



MUKA TANGATA

People, Food and Fibre

Workforce Development Council

A New Approach to Learner Pathways

January 2023



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FIND YOUR FIT IN FORESTRY

Te mahi paina me te painga o te mahi nei māu, tirohia

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Muka Tangata Qualifications and Standards Team



Foreword

This discussion document is a response to the clear messages that we have been hearing from industry, iwi and hapū Māori and vocational education providers as we have become established in 2022.

It is clear that, for many, previous settings and approaches to qualifications, standards and other forms of recognition for skill and capabilities have been inflexible and overly complex. Equally as clear is that these arrangements have not been working – the numbers of people in formal vocational education in our sector have been dropping over the last five years.

This has been happening in the midst of endemic skill and labour shortages across our sector. It is clear we need some major changes.

Our opportunity is to create a streamlined set of qualifications, standards and micro-credentials that work for ākonga (learners), our industry, and particularly for Māori and Pacific peoples. Māori and Pacific peoples are a major positive demographic opportunity for our sector - but only if vocational education enables their success.

We need a system of qualifications, standards and micro-credentials that is much more responsive to diverse needs - of employers, ākonga, and iwi and hapū Māori.

A New Approach to Learner Pathways sets out how we hope to do this. We welcome feedback and ideas to ensure that we are able deliver on that vision.



Jeremy Baker

Chief Executive, Muka Tangata

The Reform of Vocational Education

On 1 August 2019, the Government announced the Reform of Vocational Education (RoVE), with the aspirations of providing learners with more support while they are training, and of guiding vocational education and training (VET) to become more relevant to actual industry work. This will allow ākonga to move more easily between regions, between work-based and provider-based training, and return to training more easily if their employment situation changes.

This new system will have a stronger focus on employers; delivering the skills they need, providing more support for their employees, and ensuring greater consistency in vocational education across the country. Long term, this will increase the number of employers who are engaged in vocational education.

Work-integrated learning will become an increasingly important part of the VET system, giving people the opportunity and flexibility to earn while they learn, and gain an education that is more directly relevant to the changing needs of the workplace.



The Education Amendment Act

The Education (Vocational Education and Training Reform) Amendment Act (the Act) came into effect on 1 April 2020. It amends the Education Act 1989 and repeals the Industry Training and Apprenticeships Act 1992 to create a unified and cohesive vocational education and training system.

The Act has:

- established a new regulatory framework for vocational education and training.
- enabled workforce development councils to be established (including Muka Tangata, People, Food and Fibre Workforce Development Council).
- established Te Pūkenga - New Zealand Institute of Skills and Technology.
- provided transitional arrangements to enable a smooth transfer of existing functions and responsibilities to the new system.

These changes aim to create a vocational education and training system that is ready for a fast-changing future of skills, learning and work.

A unified vocational education system will:



Deliver to the unique needs of all ākonga.



Be relevant to the changing needs of employers.



Uphold Māori Crown partnerships.



Be collaborative, innovative, and sustainable.

Changes to Qualifications

In 2020, the New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA) engaged with key stakeholders and heard strong support for simplifying the design of vocational qualifications, as a key part of achieving the desired outcomes of RoVE. These ideas were formally tested through consultation in 2021.

One aim was to bring industry, employers, and iwi closer to the design of qualifications.

Following this consultation, and to implement the intent of the Act, in September 2021, NZQA announced changes to the design of vocational qualifications.

Changes include:

- Skill Standards will form the building blocks of provider programmes or of any 'national curriculum'. Skill standards will be developed by Workforce Development Councils (WDCs) in collaboration with industry and providers. Skill standards will include learning outcomes.
- WDCs can determine – qualification by qualification – whether to enable multiple programmes against the New Zealand qualification or to use a 'national curriculum'.
- Micro-credentials can be developed by providers and WDCs, which providers can be accredited to deliver. Micro-credentials will be formally included on the renamed New Zealand Qualifications and Credentials Framework.
- Training schemes will be removed and renamed as micro-credentials.

NZQA is now implementing these changes.

Changes to the Food and Fibre Sector

Muka Tangata wholly supports the aims of RoVE, and the rule changes proposed by NZQA to progress these aims. We recognise that, to become a powerful agent in this change programme, we will need to be proactive in its approach to qualification, credential, and skill standard development.

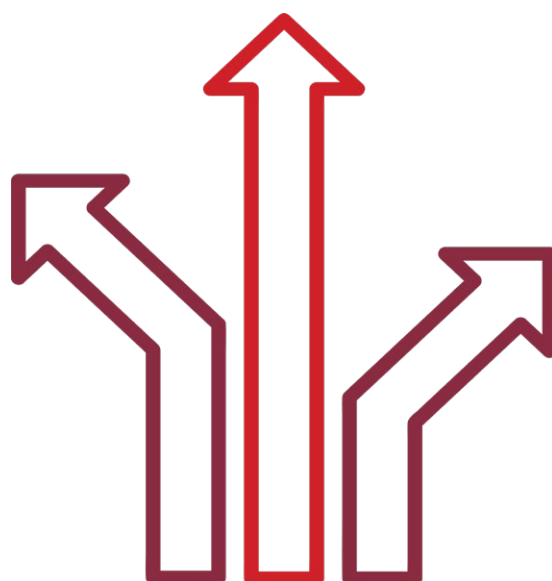
Our industries and communities are facing unfamiliar challenges and opportunities; they are looking to transform to respond to these. This transformation requires space for innovation and responsiveness to a more diverse workforce and community, and a system that recognises these different and variable needs.

