2025 intake

3.3.3 MAT performance by intended faculty

The performance levels in MAT are presented in Figure 6.

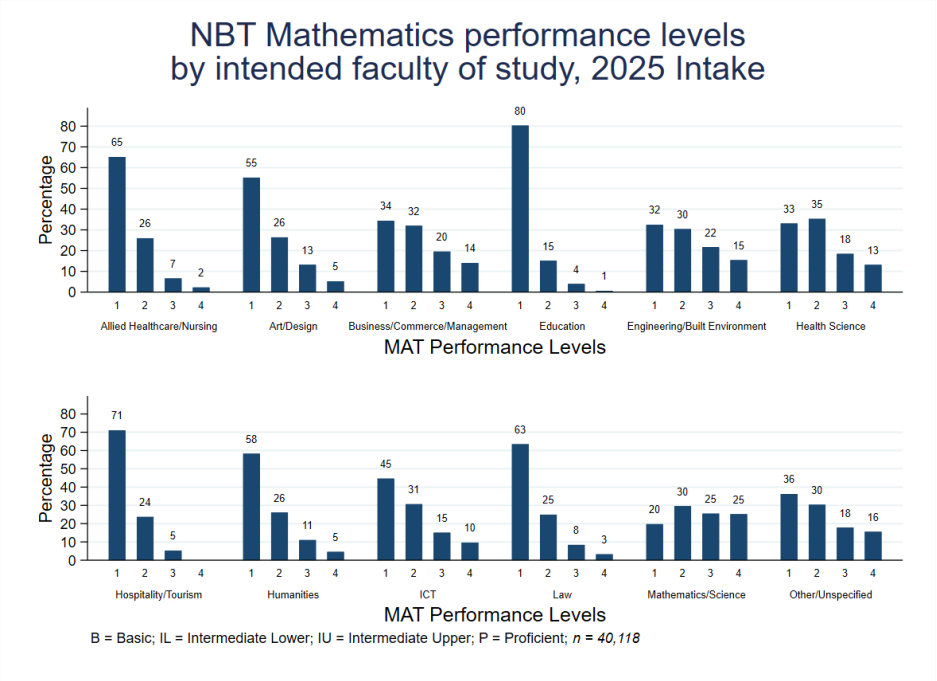

Figure 6: NBT MAT performance levels by intended faculty of study: 2025 intake

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 49 549 candidates (96.73%) wrote the NBT AL in English, while 49 543 candidates (96.73%) wrote the QL in English. Additionally, 38 895 candidates (96.95%) wrote the NBT MAT in English. In contrast, the number of candidates who wrote the NBTs in Afrikaans is very low: 1 991 candidates (3.99%) wrote the NBT AL, 1 677 candidates (3.27%) wrote the NBT QL, and 1 223 candidates (3.05%) wrote the NBT MAT.

Table 8: NBT Test language: 2025 intake

	Wrote AL		**Wrote QL**		**Wrote MAT**	
AQL/MAT test language	n	%	n	%	n	%
Afrikaans	1 677	3.27	1 677	3.27	1 223	3.05
English	49 549	96.73	49 543	96.73	38 895	96.95
Total	51 226	100	51 220	100	40 118	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: 2025 intake

NBT Test	Test language	n	Mean %	SD %	Min. %	1st Quartile %	Median %	3rd Quartile %	Max. %
AL	Afrikaans	1 677	59.14	12.24	25	50	60	69	90
	English	49 549	57.90	14.18	7	46	57	69	97
	Total	51 226	57.94	14.12	7	46	57	69	97
QL	Afrikaans	1 677	52.43	16.77	13	38	50	65	96
	English	49 543	48.09	15.27	2	36	44	57	99
	Total	51 220	48.23	15.34	2	36	44	58	99
MAT	Afrikaans	1 223	49.23	18.40	22	33	45	63	97
	English	38 895	46.40	16.72	1	33	41	56	98
	Total	40 118	46.49	16.78	1	33	41	57	98

3.4.1 AL performance on tests written in Afrikaans and English

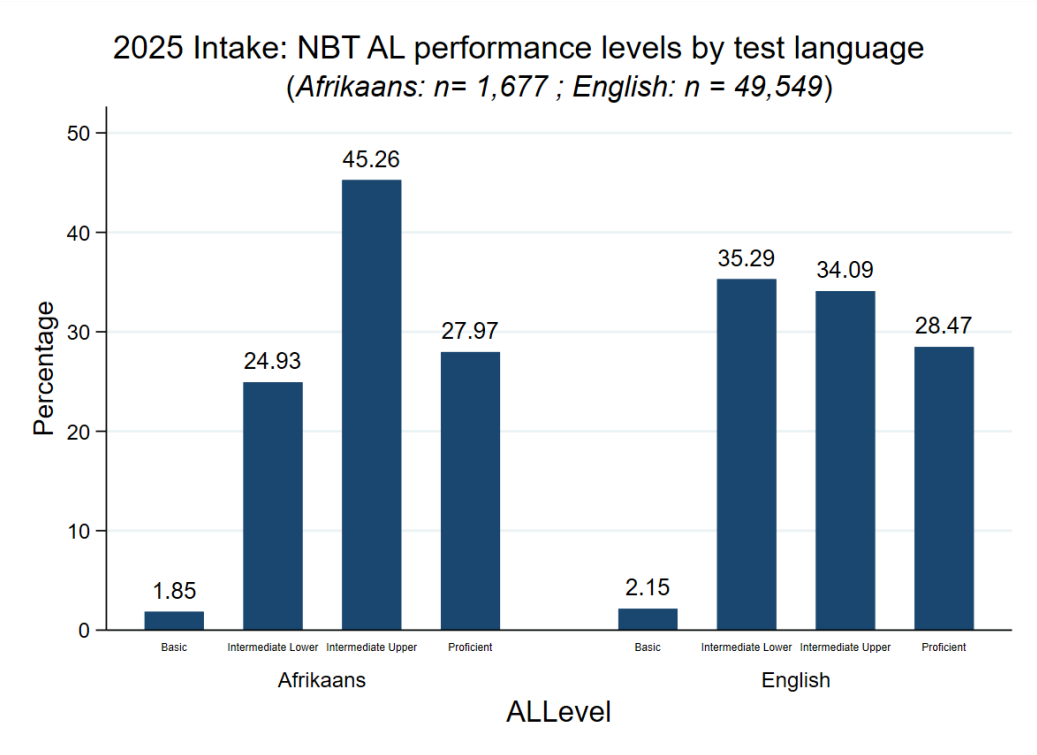

Figure 7: NBT AL performance levels by test language: 2025 intake

3.4.2 QL performance on tests written in Afrikaans and English

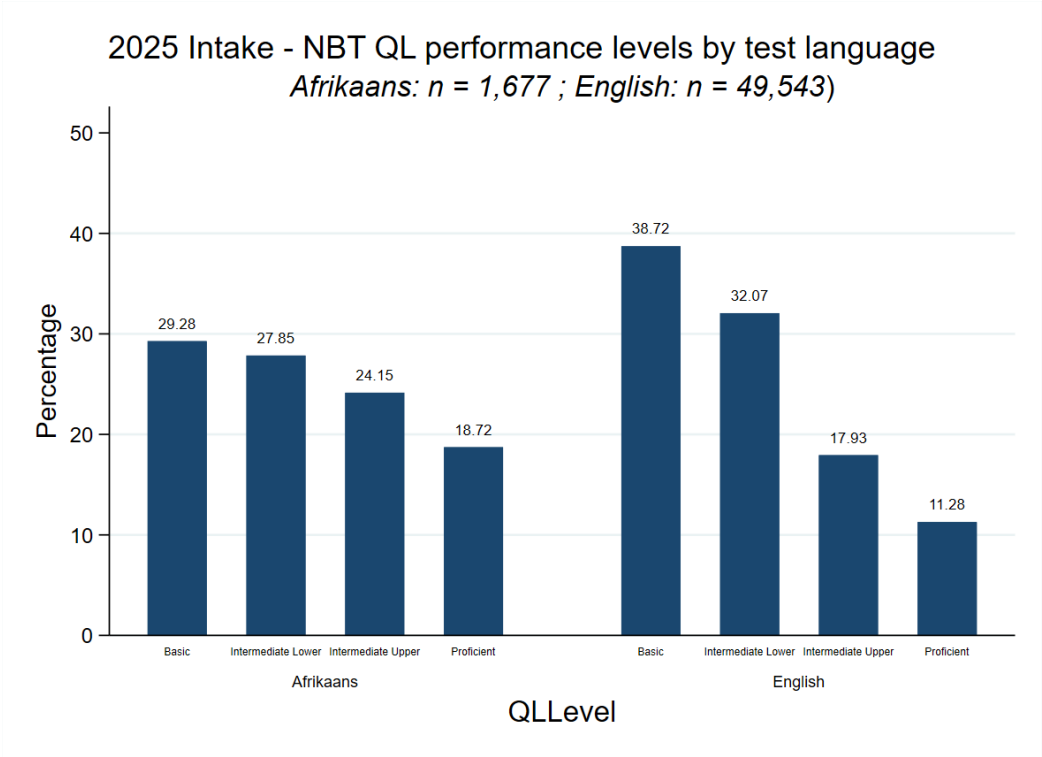

Figure 8: NBT QL performance levels by test language: 2025 intake

3.4.3 MAT performance on tests written in Afrikaans and English

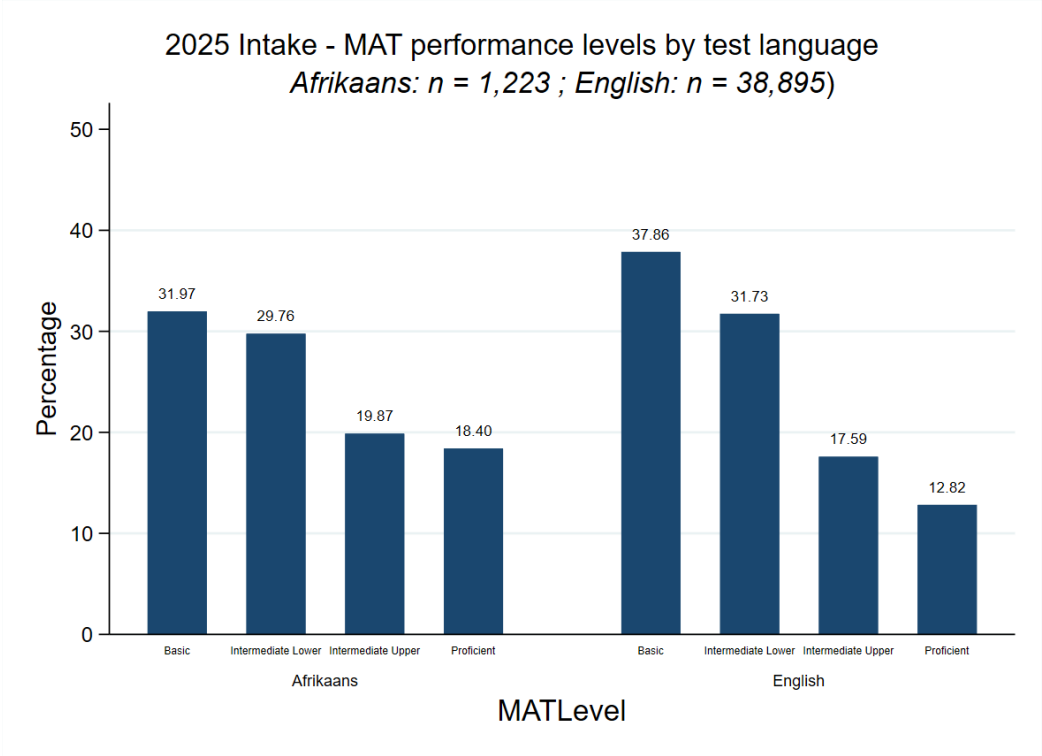

Figure 9: NBT MAT performance levels by test language: 2025 intake

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

Table 10: Number of NBT test writers by citizenship: 2025 intake

	Wrote AL		Wrote QL		Wrote MAT	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
South African	48 385	94.45	48 379	94.45	38 006	94.74
Non-South African	2 228	4.35	2 228	4.35	1 697	4.23
Unspecified	613	1.2	613	1.2	415	1.03
Total	51 226	100	51 220	100	40 118	100

Table 11: NBT scores distribution by citizenship: 2025 intake

NBT Test	Citizenship	n	Mean %	SD %	Min. %	1st Quartile %	Median %	3rd Quartile %	Max. %
AL	South African	48 385	57.75	14.12	7	46	57	69	97
	Non-South African	2 228	63.12	12.81	17	54	64	73	92
	Unspecified	613	53.89	14.63	13	42	53	66	92
	Total	51 226	57.94	14.12	7	46	57	69	97
QL	South African	48 379	48.09	15.28	2	36	44	57	99
	Non-South African	2 228	52.56	16.12	15	40	50	64	98
	Unspecified	613	43.77	13.94	14	35	39	49	92
	Total	51 220	48.23	15.34	2	36	44	58	99
MAT	South African	38 006	46.37	16.69	1	33	41	56	98
	Non-South African	1 697	49.97	18.68	9	34	46	64	98
	Unspecified	415	43.29	15.46	1	31	38	51	97
	Total	40 118	46.49	16.78	1	33	41	57	98

3.5.1 AL performance by citizenship

A higher proportion of the non-South African candidates (40.53%) scored in the Proficient band compared to the South African candidates (27.97%) and those with unspecified citizenship (22.68%). Also, South African candidates had a slightly higher proportion of scores (2.13%) in the Basic band compared to the non-South African candidates (1.08%), while the group with unspecified citizenship had the highest proportion in the Basic band (6.20%). For the Intermediate bands (Intermediate Upper and Lower), most of the scores for each category fell within these two groups; 69.9% of South African candidates' scores, 58.39% of the non-South African candidates' scores, and 71.12% of the unspecified candidates' scores, respectively (Figure 10). These percentages should be interpreted with consideration of the varying sample sizes.

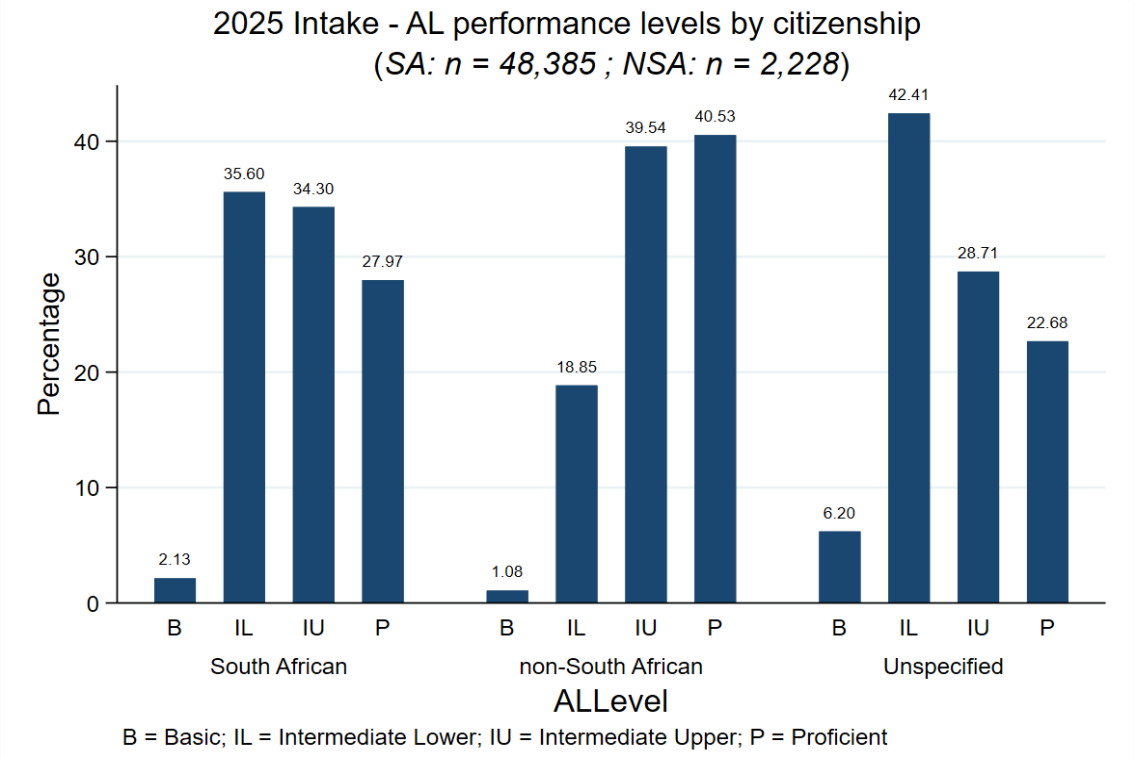

Figure 10: NBT AL performance levels by citizenship: 2025 intake

5.5.2 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 17.32% compared to 11.31% for South African candidates. In the Basic band, 38.85% of South African candidates and 24.91% of non-South African candidates scored in this category. These results suggest that both groups may need additional QL support.

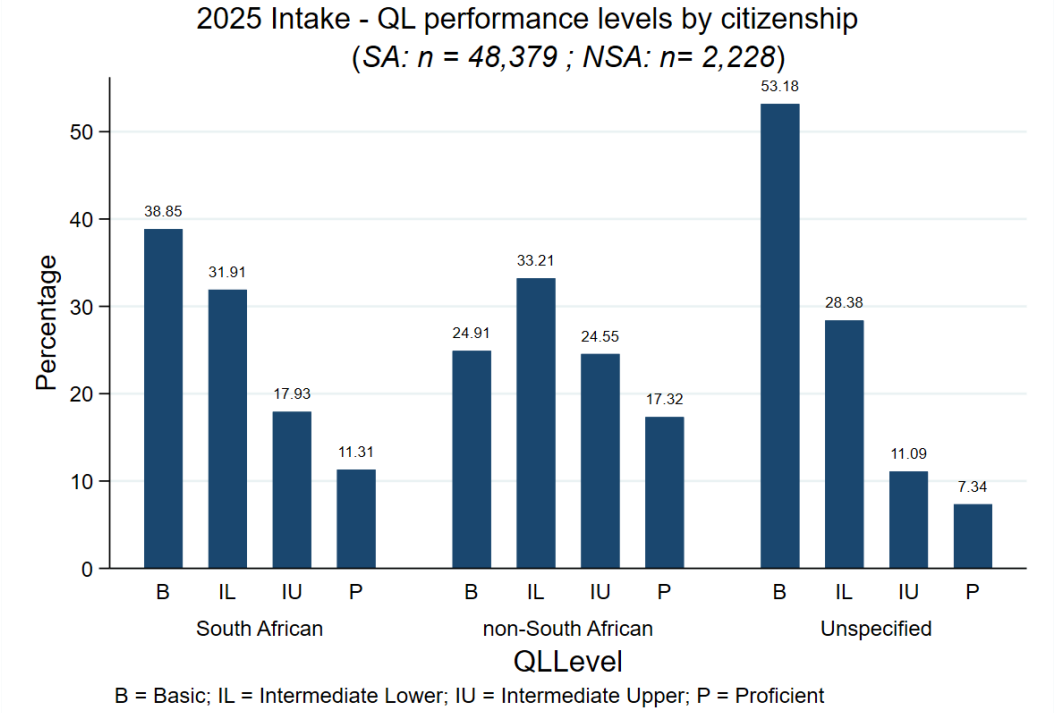

Figure 11: NBT QL performance levels by citizenship: 2025 intake

5.5.3 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 19.45% compared to 12.74% for South African candidates. In the Basic and Intermediate Lower bands, over 70% of scores across all categories fell within these bands. These results suggest that all groups may require additional MAT support.

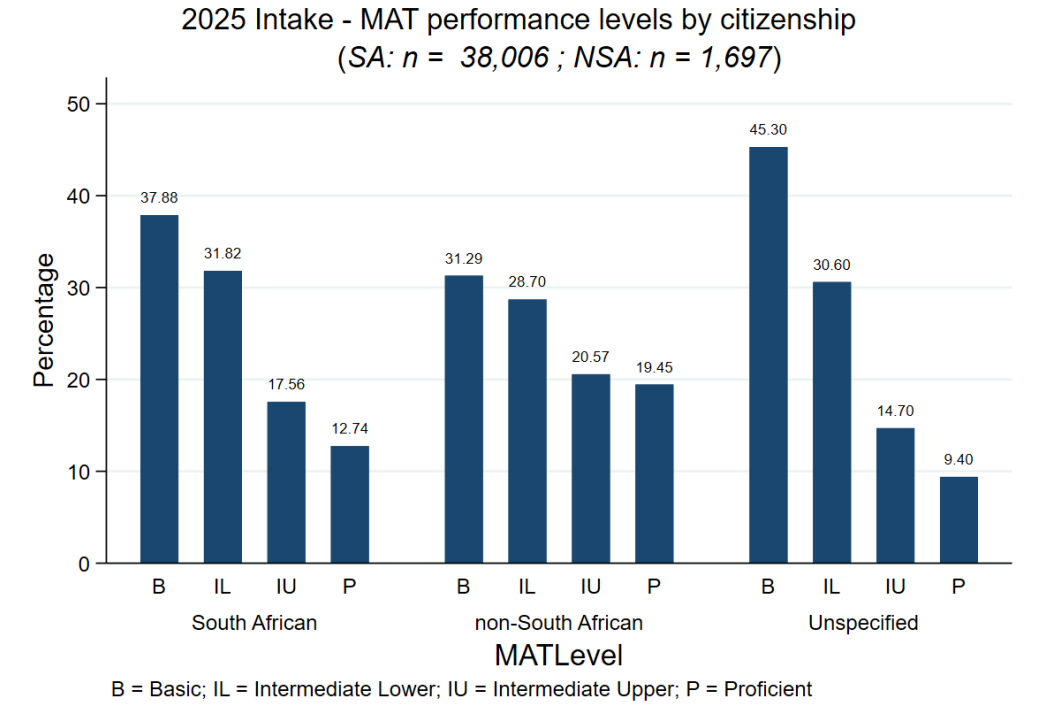

Figure 12: NBT MAT performance levels by citizenship: 2025 intake

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: 2025 intake

Skill Assessed	n	Mean %	SD %	Min. %	1st Quartile %	Median %	3rd Quartile %	Max. %
Cohesion (AL1)	51 226	68.59	20.39	0	56	67	83	100
Communicative function (AL2)	51 226	61.16	21.21	0	45	62	78	100
Discourse relations (AL3)	51 226	62.21	23.87	0	50	67	83	100
Essential/ non-essential (AL4)	51 226	59.14	19.39	0	45	60	75	100
Grammar/ syntax (AL5)	51 226	59.37	28.97	0	33	60	75	100
Inferencing (AL6)	51 226	54.72	19.26	0	40	55	69	100
Metaphorical expression (AL7)	51 226	54.75	23.13	0	38	56	73	100
Text genre (AL8)	51 226	45.84	25.75	0	25	50	67	100
Vocabulary (AL9)	51 226	52.99	21.51	0	40	50	70	100

Table 13: NBT AL subdomains median (p50) performance indicator per faculty: 2025 intake

Faculty	AL1	AL2	AL3	AL4	AL5	AL6	AL7	AL8	AL9
Allied Healthcare/Nursing	67	50	50	50	50	43	42	33	43
Art/Design	67	64	67	58	60	55	56	50	50
Business/Commerce/ Management	73	67	67	64	75	62	60	50	57
Education	56	45	50	45	50	40	40	33	43
Engineering/Built Environment	71	62	67	62	67	60	58	50	57
Health Science	71	62	67	62	60	54	55	50	50
Hospitality/Tourism	57	50	50	45	50	40	40	40	43
Humanities	67	67	67	62	67	57	60	50	50
ICT	67	60	67	58	50	56	56	50	50
Law	67	60	67	58	50	54	56	50	50
Mathematics/Science	75	67	71	67	75	62	67	50	57
Other/Unspecified	71	64	67	58	67	55	56	50	57
Total	67	62	67	60	60	55	56	50	50

