NATIONAL OFFICE
P O Box 12 013
Thorndon
Wellington 6144
Ph: 0800 692 376
Cell: 027 2116317
rebecca@civilcontractors.co.nz
www.civilcontractors.co.nz

Civil Contractors New Zealand submission to Ministry of Education discussion document: Proposal to replace NCEA

To: nceaconsultation@education.govt.nz

Contact: **Rebecca Fox**
Workforce Development Manager
Civil Contractors New Zealand
PO Box 12013
Wellington

Date: 12 September 2025

About Civil Contractors New Zealand
Founded in 1944, Civil Contractors New Zealand is an industry association representing the interests and aspirations of more than 827 member organisations, including 505 large, medium-sized, and small businesses in civil engineering, construction, and general contracting. Our 327 associate members provide valuable products, support, and services to contractor members. We live and work in all communities across New Zealand.

Our members play a vital role in the development of our country, our economy and our way of life. They are responsible for the construction and maintenance the roads connecting our cities and towns; they install and care for the water networks that bring fresh water to houses and wastewater to treatment plants; they install the cables that bring the internet to homes and businesses. These are services a modern and developed economy must have to compete efficiently in world markets and to deliver high living standards for all New Zealanders.

The broad civil construction industry employs more than 60,000 people and undertakes projects worth around $10b to $12b annually. More specifically, our organisation represents the contractors who carry out the physical construction works on New Zealand's roading, rail, port, public transport and utilities networks.

Background
Our industry research tells us that we have too few people coming into the industry as new graduates from school. Pathways and opportunities for students to work in infrastructure construction are rewarding and important for our society, but these pathways need to be

better understood and provided for by education, as illustrated in our '*Developing a Skilled Civil Construction Workforce'* report (2022)

The majority of workers entering the civil construction industry – a massive 66 per cent, as illustrated in the Construction and Infrastructure Centre of Vocational Excellence report '*Where's the front door? – An investigation of the workforce entry points into the construction and infrastructure sectors'* (2023, p3) are career changers.

An industry cannot survive just by taking people from one sector and moving them into another, and this demonstrates that entrants into the infrastructure construction workforce are not receiving the skills and preparation they need from their education. The role that secondary education has in preparing students for work is critical. This includes key literacy and numeracy skills, access to learning pathways that lead to higher education and access to career pathways that can be started in school and taken to higher levels once in employment.

This industry offers meaningful employment opportunities and as we seek to grow our country an emphasis on infrastructure development and the people that carry out this work becomes increasingly important.

Civil Construction is not well understood in secondary education which led us to develop EPIC Careers in Infrastructure as a national career promotion campaign, and a tool to promote careers in the industry - the Infrastructure Career Roadmap – to support teachers, students and families in understanding the role and opportunities the sector has to offer. This campaign and tool has been widely socialised across multiple education platforms, through the Ministry of Education Principal Advisor Network and the Careers and Transition Education Association (CATE) network.

We regularly work with tertiary qualification providers, but are keen to build better education pathways, as well as better connections between students and industry to enter the meaningful careers in infrastructure construction. Not only in terms of the role opportunities, but also in the sense of the subject choices that students need to be able to access to be function well in the industry.

CCNZ welcomes the opportunity to comment on this proposal to the Ministry of Education.

What we support in the proposal

- A clear focus on literacy and numeracy which are required in the civil construction industry. This is covered in the foundational award
- The teaching and integration of vocational education and training into secondary schools
- Improved linkages with industry
- National consistency of teaching assessment and award of qualifications

Where we have concerns

- The capacity of the schools to teach vocational pathways (including infrastructure construction equipment and expertise)
- The scaffolding and relationship building of teaching staff by industry and with industry in order to make vocational pathway teaching a success
- Adequate resourcing of the career team. Too often the career team in schools is inadequately resourced in terms of FTE / professional development
- The role of Industry Skills Board in the standard setting space for secondary schools
- Pastoral care elements that will be required to support students either completing work experience, Gateway, Trades Academies and navigating from the environment of school to the world of work

Section 1: The case for change

Do you agree that our national qualifications should assess against a national curriculum?

Yes we do.

We consider national consistency is good for employers and industry as "they know what they are getting," and for students so the standards they are expected to achieve against are clear. However, we would not like to see the consistency switch to an overly restrictive system with no flexibility and students not being able to access the full range of subjects they should be exposed to.

This may be an issue of timetabling, but students will inevitably manage risk and opportunity cost. For example, many students will be reluctant to commit to a science path if they believe it excludes other opportunities available to them.

Key examples may be a student that is supported to gain a qualification through work experience while at school (for instance rope access or infrastructure works), that is outside the core curriculum but beneficial to the student and their future employer.

Do you understand NCEA?

Yes.

Are there aspects of NCEA you think support student learning and achievement?

Elements of the flexibility have been good for some students and this has allowed a real focus for them. The concept of bite sized chunks of learning and not being pigeonholed has also been helpful for some learners. Ability to gain accreditation on a more flexible range of skills and opportunities can sometimes bridge the gap between school and work.

Do you agree that the senior secondary qualifications system needs to improve?