Every employer is different, and every learner is different. Training can allow providers to respond more effectively to these differences if the qualifications and standards allow them the space to do so.

Over the last 30 years, there has been a strong focus on 'consistency' in qualifications and standards, which has resulted in rigidity in the interpretation and application of listing rules. We agree that some level of consistency is required but only for things that need to be consistent. There should be a clear justification of the need for consistency, so that innovation and responsiveness is enabled and expected.

Frameworks and pathways are vital, but these need to **enable variability and diversity** as well as supply structure and coherence.

It is also important to recognise that **there are many learners who do not follow the education pathways set for them**. Our qualification and credential design needs to allow for meaningful exit points and entry points that can recognise what the individual learner knows and can do, and accommodate any changes to their personal circumstances.



Mobility between jobs, employers, regions, and sectors has increased and thought needs to be given to whether our education solutions allow or obstruct this movement. We do not want an individual learner's education pathway to be arrested because our framework is too rigid.

The in-built competition among tertiary providers has not facilitated learner mobility, as what might be good for an individual (for example starting a provider-led programme and then getting work in that sector) has not been good for the performance measures of the provider. One of the stated aims of RoVE is to encourage greater collaboration amongst providers in the system, and to support learners to move easily between regions and between work-based and provider-based training. It is important that our standards and qualifications are designed to enable this.

It has always been the goal to create meaningful pathways for learners, but the focus has been more on describing employment roles within an industry, rather than looking across all our industries to find areas of common ground or overlap.

We need to try to create a framework, and suite of products, that maximises flexibility and transferability without shutting off opportunities for specialisms or creating something too generic to be intelligible to industry.



Our Response

We acknowledge that there is work to be done to our suite of qualifications, credentials, and standards to increase learner mobility, recognise diverse needs, and be flexible in intent to allow for innovation and responsiveness.

Our quality assurance settings should be equally enabling.

We will work with industry to understand how we can maximise learner mobility while ensuring qualifications have currency for employers. **To do this, we will ask ourselves two key questions.**

1 - What is the optimum level of skill flexibility and transferability for ākonga in the food and fibre sector?

To answer this question, we will engage with participants in the VET system and beyond to:

- understand the requirement and value of flexibility and transferability for (and between) the industries that we serve.
- identify examples for industry where transferable skills are already articulated for students.
- identify barriers (real, perceived, structural or other) to the successful implementation of pathways which serve multiple industries within our sector.

2 - What action should we take to achieve this outcome?

Listening to the voices of ākonga, providers, and industry we will:

- investigate the flexibility and transferability of our current qualifications, standards, and micro-credentials, as well as the skills they promote.
- identify successful examples of existing educational programs from within other sectors, and how those same concepts could be replicated for use in our own.

From 2023, the industry intelligence we receive and capture in the workforce development plans will largely drive our 'development and review' work plan, and inform the content and structure of what we create going forwards.

We will prioritise early and regular engagement with iwi and hapū Māori to better align our work with their priorities, and to inform the inclusion of a te ao Māori view into our educational solutions. Additionally, we will deepen our engagement with tertiary education providers, ensuring that what is designed can be converted into programmes swiftly.

Through a broadened engagement process we hope to better understand the needs of employers and potential ākonga not currently engaging with our qualifications, with a particular emphasis on underserved learners.

Where possible, we aim to develop qualifications, credentials and standards in parallel to ensure that all components work together cohesively, and to increase the speed of their delivery to providers. This should also future-proof the learning pathways, reducing the need for frequent reviews.



Overarching Principles

We have identified three overarching development principles that will underpin, inform, and support our continued work creating and maintaining qualifications, standards, and micro-credentials that are fit-for-purpose, flexible, and high-quality.

1 - The incorporation of mātauranga Māori into learning

Using mātauranga Māori as an essential component of every educational development in a food and fibre setting, in accordance with our commitment to te Tiriti o Waitangi, resides at the core of what we do.

The VET system will better support Māori to flourish in the food and fibre sector and allow better insight into te ao Māori.

2 - The creation of a food and fibre skills framework

All qualifications, standards, and micro-credentials within the food and fibre sector should work together as a coherent set in both workplace-based and provider-based settings to form a wider and more transferable skills base.

Pathways will become more intelligible and enable greater learner mobility within the sector and beyond.

3 - The design of learning elements in parallel

Most qualifications, standards, and micro-credentials will be designed together, and tailored responsively based on input from the relevant industry workforce development plan.

Conjunctive design ensures and supports relevance, coherence, and mobility, and creates clearer pathways for learners.

Design Principles

We have developed a set of specific design principles that we will take into future qualification, credential and standard development or review projects. Some of these are not new; others are only now possible because of the recent changes to the qualifications system.