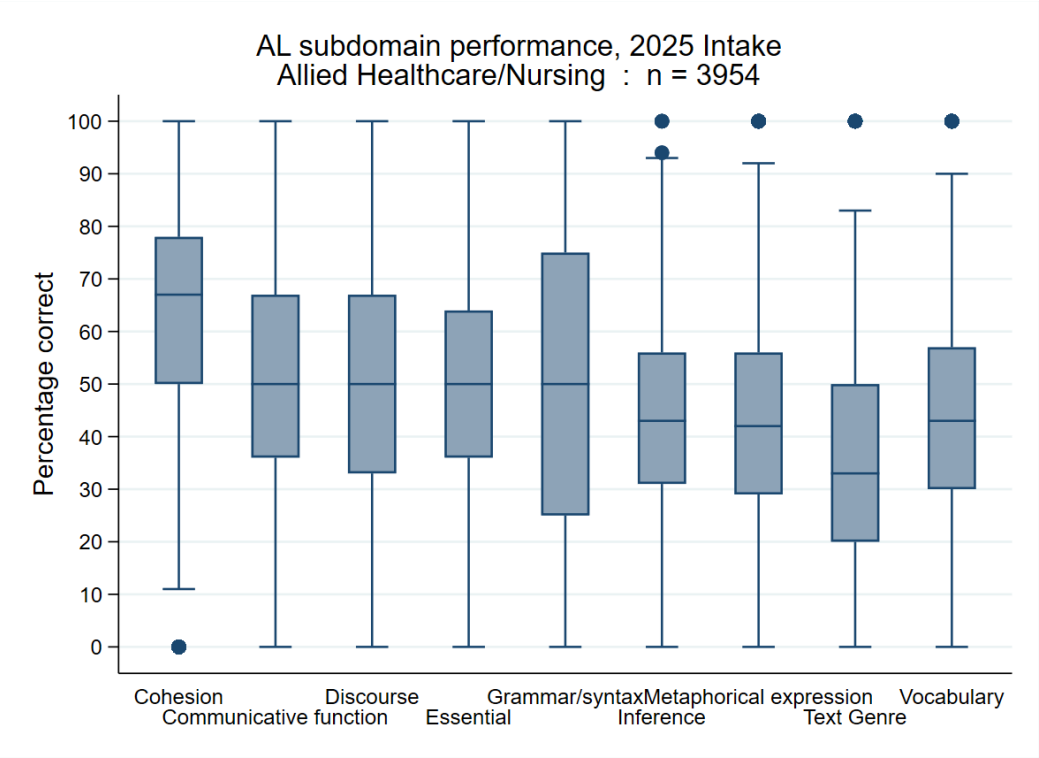

Figure 13: Allied Healthcare/Nursing AL subdomain performance: 2025 intake

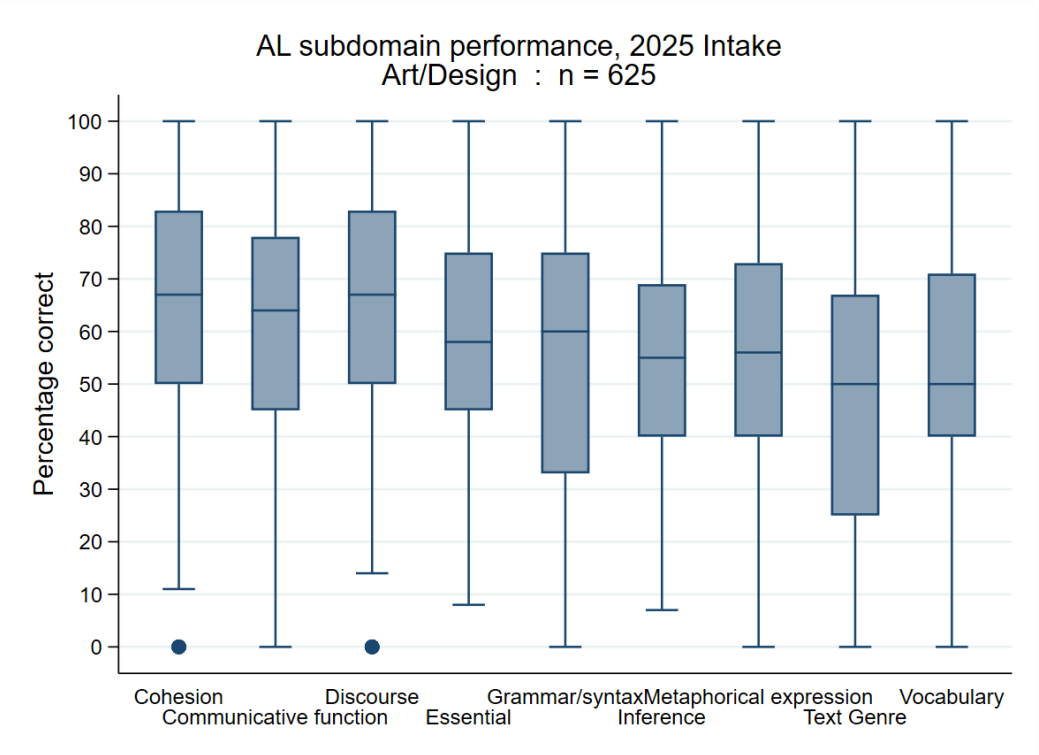

Figure 14: Art and Design AL subdomain performance: 2025 intake

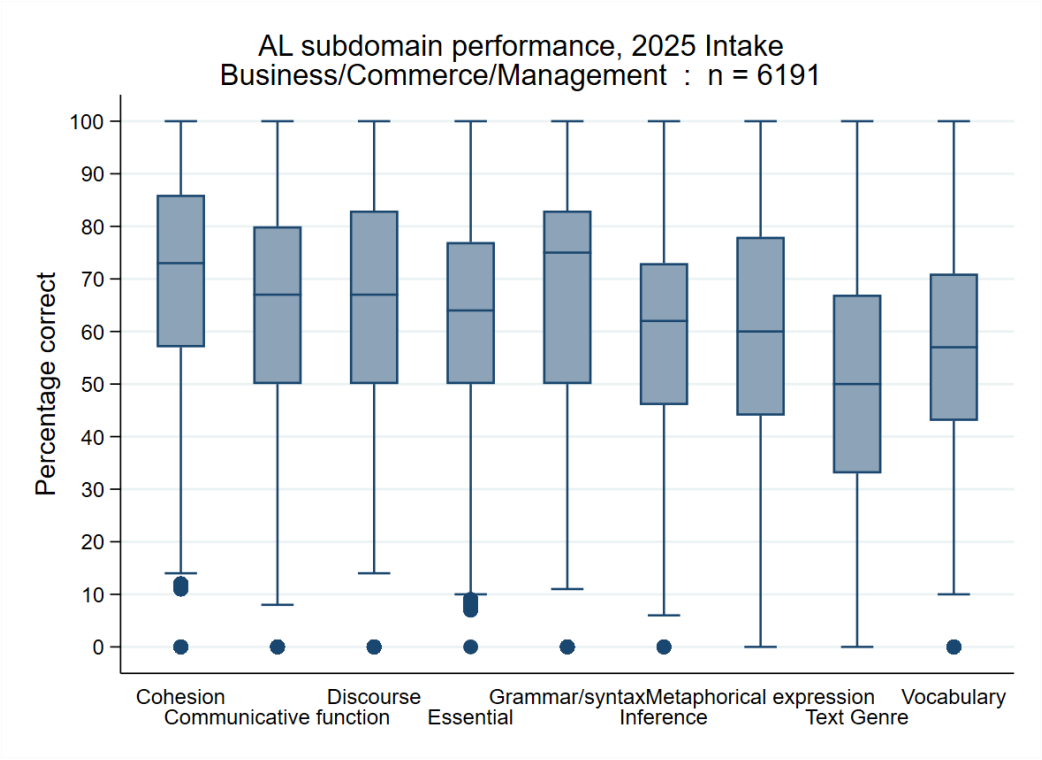

Figure 15: Business/Commerce/Management AL subdomain performance: 2025 intake

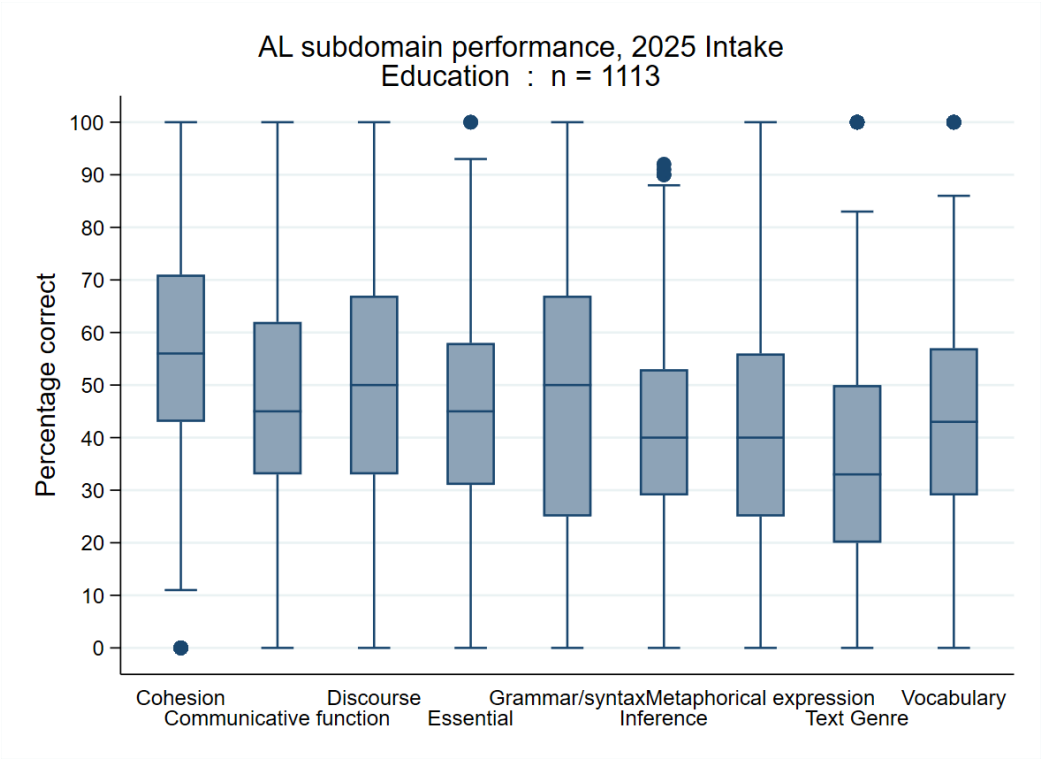

Figure 16: Education AL subdomain performance: 2025 intake

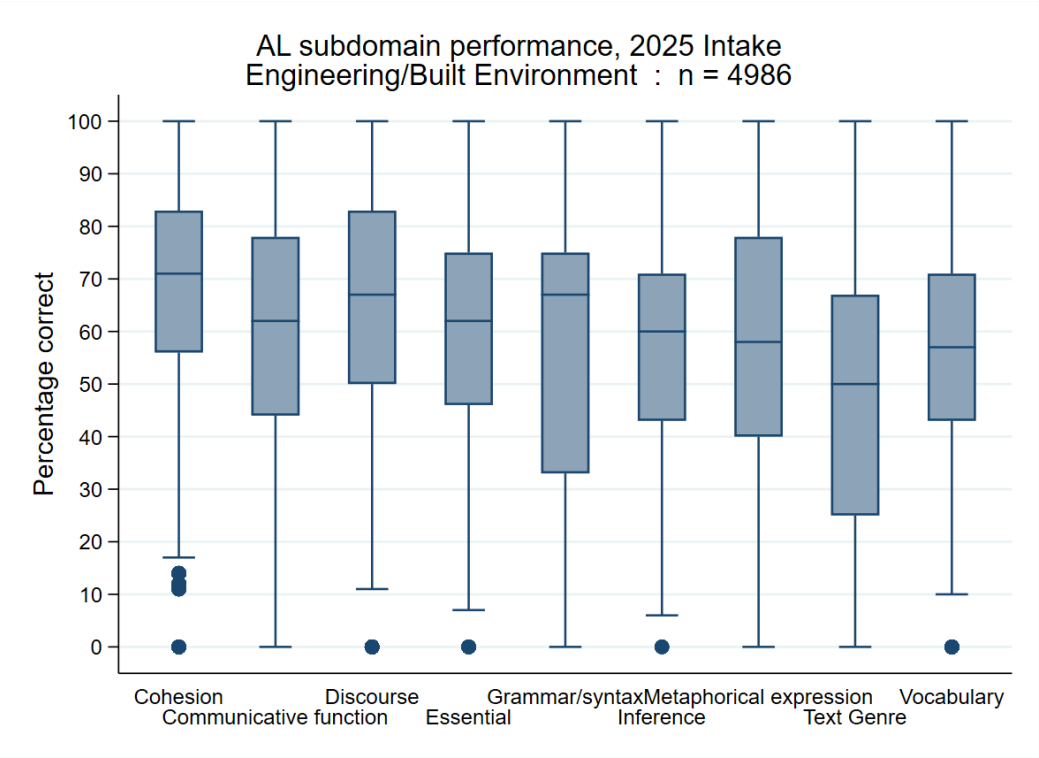

Figure 17: Engineering/Built Environment AL subdomain performance: 2025 intake

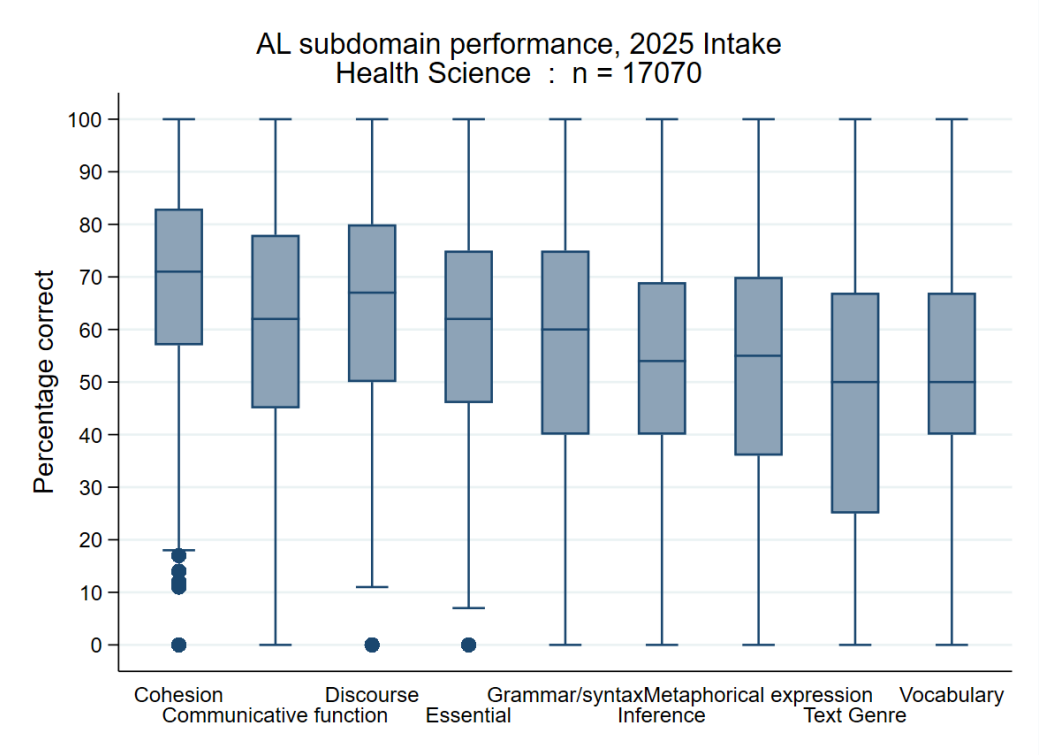

Figure 18: Health Sciences AL subdomain performance: 2025 intake

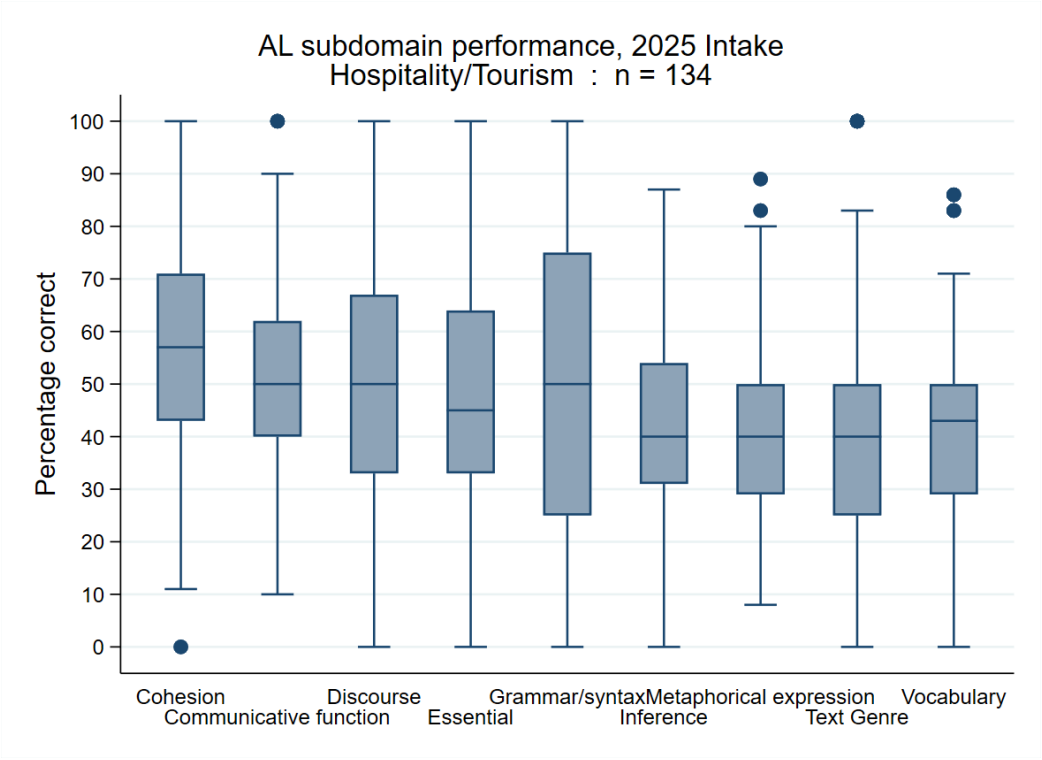

Figure 19: Hospitality/Tourism AL subdomain performance: 2025 intake

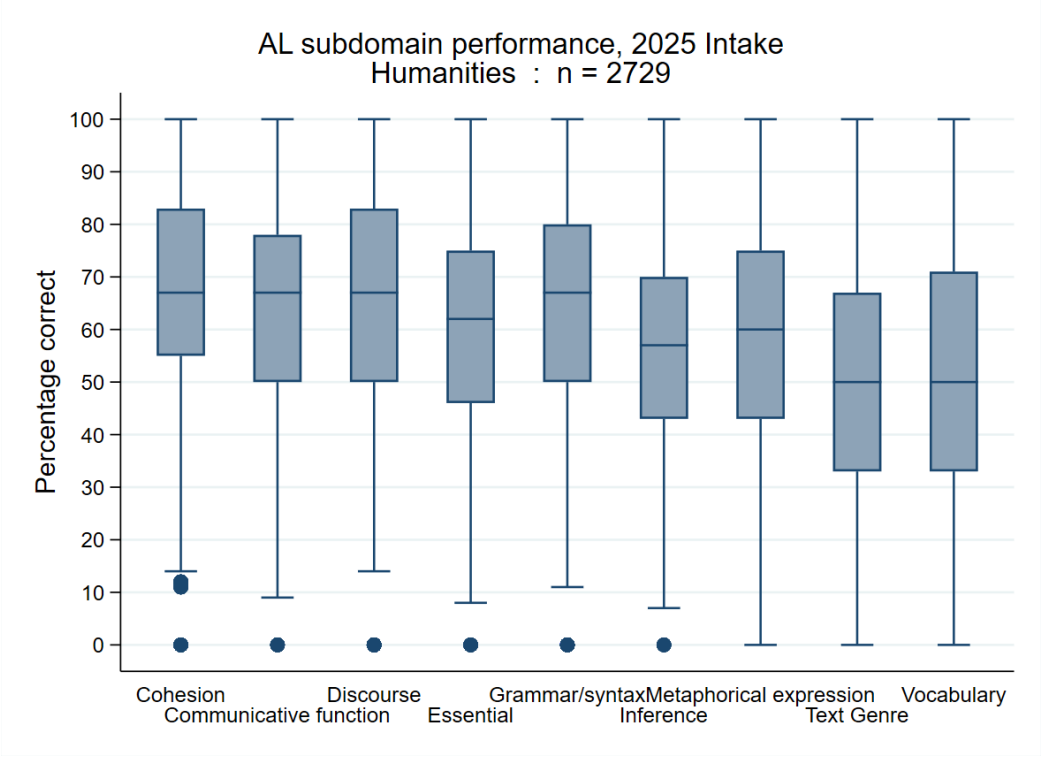

Figure 20: Humanities AL subdomain performance: 2025 intake

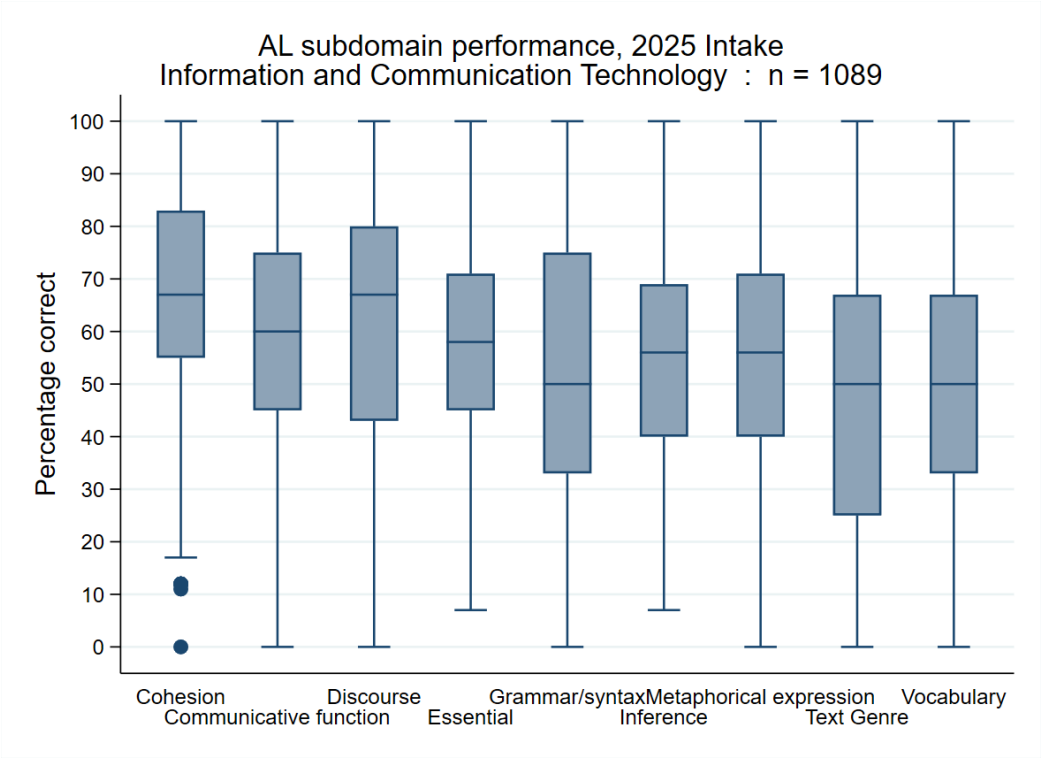

Figure 21: Information and Communication Technology AL subdomain performance: 2025 intake

