

Submission on Phase 5 Physical Education Curriculum

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Submitter details

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Executive Summary

Introduction

1. Recreation Aotearoa is the professional association and industry organisation responsible for providing leadership, advocacy, and professional development opportunities for those involved in the broader recreation sector. We serve as the collective voice of recreation in New Zealand, ensuring its value is recognised across government, industry, and communities.
2. Our membership includes recreation policy makers, territorial local authorities, regional sports trusts, outdoor recreation providers, and aquatic facility managers. We work to build capability and equip individuals and organisations with the skills to deliver high-quality experiences that engage participants across their lifespan.
3. Our mission is enhancing wellbeing through recreation. We believe recreation is not a discretionary “nice-to-have” but a fundamental contributor to New Zealand’s physical and mental health, social cohesion, and youth development.
4. Recreation Aotearoa conceptualises recreation through the lens of Te Whai Oranga – the pursuit of wellbeing. This reframes recreation as a holistic endeavour, shifting the focus from purely physical activity toward wellbeing in its broadest sense, recognising that individual health is inseparable from the wellbeing of communities and the environment.
5. We welcome the opportunity to submit on the Phase 5 Physical Education Curriculum. This review is a critical inflection point for our education system, and the policy settings established here will directly shape the opportunities our rangatahi have for healthy, connected lives.
6. Our position is informed by the principles of a commitment to physical literacy, holistic wellbeing, and ensuring that the curriculum remains realistic and inclusive.
7. Consistent with our collaborative approach, we explicitly endorse and draw upon the expertise of our sector partner, Education Outdoors New Zealand (EONZ), regarding the specific disciplinary needs of Outdoor Education (OE) within this phase.

Restoring the Senior Outdoor Education Pathway

8. Recreation Aotearoa is deeply concerned that the current Phase 5 structure creates a broken pathway for Outdoor Education. While Year 12 and 13 Outdoor Education exist as separate subjects, the omission of a dedicated Year 11 Outdoor Education subject creates a critical gap.
9. Currently, roughly 3,000 students take Level 1 Outdoor Education annually. Outdoor Education often engages students who do not see themselves in traditional, sport-focused PE, offering different avenues for success and connection to te taiao.
10. Removing this at Year 11 places the OE pathway at a distinct disadvantage compared to Physical Education (PE), as students entering Year 12 OE will lack a foundational year of senior subject-specific learning.

Clarifying Disciplinary Boundaries and Pathways

11. We believe the draft Phase 5 PE curriculum attempts to absorb too much OE content, leading to confusion and safety risks. The current "pathways visual" implies that PE alone provides a sufficient foundation for specialist roles like Mountain/Wilderness Safety Officer or Adventure Tourism Guide. These roles require specific OE knowledge—such as dynamic risk management and group leadership in natural environments—that PE knowledge statements do not adequately cover
12. We echo EONZ's call to define "environment" more tightly within PE. While PE appropriately focuses on movement constraints and social settings, OE focuses on dynamic natural settings where decision-making under uncertainty is paramount. Blurring these lines risks treating outdoor contexts as mere "movement spaces" rather than specialist environments requiring specific safety-management Physical Education

Resourcing and Unfunded Mandates

13. In our Year 0–10 submission, we flagged the risk of "unfunded mandates", and this concern persists for Phase 5. The draft suggests that schools may use outdoor contexts to meet PE requirements. However, many schools lack the transport budgets and equipment required for safe Education Outside the Classroom (EOTC).
14. There is a significant risk that PE teachers may be expected, implicitly or explicitly, to lead sessions in outdoor contexts without the specialist training or knowledge required for safe delivery.

Broadening the View of Movement

15. Consistent with our previous advocacy, we request that the curriculum explicitly include "Recreation" alongside "Sport" as a named context. This ensures that lifelong activities like walking, cycling, and paddling are recognised as legitimate learning modes. Furthermore, the curriculum must remain strengths-based and inclusive, ensuring that disabled students are not positioned as an afterthought in performance-focused environments

Recommendations

16. **Develop a Separate Year 11 Outdoor Education Subject:** This is essential to provide a coherent foundation for Year 12–13 OE and to protect a valued pathway for 3,000+ students.
17. **Revise PE Pathways Visuals:** Remove specialist outdoor sector roles from the PE-only visual to avoid misleading students and careers advisors.
18. **Tighten PE Knowledge Statements:** Ensure that OE-specific knowledge (e.g., specialist outdoor risk assessment) is not compulsory in PE. Outdoor contexts in PE should be clearly labelled as ****optional**** and contingent on robust EOTC safety systems.
19. **Adopt a Te Whai Oranga Lens:** Reintroduce Hauora as a guiding principle to ensure a holistic focus on wellbeing across the lifespan.
20. **Address Implementation Equity:** Provide targeted resourcing to ensure that all schools, regardless of their equity index, can safely access the outdoor and aquatic environments mentioned in the draft

Conclusion

21. Aotearoa New Zealand needs a curriculum that supports both those who thrive in sport and those who find their wellbeing in te taiao. By establishing a dedicated Year 11 Outdoor Education subject and clearly distinguishing it from Physical Education, the Ministry can ensure a safer, more equitable, and more professional pathway for our young people.

Appendix 1 – [Title]