1. Skill Standards

Principle	Description	Impact
Skill Standards are developed and made compulsory where useful.	Many qualifications will be fully defined by skill standards; but some may have credits that are more loosely defined. Not every outcome of a qualification need be covered by a standard if this is not useful.	Use of compulsory skill standards enables greater learner transferability across multiple providers and modes of delivery. Having some credits or outcomes that are not tied to skill standards enables greater flexibility in programme design by providers, and greater tailoring by/for learners and employers.
Skill Standards are less prescriptive.	Skill Standards provide only the level of specificity and detail required, recognising the varied contexts in different food and fibre workplaces and industries.	Less prescription gives greater flexibility to providers to account for regional differences, greater tailoring by/for learners. Could reduce the need for reviews and updates to standards as less detail contained in the standards.
Skill Standards have standardised sizes.	Ideally, standards describe significant skill sets that act as buildable blocks for delivery. For example, one standard of 15 credits rather than three of 5 credits.	Standardised sizes help providers to build programmes. Larger standards should reduce risk of over-assessment and reduce administration for the provider.

2. Micro-credentials

Principle	Description	Impact
Micro-credentials are used in three ways.	1. Stackable elements of qualifications 2. Additional elements to qualifications 3. Stand-alone specialised skills	Clarity of purpose could support better micro-credential design and help with learner and employer understanding of the system. Could enable greater recognition of mātauranga Māori.
Micro-credentials and/or skill standards are designed so they can be used to recognise iwitanga and hapūtanga.	Design that enables recognition while ensuring that rangatiratanga is respected and enhanced. Micro-credentials could be developed by iwi or hapū Māori, with Muka Tangata support. Relevant skill standards would need to be designed so that the iwitanga content is not encoded in a national standard.	Enables greater recognition of mātauranga Māori while respecting rangatiratanga. Supports success for Māori and better workforce development for iwi and hapū Māori.

Micro-credentials as stackable elements:

Micro-credentials have currency not only as stand-alone credentials, but as building blocks, stacked within wider qualifications. These stackable micro-credentials:

- give individual ākonga flexible entry and exit points, enabling them to create their own unique pathways, in line with their personal and professional needs and circumstances.
- give employers and tertiary education providers agency, and flexibility of choice, to determine what skills are most needed by their businesses and in their communities.

3. Qualifications

Principle	Description	Impact
Qualifications for an industry are coherent and create pathways.	It is clear what each qualification supports and leads to; the connections between qualifications are clear.	Supports pathways, mobility, and attraction.
Qualifications have standardised sizes.	Qualifications of 40, 60, 80, 100 and 120 credits.	<p>Enables providers, learners, and employers to have a clearer understanding of the system.</p> <p>Enables providers to plan their programme and resource development workload more easily.</p>
Qualifications have pre-designed exit points.	These could either be a group of micro-credentials, or 'exit' qualifications.	Enables greater skill recognition and meaningful learner success, as well as later progression.
Qualifications have strands.	Apart from highly specialised qualifications, most qualifications would have strands to enable the sharing of a common core across a sector.	<p>Enables greater flexibility within industries and workplaces</p> <p>Enables greater recognition of mātauranga Māori.</p>
Qualifications have optional elements.	All qualifications have a number of credits that include optional elements.	Enables learners and employers to tailor the qualification and programme to their needs.
Qualifications have fully stacked micro-credentials	Most, if not all, elements of a qualification would be attainable or could be recognised as a micro-credential.	Enables learners to build up towards a qualification using micro-credentials, and/or have more of their learning recognised, even if they did not fully complete a qualification.

Next Steps

We have been in conversations with the Food and Fibre Centre of Vocational Excellence to align their numerous research projects with this work. The following projects align with our work, and we have added staff to these projects:

Project name	Scheduled completion date
Training and Career Framework	31 March 2023
NZ Apprenticeships Level 1-4 Review	March 2023
Attraction and Retention Research Programme	31 October 2023
Food and Fibre Leadership Framework Research Project	November 2025
Food and Fibre Degree-level Apprenticeship	TBA

We have also initiated conversations with the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment in relation to Regional Skills Leadership Group (RSLG) involvement, particularly those RSLGs where the food and fibre sector is of interest.

We are discussing this project with our colleagues from across the other WDCs – both to see whether similar work has already been done in other sectors, or if it has been identified as priority work.

We are also interested to see where there may be opportunities for learner mobility and transferability across the entire Ohu Ahumahi WDC network.

The Qualifications and Standards team will review the current standards and qualifications that are under our purview, with goal of mapping the ‘current state’ and identifying potential topics or activities that lend themselves to being reworked as core across the suite.

There are currently **1332 standards** and **86 qualifications** that fall under our coverage, so this review is a big piece of work. We are fortunate to have staff who know these products very well and may be able to identify some subject areas for immediate exploration.

We look forward to exploring this new approach with industry and tertiary education providers to support the vision of a unified vocational education system that maximises learner agency and transferability, supports Māori success, and contributes to the upskilling of the food and fibre sector.





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