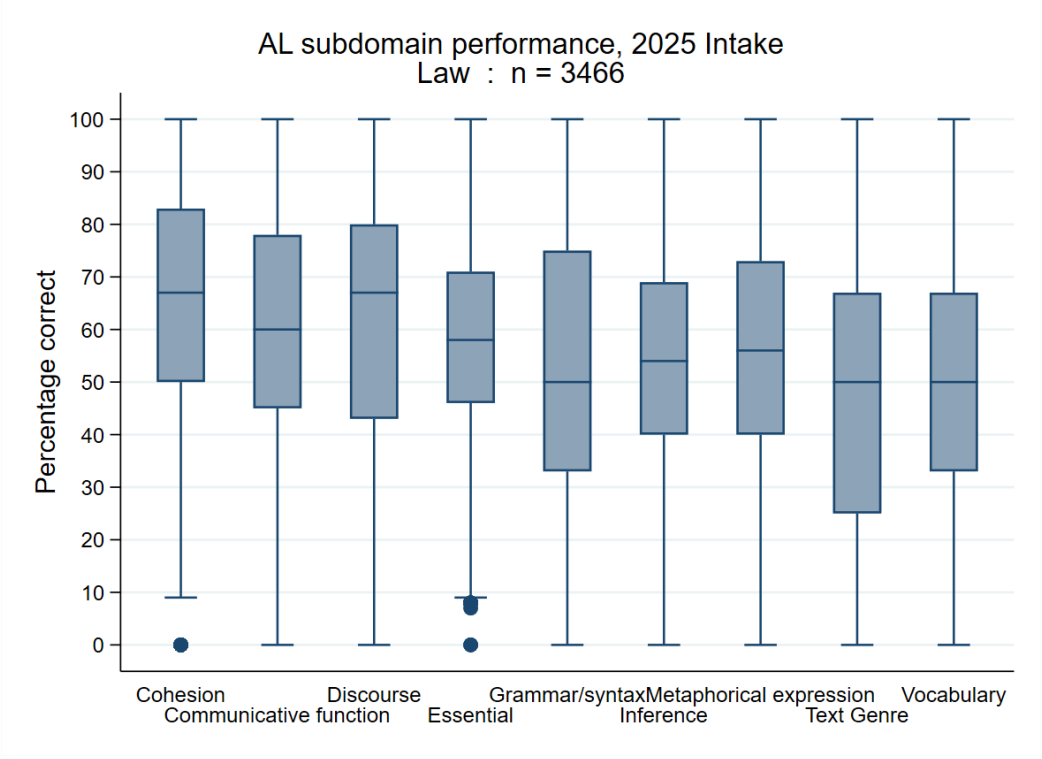

Figure 22: Law AL subdomain performance: 2025 intake

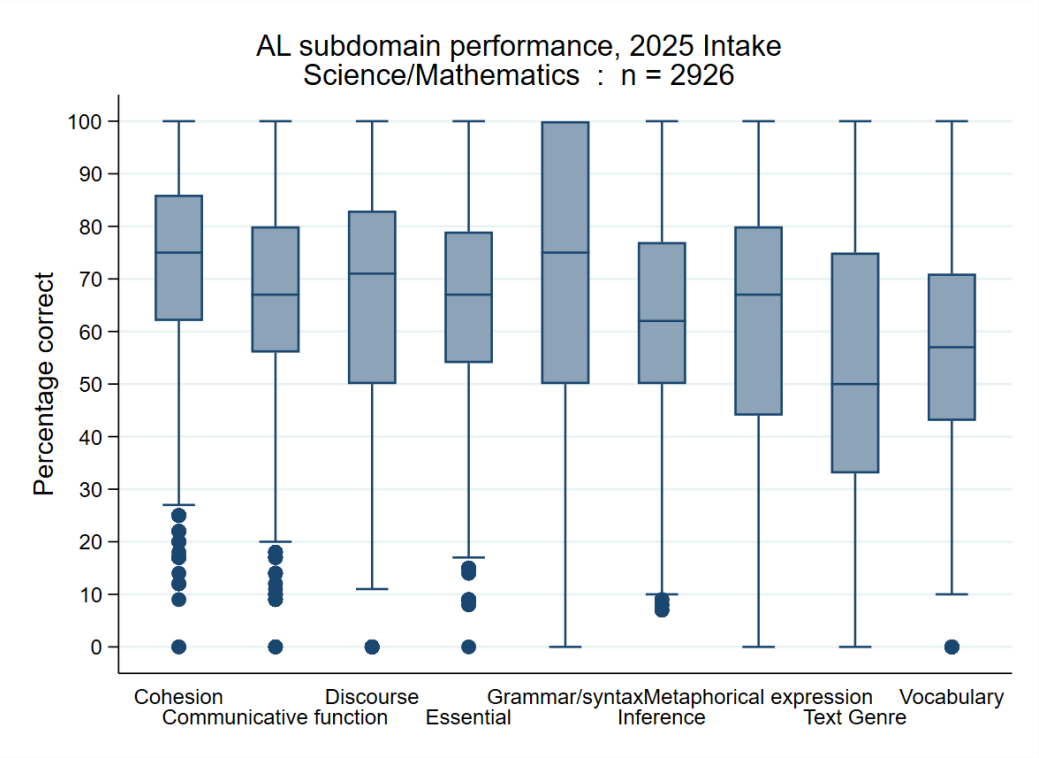

Figure 23: Science/Mathematics AL subdomain performance: 2025 intake

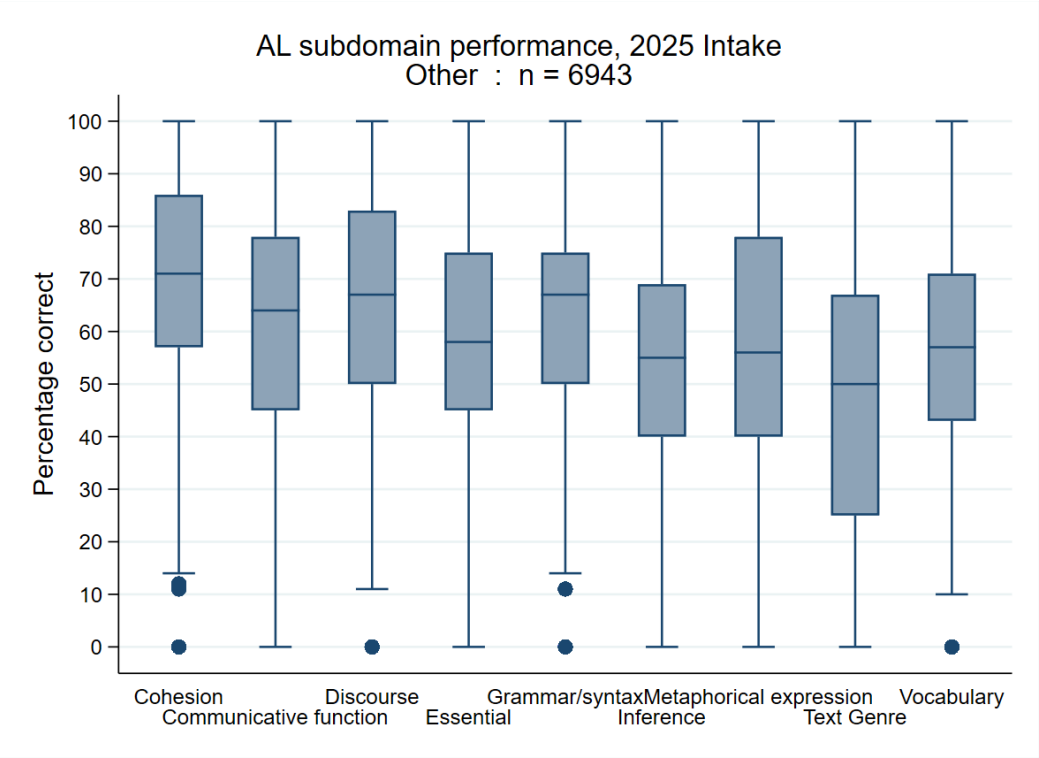

Figure 24: Other AL subdomain performance: 2025 intake

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: 2025 intake

Skill Assessed	n	Mean %	SD %	Min. %	1st Quartile %	Median %	3rd Quartile %	Max. %
Change and rates (QL1)	51 220	35.58	26.63	0	25	25	50	100
Data representation and analysis (QL2)	51 220	50.73	19.54	0	38	50	64	100
Chance and uncertainty (QL3)	51 220	53.30	32.00	0	33	67	67	100
Quantity number and operations (QL4)	51 220	45.81	21.87	0	27	42	58	100
Relationships pattern and permutation (QL5)	51 220	49.48	23.55	0	29	50	67	100
Shape dimension and space (QL6)	51 220	52.31	22.95	0	38	50	71	100

Table 15: NBT QL subdomains median (p50) performance indicator per faculty: 2025 intake

Faculty	QL1	QL2	QL3	QL4	QL5	QL6
Allied Healthcare/Nursing	25	40	33	33	43	38
Art/Design	25	44	33	42	43	50
Business/Commerce/Management	50	56	67	50	57	50
Education	25	38	33	27	29	38
Engineering/Built Environment	40	56	67	50	57	57
Health Science	25	50	67	42.5	57	50
Hospitality/Tourism	25	37	33	27	29	38
Humanities	25	47	33	42	43	50
ICT	33	50	67	45	43	50
Law	25	44	33	42	43	43
Mathematics/Science	50	60	67	58	57	62
Other/Unspecified	25	50	67	45	43	50
Total	25	50	67	42	50	50

