

Submission from New Zealand Minerals Council to the Ministry of Education

Proposal to replace NCEA with new national qualifications

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 make this submission on the discussion document, [Proposal to replace NCEA with new national qualifications](#).
3. This is important to us as the NCEA/secondary school education system is crucial for providing the skilled workforce that the minerals sector relies on.

Background – the minerals industry

4. The minerals sector is crucial to New Zealand. Nearly all materials essential to modern life, from electronics and infrastructure to communications and energy, come from minerals and are therefore extracted or mined from the ground. "If it isn't grown, it must be mined."
5. The New Zealand mining sector produces many of these – aggregates for infrastructure, housing and concrete; coking coal and iron ore for steel; gold, silver, mineral sands and rare earth elements for electronics, hybrid cars, medical devices, solar panels, batteries, and the like.
6. The sector's contribution to the economy is significant. It is the country's most productive sector and provides high wage jobs in the regions. The Government has a goal of doubling minerals exports by 2035, which the industry believes is achievable and with the mining projects in the pipeline, we anticipate a growing workforce that will need to be appropriately trained.
7. Mining companies employ people from a range of vocational trades and highly trained professions in a range of fields including environmental science, geology and engineering.
8. The minerals exploration and mining sectors are growing and there is an increasing need for more trained workers.
9. The NCEA/secondary education system is obviously a crucial part of the pathway for both academic and vocational training providing the skilled workforce that the minerals sector relies on.

Submission

What is wrong with the current system?

10. We agree with the problems of the current system, as identified in the discussion document, in relation to a lack of consistency and too much flexibility affecting the credibility of NCEA.
11. We support the general direction of the proposed reforms including the curriculum refresh, proposed new qualifications, and vocational pathways. Teaching and learning needs to be driven by a strong national curriculum and our national qualifications should assess pupils against this. Shifting the balance away from excessive flexibility will help address the credibility issues associated with the NCEA.
12. As the reforms proceed the Government must continue to work with industry to ensure the system is fit for purpose and is able to meet the requirements of a growing workforce.

Curriculum refresh

13. We support the proposed curriculum refresh, running in parallel with the proposals to replace NCEA.
14. Obviously, the curriculum content is important in preparing students for the workforce. This includes those who will end up working in the minerals sector.
15. It is also important that the broad curriculum does not inadvertently (or explicitly) portray mining in a negative light – particularly in terms of environmental impact, for example – as this would be inconsistent with the facts, evidence and science. It must be emphasised that modern mining in New Zealand operates under some of the highest standards in the world and portrayals of environmental destruction and low labour standards, as well as historic mining methods, are not applicable to New Zealand.

Proposal 1: Working with industry to integrate Vocational Education and Training (VET) subjects into the senior secondary qualifications

16. We support the integration of Vocational Education and Training (VET) subjects into the senior secondary qualifications. This will strengthen vocational pathways and be of value to students, employers, and industry.
17. We see merit in the idea of steering school pupils toward either a university-preparatory route or a vocational stream that blends classroom learning with workplace experience. We recognise the system will need to ensure flexibility for pupils who might want to change track as they get older. Vocational options will be seen as second-tier compared to academic ones for some pupils, but this should not be the case.
18. If this approach progresses, it is critical that businesses and employers are involved with it, helping the Government create VET subjects and shaping the content and skill standards. Employers understand the skills needed within their respective industries.
19. We recommend collaboration with industry organisations in this process as they can pull together representative employers to work with the Government in this process. The New Zealand Minerals Council is happy to help in this regard.

Proposal 2: Introducing a new Foundational Award and national senior secondary qualifications for Years 12 and 13

20. We support the proposal to replace NCEA Level 1 with a Foundational Award in numeracy and literacy. This will prepare students with the basic skills needed to successfully engage with future learning and employment.
21. It will also provide potential employers, including in the minerals sector, with a sense of a school-leaver's knowledge in fundamental areas.

Proposal 3: Shifting focus to a structured and subject approach and introducing required subjects in the curriculum

22. We support the shift from the current standards-based model to a subject-based approach.
23. We agree the standards approach has undermined deep learning and was too easily gamed by both pupils and schools.
24. Focusing on subjects rather than standards will enhance the learning that is needed for a student's chosen pathway post-school.

Proposal 4: Strengthening the achievement requirements

25. We support the proposals around strengthening achievement requirements.
26. We agree that making achievements more transparent and comparable internationally is a good thing.
27. Having both external and internal assessments within a subject will provide potential employers and tertiary educators with a better sense of students' knowledge and skills in key learning areas.