



Submission

To the Ministry of Education on the
draft English Curriculum

PPTA Te Wehengarua

The New Zealand Post Primary Teachers' Association / Te Wehengarua (PPTA) is the union and professional association for secondary school teachers in New Zealand.

PPTA Te Wehengarua represents the majority of teachers engaged in secondary education in New Zealand, including secondary teachers, principals, and manual and technology teachers.

Under our constitution, all PPTA Te Wehengarua activity is guided by the following objectives:

- to advance the cause of education generally and of all phases of secondary and technical education in particular;
- to uphold and maintain the just claims of its members individually and collectively; and,
- to affirm and advance Te Tiriti O Waitangi.

This submission is from the PPTA Te Wehengarua Executive and is on behalf of all of our members.

Introduction

At PPTA Te Wehengarua's Annual Conference in 2024, the following principles on curriculum development were agreed:

- Principle 1: Te Tiriti is valued and is visible;
- Principle 2: Learners are at the centre so that the curriculum is inclusive and equitable;
- Principle 3: The curriculum is manageable, is well resourced, coherent, and well communicated;
- Principle 4: Teachers are valued as curriculum designers and their expertise and specialisation are recognised and valued; and,
- Principle 5: The curriculum is regularly reviewed through research on effective practice to make sure it is fit for purpose.

This submission sets out our members' views on how well the Draft English Curriculum reflects these principles, recognising that its development will shape curriculum design across other learning areas.

The final section of this submission takes a brief look at how well, in the Association's view, the draft English Curriculum measures up against the Ministry of Education's own Curriculum Design Principles.

PPTA Te Wehengarua's Five Principles for Curriculum development

Principle 1: Te Tiriti is valued and is visible

Te Tiriti and Te Mātaiaho

Unlike the Draft Mathematics and Statistics Curriculum (years 9-13) released for consultation in January 2025, the Draft English Curriculum is problematic in meeting obligations under Te Tiriti. Where the former was clearly framed within the whakapapa of Te Mātaiaho (pages 5-7), the latter is void of all references to Te Mātaiaho.

The rationale for Te Mātaiaho, the refreshed curriculum, included giving practical effect to Te Tiriti o Waitangi. Changes that were under development for this work had Mātauranga Māori sitting at the heart of the learning areas, with key competencies, literacy, and numeracy explicitly woven into each learning area.

Through collaboration, an overarching kaupapa was created with the desire to enable the centrality of Te Tiriti o Waitangi. Alongside this kaupapa was a redressing of the impact of colonisation on the curriculum, through the incorporation of Mātauranga Māori and more emphasis on local curricula. In the latest Draft English curriculum there is a more Euro-centric approach with, for example, practices under oratory being referred to as planned speeches such as the Westminster debate.

The Education and Training Act 2020 provides, in section 127, that one of the primary objectives for School Boards is to give effect to Te Tiriti o Waitangi as it outlines the duty of the Crown to actively promote and protect Tiriti rights and to develop education settings in a way that reflects Māori-Crown relationships. In keeping with this requirement therefore, the Teaching Council's Standards for the Teaching Profession also require that teachers '[d]emonstrate commitment to tangata whenuatanga and Te Tiriti o Waitangi partnership in Aotearoa New Zealand'.

Not surprisingly then, under Rule 4(c), the Constitution of PPTA Te Wehengarua states (as above) that one of the objects of the Association shall be:

To affirm and advance Te Tiriti o Waitangi (The Treaty of Waitangi) as embodied in the First Schedule of these rules.

PPTA Te Wehengarua takes its commitment to affirm and advance Te Tiriti o Waitangi seriously and expects to see the mana and dignity of Mātauranga Māori protected and enhanced appropriately in all curriculum developments.

Principle 2: Learners are at the centre so that the curriculum is inclusive and equitable

There is little regard for student voice in the Draft English Curriculum document. In the development of Te Mātaiaho which should be the umbrella for all curriculum documents, there was recognition of student voice through the inclusion of their vision for the future of education in this country. Te Mātaiaho had targeted representation from across youth and disability sectors and their voices were clearly visible.

PPTA Te Wehengarua believes that all curriculum documents should reflect the lived reality of the young people in the classroom, they should reflect their own languages, cultures and identities and provide a window to help them participate in and make sense of the world.

Principle 3: The curriculum is manageable, is well resourced, coherent, and well communicated

Some members like that:

- crafting text is more prominent and more specific;
- some of the guidance that focuses on skill development is clearer;
- overall, there is an increased focus on literacy, although there is a danger it could take away the focus on English the subject.