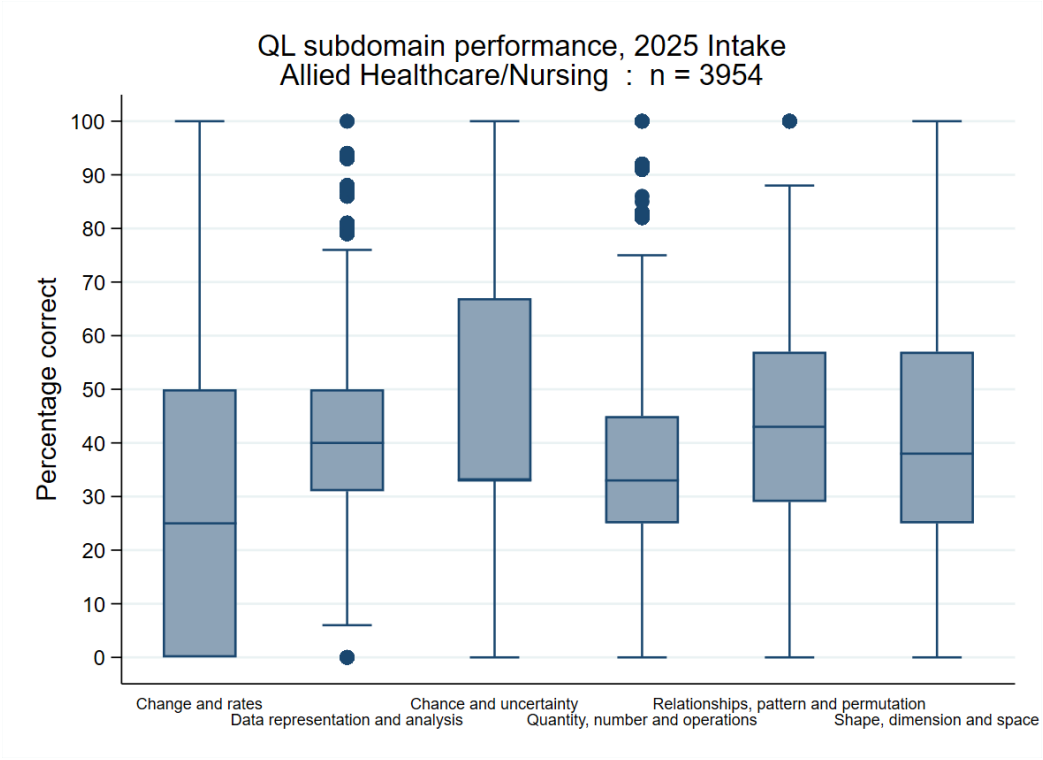

Figure 25: Allied Healthcare/Nursing QL subdomain performance: 2025 intake

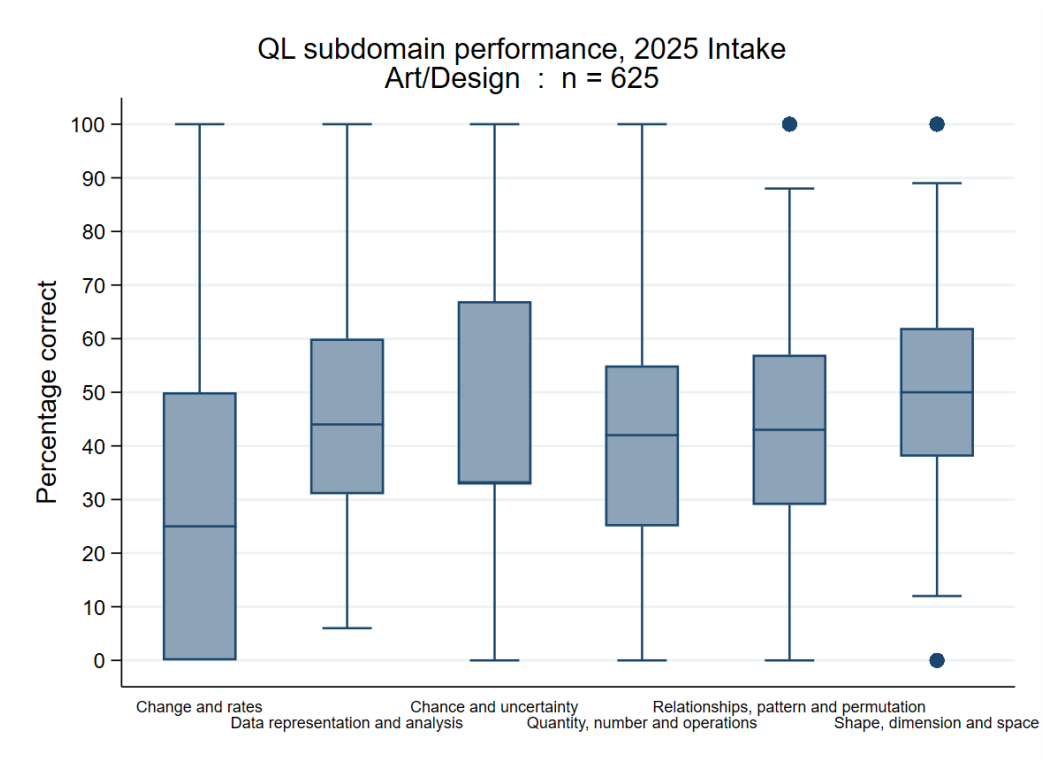

Figure 26: Art/Design QL subdomain performance: 2025 intake

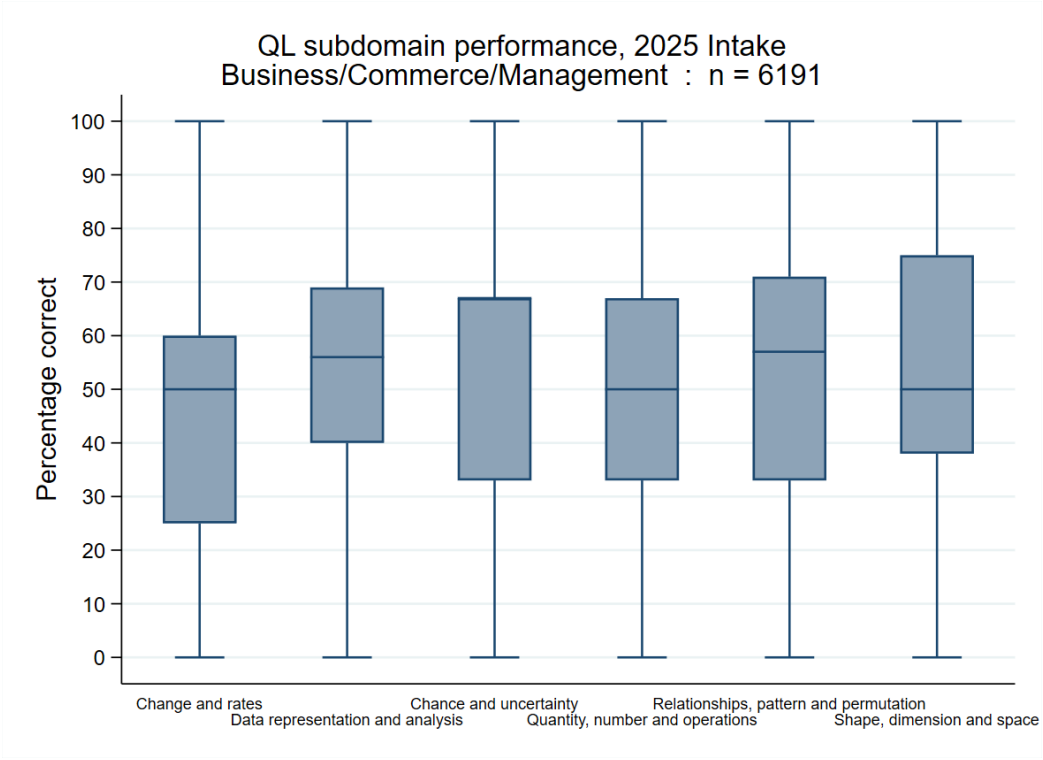

Figure 27: Business/Commerce/Management QL subdomain performance: 2025 intake

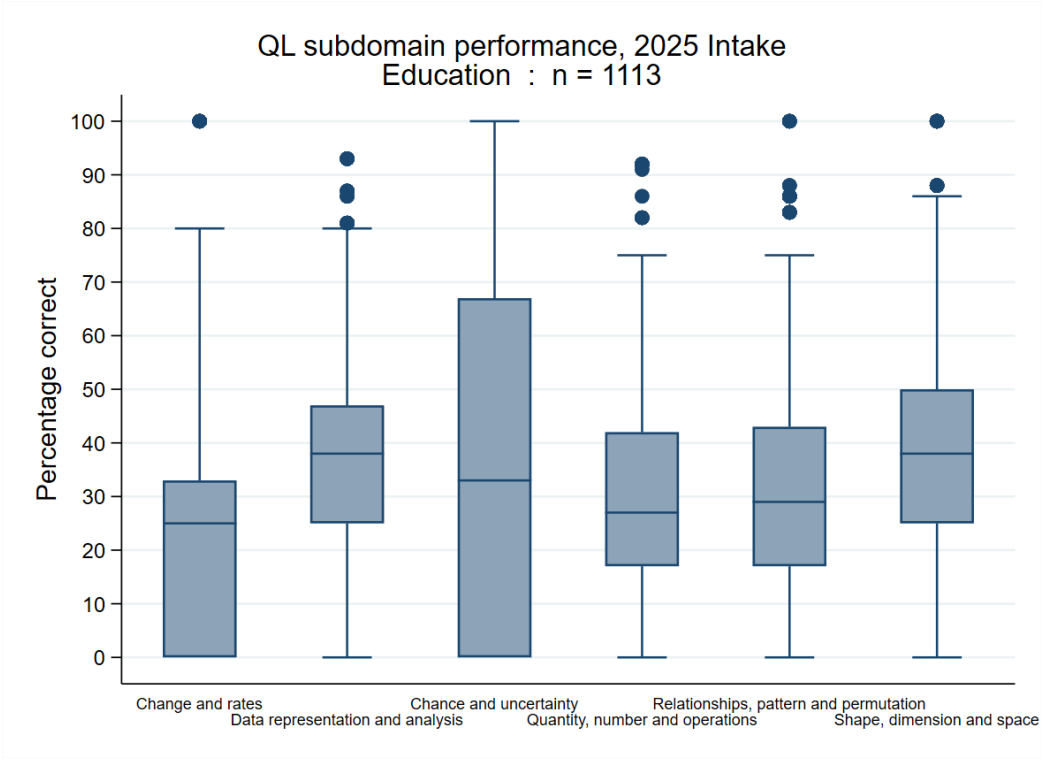

Figure 28: Education QL subdomain performance: 2025 intake

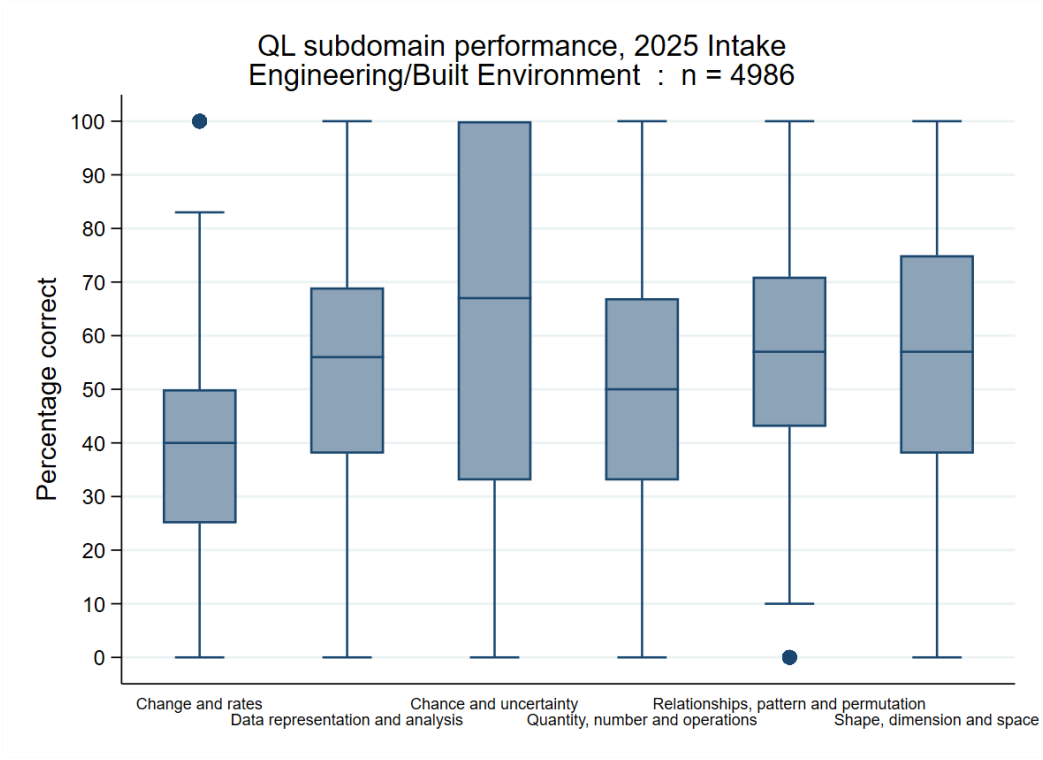

Figure 29: Engineering/Built Environment QL subdomain performance: 2025 intake

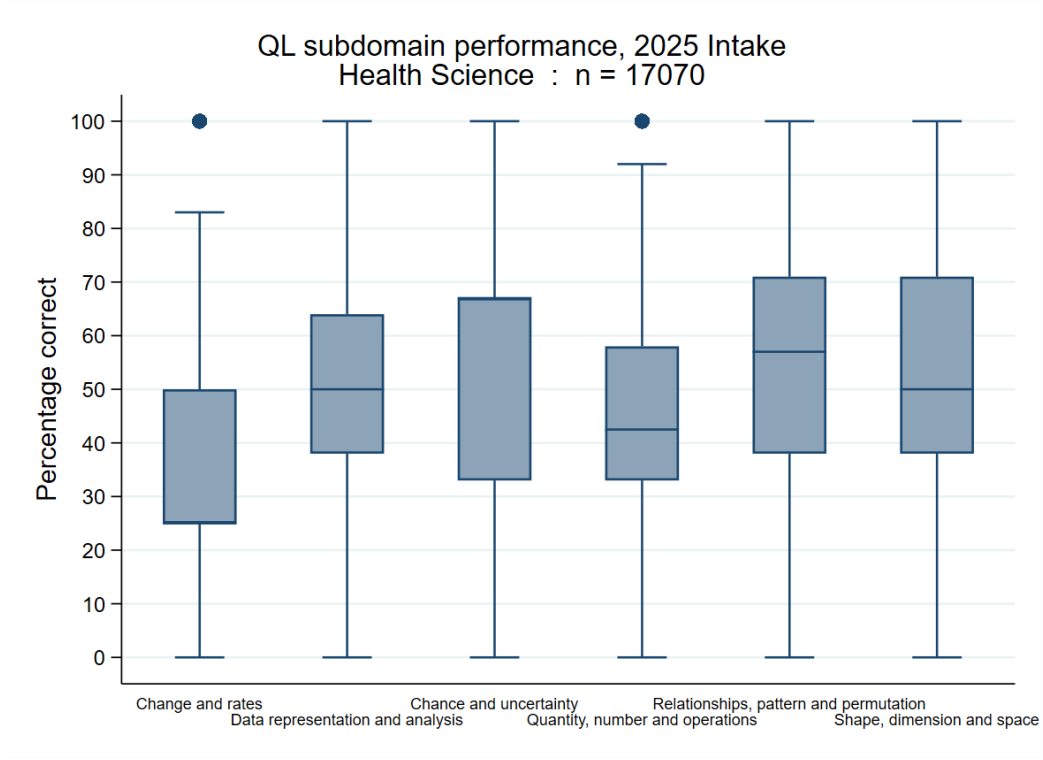

Figure 30: Health Sciences QL subdomain performance: 2025 intake

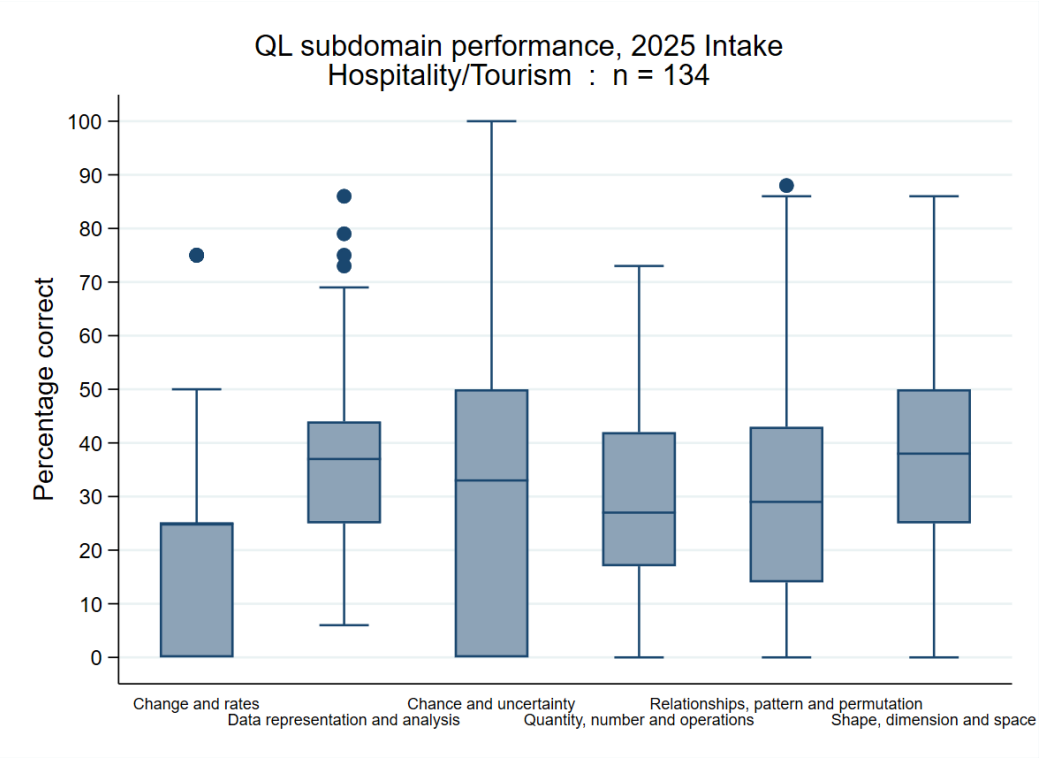

Figure 31: Hospitality/Tourism QL subdomain performance: 2025 intake

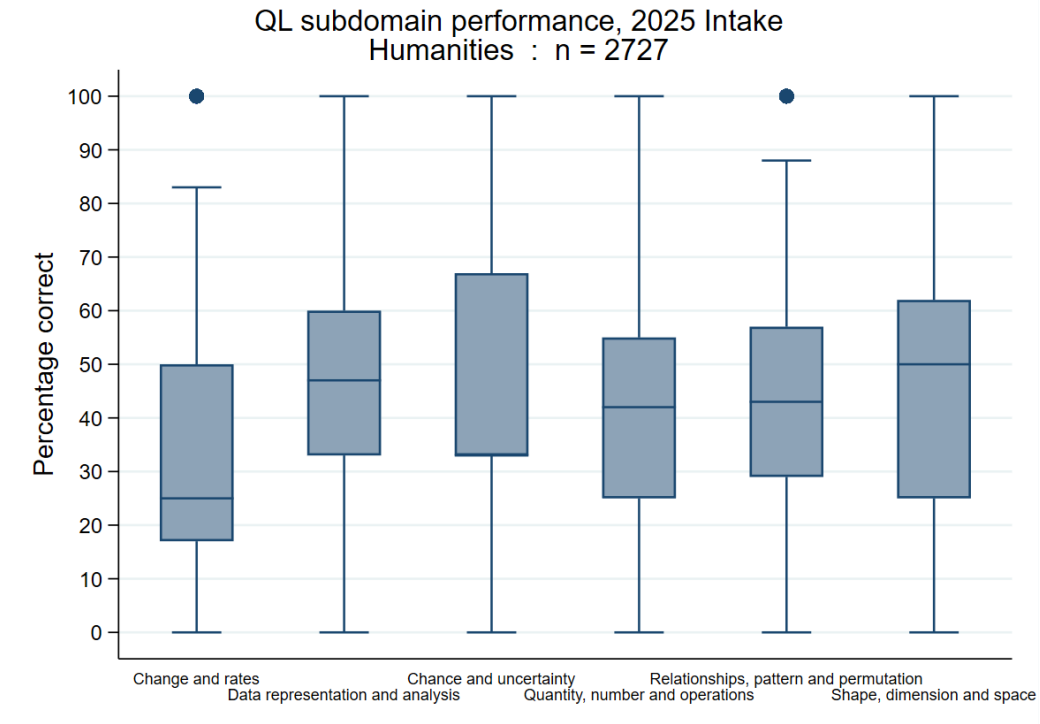

Figure 32: Humanities QL subdomain performance: 2025 intake

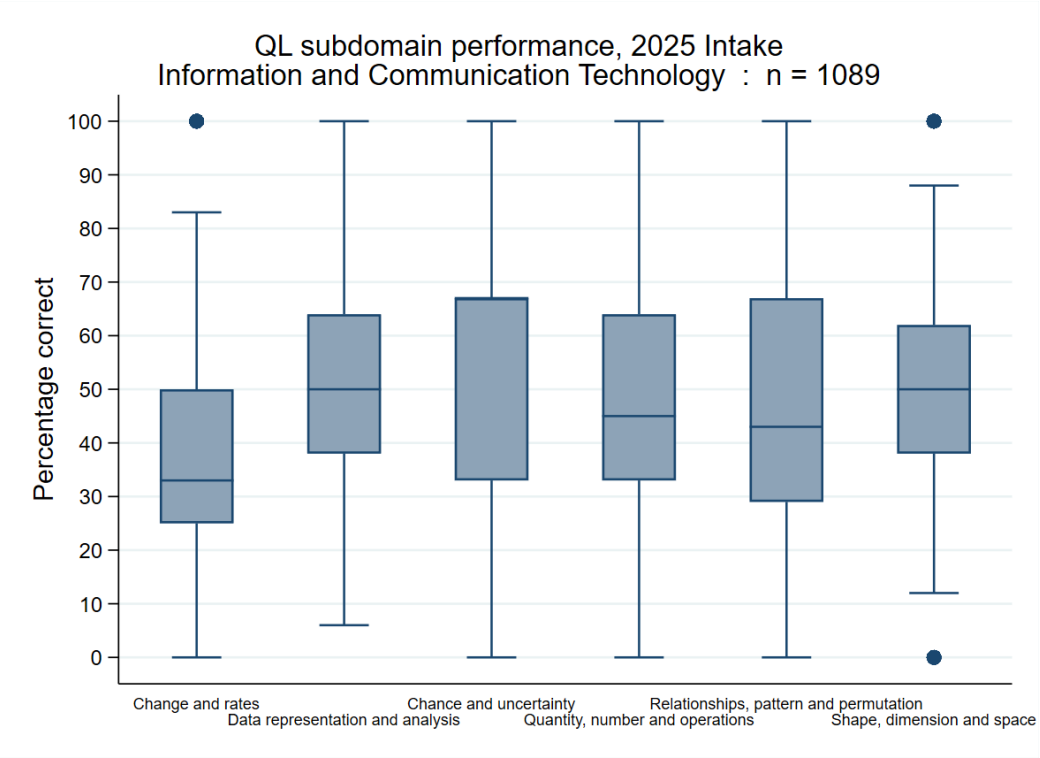

Figure 33: Information and Communication Technology QL subdomain performance: 2025 intake

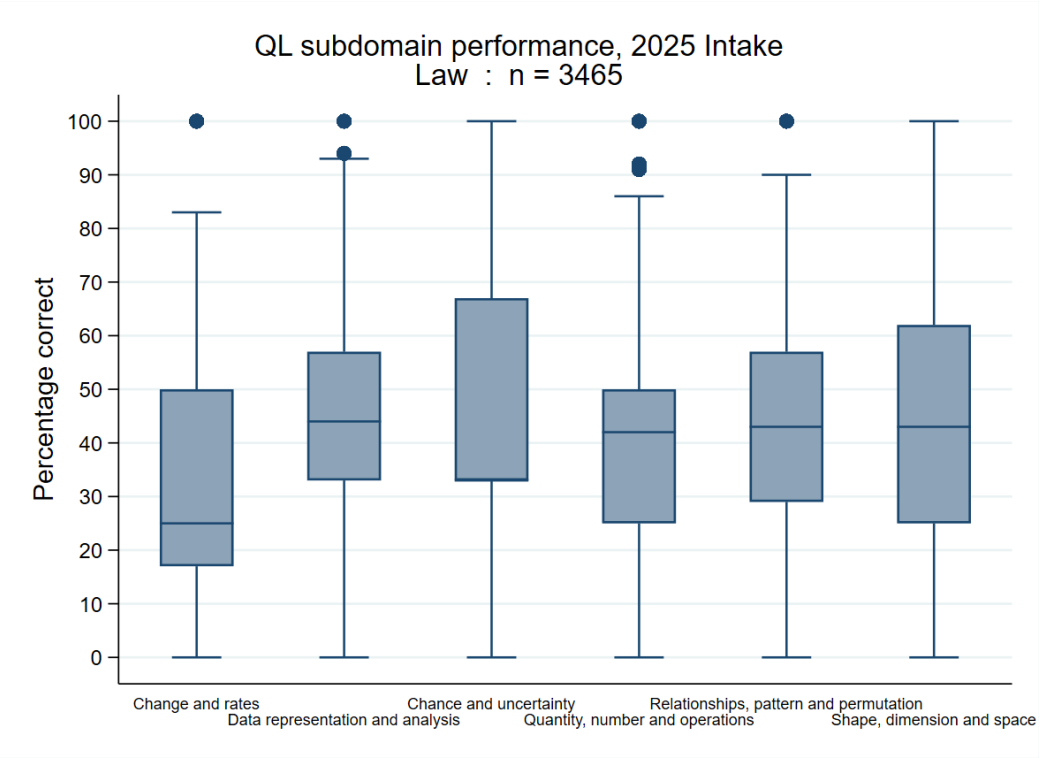

Figure 34: Law QL subdomain performance: 2025 intake

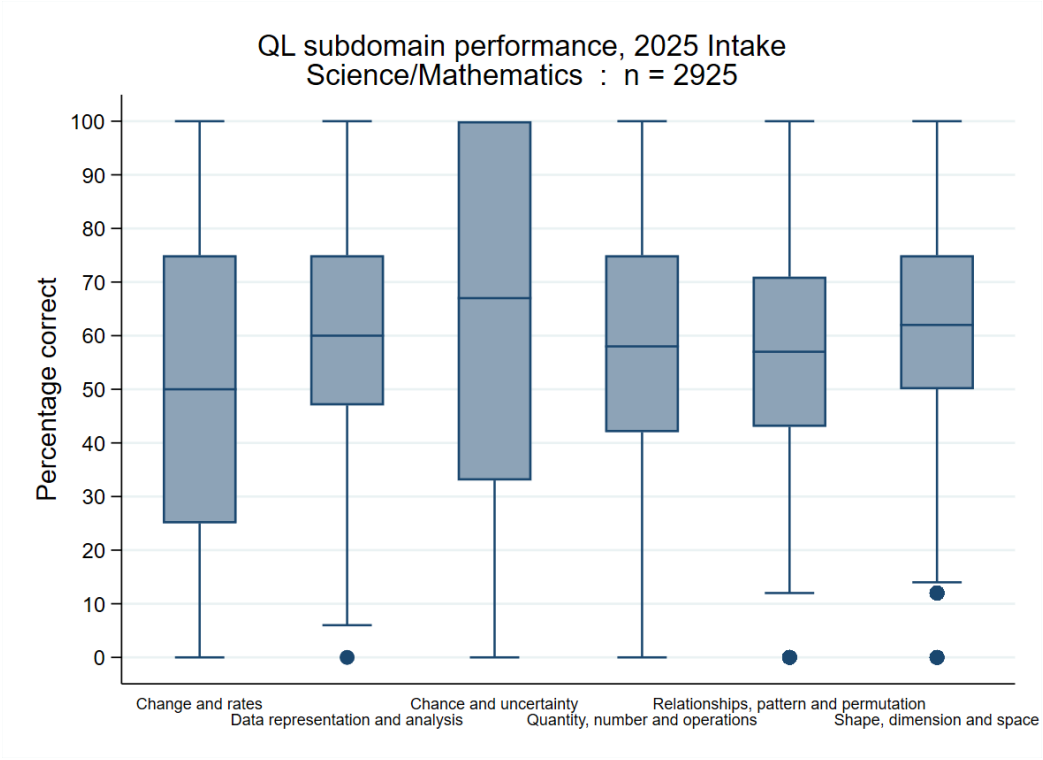

Figure 35: Science/Mathematics QL subdomain performance: 2025 intake

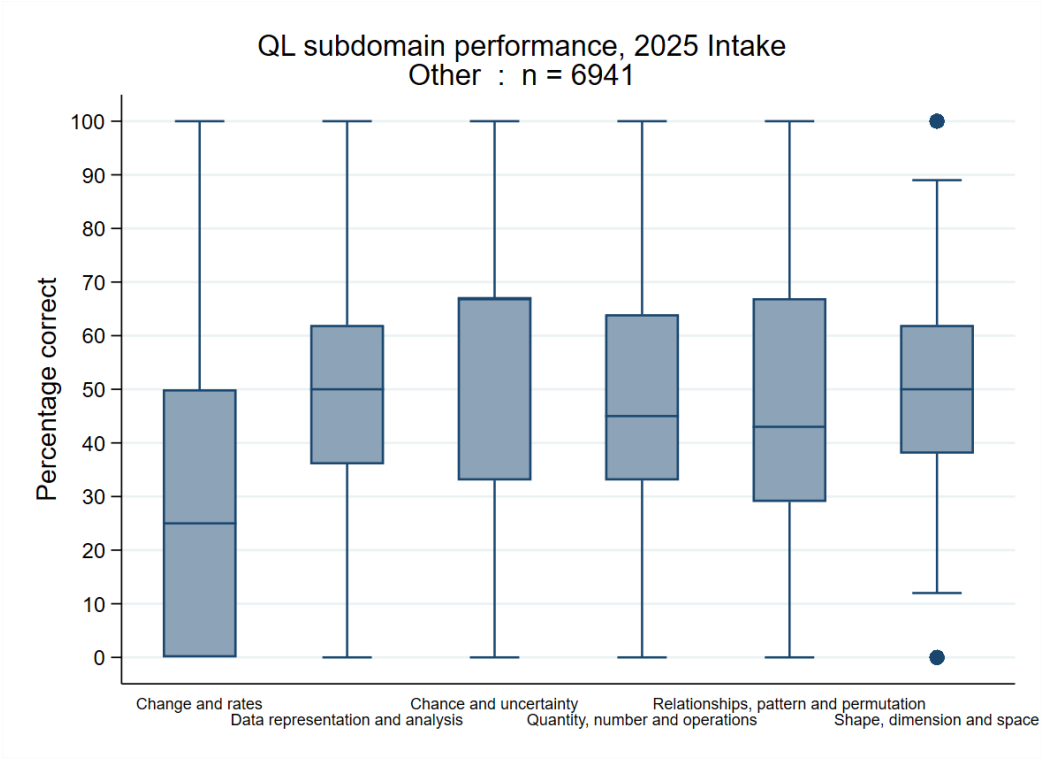

Figure 36: Other QL subdomain performance: 2025 intake3.6.3 The construct of the MAT test

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: 2025 intake

Skill Assessed	**n**	**Mean %**	**SD %**	**Min. %**	**1st Quartile %**	**Median %**	**3rd Quartile %**	**Max. %**
Algebraic processing (MAT M1)	40 118	49.09	21.81	0	33	47	67	100
Number sense (MAT M2)	40 118	35.82	28.44	0	20	25	50	100
Functions and graphs (MAT M3)	40 118	49.79	22.75	0	33	50	67	100
Trigonometric functions and graphs (MAT M4)	40 118	48.01	24.61	0	33	44	67	100
Geometric reasoning (MAT M5)	40 118	39.99	23.20	0	25	33	55	100

Table 17: NBT MAT subdomains median (p50) performance indicator per faculty: 2025 intake

Faculty	**MAT M1**	**MAT M2**	**MAT M3**	**MAT M4**	**MAT M5**
Allied Healthcare/Nursing	33	25	36	33	25
Art/Design	40	25	42	38	33
Business/Commerce/Management	47	25	50	44	38
Education	27	25	31	33	25
Engineering/Built Environment	53	33	50	50	42
Health Science	47	25	50	50	36
Hospitality/Tourism	40	25	33	33	27
Humanities	40	25	38	33	27
ICT	42	25	45	44	33
Law	33	25	33	33	25
Mathematics/Science	60	50	58	56	50
Other/Unspecified	47	25	50	44	38
Total	47	25	50	44	33

