



High failure rates for B Grade quarry qualifications are a symptom of wider issues within the quarry industry which it is determined to address as part of a wider response, says Aggregate and Quarry CEO Roger Parton.

A recent article in our journal, Aggregate News on B Grade Certificates of Competence covered the debate going on within our industry.

It outlined how failure rates of 60% are being recorded for B Grade CoC oral exams run by WorkSafe's Board of Examiners.

The article surveyed a range of views on what were the causes of this high rate of failure.

The story was picked up by Radio NZ's Morning Report which included commentary from a union spokesman who claimed the industry was determined to avoid any regulation.

Nothing could be further from the truth. What is true is that the quarry industry did not want to be included in the rushed mining laws that followed the Pike River disaster. Sorry, but given the last underground coal mine is now closing this year, we were right to say we did not need our guys wading through laws which referred to issues like methane which don't exist in quarries; we wanted and still want quarry-specific regulations.

Behind the objection of being lumped in with mining was another reality. The average age of a worker in the quarry sector is mid-fifties. Many of our employees can turn a digger on a sixpence but they may not have had much, if any, formal training. Some of them are not highly literate, so complex and irrelevant mining regulations would not assist their understanding of what is required.

Besides its Governments, not industries, which set the regulatory environment? Over the working life of the average age quarrymen they've seen Governments alternate between complete hands-off the steering wheel to taking a firm grip. That's where we are now and our industry has been working very closely with WorkSafe to develop laws and regulations that are fit for purpose. The quarry sector is actually well

ahead of many other industries because we were required to make some major changes ahead of the new legislation, including the detailed new Good Practice Guidelines on quarry safety, which we launched with WorkSafe in late 2015.

Underground mines are (or were when still open) often run by tertiary-education professionals with big management teams and workforces in their dozens or hundreds. In contrast, many quarries are one or two-man bands.

One of the issues emerging in the high B Grade oral exam failure rate is that it is seen as being too close to the A Grade qualification. Someone with a B Grade CoC might manage four staff; an A Grade can manage a quarry with 40 or more workers. In the same way as a driver's license is less onerous to get than a Passenger Services Licence, there needs to be a differentiated requirement for a B Grade CoC.

More than that, there's a strong case for another level of qualification for the small, specific sites that dot our landscape. You'll have seen them in places like an alluvial riverbank, where a couple of guys might be crushing river gravel.

Getting qualifications in place and the training to support these takes time. I acknowledge our industry had a year's extension to get CoCs in place by 1 January this year. Many in our industry did leave their new or renewed CoC oral exam until the latter part of 2016. Some were clearly not properly prepared; others felt like they were being put back in a classroom they'd left 40 or years more before and were spooked by it. We need to work on how exams are conducted and better prepare our people for them.

In mid-February, the Aggregate and Quarry Association and Institute of Quarrying NZ brought together a half day summit on these issues. We met with Mark Pizey, WorkSafe's Chief Inspector Extractives and worked to develop a package of measures which we think can get some real progress on the current B grade failure rate. At time of writing, details were to be confirmed and I can't speak for WorkSafe but I can say that the AQA/IOQNZ will be working with their members on several fronts, including:

- A survey of CoC oral examinees to ask about their exam experiences, what training they received and how useful was it
- Development of some sample questions a CoC oral candidate is likely to face
- Seeking clarity on what, if any, materials a candidate can take into an oral exam such as the Good Practice Guidelines or emergency management plans
- Contributing to a new round of regional forums including running mock oral exams

AQA/IOQNZ will also continue to work with WorkSafe on any potential to develop a lower grade qualification, even as an interim. Longer term, we also want to review the

unit standards currently required for a CoC and how training can be better tailored to industry realities.

We would also like to see a Government crackdown on the hundreds of unregistered quarries who are not even attempting to meet the regulatory requirements and who feature far too prominently in industry injury statistics.

As industry bodies, we only represent a small percentage of quarries. Far from dragging the chain on regulation, we are committed to making it work.