Concerns from members about manageability:

The volume of work expected from Phase 3 is unmanageable – especially given that students are often working at much earlier stages of the curriculum and are still building basic skills during Phase 3.

Concerns from members about coherence:

- There is a different structure across Phase 3,4 and 5 – the content doesn't build across the phases – having a different structure for each phase will be problematic for implementation in the different school types (years 1-6/1-8/ 7 & 8 / 7-13/ 1-3).
- The different understandings for the UKD (compared with the 0-6 document) make for potential confusion if a teacher is not aware of what has come before. 0-6 has UKD explanations and an incorporation of Te Mātaiaho.
- There should be a single UKD framework across all five phases.
- Phase 3 does not appear to show much progress from Phase 2.
- The text list is a distraction.

Concerns from members about being well communicated:

Throughout the Draft English Curriculum document there are various terms that are not well explained – our members have pointed out that:

- There is no clear explanation of Understand-Know-Do
- Each phase has an explanation of Know and Do, but no explanation of Understand
- Although the word 'knowledge' appears 103 times, there is no explanation of 'knowledge-rich'

Concerns from members about being well resourced:

- Despite regular requests for the strategy for curriculum implementation and the plan for support for teachers for the new Draft English Curriculum (and indeed all learning areas) at secondary level there is no plan or resources available.
- Secondary education involves subject specialisms that have not been catered for either at national level, nor in the regions.
- If big shifts in pedagogy are expected, then all Heads of Learning areas and teachers should be given subject specific support.

PPTA Te Wehengarua expects to see:

- ***A plan for implementation that involves subject experts being available to teachers across the country.***
- ***Funding for schools to cover the costs of implementation including resources and release time for PLD and preparation.***
- ***Genuine consideration of and response to the interaction between the curriculum development and NCEA and the associated changes for levels 1, 2 and 3 so that teachers are not left managing multiple changes in very close timeframes.***

Principle 4: Teachers are valued as curriculum designers and their expertise and specialisation are recognised and valued

It is important to acknowledge that curriculum development and the education systems that the curriculum sits inside are of interest to us all, are often highly contested, and involve many stakeholders and multiple components. These education systems are 'made up of a large number of actors (teachers, parents, politicians, bureaucrats, civil society organizations) interacting with each other in different institutions (schools, ministry departments) for different reasons (developing curricula, monitoring school performance, managing teachers). All these interactions are governed by rules, beliefs and behavioral

norms that affect how actors react and adapt to changes in the system'¹.

The following table provides an overview of the actors involved, the levels of involvement, and some examples of activities the various actors are involved in.

Level	Description and examples of activity	Examples of actors in the Aotearoa-NZ context
Supra	International: Transnational curricular discourse generation, policy borrowing and lending; policy learning	OECD; Common European Framework of References for Languages ² ; UNESCO; Education International
Macro	Systems at government level: Development of curriculum policy frameworks; legislation to establish agencies and infrastructure	Curriculum agencies: Ministry of Education; NZQA – qualifications and examinations; NZ Curriculum - guidance; writing groups
Meso	School, Institute: Production of guidance; leadership of and support for curriculum making; production of resources	Boards, Principals, senior and middle leaders; School-specific programmes; Subject Associations; Networks of Expertise ³ ; resourcing including textbook publishers. Evaluation agencies: ERO; ākongā and whānau
Micro	Classroom, Teacher: School-level curriculum making; programme design; lesson-planning	Teacher planning, instructional materials, modules, coursework (including assessment); learning experiences outside the classroom; ākongā and whānau
Nano	Pupil, Individual: Curriculum making in classrooms and other learning spaces: pedagogic interactions; curriculum events	Teachers; students - personal / individual plans for learning; ākongā and whānau

Adapted from Priestley et al. 2021⁴

PPTA Te Wehengarua asserts that the expertise and input of teachers should be considered - at the very least - at all levels of curriculum development, with increased involvement from macro level.

Teachers are experts for interpreting and implementing the curriculum through programme design and lesson planning and are indeed held accountable for their actions through the Professional Teaching Standards, so it is unconscionable to suggest that they are shut out of curriculum planning at macro level.⁵

The voice of teachers, both directly and through their subject association(s) needs to be explicit and visible both in this process, and in any ongoing process of review and refresh of the documents.

PPTA Te Wehengarua believes that ‘Curriculum making strategies that allow actors to experience themselves as trusted and capable participants in curriculum making and make sense of it together with others are the most effective ones – ‘effective’ meaning here that people relate to the aims of the

¹ Global Education Partnership. (2019). Country level evaluations (Synthesis Report). https://www.globalpartnership.org/sites/default/files/2019-02-gpe-synthesis-report-country-level-evaluations_0.pdf.

