



Submission

To the Ministry of Education on
the Relationship and Sexuality
Education (RSE) framework

May 2025

About PPTA Te Wehengarua

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.

It is PPTA Te Wehengarua policy that safe, inclusive schools are important for the wellbeing of both kaiako and ākonga. We have chosen to submit outside of the suggested format, and this shows the importance that we have placed on the Relationship and Sexuality Education (RSE) framework consultation.

Through our Safer Schools workshops, that we deliver to school staff, we are actively involved in the education and support of our kaiako and ākonga in our secondary schools. There are a number of different aspects to the workshops, and while the presenter generally touches on all of them, they have the ability to respond to a school's needs by focusing on particular aspects, such as

- General awareness of the range of sexual orientations and gender identities including appropriate language;
- The regulatory framework that requires schools to be proactive in this area;
- Data about the health and wellbeing of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender students in New Zealand secondary schools (from the Auckland University Youth 2000 series of surveys);
- Strategies that teachers can use to promote a safe environment for all students.

The presenters are specially trained members of PPTA's Rainbow Taskforce for Safe Schools. They are sensitive to the range of knowledge, opinions and values about sexuality and gender issues likely to be present in a school staff and provide for that. The presenters collect evaluations from all participants at every session, and the feedback has been overwhelmingly positive.

As educators committed to the holistic wellbeing of young people, we support the ongoing review and development of robust, inclusive, and age-appropriate RSE guidelines. We acknowledge the Ministry's efforts to ensure that these guidelines reflect the diverse realities and needs of our rangatahi (young people) in Aotearoa.

It's important to note that the Code and Standards for the Teaching Profession¹ includes commitments by teachers to work in the best interests of learners by "respecting the diversity of the heritage, language, identity and culture of all learners" and "promoting inclusive practices to support the needs and abilities of all learners".

We believe that all rangatahi deserve a "high-quality, age-appropriate curriculum", and it should be one that values inclusion. Relationships and sexuality education must be inclusive of the unique experiences of all of our ākonga, including our trans and non-binary young people.

We know that RSE is absolutely crucial when it comes to the physical and mental health of our young people. As the ERO report *Let's talk about it: Review of relationships and sexuality education* states, "we

¹ <https://teachingcouncil.nz/professional-practice/our-code-our-standards/>

have a range of worrying health and safety issues that directly relate to relationships and sexuality, including family and sexual violence, bullying and racism.” RSE is an opportunity to provide our rangatahi with the knowledge to keep themselves, their families, and sometimes their peers, safe.

We know that kids talk to each other, and they often share ‘information’ that is less-than factual. Kids have the whole internet at their fingertips and often without the guidance of a trusted adult. Our young people should be learning from their parents, caregivers and whānau, but sometimes modern life moves faster than parents can keep up with. If they are able to learn these important lessons at school, we at least know that it is based in evidence. It is also important to note that we know that sexual harm against children is most likely to occur at home. Having a robust school curriculum helps to keep ākonga safe by ensuring that they have access to complete and correct information. As teachers, we know that often a child’s ‘safe adult’ is found in the school system.

Just as we have seen in other areas of curriculum review, the phrase ‘science of learning’ has also been front and centre in this document. A fairly new term that is subjective in meaning, we are mindful of the ‘experts’ that have been involved in the drafting of this document and we think it is remiss of the Ministry not to have consulted more widely in the sector before this point. We are also concerned that this draft may be silencing student voice.

It is pleasing to see guidance for years 12 and 13, though much of the content comes too late for many of our ākonga and is unlikely to have much of an impact as fewer students will be exposed to the information.

Key Points of Feedback

Consistent RSE is needed

We know that this review responds to the ERO research which showed – among other things – that there was too much inconsistency across the network of schools.

A centralised, explicit, and nationally mandated curriculum is vital if we are to build an inclusive society and ensure our schools are (and remain) safe places for all students. However, it is equally vital that any such curriculum be informed by evidence, science, data, and sound thinking - this is not an area of the curriculum that should be influenced by ideology or opinion.

Our members are reporting an increase in transphobic abuse in school grounds, both for teachers and students. It is felt that this is partly due to the rhetoric we are seeing in wider society, with some community groups and politicians emboldening those with transphobic views. If we are to prevent these views from gaining a foothold in our society, it is imperative that we educate our young people to be safe, secure in who they are, and tolerant of others.

Lack of Te Ao Māori

We are concerned about the lack of Te Ao Māori being present in this document. We do acknowledge that this draft framework is for schools using The New Zealand Curriculum, and that content for use by schools using Te Marautanga o Aotearoa will be released (we hope for consultation) in Term 4, but for the majority of rangatahi Māori who are learning in Kura Auraki their culture is all but invisible.

Key concepts in health such as Sir Mason Durie’s Te Whare Tapa Whā model or fundamental concepts such as hauora² have not been mentioned at all, and there is barely any use of te reo Māori in the document.

² Hauora is a Māori view of health that is unique to Aotearoa New Zealand. It covers 4 aspects of health and wellbeing that relate to our physical, mental, social and spiritual needs, with each concept supporting the others.