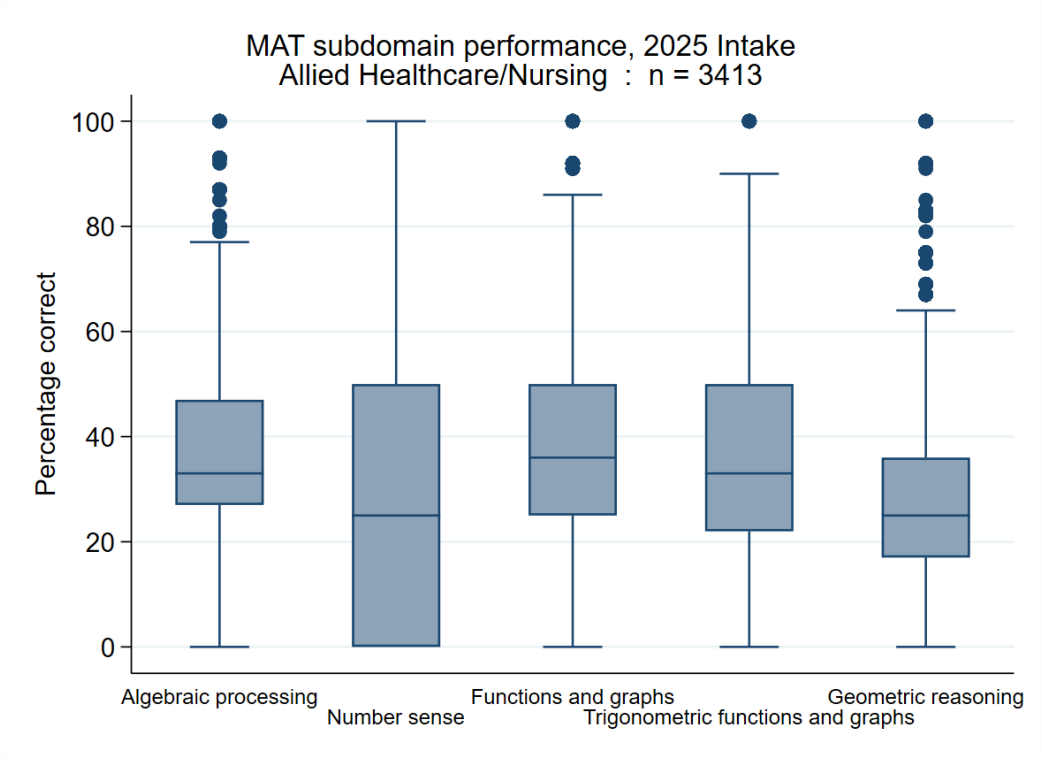

Figure 37: Allied Healthcare/Nursing MAT subdomain performance: 2025 intake

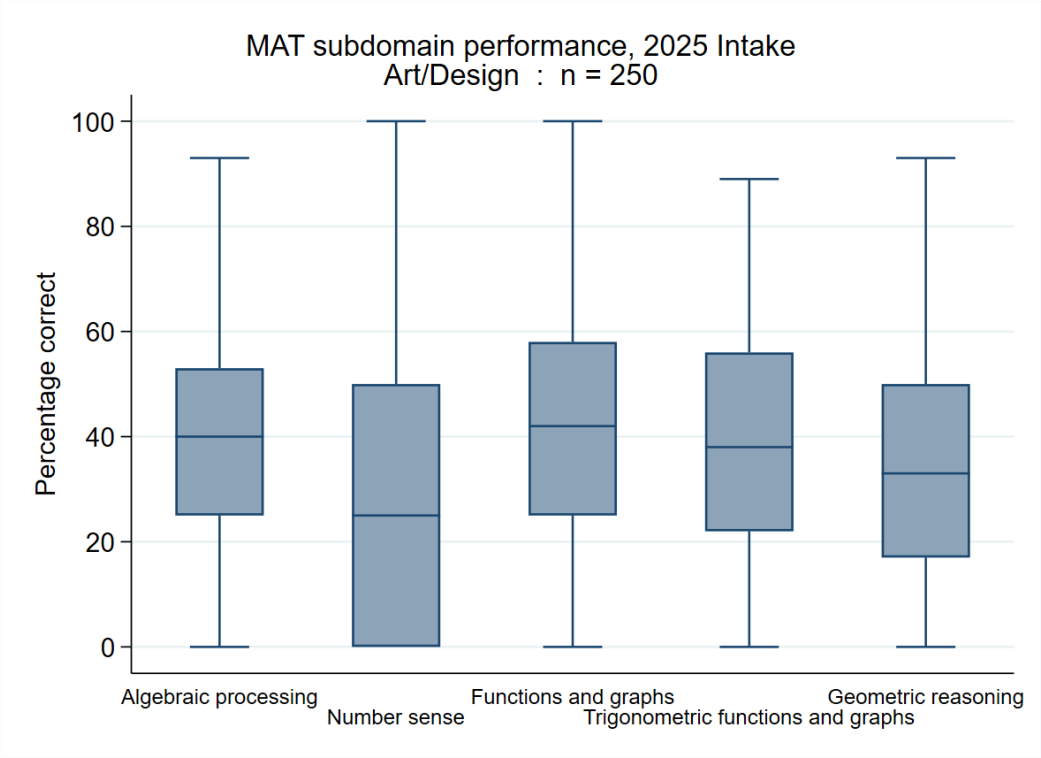

Figure 38: Art/Design MAT subdomain performance: 2025 intake

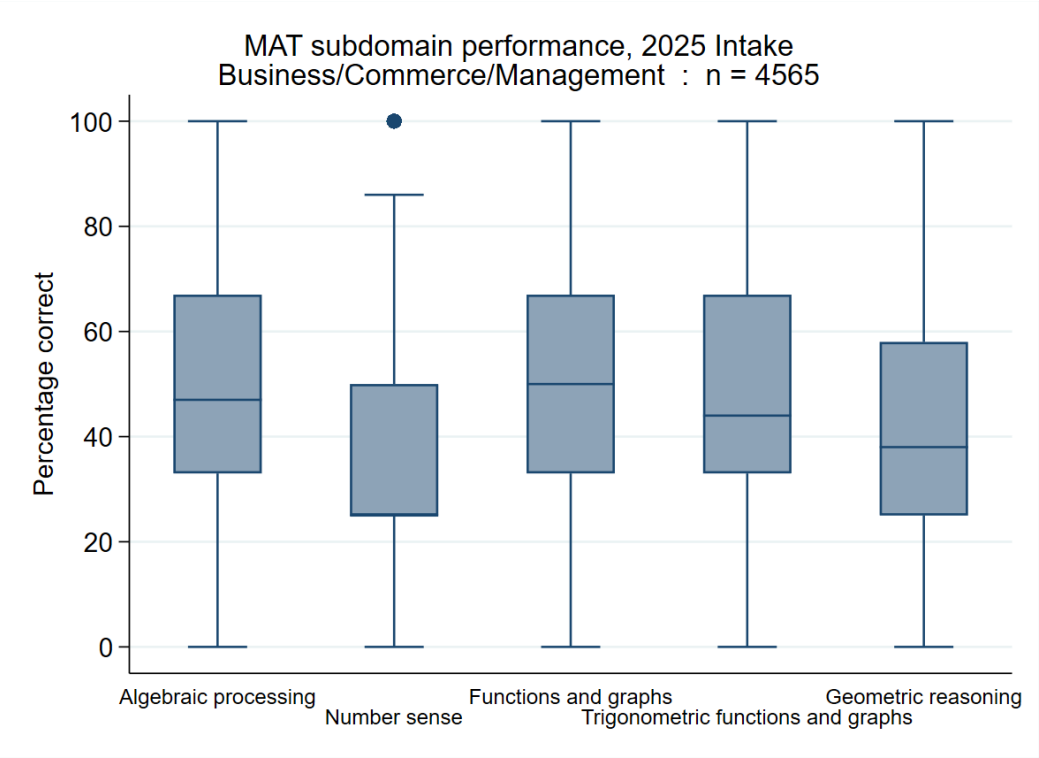

Figure 39: Business/Commerce/Management MAT subdomain performance: 2025 intake

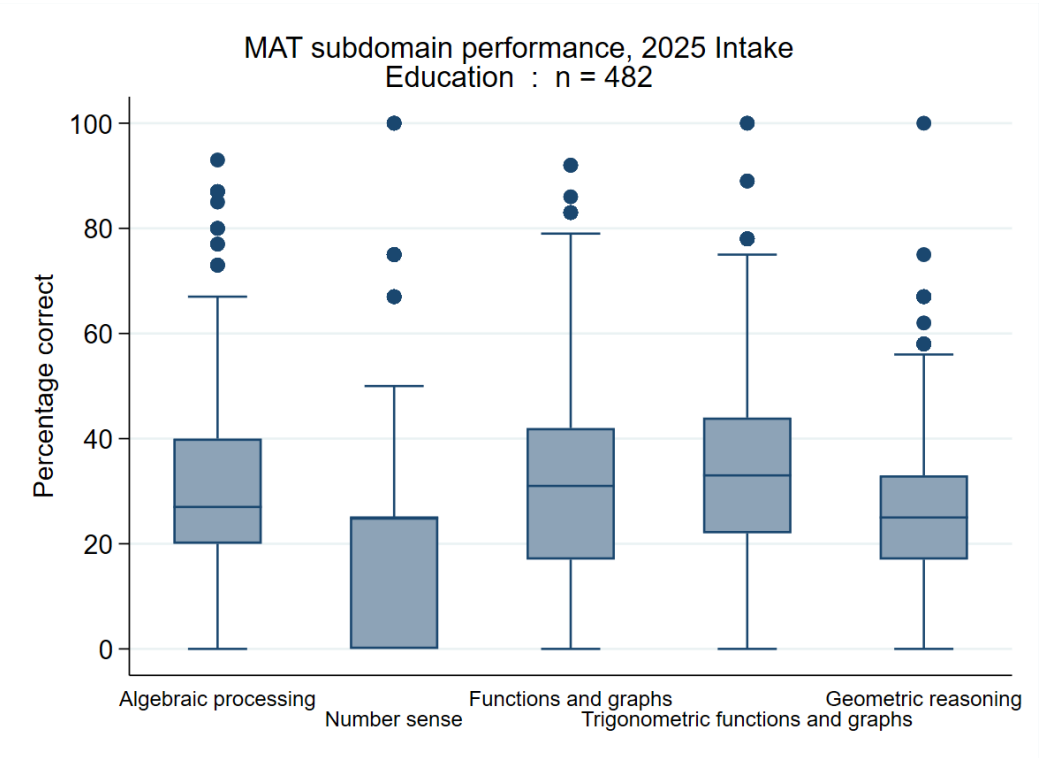

Figure 40: Education MAT subdomain performance: 2025 intake

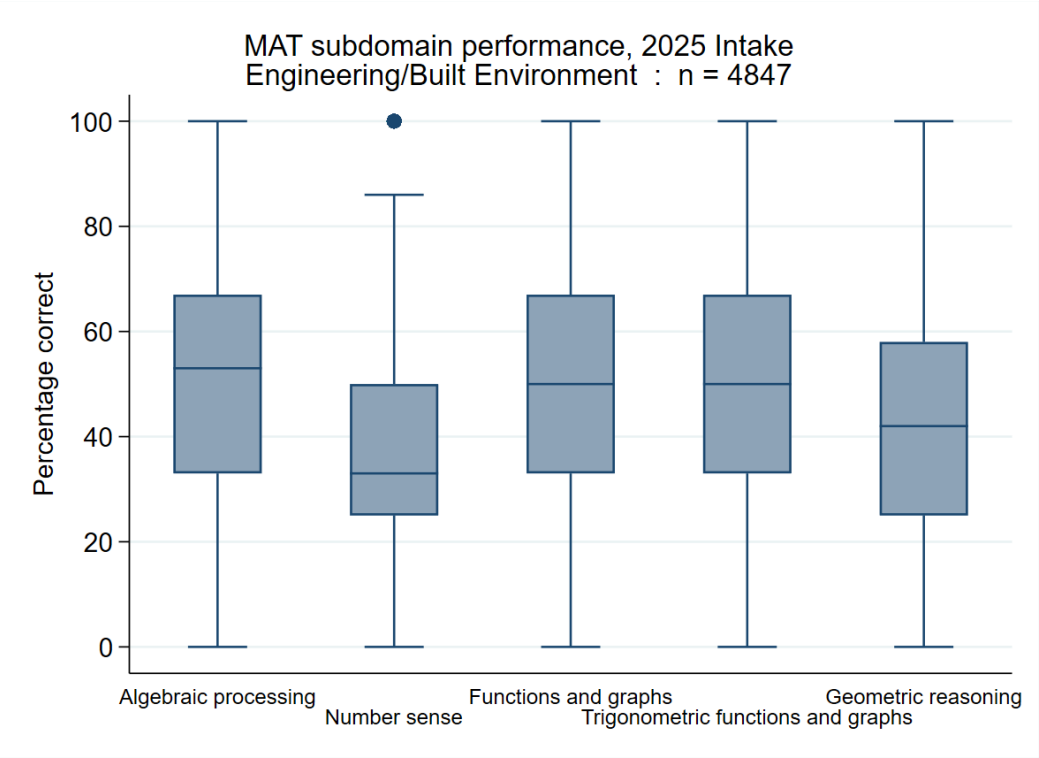

Figure 41: Engineering/Built Environment MAT subdomain performance: 2025 intake

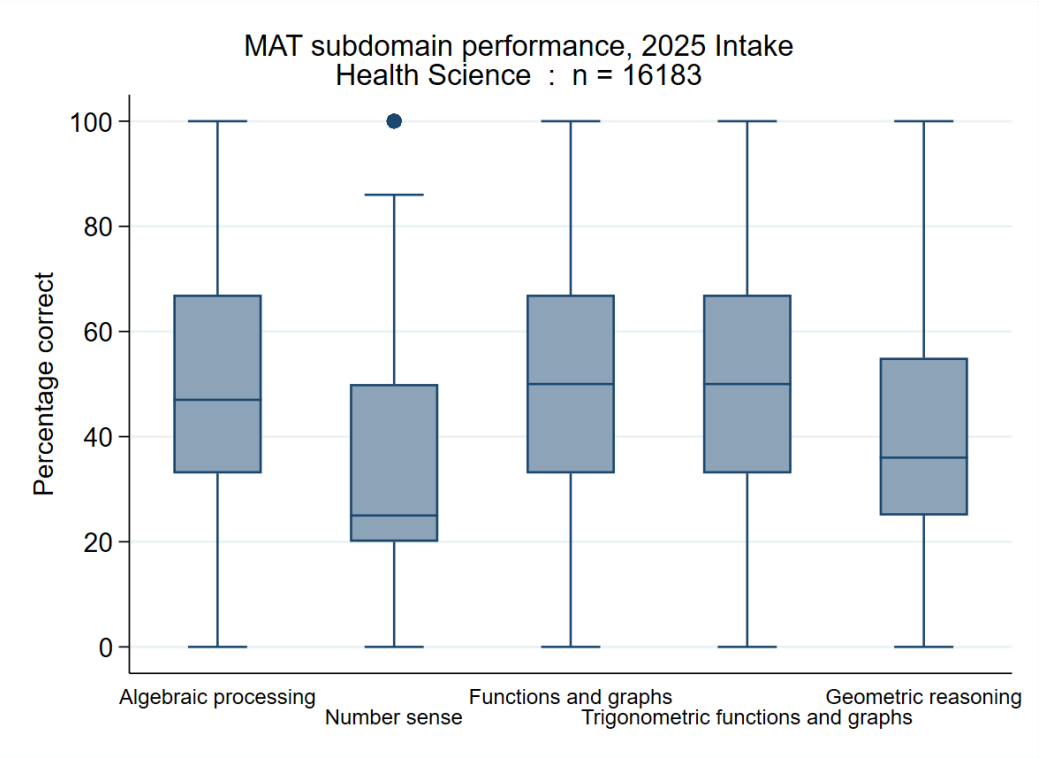

Figure 42: Health Sciences MAT subdomain performance: 2025 intake

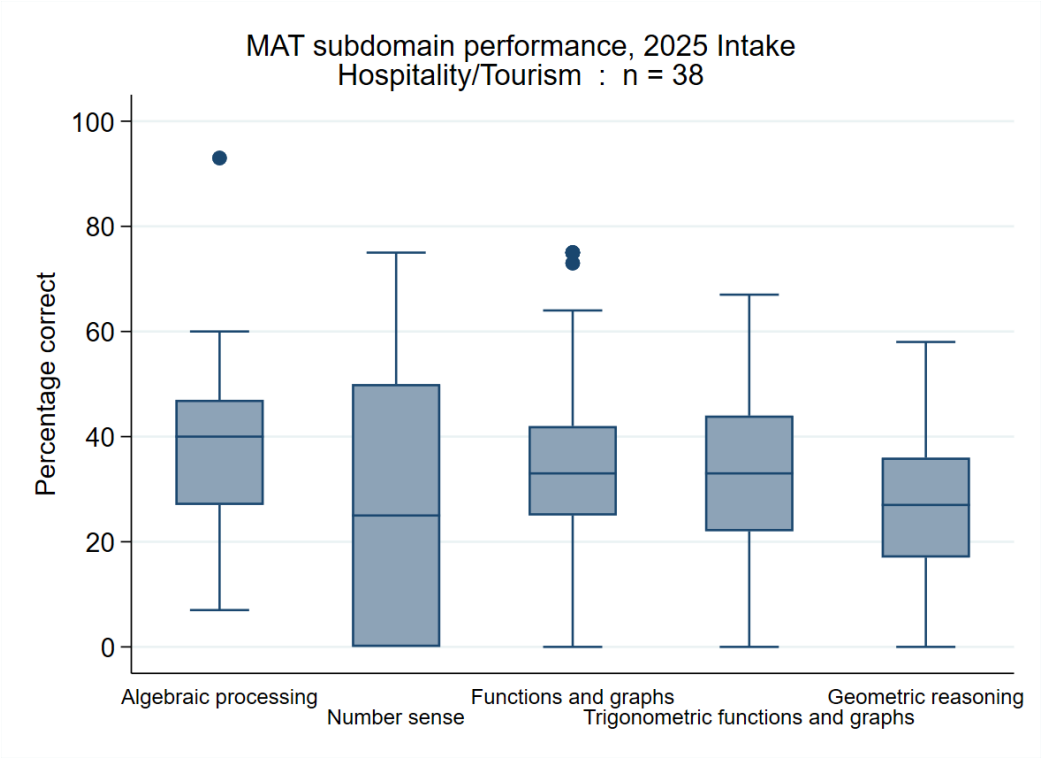

Figure 43: Hospitality/Tourism MAT subdomain performance: 2025 intake

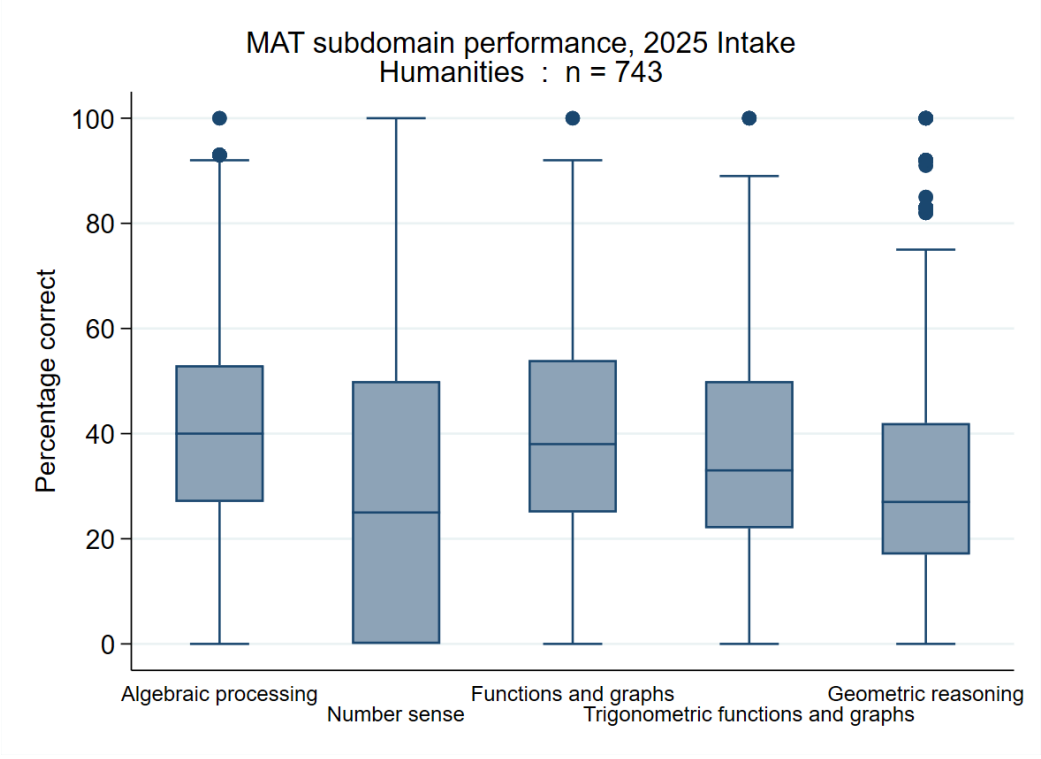

Figure 44: Humanities MAT subdomain performance: 2025 intake

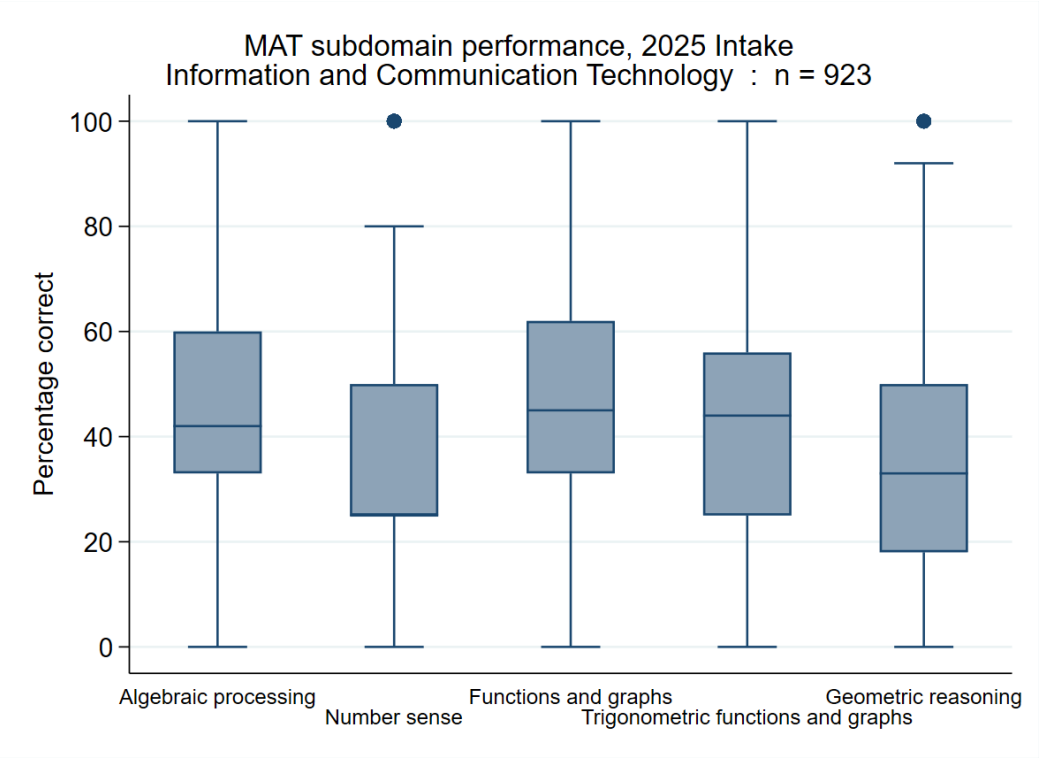

Figure 45: Information and Communication Technology MAT subdomain performance: 2025 intake

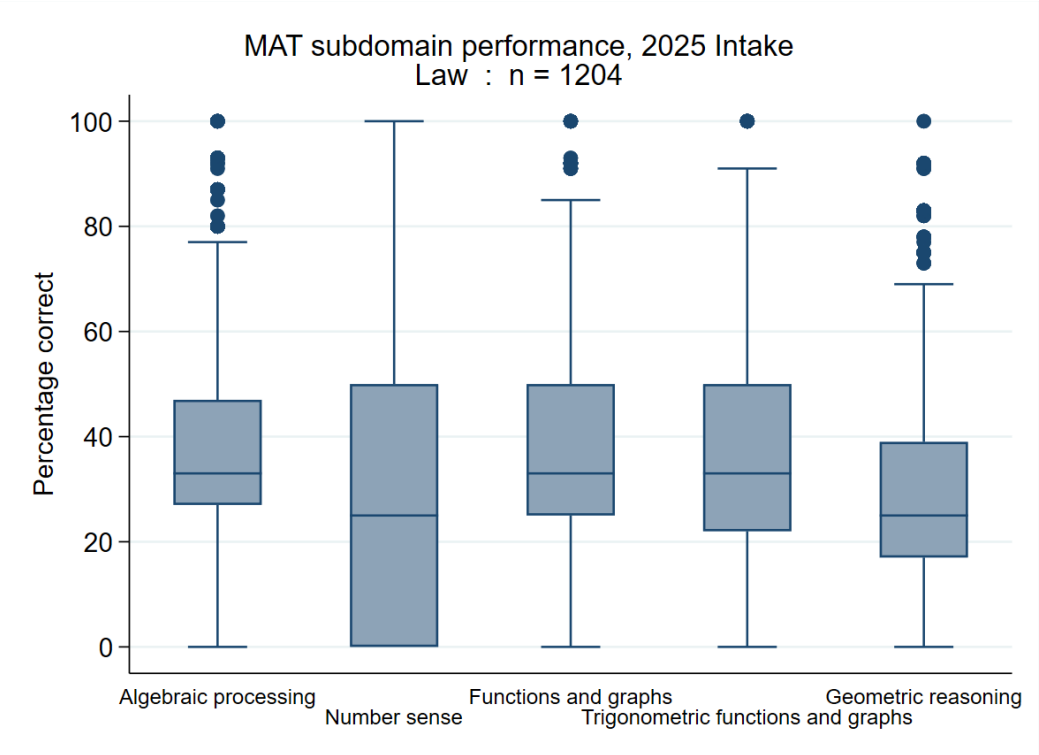

Figure 46: Law MAT subdomain performance: 2025 intake

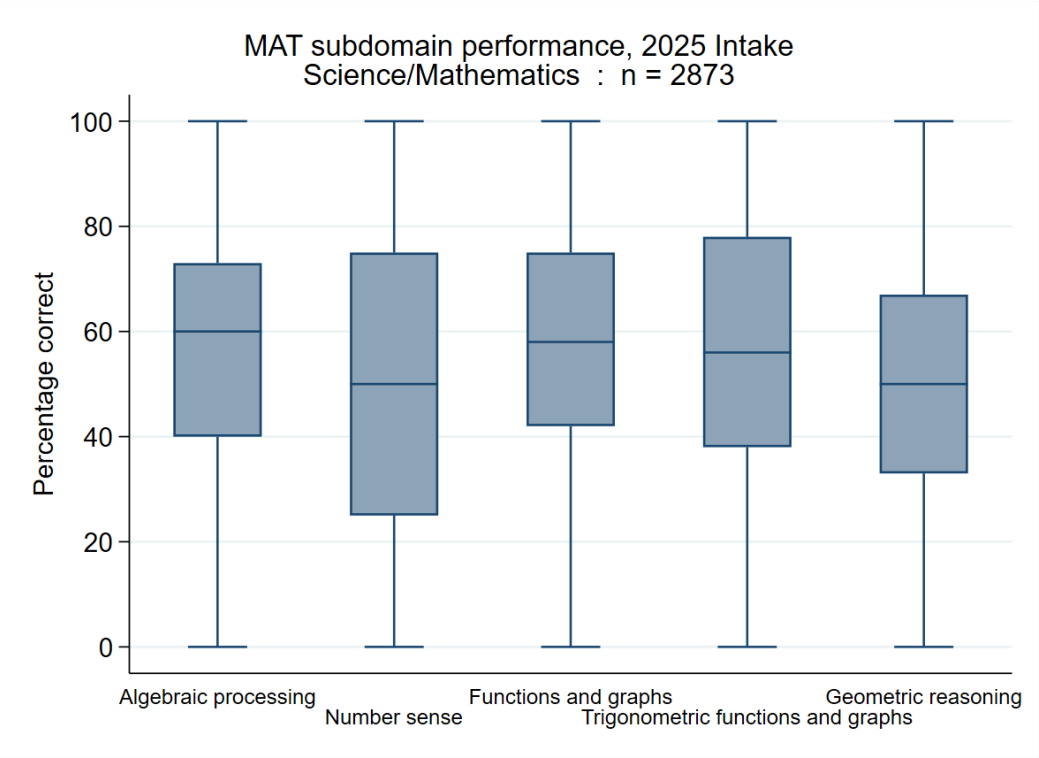

Figure 47: Science/Mathematics MAT subdomain performance: 2025 intake

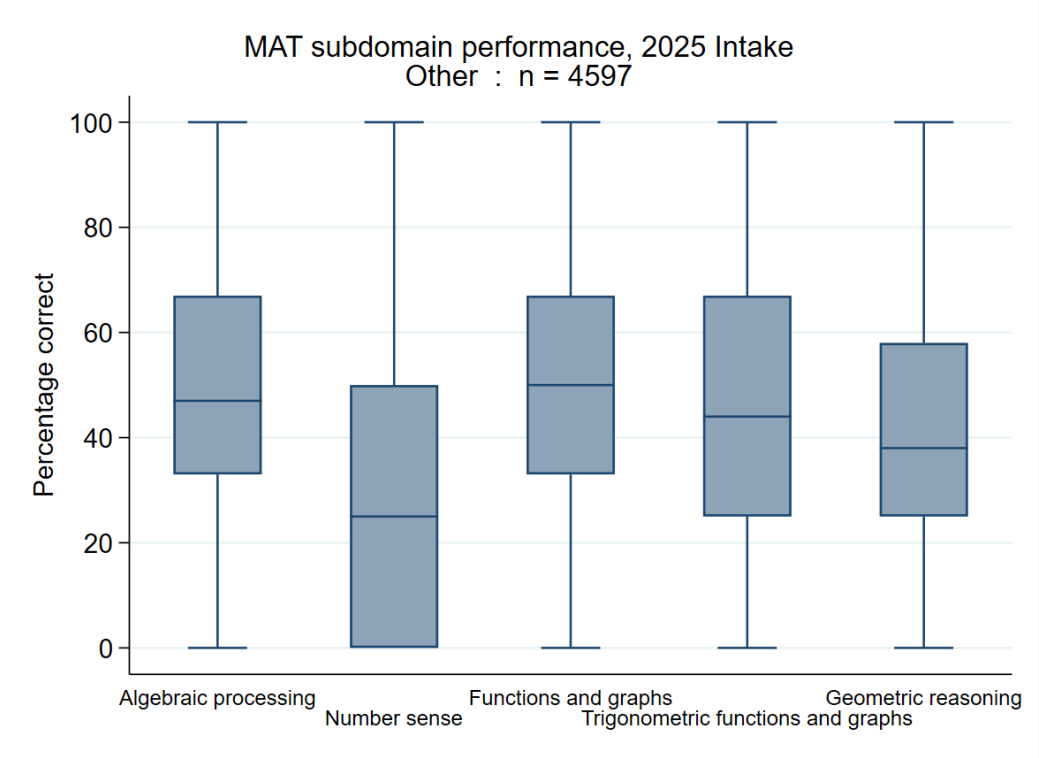

Figure 48: Other MAT subdomain performance: 2025 intake

4. Comparison of NBT performance: 2025 intake

4.1 NBT performance by test language

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

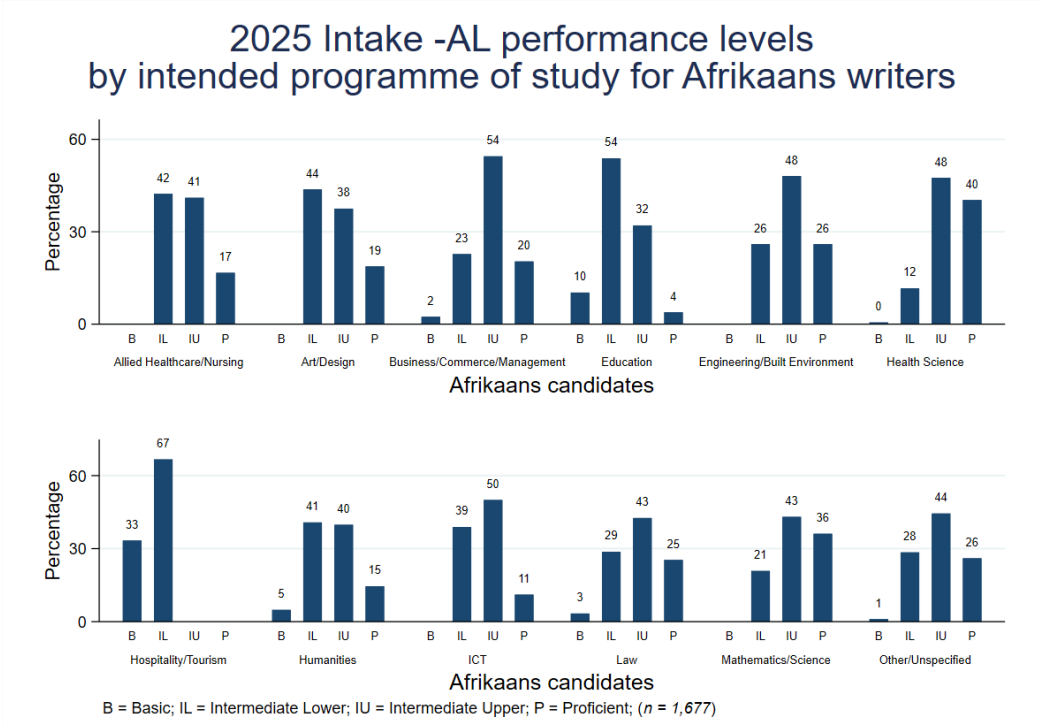

Figure 49: NBT AL performance levels by intended faculty of study for Afrikaans writers: 2025 intake