² Referenced in the creation of the *Learning Languages* learning area of the New Zealand Curriculum, 2007

³ <https://pld.education.govt.nz/find-pld/networks-of-expertise/>

⁴ https://www.storre.stir.ac.uk/retrieve/e68166a2-7fa0-4caa-b8d9-6e73d5fe7f59/Intro_curriculummaking.pdf

⁵ <https://educationhq.com/news/torrid-times-ahead-furore-as-teachers-shut-out-of-curriculum-change-process-174750/>

*curriculum they co-construct and feel ownership, and through that are willing to adapt and develop not only curriculum, but also the educational system and settings within which they work”.*⁶

Principle 5: The curriculum is regularly reviewed through research on effective practice to make sure it is fit for purpose

There will need to be a process that enables the key actors to play a part in responding to the needs of the system as a whole, in an ongoing and coherent way.

The ultimate aim of any change should be to improve the learning experiences for the learners and indeed to improve the learning outcomes; to address any identified gaps to meet the needs of diverse learners; and to incorporate new developments that will enhance teaching practices.

However, changes need to be based on research that is relevant to the Aotearoa New Zealand context and aligns with the intent of the previous four principles. Any review process must involve the teaching profession and give due consideration to the impact on learning and teaching programmes and the resourcing (time, PLD and materials) needed.

PPTA Te Wehengarua looks forward to seeing its five principles for curriculum development better addressed in the next version of the English Curriculum and in curriculum documents for other learning areas.

Ministry of Education’s Curriculum Design Principles

PPTA Te Wehengarua notes that the Ministry has its own Curriculum Design principles that were shared with us at the end of 2024:

1. **Underpinned by the Science of Learning.**
2. **Knowledge-rich**
3. **Inclusive of evidence informed teaching practices**
4. **Clear and easy to use**
5. **Internationally comparable**
6. **Supporting the development of key competencies**

We were also told that ‘a Curriculum coherence group alongside the knowledge, skills and expertise of ministry staff, will be ensuring that each learning area adheres to those principles, giving us [The Ministry] an independent view and critique of the work the Ministry are doing.

PPTA Te Wehengarua would like to suggest that if the draft English Curriculum is the benchmark of these principles then there is some way to go yet.

- The Science of Learning: is yet to be well-articulated in any documentation we have seen. However, what we have spoken about appears to be confined to some very specific teaching strategies (e.g. direct instruction), when in fact it should not be limiting. Rather it encompasses some sound pedagogical understandings that have been taught in teacher education programmes and applied in classrooms for decades. What is missing in the current situation is a known, understood definition.

⁶ Alvunger, D., Soini, T., Philippou, S. & Priestley, M. (2021). Conclusions: Patterns and trends in curriculum making in Europe. In: M. Priestley, D. Alvunger, S. Philippou. & T. Soini, Curriculum making in Europe: policy and practice within and across diverse contexts. Bingley: Emerald. The original publication is available at: <https://doi.org/10.1108/978-1-83867-735-020211013>

- As above, Knowledge-rich has been ill-defined and is in danger of being interpreted as a focus on information instead of discipline knowledge that has its own progressions. There is also little evidence in documentation seen to date of a commitment to Mātauranga Māori with its own progressions. Without an adequate definition provided, all the actors will apply a definition of whatever it is they see fit for their context. Michael Young's concept of 'powerful knowledge' that is systematic and specialised would be one well worth exploring in its support for learners to think critically beyond their everyday experiences.⁷ However, without explanation and clarity, even this concept cannot be debated and negotiated.
- Clear and easy to use – comments from our members suggest that while there is improved guidance provided with lots 'to cover' in Phases 3,4,5, the structure of the phases is not clear and easy to use.
- Internationally comparable – This needs to be sensibly balanced with the unique local contexts in New Zealand. In the English curriculum, this might look like (among other things), having diverse local texts represented in the curriculum.
- Supporting the development of key competencies – The key competencies in this version of the curriculum aren't really defined. We look forward to seeing how the curriculum helps support learners to function as engaged and informed citizens of Aotearoa New Zealand.

PPTA Te Wehengarua calls on the Ministry of Education to publish an accompanying document to the curriculum outlining what it means by the 'Science of Learning' and 'Knowledge-rich' with supporting research and references, so it can form the basis of rational critique and discussion in schools.

⁷ [Applying the 'powerful knowledge' principle to curriculum development in disadvantaged contexts](#)