Completely agree. It is unfortunate that flexibility has allowed students to 'gamify' a system of education leading to lower levels of academic achievement, less consistency and many students with no idea of what they might be capable of due to a lack of pathways and consistency. NCEA is just not clear or consistent enough to support our country's learners.

In terms of priority for improvement, pathways to employment as they link to curriculum teaching needs to be prioritised. Contextualised teaching is important so that students can understand the relevance of what it is they are learning to their future career opportunities.

The government wants the senior secondary qualification to be coherent, consistent and credible, with greater access to an enhanced vocational model. Do you think there are other opportunities for positive change with the new qualifications?
Yes we do. We see there is opportunity for far greater linkages with industry, in that industry can become part of the classroom. Industry has the skills and equipment to teach and support teachers and students in class, but connections for students to be able to enter 'real world' scenarios, and opportunities for infrastructure construction contractors to make their knowledge and equipment available for students need to be built.

Real world teaching is impactful and needs to be considered in order to showcase career opportunities and maximise learning outcomes. The opportunity for greater work experience opportunities, even to find out what you do not like, is an opportunity that needs to be leveraged.

Proposal 1: Working with industry to integrate VET learning into the senior secondary qualification system

Do you support government working with industry to create VET subjects?
Yes we do. The more opportunities young people have to see the range of career options available to them through direct exposure (work experience and contextualised teaching) the better.

We also think the earlier this can occur the better as students can start developing clear thinking about what they might be interested in and how their subject choices are integral to meeting their first career opportunity. However, we have concerns there will be a lack of resourcing in the ISB as they are a new entity in their capacity to do this work, due to under-funding.

Equally, we know schools and industry are stretched, so this also needs to be factored in. Existing Strategic Sector Reference Groups that are part of the current workforce development councils may be able to support some of this early work as a connection into industry. Good transition to work programmes will be needed.

It is also worth noting a key philosophical difference between education and industry. Education tends to see qualifications as the key that opens the door to employment. In some industries (i.e. law or medicine), this is true. But in the infrastructure construction trades, a significant proportion of learning is delivered on the work site, where people can learn to be a civil engineer or a civil tradesperson.

Our current system pushes people towards tertiary education at university of Polytech and leaves our trades. It is important that while the proposal to create VET learning also allows flexibility in the event a student changes their mind.

Proposal 2: Foundation Award and new senior secondary qualifications

Do you agree that is would be beneficial to remove NCEA Level 1 and for student to focus assessment effort on the year 12 and 13 qualification having obtained a Foundational Award in literacy and numeracy
We think NCEA level 1 is not well understood. With 10 credits in literacy and 10 in numeracy is it insufficient to demonstrate lifelong skills in both. The foundational award will need significant bolstering for it to be useful. An employer also needs to understand exactly what the award means.

Even high achievers currently leave school with no qualifications that are relevant to infrastructure construction, so it is worth considering the value an Infrastructure Works qualification (even at level 2) can bring to the classroom.

Do you think other areas of learning or achievement should be considered as part of the foundational award? For example, student attendance?
The key thing is to assess these skills in taught subjects, and support and scaffold students to achieve literacy and numeracy skills. These skills are required for lifelong success and future learning and development opportunities. Attendance should not be considered as part of the award. This should be an expectation of attending school.

If school is adequately engaging with opportunities that allow for learning and creative expression students will turn up. Students at school should have access to opportunities that allow for the development of critical thinking, communication, creativity and develop skills for lifelong learning.

Proposal 3: Shifting focus to a structure and subject approach

Do you support a subject approach to assessments at years 12 and 13.
We do.

How important is it to engage with the full curriculum (rather than segments)?
It is vital that students engage with the full curriculum so they can assess how subjects interrelate with each other. However, students may still need to mix it up a little to balance both academia and creativity. Ensuring there is system flexibility here may be the challenge.

Proposal 4: Strengthened Achievement Requirements
Do you find the proposed achievement requirements for the new qualifications easier to understand than NCEA?
Yes.

Do you think four subjects is a reasonable requirement to gain a secondary qualification?
It is consistent with earlier practices in the New Zealand school curriculum.

Summary Questions
Do you agree that the proposed changes will improve the coherence, consistency and credibility of the qualifications?

Yes, we believe they are. Employers have not well understood NCEA and it has not scaffolded students well into higher study, or the world of work. The system will need a lot of support to ensure that schools are adequately resourced in order to succeed.

What other changes or support would help students complete the new qualifications?
There needs to be a significant bolstering of the career departments in schools and deliver opportunities for teachers for professional development so can learn more about vocational pathways. The departments need to be well funded.

Equally, funding for pastoral care or extension programmes need to be considered for students that require either, or both. Ultimately, we are looking to generate a pipeline of people that leave school and come directly into work because they understand what work opportunities are available to them if this is the path they want to take. We need to ensure that the system allows this and does not favour a focus on tertiary education as the only option.

Conclusion
Civil Contractors New Zealand thanks the Ministry of Education for the opportunity to make this submission and welcomes further engagement to improve outcomes for learners entering the infrastructure construction industry.

Yours faithfully

Rebecca Fox
Workforce Development Manager
Civil Contractors New Zealand Inc.
Rebecca@civilcontractors.co.nz
027 211 6317