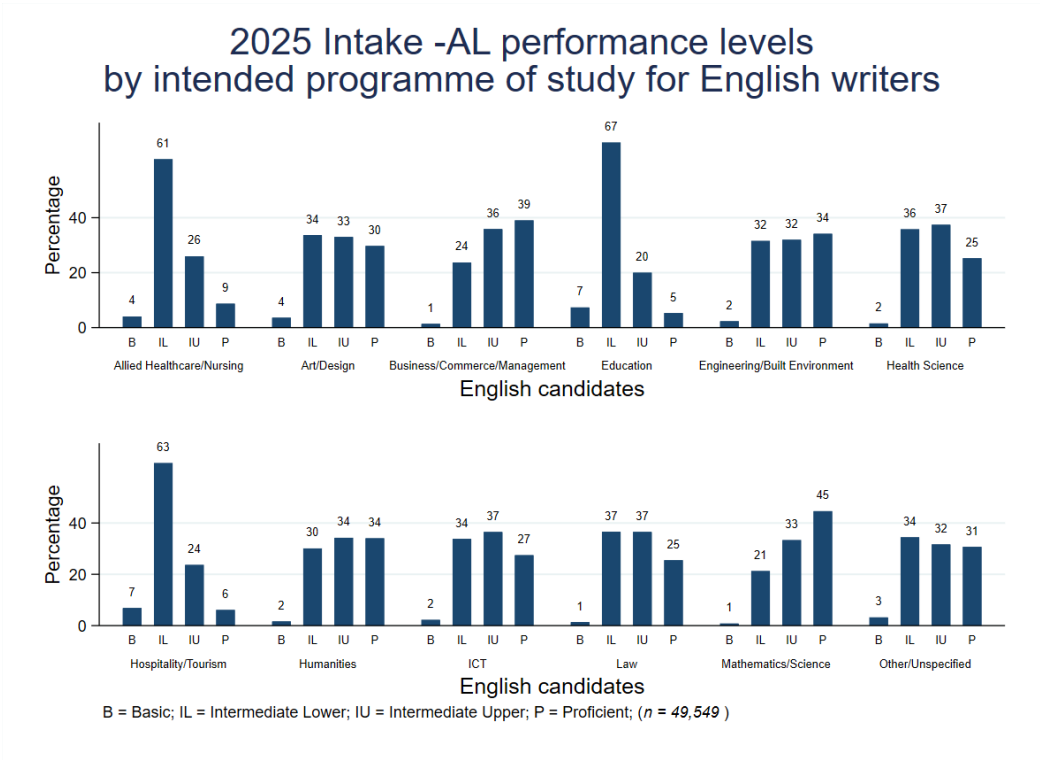

Figure 50: NBT AL performance levels by intended faculty of study for English writers: 2025 intake

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

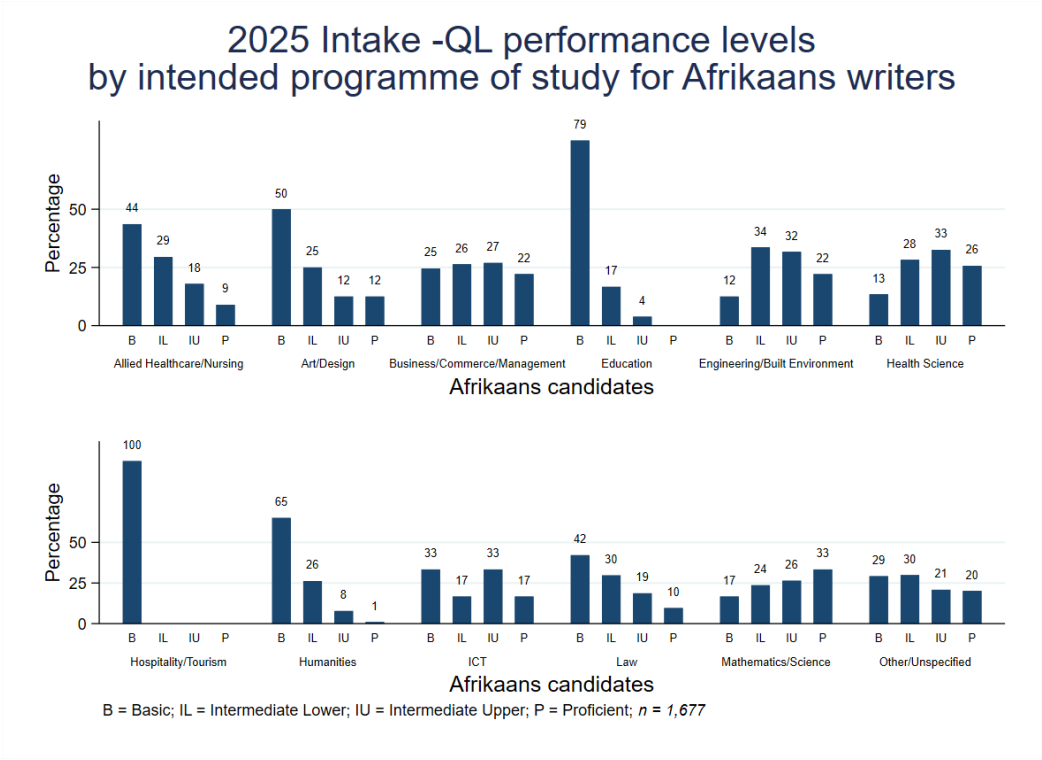

Figure 51: NBT QL performance levels by intended faculty of study for Afrikaans writers: 2025 intake

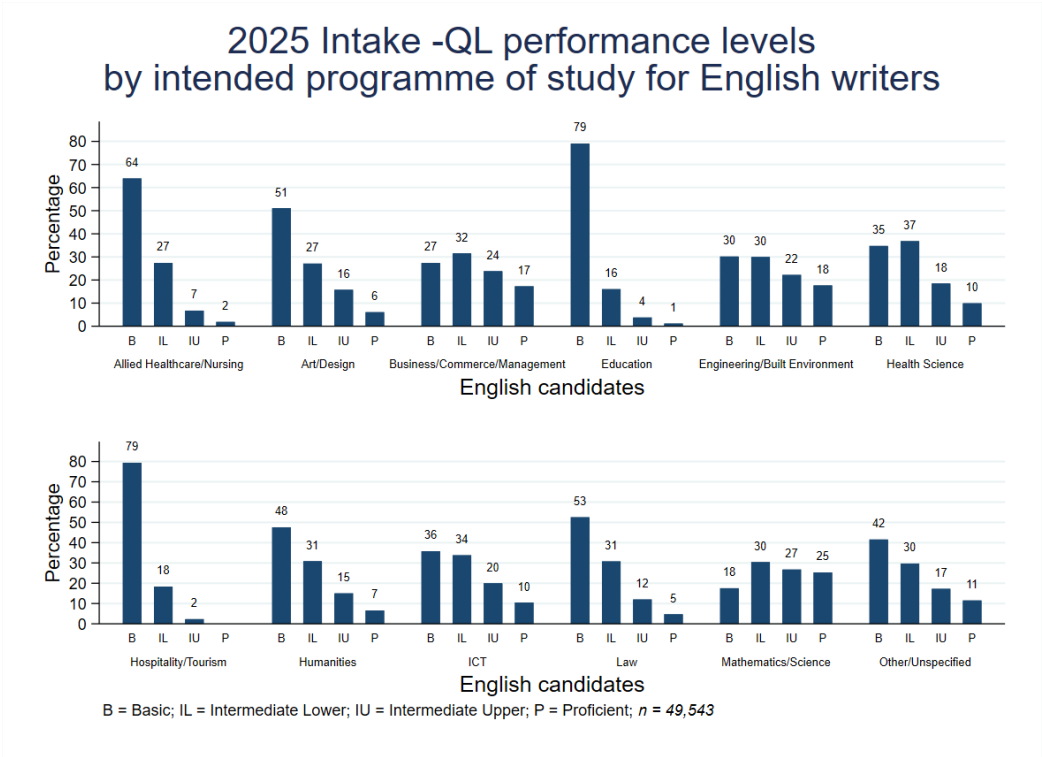

Figure 52: NBT QL performance levels by intended faculty of study for English writers: 2025 intake

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

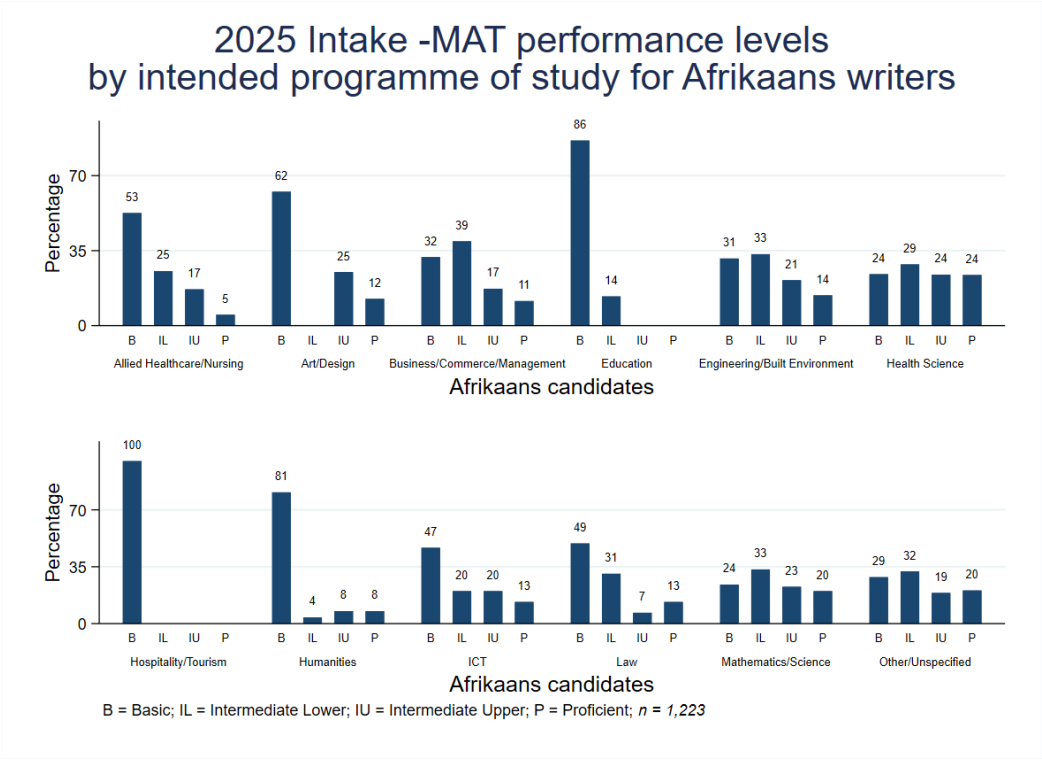

Figure 53: NBT MAT performance levels by intended faculty of study for Afrikaans writers: 2025 intake

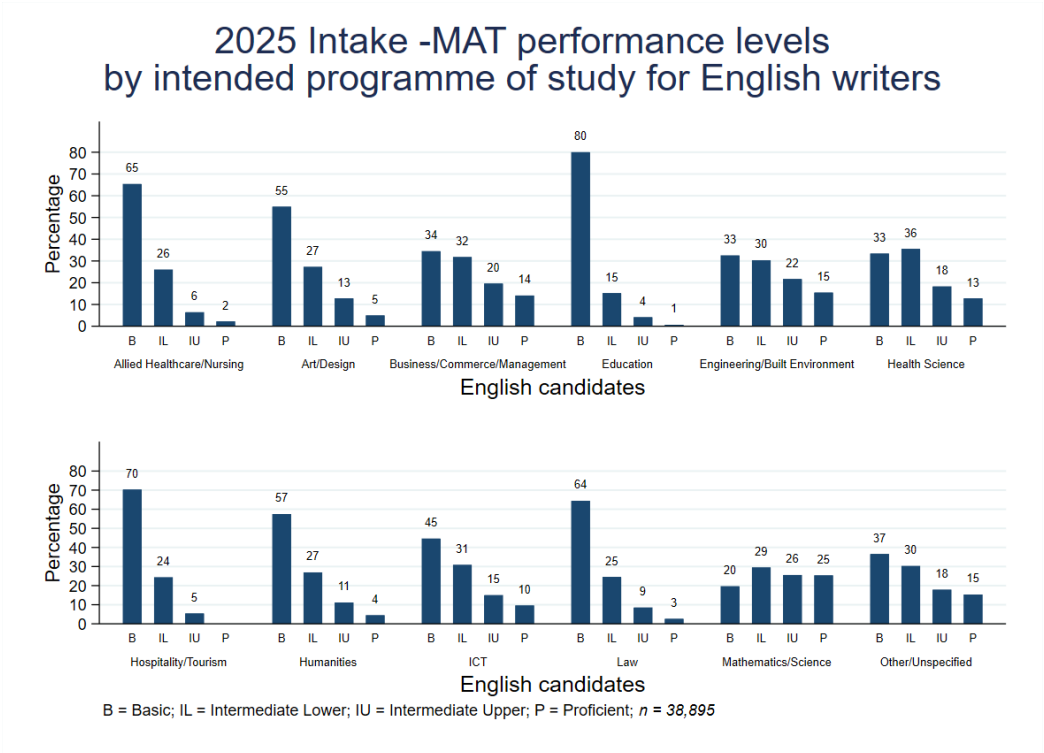

Figure 54: NBT MAT performance levels by intended faculty of study for English writers: 2025 intake

