

Extractives apprenticeships and training under threat - MITO

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The Government's education reform caters for major industries, and not smaller sectors, such as quarrying and mining, says MITO chief executive, Janet Lane.

"By all means get the polytechnic situation sorted, but not at the expense of industry training organisations," she told *Inside Resources*.

"Simply transferring 145,000 learners to a national institution is not the answer," Lane says of Education Minister Chris Hipkins' vocational education reform. Submissions closed on Friday.

Lane referred to the Government's investing \$100 million in four polytechnics "who were in financial jeopardy".

"Like many other new and highly-specialised programmes, the extractives apprenticeship scheme could be at risk in the transition".

Public consultation on the reforms was originally open until 27 March. However, due to the events in Christchurch on 15 March, this period was extended to 5 April.

Lane says that the seven-week consultation period was insufficient to allow for meaningful engagement on such a substantial proposal.

"We were blindsided with the announcement; there had been no previous indication of the enormity of the reform.

"Furthermore, with no indication of costs and efficiencies, it is impossible to meaningfully assess the merits of the proposal. Guaranteed, this will cause huge uncertainty and massive upheaval to a system that has been operating successfully for over 25 years."

Background

Minister Hipkins announced vocational education reform on 13 February.

He proposed that industry training organisations (ITOs) be disbanded and replaced by Industry Skills Bodies, with the 16 existing institutes of technology and polytechnics (ITPs) merged into a consolidated, government-led institution: The New Zealand Institute of Skills & Technology.

This would also administer apprenticeships and training programmes.

"The Government seeks to establish a unified national system of vocational education and training," he said in a statement at the time.

Apprenticeship programme

MinEx and MITO launched the existing mining and quarrying apprenticeship programme in July 2018.

MITO worked with the extractives industry reference group, consisting of employers in the mining and quarrying industry, and MinEx chief executive Wayne Scott, to develop the Level 2 and Level 4 training programmes.

"We were able to expedite the launch of the Level 2 programme in record time and fast track development of the Level 4 programme.

"And we knew from this, that extra mentoring was required for the Level 2 learners, so we implemented live tutor-led online tutorials on top of their normal pastoral care. This is an example of how nimble MITO can be to meet industry needs," Lane said.

Lane and Scott both share concerns that the new national institution would not be able to respond to industry as quickly or effectively as ITOs currently do.

"MinEx partnered with MITO because of the level of pastoral care we would be able to collectively provide," Scott said.

"It is not clear how this education reform will continue to provide the same level of care that our learners currently experience," Scott said. "Learners can engage with one another, and get help from the tutor whenever they need to. It is a very hands-on thing."

The online tutorials are held every four to six weeks, with eight in total over the course of the Level 2 programme.

Future of programme

Scott agrees the Government's model suits national employers, and major industries, such as building and construction, plumbing or forestry.

"While I do accept that some changes in the current system are necessary, it feels to me that this is an opportunity to make a bold statement, with little consideration of some of the outcomes."



His primary concern is who would develop and maintain learning programmes leading to qualifications in the extractives sector.

“The New Zealand Qualifications Authority approved qualifications that were developed in consultation with industry and MITO,” Scott explained.

“MITO, together with industry, developed learning programmes to support the qualifications and inform *how* and *what* that tutors teach. This is going to be left in limbo – and that puts the apprenticeship programme in jeopardy.”