

15 September 2025

Education Consultation
Ministry of Education
PO Box 1666, Wellington 6140
sent by email to: nceaconsultation@education.govt.nz



Federated Mountain Clubs of New Zealand Inc. Feedback on the Ministry of Education Discussion Document “Proposal to replace NCEA with new national qualifications”

Tēnā koe

Introduction

Federated Mountain Clubs of New Zealand Inc. (FMC) was founded in 1931 to, amongst other things, promote outdoor recreation in our outdoors and to preserve our backcountry for non-commercial outdoor recreation. We continue to advocate for New Zealand's backcountry and outdoor recreation on behalf of over 22,000 members comprising 118 clubs, organisations and schools, and over 1,000 individual supporters. We also speak for the large number of other New Zealanders who also enjoy outdoor recreation seeking beauty, spiritual enjoyment, challenges and friendship.

We understand that as part of the NCEA curriculum review, Outdoor Education (OE) is being removed from the list of NCEA subjects available as part of the senior curriculum and would be offered instead as a Vocational Education and Training (VET) subject.

Summary of our feedback

We understand that the government is considering removing Outdoor Education (OE) from the NCEA curriculum and transitioning it into a vocational subject^{1,2,3} as part of the proposals to replace NCEA with a new qualifications pathway by working with industry to integrate Vocational Education and Training (VET) subjects into the senior secondary qualifications.

Federated Mountain Clubs of New Zealand Inc. (FMC) opposes the change of Outdoor Education (OE) from the curriculum to the vocational subject list. FMC's concerns are specifically around the omission of OE from the curriculum and as such, we have limited our feedback to this area.

The main points of our feedback are:

- Retaining Outdoor Education in the curriculum preserves the flexibility to tailor programmes to local environments and students' needs. A homogenous, vocationally-focused approach would limit these unique advantages.

¹ <https://newsroom.co.nz/2025/09/13/outdoor-education-up-a-creek-without-a-paddle/>

² <https://www.thepost.co.nz/wellbeing/360821843/dropping-subject-could-benefit-us-its-still-bad-idea>

³ <https://eonz.org.nz/Home/NCEA-Outdoor-Education-Proposed-Changes>

- Through its unique pedagogy, OE builds transferable skills which strengthen learning across the curriculum, providing students with a more holistic education that equips ākonga (students) for future study and employment.
- OE has proven to be beneficial to participants physical, mental, and social wellbeing⁴, challenges particularly relevant to current younger generations^{5,6,7}. Positive wellbeing is linked to better academic performance⁸.
- Moving Outdoor Education out of schools curriculums risks wasting schools' existing investments. If enrollment is reduced, there could be implications where the supply of skilled domestic labour no longer meets the demand of the adventure-tourism industry.

Specific comments on the proposal

Benefits to staying on the curriculum

Outdoor Education (OE) offers uniquely place-based learning opportunities. Retaining OE in the senior curriculum allows schools to tailor the OE programme to take advantage of opportunities in their local natural environments⁹. Transferring responsibility to an industry skills body may not allow this discretion when it comes to developing an OE programme to engage ākonga (students) with their regions.

To ensure consistency between schools rather than relying on homogeneity, OE qualifications could be designed to recognise a broad set of competencies across the whole subject, with qualifications granted for multiple skills gained over a broad range of activities. Keeping OE within the curriculum prevents the curriculum from being limited to a narrow range of vocational outcomes, which increases the likelihood that students with a diverse range of educational aspirations and interests will stay on for Years 12 & 13 and benefit from other subjects in the school curriculum¹⁰. Retaining this visibility and prestige ensures the subject is taken seriously within schools.

Beyond academic education

The inclusion of OE enriches the overall curriculum by teaching co-operation, practical problem solving, leadership and self efficacy¹¹. Development of non-academic skills have been associated with improved educational attainment and job success¹². OE also has the opportunity to also offer knowledge rich content. An outdoor education programme can be used to teach mathematics and reasoning through skills such as navigation and planning trips. It can also involve research and critical analysis in areas of geography, geology, ecology and conservation, fostering passion for sciences and social sciences. Students learn in different ways, and OE has

⁴ <https://theeducationhub.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Outdoor-play-and-why-its-important.pdf>

⁵ <https://sportnz.org.nz/resources/determinants-of-physical-activity-in-young-people/>

⁶ <https://www.mhwc.govt.nz/news-and-resources/unicef-report-low-ranking-for-nz-child-and-youth-mental-health-and-wellbeing/>

⁷ <https://doi.org/10.54474/herourou.v2i1.7149>

⁸ <https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/POST-PN-0739/POST-PN-0739.pdf>

⁹ <https://www.nzcer.org.nz/nzcerpress/set/articles/teacher-perspectives-place-responsive-outdoor-education>

¹⁰ <https://www.rnz.co.nz/national/programmes/morningreport/audio/2019001457/outdoor-education-and-to-urism-teachers-concerned-about-ncea-overhaul>

¹¹ <https://newzealandcurriculum.tahurangi.education.govt.nz/outdoor-education/5637166437.p>

¹² <https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/POST-PN-0583/POST-PN-0583.pdf>

the opportunity to intercept ākonga (students) who fall through the cracks of traditional education systems. It also has the potential to utilise activities they enjoy as a vessel for engagement in academic content.