4.2 Comparison of the 2025 intake results with the 2024 intake results

4.2.1 AL, QL and MAT by performance benchmarks

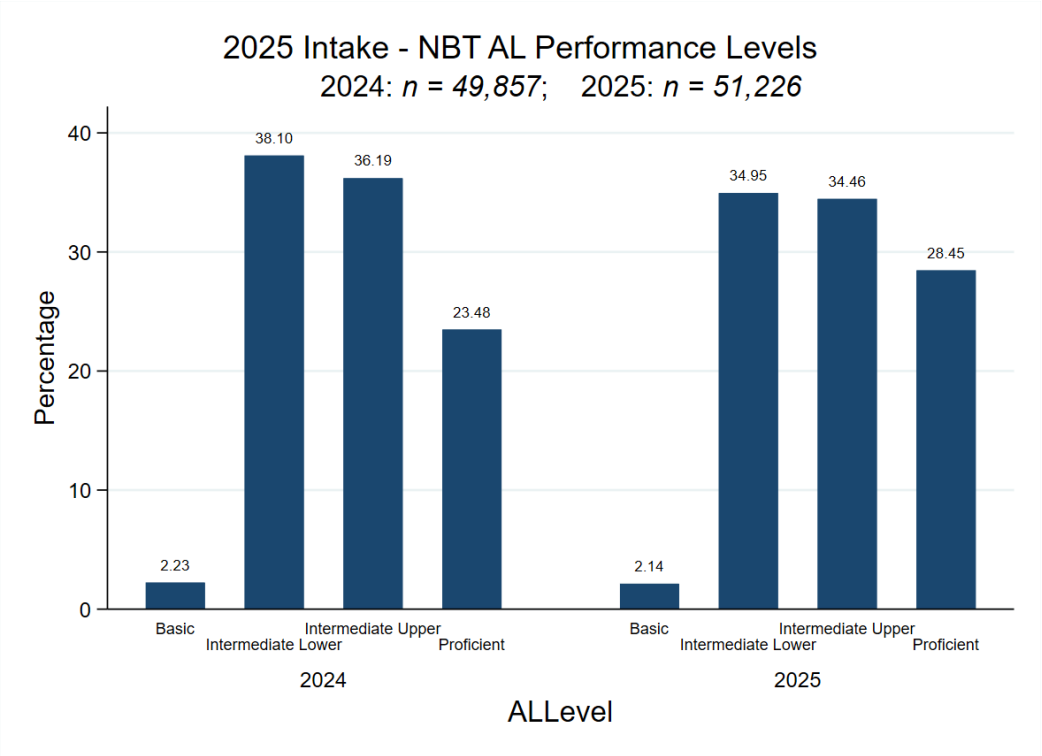

Figure 55: Performance in NBT AL 2024 and 2025 intake cycles

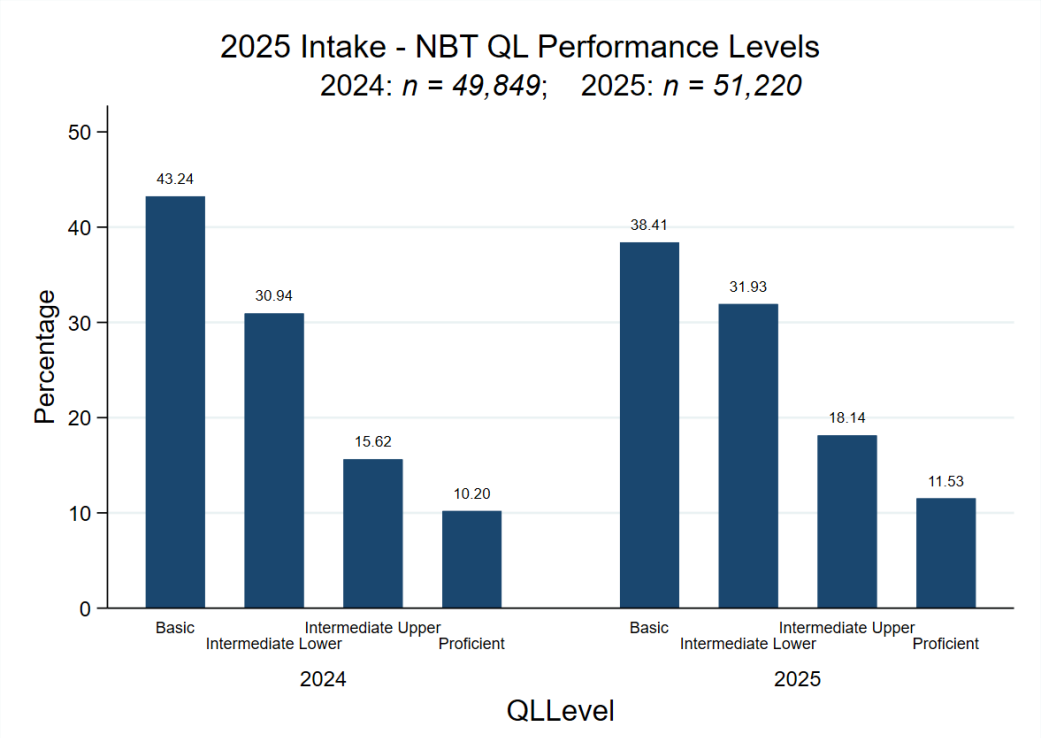

Figure 56: Performance in NBT QL 2024 and 2025 intake cycles

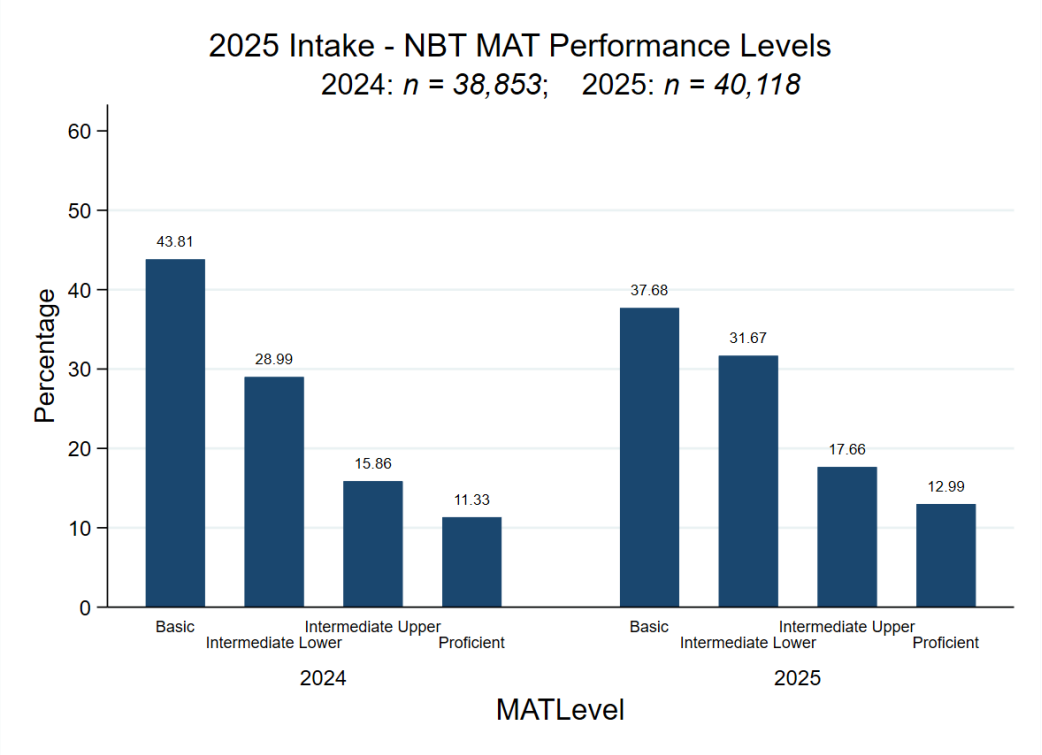

Figure 57: Performance in NBT MAT 2024 and 2025 intake cycles

4.2.2 AL, QL and MAT by test language

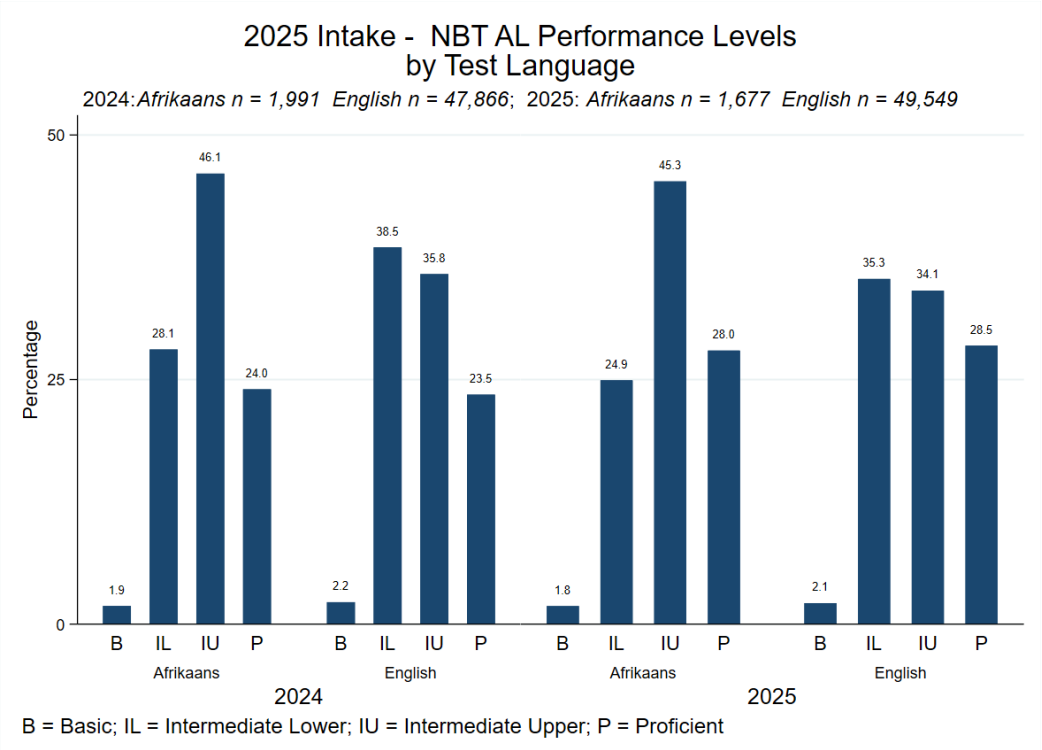

Figure 58: NBT AL performance by test language 2024 and 2025 intake cycles

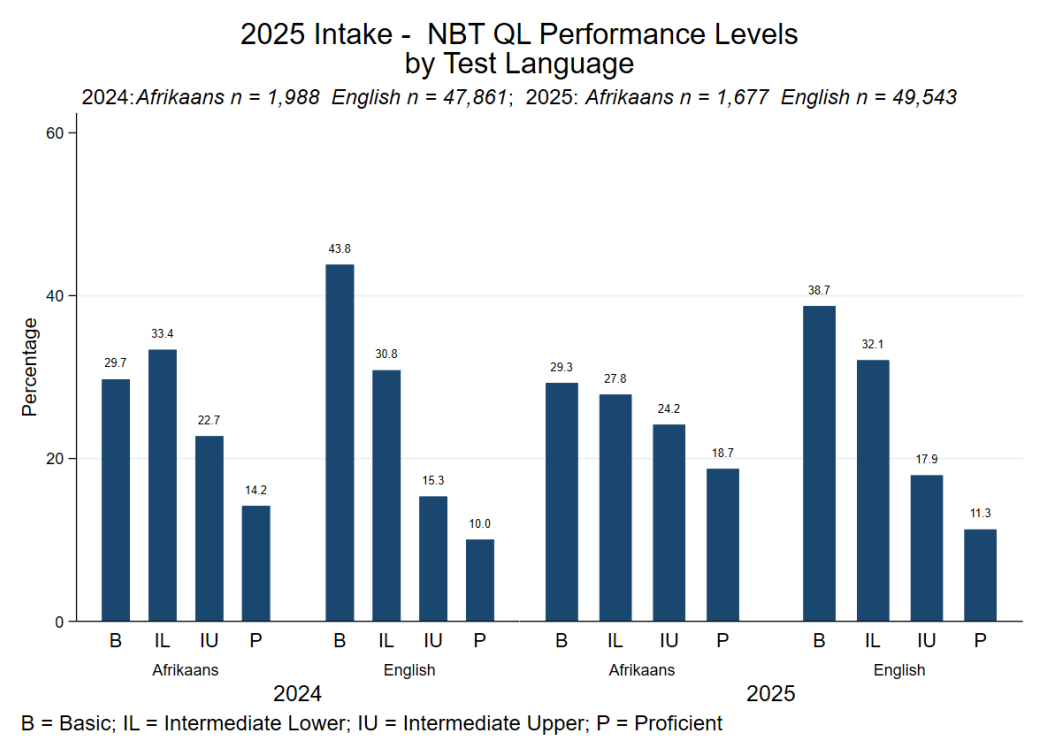

Figure 59: NBT QL performance by test language 2024 and 2025 intake cycles

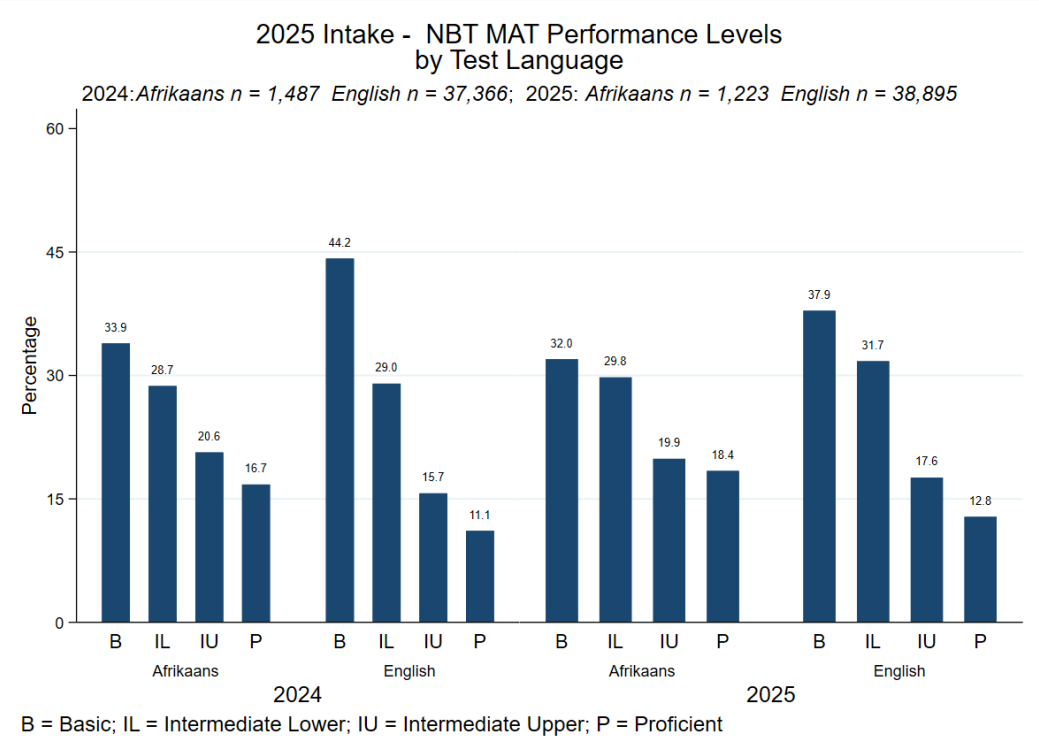

Figure 60: NBT MAT performance by test language 2024 and 2025 intake cycles

4.2.3 AL, QL and MAT by citizenship

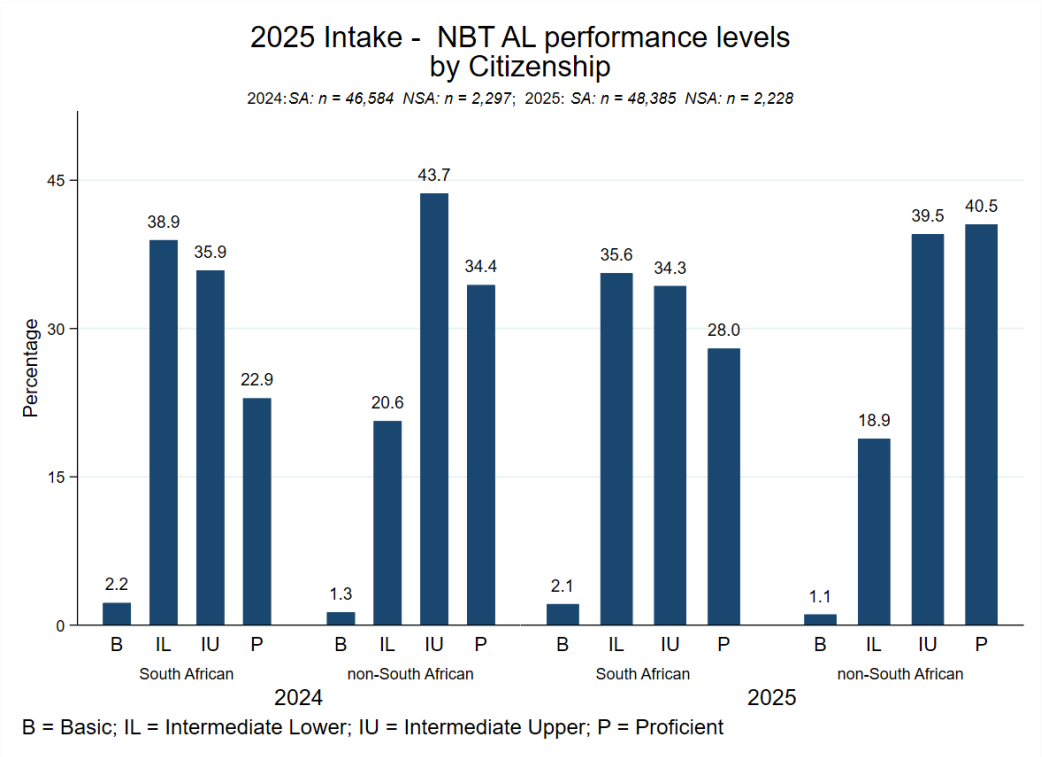

Figure 61: NBT AL performance levels by citizenship 2024 and 2025 intake

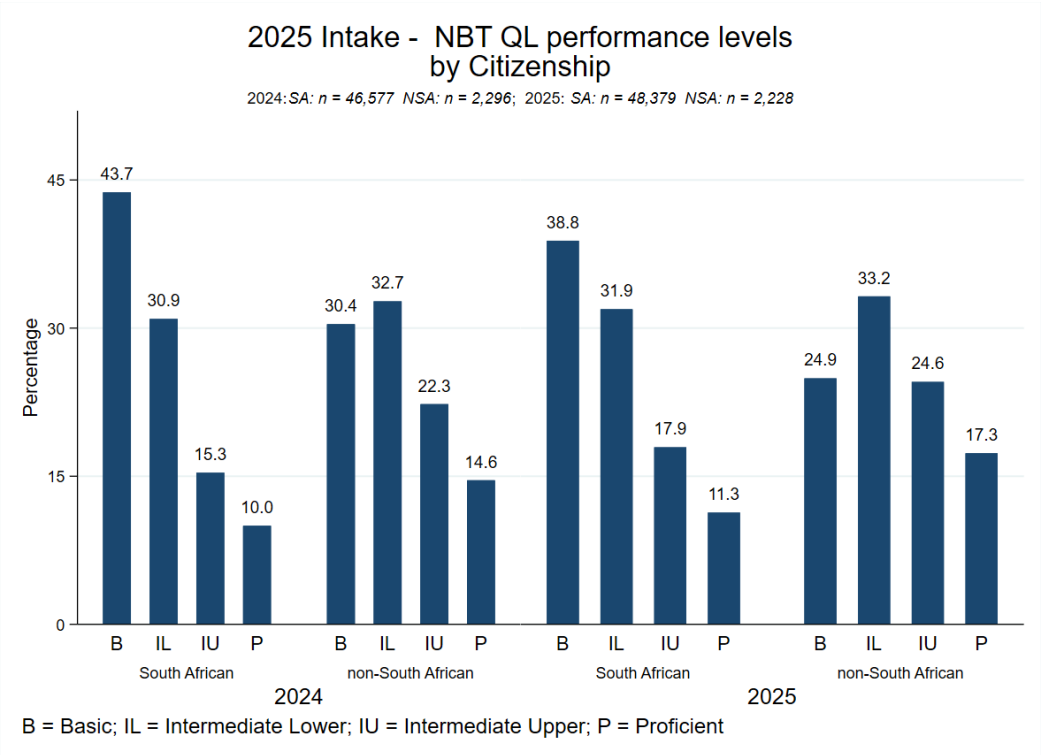

Figure 62: NBT QL performance levels by citizenship 2024 and 2025 intake

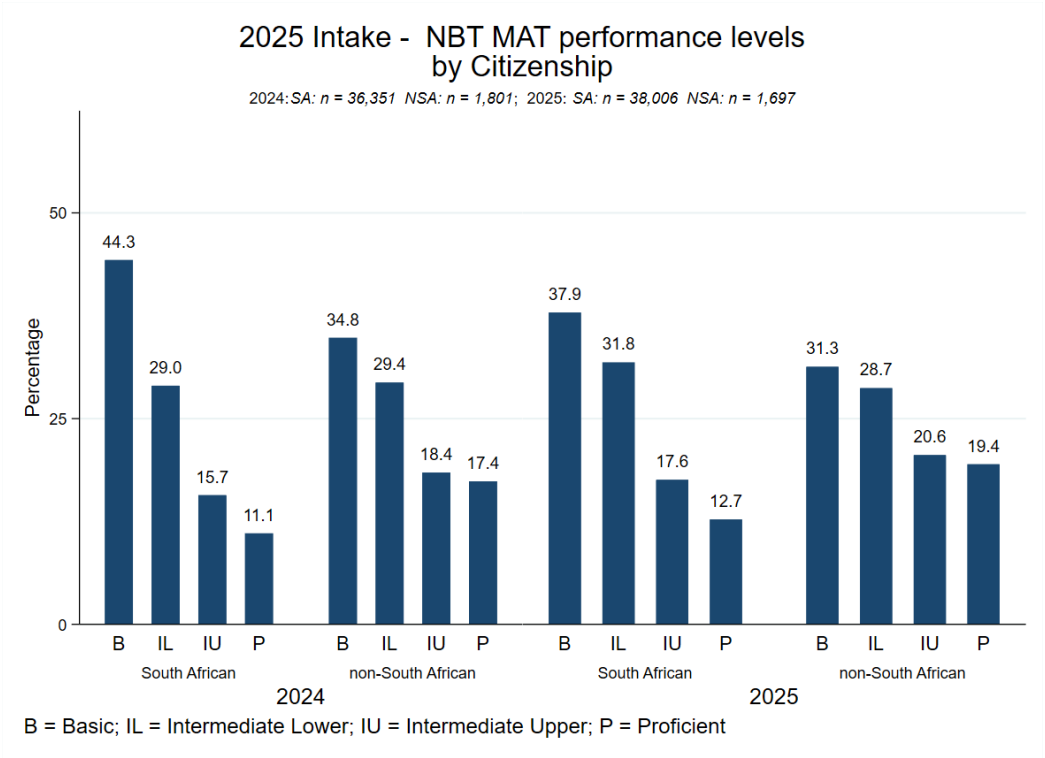

Figure 63: NBT MAT performance levels by citizenship 2024 and 2025 intake

5. Performance of the NSC cohort in the NBT domains and in cognate NSC subjects: 2025 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: 2025 intake

	Full Cohort		**Bachelor's degree pass**		**Diploma or Higher Certificate pass**	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
GENDER						
Male	11 586	32.81	10 830	32.96	756	30.73
Female	23 731	67.19	22 027	67.04	1 704	69.27
Total	35 317	100	32 857	100	2 460	100
POPULATION GROUP						
Black	24 144	68.19	22 306	67.71	1 838	74.69
Coloured	4 110	11.61	3 728	11.32	382	15.52
Indian/Asian	2 747	7.76	2 593	7.87	154	6.26
White	3 785	10.69	3 751	11.39	34	1.38
Other	108	0.31	100	0.3	8	0.33
Unspecified	512	1.45	467	1.42	45	1.83
Total	35 406	100	32 945	100	2 461	100
CITIZENSHIP						
South African	34 765	98.19	32 352	98.2	2 413	98.05
SADC countries	82	0.23	79	0.24	3	0.12
Other African countries	98	0.28	97	0.29	1	0.04
Other	83	0.23	80	0.24	3	0.12

Unspecified	378	1.07	337	1.02	41	1.67
Total	35 406	100	32 945	100	2 461	100
GR 12 LANGUAGE						
Afrikaans	1 759	4.97	1 663	5.05	96	3.9
English	31 697	89.52	29 470	89.45	2 227	90.49
Other	1 220	3.45	1 139	3.46	81	3.29
Unspecified	730	2.06	673	2.04	57	2.32
Total	35 406	100	32 945	100	2 461	100
HOME LANGUAGE						
Afrikaans	1 845	5.21	1 754	5.32	91	3.7
English	11 588	32.73	10 857	32.95	731	29.7
isiNdebele	209	0.59	195	0.59	14	0.57
isiXhosa	5 482	15.48	4 999	15.17	483	19.63
isiZulu	5 054	14.27	4 752	14.42	302	12.27
Sesotho	2 120	5.99	1 944	5.9	176	7.15
Sesotho sa Leboa	2 835	8.01	2 642	8.02	193	7.84
Setswana	1 691	4.78	1 579	4.79	112	4.55
siSwati	555	1.57	518	1.57	37	1.5
Tshivenda	1 456	4.11	1 342	4.07	114	4.63
Xitsonga	1 437	4.06	1 311	3.98	126	5.12
Other Language	406	1.15	381	1.16	25	1.02
Unspecified	728	2.06	671	2.04	57	2.32
Total	35 406	100	32 945	100	2 461	100
PROVINCE						
Eastern Cape	3 138	8.86	2 907	8.82	231	9.39
Free State	1 751	4.95	1 580	4.8	171	6.95
Gauteng	6 906	19.51	6 559	19.91	347	14.1
KwaZulu Natal	5 036	14.22	4 743	14.4	293	11.91
Limpopo	4 018	11.35	3 709	11.26	309	12.56
Mpumalanga	866	2.45	773	2.35	93	3.78
North West	598	1.69	575	1.75	23	0.93
Northern Cape	242	0.68	218	0.66	24	0.98
Western Cape	6 847	19.34	6 241	18.94	606	24.62
Unknown	6 004	16.96	5 640	17.12	364	14.79
Total	35 406	100	32 945	100	2 461	100
HE ADMISSION						
Bachelors degree	32 945	93.05				
Diploma/Higher Certificate	2 461	6.95				
Total	35 406	100				

5.4 Descriptive statistics

Table 21: Descriptive statistics for NBTs and NSCs: 2025 intake

	n	Mean %	SD %	Min. %	1st Quartile %	Median %	3rd Quartile %	Max. %
FULL COHORT								
ALScore	35 406	58.09	13.98	11	46	58	69	95
QLScore	35 404	48.78	15.27	2	37	44	58	99
MATScore	28 798	47.19	16.74	1	33	42	57	98
MTHN	29 954	64.28	17.57	0	52	66	78	100
MTLN	5 605	69.04	14.00	25	60	71	80	100
ENHN	21 062	70.63	9.31	38	64	71	77	98
ENFN	14 344	73.50	8.14	36	69	74	79	96
PSCN	25 723	61.03	16.65	0	49	61	74	100
BACHELOR'S DEGREE								
ALScore	32 945	58.90	13.84	12	47	59	70	95
QLScore	32 943	49.58	15.36	2	37	46	59	99
MATScore	27 057	48.12	16.74	1	34	44	59	98
MTHN	28 131	66.08	16.41	0	54	67	79	100
MTLN	4 972	71.40	12.32	28	63	72	81	100
ENHN	19 487	71.66	8.68	42	66	72	78	98
ENFN	13 458	74.27	7.54	36	70	75	80	96
PSCN	24 153	62.77	15.56	0	51	63	75	100
DIPLOMA/CERTIFICATE								
ALScore	2 461	47.27	11.03	11	39	44	54	90
QLScore	2 461	38.00	8.60	14	34	36	40	95
MATScore	1 741	32.85	7.98	19	29	31	34	96
MTHN	1 823	36.47	9.54	6	30	37	43	83
MTLN	633	50.52	12.50	25	42	48	59	88
ENHN	1 575	57.95	7.31	38	53	58	63	82
ENFN	886	61.75	7.95	37	56	62	67	84
PSCN	1 570	34.19	7.22	0	29	34	39	59

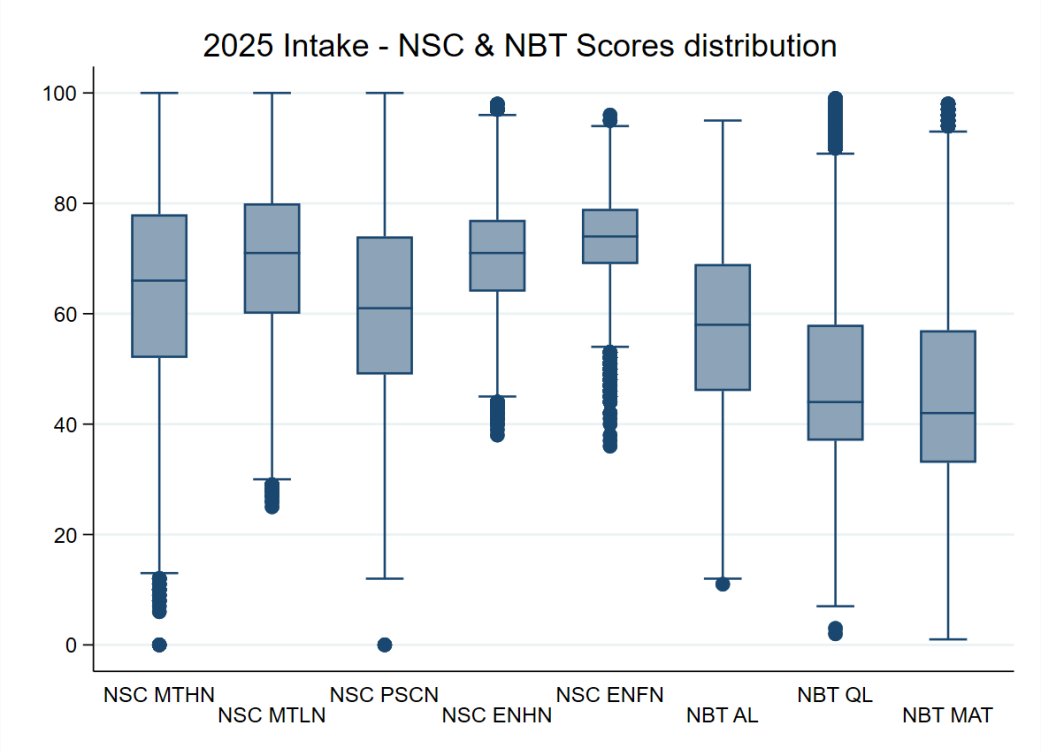

Figure 64: NBT/NSC scores distribution: 2025 intake

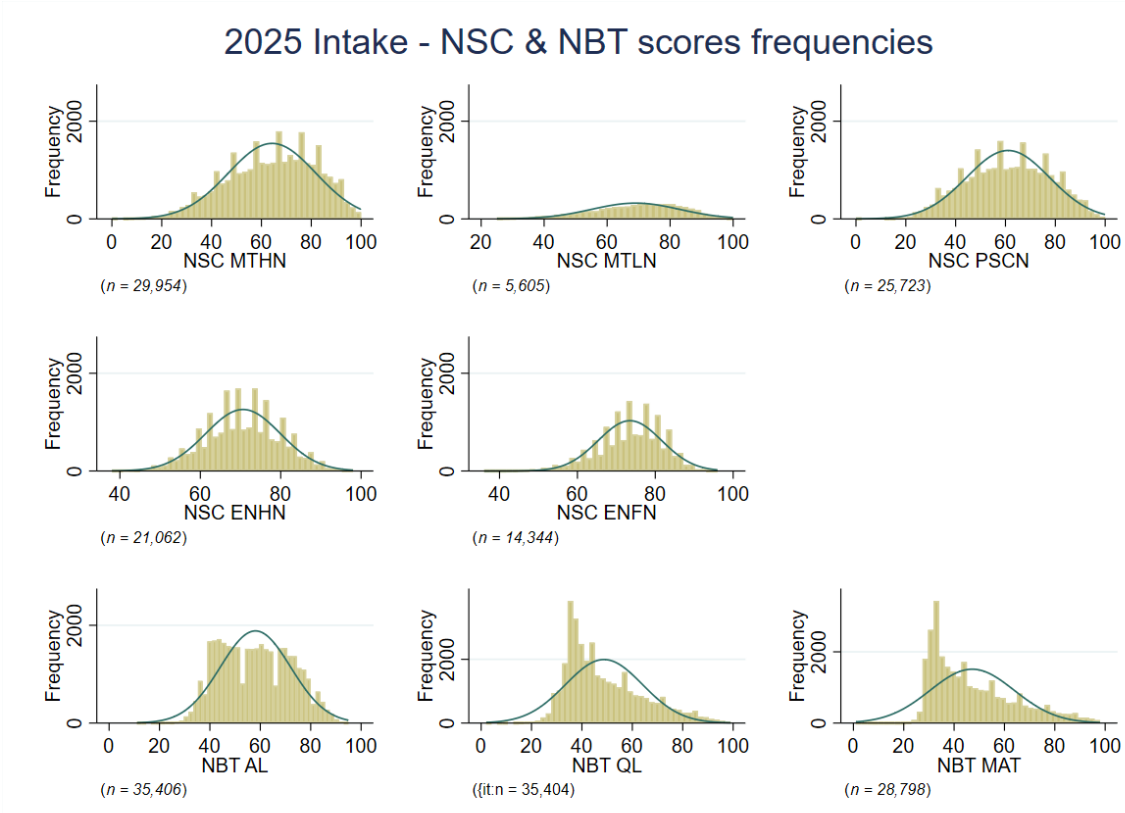

Figure 65: NBT/NSC score frequencies: 2025 intake

5.5 NBT benchmarks

Table 22: NBT benchmark levels for the NSC cohort: 2025 intake

	Basic		Intermediate Lower		Intermediate Upper		Proficiency		Total
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n
ACADEMIC LITERACY									
Bachelor's degree	492	1.39	10 776	30.44	12 381	34.97	9 296	26.26	32 945
Diploma/Higher Certificate	89	0.25	1 334	3.77	691	1.95	347	0.98	2 461
QUANTITATIVE LITERACY									
Bachelor's degree	11 115	31.39	11 106	31.37	6 509	18.38	4 213	11.9	32 943
Diploma/Higher Certificate	569	1.61	1 631	4.61	230	0.65	31	0.09	2 461
MATHEMATICS									
Bachelor's degree	8 678	30.13	9 255	32.14	5 262	18.27	3 862	13.41	27 057
Diploma/Higher Certificate	1 169	4.06	512	1.78	26	0.09	34	0.12	1741