While there is some discussion of ‘cultural’ views coming in at Year 7, but we would like to see tikanga and te Ao Māori represented more explicitly, from the first year of teaching.

Further to this point, we tautoko | support the work of InsideOUT Kōaro and Sexual Wellbeing Aotearoa and implore the Ministry of Education to give weight to the submissions of these two expert organisations.

Curriculum Integration and Resourcing

RSE should not be treated as an optional or add-on subject. To be effective, it must be embedded across curriculum areas and supported with resourcing for professional development, teaching materials, and time allocation within timetables.

We recommend targeted PLD funding and clear guidance to support secondary teachers across multiple subject areas to integrate RSE into their teaching practice.

Teacher Confidence and Training

Some teachers lack confidence in delivering RSE. This is partly due to the sensitive nature of the content but can most clearly be put down to a lack of explicit training.

We propose the Ministry invest in professional development for teachers, co-designed with communities and relevant agencies (e.g., Family Planning, InsideOUT Kōaro, kaupapa Māori health providers). We encourage the Ministry to ensure that any professional development provided to teachers be data-driven, evidence-based, and not tied to ideology or opinion.

One possible way to improve teacher confidence would be to include training on RSE delivery in pre-service teacher education across all sectors.

Inclusivity and Affirming Language

We commend the inclusion of gender-diverse and rainbow identities in the guidelines but this does not go far enough. This is vital for the safety and wellbeing of many students.

The first mention of sexual orientation is at Year 8. This implies that only adults need to know about sexual orientations and contradicts what we know about self-identification. The most recent iteration of the Youth 2000 survey showed that 16% of all school students in New Zealand were same sex attracted, multiple sex attracted or had no sexual attractions. 6.8% of students aged 13 (that is, sometime in Year 8 or Year 9) reported being same sex or multiple sex attracted. 5% of all students who self-identified as same sex or multiple sex attracted first told someone about their sexual orientation when they were aged 10 or younger (that is, sometime in Year 6). To only begin teaching about sexual orientation (whether explicitly or implicitly) in Year 8 would do same sex and multiple sex attracted students a disservice.

Similarly, the most recent iteration of the Youth 2000 survey showed that 1.6% of all students identified as transgender or were unsure of their gender. The survey also showed that three-quarters of transgender students knew they were transgender by the time they were 14 (that is, sometime in Year 9 or Year 10). Clearly, education about gender identity needs to be done early so that transgender students can navigate their journeys with confidence and knowledge.

Sexuality and Gender

We are concerned that references to gender diversity and the difference between biological sex and gender, which were present in the MOE’s 2020 *Relationships and Sexuality Education Guidelines* have been removed.

In this new *draft* framework, all references to gender refer only to “man” and “woman”, with only one reference to ‘intersex’ and no recognition of transgender and non-binary identities. While some diversity of sexuality identities is acknowledged, they are defined in relation to there being only two genders. We

believe that understanding gender diversity is an essential part of relationships and sexuality education, and this is supported by international best practice.

We would support InsideOUT Kōaro’s assertion that “sexuality is ... not a fixed state. Diverse sexualities can include identities such as lesbian, gay, bisexual, takatāpui, pansexual, queer, asexual, aromantic, demisexual, and many more”³.

We urge the Ministry to maintain this commitment in the face of political or ideological pushback.

The use of affirming and inclusive language must remain non-negotiable. Young people need to see themselves reflected positively in what is taught.

Assessment and Reporting

Clearer guidance is needed on how learning in RSE is assessed and reported. Teachers need to understand what success looks like and how it can be communicated to students and whānau without breaching personal privacy or reducing complex learning to checkboxes.

Community Engagement and Support

Schools need support in engaging with whānau and communities around RSE in ways that are respectful, transparent, and culturally appropriate. Misunderstandings about RSE often arise from lack of clear communication.

The guidelines should include clearer frameworks or exemplars for schools to engage in this dialogue, especially within diverse cultural and religious contexts.

Support for Schools Facing Pushback

Our members are concerned about the pressure some schools face from vocal groups opposing any RSE outside very narrow parameters. The Ministry should provide public messaging, and school communications strategies—to help schools uphold the guidelines confidently.

There are very well-organised groups who are spreading misinformation around what is taught in our schools under the heading of RSE. There is a sense of hysteria around the issues of gender and sexuality education and lies spread quickly.

Conclusion

The proposed RSE guidelines represent a positive step toward ensuring that all ākonga in Aotearoa receive education that supports their identity, relationships, safety, and wellbeing.

We would like to see more explicit discussion of the diversities in sexuality and gender and relationships and for these to come earlier than Year 11.

For the guidelines to be successfully implemented, the Ministry must provide comprehensive resourcing, professional development, and practical support for schools and teachers.

We welcome the opportunity to continue contributing to this important area of education.

³ <https://insideout.org.nz/make-an-urgent-submission-on-the-draft-relationship-and-sexuality-education-framework-today-before-submissions-close-9-may-2025/>