

# School Certificate — the Take remains

by Bernard Gadd

The statistics for the 1984 School Certificate examinations reveal that not only does the hierarchy of its subjects remain (see *Tu Tangata* November, 1985, "Haere ra, School certificate"), but that the success rate allowed to Maori candidates has improved little since 1968, when pass rates in individual subjects first became available.

The fundamental character of the examination papers, and the statistical manipulation of the raw marks gained in them have remained so consistent over the years, that such improvement as has shown up in Maori pass rates, may well result from the pressures towards cultural assimilation that our school system relentlessly exerts upon Maori youngsters.

The figures show that the success rate in all subjects entered by Maori candidates has improved little over the years. In 1968 29% of the subjects sat were passed. By 1984 32.1% of the subjects were being passed. But the success rate for all New Zealand candidates (a figure which includes Maori) showed an even greater improvement from 50.8% to 54.9%. Thus after nearly 20 years, Maori candidates were relatively worse off than before.

The situation is more serious than those figures suggest. Over the same period of time the number of Maori students entering for School Certificate examinations has more than doubled, a far greater increase than among total New Zealand candidates. Therefore the number of unsuccessful Maori candidates has grown greatly.

Nor have pass rates for Maori candidates shown much change in the ten subjects sat by the greatest numbers of Maori. These results can best be displayed in a table:

The greatest improvement in Maori pass rates have come in Technical Drawing (a 15.2% rise), Science (a 12.6% rise), and in English, Maths, Typing with about an eight per cent rise. In all of those subjects, except English, the improvement in the Maori pass has been a spin-off from a higher pass rate awarded to all candidates in that subject. In the case of English the improvement has in part come about because of a sustained campaign to make examiners and markers more

aware of the bi-cultural nature of our student population, a campaign that has recently included the refusal by members of the Association of Teachers of English to set or mark School Certificate English exams.

However, the overall situation for Maori candidates remains remarkably similar over the years. In 1968 Maori candidates' pass rates for the ten subjects listed above ranged from 22.4% to 49.7%. In 1984 the Maori pass rates ranged from 26.8% to 39.8 with a single anomaly, the pass rate for 'Maori' of over 50%, the result of a decision to give Maori a pass rate equivalent to that of English.

The reasons for the lesser success by Maori candidates lie in the examinations, and not in the Maori pupils. The examinations all assume that the can-

didates live a middle class and pakeha lifestyle, are familiar with the wide range of consumer gadgets typical of that lifestyle, speak the sort of English that goes along with that lifestyle, and have habits of thought, work and language encouraged by that monocultural lifestyle.

All of these matters have been drawn to the attention of the examination controllers for many many years.

Yet after 40 years of existence, School Certificate still fails most of its Maori candidates while passing the majority of its total candidates. One can only assume that the people who control the examinations have no intention of allowing the pass rates to become more equal. And by doing so, they continue to give middle class pakeha candidates a head start in these examinations which are paid for from the taxes of us all.

The worrying thing is that all indications are that the School Certificate examinations will remain in existence for a long time to come.

PASS RATES IN INDIVIDUAL SUBJECTS				
* Maori pass rate equal to or better than All NZ candidates pass rate				
	1968 Pass Rates for		1984 Past Rates for	
	Maori	All NZ candidates	Maori	All NZ candidates
	%	%	%	%
Art	36.9	49.7	38.7	54.4
English	25	54.6	33.1	52.4
Geography	24.9	52.1	26.8	53.4
History	32.1	53.9	35	62.8
Maori	49.7*	49.1	51.8	53.1
Maths	27.6	52.2	35.5	57.9
Science	22.4	51.8	35	59.4
Tech Drawing	24.6	47.9	39.8	58
Typing	28	44.5	34.5	48.8
Economic Stud.	—	—	33.6	57.7