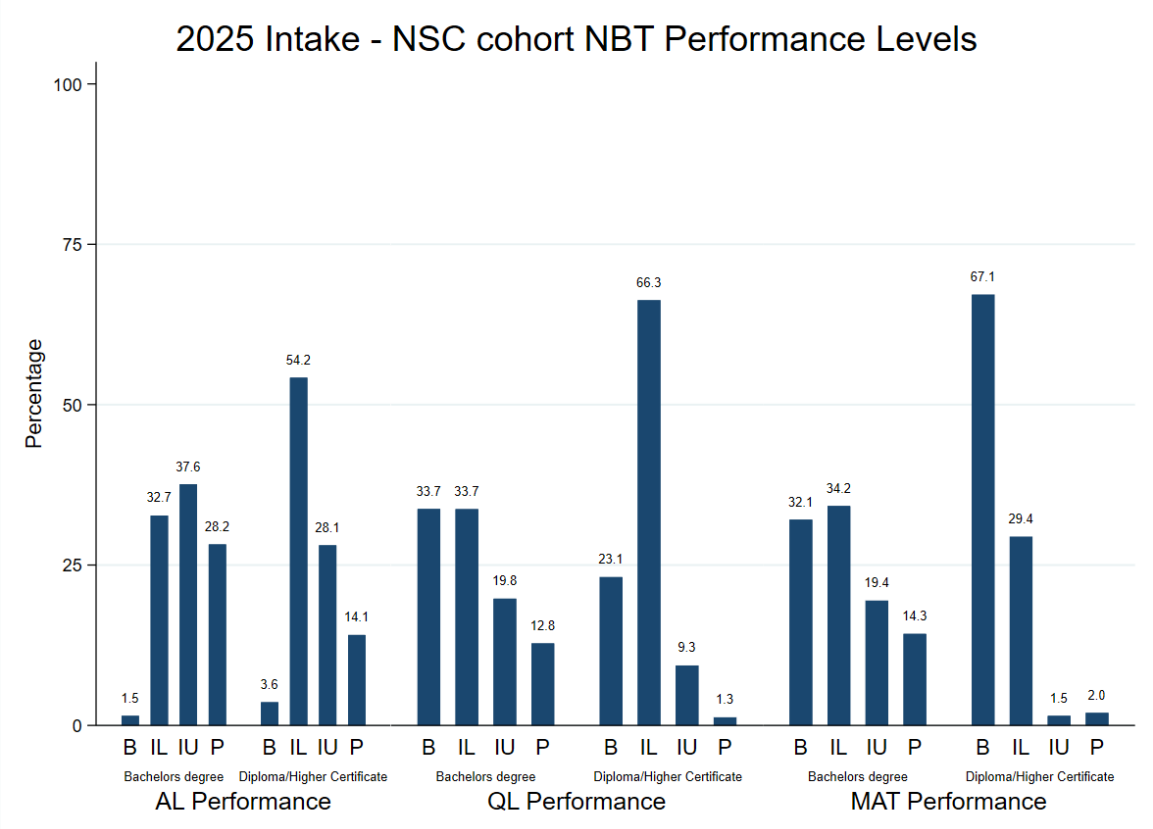

Figure 66: NSC cohort performance levels on NBT: 2025 intake

5.6 Associations between scores on NBTs and NSC Examination

Table 23: Correlation matrix for the NSC and NBT results - Bachelor's degree: 2025 intake

Bachelor's	NBT AL	NBT QL	NBT MAT	NSC MTHN	NSC MTLN	NSC ENHN	NSC ENFN	NSC PSCN
NBT AL	1							
	32 945							
NBT QL	0.6986	1						
	32 943	32943						
NBT MAT	0.4976	0.6864	1					
	27 057	27 057	27 057					
NSC MTHN	0.2717	0.4897	0.733	1				
	28 131	28 131	26 699	28 131				
NSC MTLN	0.5807	0.5974	0.3416	0.4086	1			
	4 972	4 970	485	186	4 972			
NSC ENHN	0.6768	0.5505	0.5113	0.5372	0.6045	1		
	19 487	19 486	15 144	15 940	3 721	19 487		
NSC ENFN	0.6098	0.4374	0.3873	0.3943	0.5672	.	1	
	13 458	13 457	11 913	12 191	1 251	0	13 458	
NSC PSCN	0.238	0.4162	0.6614	0.8764	.	0.5627	0.4262	1
	24 153	24 153	23 570	24 152	0	12 728	11 425	24 153

Table 24: Correlation matrix for the NSC and NBT results - Diploma/Higher Certificate: 2025 intake

	NBT AL	NBT QL	NBT MAT	NSC MTHN	NSC MTLN	NSC ENHN	NSC ENFN	NSC PSCN
NBT AL	1							
	2461							
NBT QL	0.6053	1						
	2461	2461						
NBT MAT	0.3224	0.3978	1					
	1741	1741	1741					
NSC MTHN	0.0847	0.2102	0.1939	1				
	1823	1823	1670	1823				
NSC MTLN	0.5289	0.5255	0.0194	0.9803	1			
	633	633	69	3	633			
NSC ENHN	0.5634	0.3345	0.0645	0.1043	0.2473	1		
	1575	1575	1061	1106	467	1575		
NSC ENFN	0.4667	0.1934	0.0034	0.0609	0.5151	.	1	
	886	886	680	717	166	0	886	
NSC PSCN	-0.0458	0.0057	0.0453	0.4512	.	0.0243	0.0647	1
	1570	1570	1468	1570	0	904	666	1570

5.6.1 Associations between scores on NBT Academic Literacy and NSC Examination

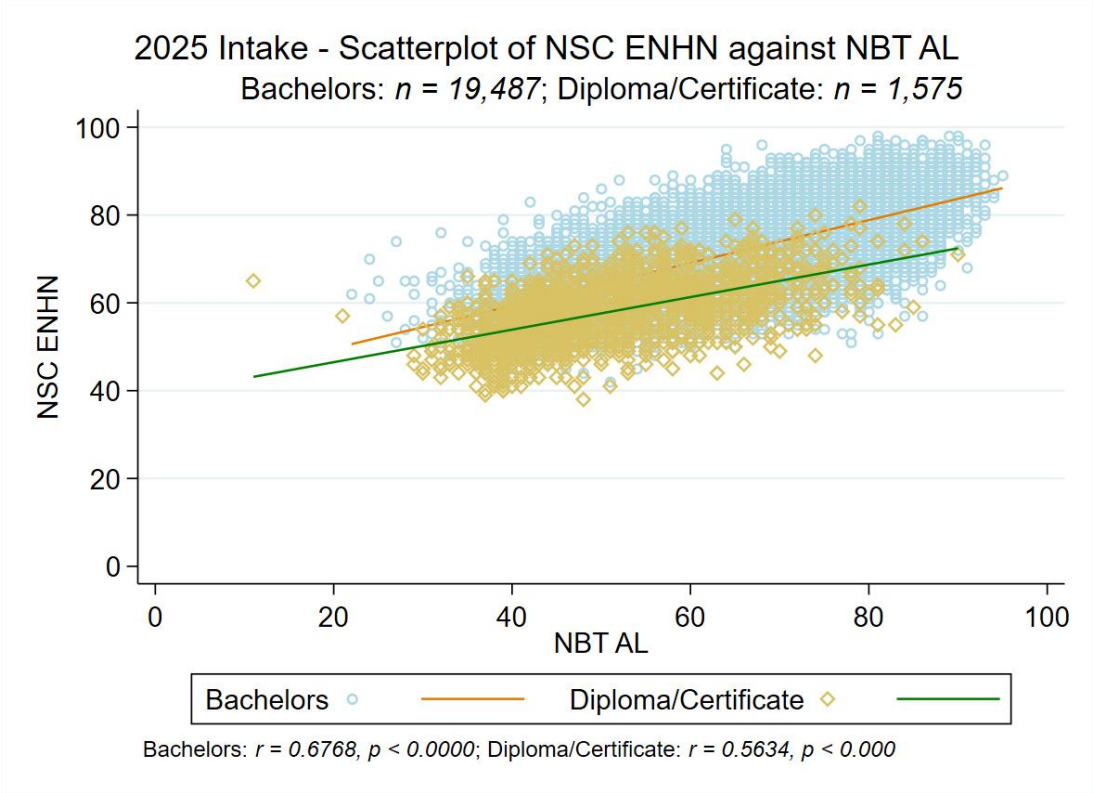

Figure 67: Scatterplot NBT AL vs NSC ENHN: 2025 intake

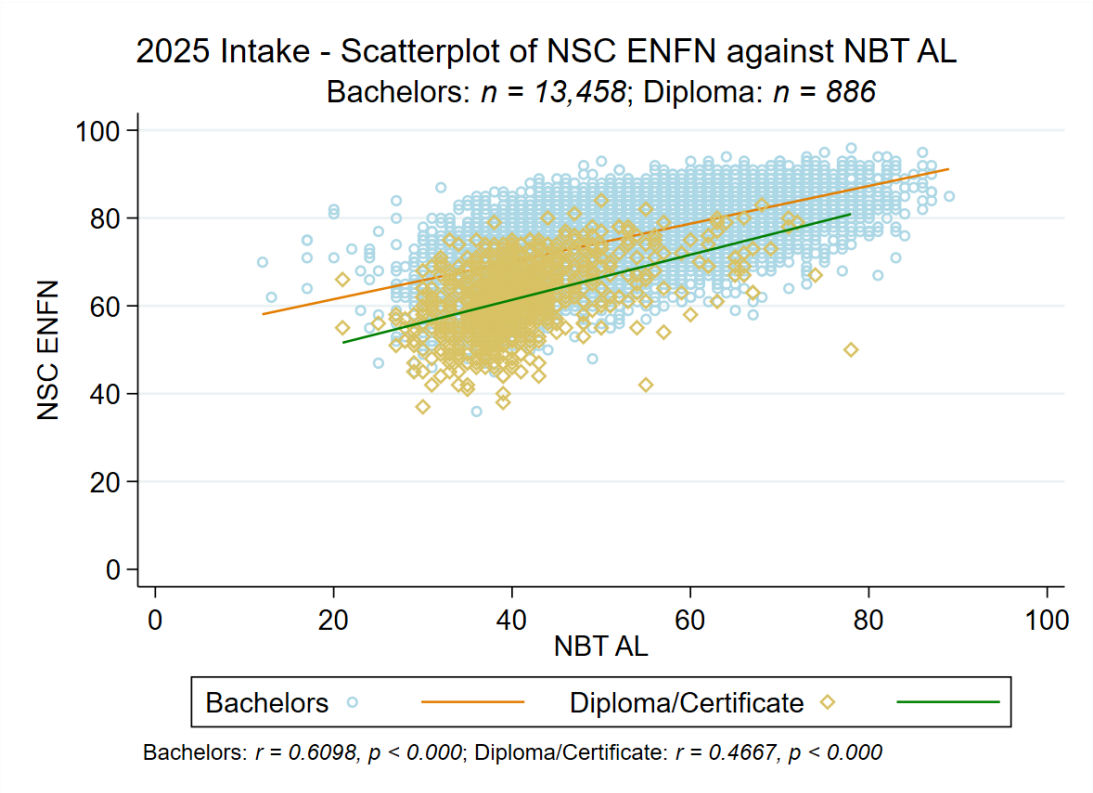

Figure 68: Scatterplot NBT AL vs NSC ENFN: 2025 intake

5.6.2 Associations between scores on NBT Quantitative Literacy and NSC Examination

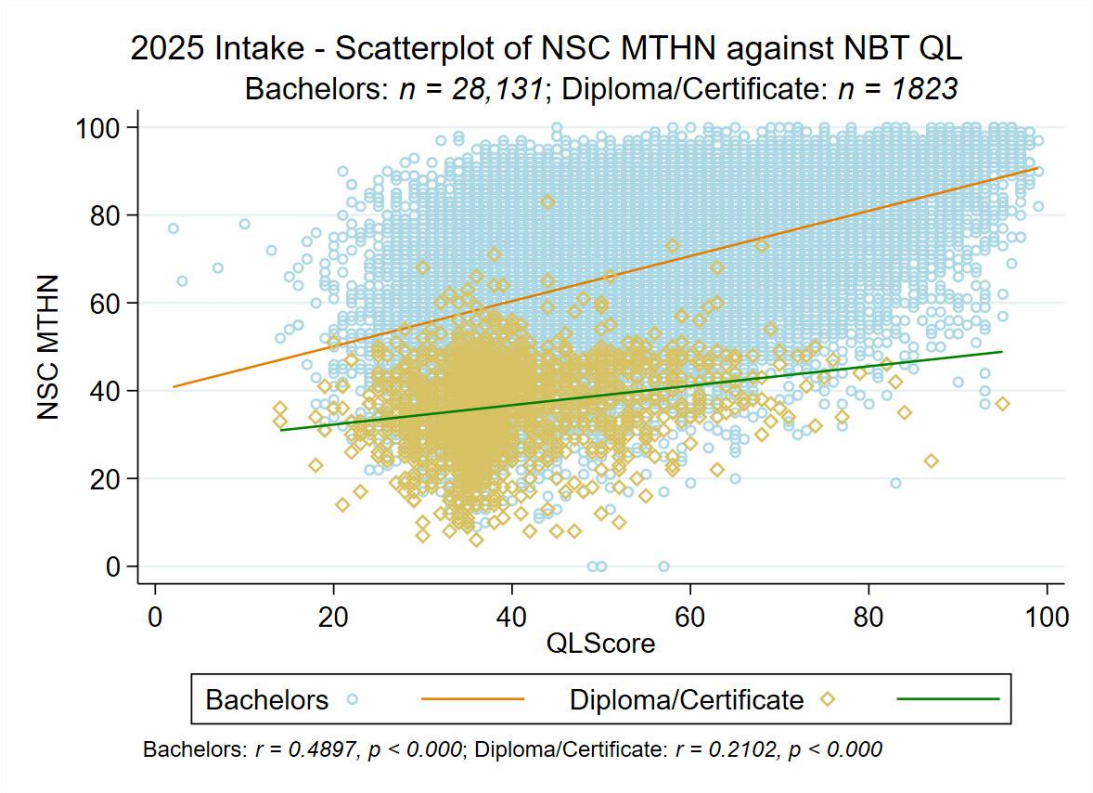

Figure 69: Scatterplot NBT QL vs NSC MTHN: 2025 intake

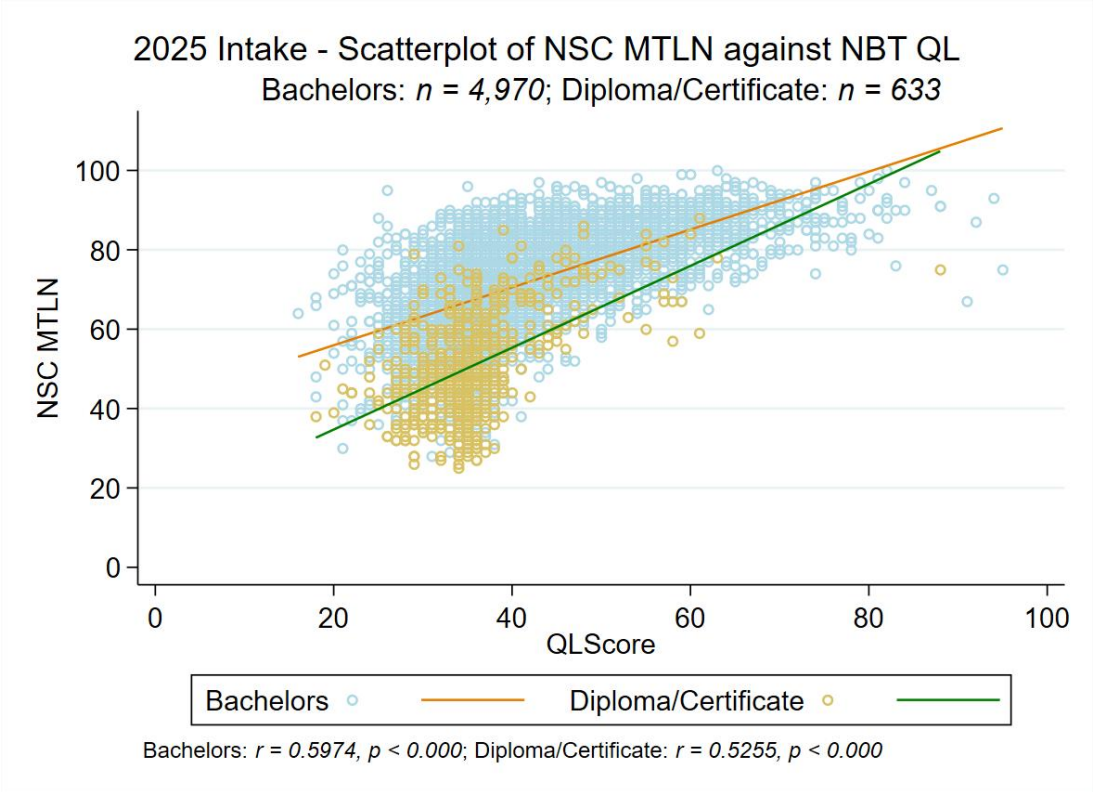

Figure 70: Scatterplot NBT QL vs NSC MTLN: 2025 intake

5.6.3 Associations between scores on NBT Mathematics and NSC Examination

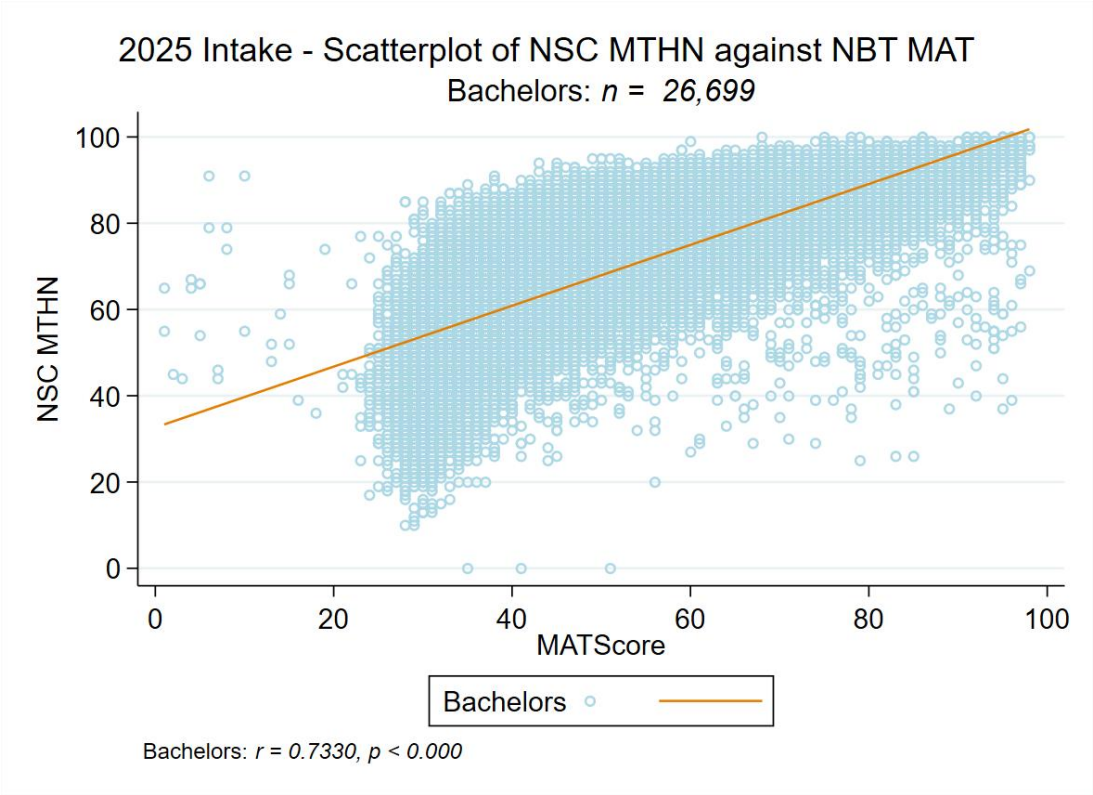

Figure 71: Scatterplot NBT MAT vs NSC MTHN: 2025 intake

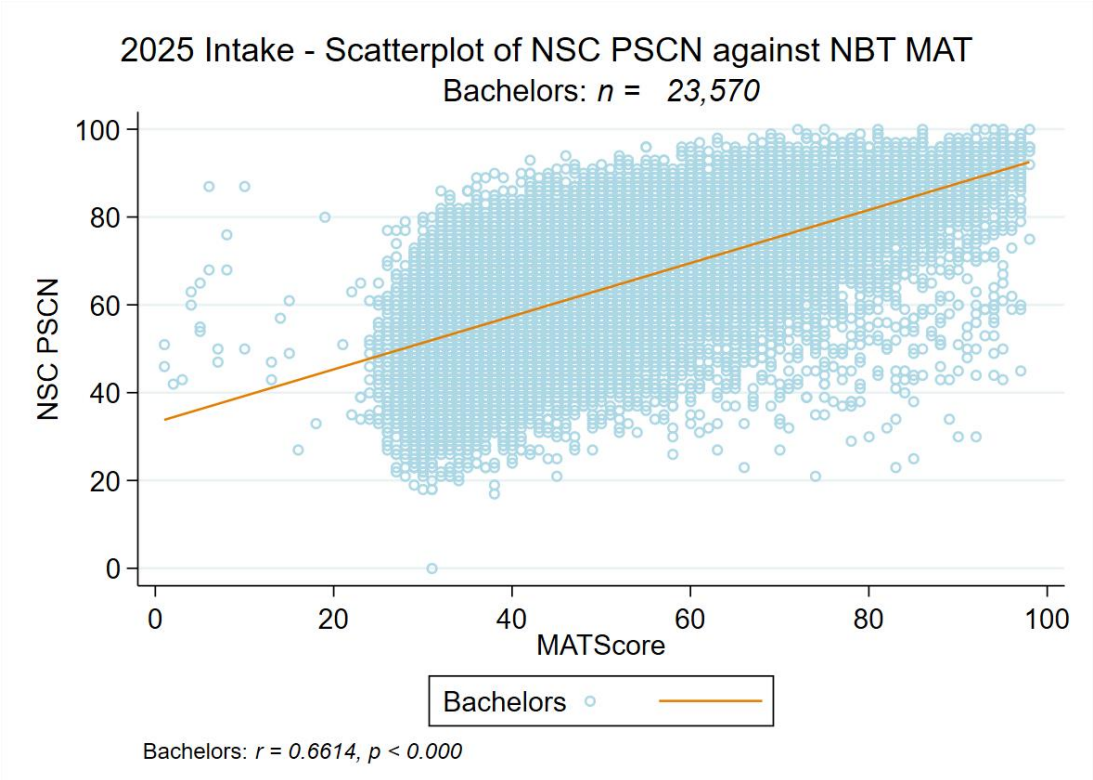

Figure 72: Scatterplot NBT MAT vs NSC PSCN: 2025 intake

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