SUBMISSION

New Zealand MINERALS COUNCIL

Feedback from New Zealand Minerals Council to the Ministry of Education Draft Tertiary Education Strategy

September 2025

Introduction

1. New Zealand Minerals Council is the industry association representing the New Zealand minerals and mining sector. Our membership is comprised of mining companies, explorers, researchers, service providers, and support companies.

2. We welcome the opportunity to provide feedback on the Government's Draft Tertiary Education Strategy.

3. We are commenting here on the document *Tertiary Education Strategy – Draft for targeted sector consultation.* First, we provide some background on the importance of the tertiary education sector to the minerals industry.

Background

4. Mining companies employ people from a range of trades and highly trained professions in fields including environmental science, geology and engineering.

5. The tertiary education system, academic and vocational, is crucial for providing the skilled workforce that the minerals sector relies on.

6. According to MITO, the industry training organisation supporting the extractives sector, approximately 16% of the mining and exploration workforce in New Zealand is employed in highly skilled occupations. 57% have a tertiary qualification and 17% have degree level qualifications.

7. The mining and exploration sectors are growing and there is an increasing need for more trained workers.

8. It is estimated that at least 2,000 new mining workers will be needed by 2035 as new projects proceed and existing mines expand. This is consistent with the Government's goal for doubling mineral exports and increasing employment growth from 5,000 to 7,000 people.

9. It is important for the minerals sector that the tertiary education system can provide a strong pipeline of skilled professionals to meet this future need.

10. It comes against a backdrop where demand for such skills is increasing world-wide and New Zealand workers are drawn to Australia and beyond where mining incomes are higher than in New Zealand. This outflow is compounding the risk of significant workforce shortages that New Zealand mining faces.

11. To make up for this brain drain, i.e. the loss of New Zealand trained workers, a proportion of workers that the New Zealand industry is employing come from overseas.

12. Mining companies in New Zealand want to employ New Zealanders as well as overseas people, reinforcing the need for a tertiary education system which can provide the workforce the sector requires.

Submission

Strategic Direction Objective

13. We support the proposed objective of the Tertiary Education Strategy:

> *A tertiary education system that enables people to succeed with knowledge and skills that advance an innovative, high-productivity economy, and improve quality of life.*

14. The strategy has an increased focus on economic growth. We support this and we note that it does not need to come at the expense of the other objectives of a broad tertiary education system nor, as some critics might suggest, limit the range of courses offered.

15. A broad curriculum encompassing all facets of knowledge is key to achieving economic growth.

16. The mineral sector's contribution to economic growth is significant. It is the country's most productive sector providing high wage jobs in the regions and is responsible for increasing export receipts. The minerals sector needs to be catered for in the Tertiary Education Strategy.

17. The tertiary education system can enable mining's contribution to increasing New Zealand's economic growth by providing a workforce with a broad range of skills and knowledge to meet the range of professions and trades that are basic to the mining sector's needs.

Priority 1: Achievement

> *Ensure students and trainees achieve qualifications that lead to good careers and economic security, with a focus on strong pathways between school, tertiary education, and work.*

18. We agree that achievement should be a priority in the Tertiary Education Strategy. The acquisition of meaningful skills is what matters to employers, including in the mining sector. The system needs to ensure courses provide these skills and that their acquisition is reflected in the associated qualifications.

19. We support increased numbers of providers moving into work-based learning and developing new apprenticeship and traineeship programmes.

Priority 2: Economic Impact and Innovation

> *Increase the economic impact of tertiary education by delivering relevant, adaptable skills, and research that drives productivity, innovation, commercialisation and broader economic opportunities.*

20. We agree tertiary education delivering relevant, adaptable skills; and research that drives productivity, innovation, commercialisation and broader economic opportunities will contribute to increased economic growth.

21. We are concerned that in recent years there has been a decline in university earth sciences training, particularly geology. This has implications for the minerals sector both in terms of the employment of graduates within mining companies with the right level of technical skills, and also research capability which will add value to the sector both from mineral exploration through to the application of minerals in manufacturing supply chains.

22. Demand for skills in the minerals sector is growing and will continue to grow as minerals are increasingly sought for new technologies and mining activity in New Zealand increases. New Zealand employers are ever more having to look offshore for workers to fill their needs.

23. We agree with the statement in the strategy that New Zealand's research and innovation performance lags comparable countries. It has low levels of research commercialisation and limited business uptake of new knowledge and technology.

24. This is very relevant to the minerals sector. As with funding for university courses, funding for research in minerals science and geology both in universities and also Crown research institutions and other science organisations, has suffered in recent government science funding rounds.

25. It is important that the decline in university earth sciences training is turned around and that the minerals research capability that New Zealand has built up over many years continues to be developed, particularly given the global race to secure and maximise minerals for technology, energy, medicine, and the like.

26. Research and development in the exploration, extraction, processing and use of minerals has the potential to add considerable economic benefit for New Zealand.

27. We acknowledge the recent establishment of Earth Sciences New Zealand and hope that it and other similar institutions working in the minerals areas are well resourced and enabled to focus on adding value to the sector.

Priority 3: Access and Participation

> *Enable access to education and training for people from all backgrounds and regions, ensuring more people build relevant skills that contribute to a productive economy.*

28. We strongly support reducing barriers for groups of New Zealanders that may traditionally not participate in tertiary education. As well as benefiting the individuals concerned, fully capitalising on New Zealand's potential talent pool benefits industry, the wider economy and society.

29. High-quality information on career pathways and employment outcomes needs to be available to secondary school students, preferably some time before they are leaving school so they can make the right decisions about subjects they study.

30. At the same time, the system has incentivised too many people to opt for university and damaged the reputation and supply of school leavers moving into the trades. Universities have crowded out vocational training institutions to increase enrolments and, in the process, academic standards have declined as well as numbers opting for trades.

31. We support more agile and responsive delivery models to support upskilling and retraining in the vocational education areas. This needs to include more accessible work-based learning and quality online provision giving learners more options for accessing tertiary education.

Priority 4: Integration and Collaboration

> *Deepen collaboration between education providers, employers, iwi, research institutions, and communities to align education with regional and national economic development.*

32. We support the deeper collaboration between education providers and other groups as set out in Priority 4. Closer partnerships between tertiary providers and employers in particular are very important and the benefits go both ways.

33. For example, deeper collaboration between industry and tertiary education providers will help ensure that courses provided will meet the needs of employers. Knowing what skills are in demand from business will benefit educational institutions as well as the students and businesses themselves. A better understanding of the research programmes being undertaken in universities will benefit businesses.

34. Businesses and professionals in the minerals sector should be involved in helping the providers create and design both vocational education training and academic courses. Employers understand the skills needed within their respective industries.

35. For this purpose, we recommend collaboration between the tertiary education providers and industry and professional organisations. The New Zealand Minerals Council and the Australasian Institute of Mining and Metallurgy (AusIMM) New Zealand branch should be involved when it comes to our sector. These organisations can pull together representatives and employers to work with the Government in this process.

36. Governance bodies for mining-related programmes should include individuals with relevant industry experience.

37. Strong connections and collaboration between the minerals sector, the research, science and innovation sector, and government agencies will be important to ensure mineral sector research is optimised. Fostering strong partnerships with industry will help ensure research relevance and facilitate skills development aligned with industry needs.

38. We support the Tertiary Education Strategy placing emphasis on regional responsiveness, and the support of training tailored to local industry conditions and better engaging with Māori and rural learners, as these groups are highly represented in the extractives sector. The risk of variable quality arising from this would need to be managed.