Boosting the non-academic skills and confidence of ākonga (students) can help to expand their desire to strive for further qualifications¹³. Attaining tertiary or vocational training before students enter the workforce helps to raise their talent and confidence for relevant sectors. For students who choose to pursue a non-OE related career they may rely on skills such as resilience or perseverance they developed through OE. The success of the long running outdoor recreation programme offered to adults, teens and aspiring leaders by Outward Bound NZ is a testimony to the benefits OE offers to develop skills and confidence that will be applied in many areas of life. With the pervasive influence of social media contributing to prejudice and divisive debate, OE offers a wonderful opportunity for different groups to meet, to have common goals and to work together to achieve them.

A number of New Zealand's most academically successful schools have significant outdoor education facilities and programmes, which is a testament to the value these high performing institutions place on OE and its part in developing self reliant, well rounded students. As a result of this influence, students may also be encouraged to volunteer or participate in community activities, such as local sports clubs as a response to skills and values gained during their studies.

Health benefits

OE provides significant physical, mental, and social benefits for ākonga¹⁴ (students). This is particularly salient at a time when young people display increasing levels of sedentary behaviour¹⁵, and face greater mental health challenges¹⁶ and loneliness¹⁷. OE encourages students to step away from screens, and engage actively with the natural environment and other people, fostering physical fitness and greater awareness of nutrition, health and wellbeing. Positive wellbeing is also linked to better academic performance¹⁸.

OE is strongly linked to improved mental health, including reduced anxiety and enhanced self-esteem¹⁹. The unique pedagogy of OE develops transferable skills, such as teamwork, leadership, and problem-solving, which support learning across the wider curriculum. These skills help prepare students for life beyond school²⁰. While physical education and school sports have long been part of the curriculum, OE provides a distinct and inclusive pathway for students who may not feel comfortable or able to participate in competitive team sports²¹. By offering a broader range of opportunities for engagement, OE ensures more students experience the benefits of physical activity, increasing the likelihood of their continued involvement in recreational and community activities into adulthood, including at tertiary level.

¹³ <https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/POST-PN-0583/POST-PN-0583.pdf>

¹⁴ <https://theeducationhub.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Outdoor-play-and-why-its-important.pdf>

¹⁵ <https://sportnz.org.nz/resources/determinants-of-physical-activity-in-young-people/>

¹⁶

<https://www.mhwc.govt.nz/news-and-resources/unicef-report-low-ranking-for-nz-child-and-youth-mental-health-and-wellbeing/>

¹⁷<https://doi.org/10.54474/herourou.v2i1.7149>

¹⁸ <https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/POST-PN-0739/POST-PN-0739.pdf>

¹⁹

<https://theconversation.com/outdoor-education-has-psychological-cognitive-and-physical-health-benefits-for-children-183763>

²⁰ <https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/POST-PN-0583/POST-PN-0583.pdf>

²¹

<https://publications.outwardbound.co.nz/story/outward-bound-new-zealand-purongo-a-tau-or-annual-report-2023-2024/page/13/1>

Economic benefits

If the subject is no longer offered by schools and instead run by polytechnics or other institutions, students would be required to travel further for their education, as this subject, due to its nature, cannot be taught online via distance. This may discourage students from enrolling in the subject and further limit their options not only in school but for after school. This would be especially problematic for students attending rural schools. OE also reflects a unique aspect of New Zealand's culture and education system, fostering an international reputation which can be particularly attractive to exchange students²².

Adventure-tourism is a growing industry in Aotearoa²³, essential for GDP and importantly many regional economies²⁴. Skills and training in OE can help rural students find jobs in their area once they have finished high school, opportunities which may otherwise be limited. Declining enrolments in outdoor education programmes will reduce the number of graduates with relevant skillsets, limiting the domestic workforce available to meet industry demand and increasing reliance on overseas workers to fill seasonal roles²⁵.

Some schools have already made significant financial investments in their outdoor education programmes, such as purchasing equipment like kayaking or mountain bikes or constructing facilities like climbing walls. These facilities would have the potential to be significantly underutilised.

Recommendation

FMC recommends that OE is retained in the curriculum as a general senior subject list for Years 12 and 13.

Ngā mihi,



Megan Dimozantos
President
Federated Mountain Clubs of NZ

²² <https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/thedetail/572931/the-detail-outdoor-education-up-creek-without-paddle>

²³ https://www.aut.ac.nz/_data/assets/pdf_file/0010/136567/Outdoor-Education-Careers.pdf

²⁴ <https://www.tourismnewzealand.com/insights/tourism-impact/>

²⁵ <https://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/bay-of-plenty-schools-fear-for-outdoor-education-after-proposed-government-change/ZTIP2CA64RDJRAPWFV4ENYSCT4/>