

What the Proposed NCEA Changes Mean for Outdoor Education

1. Where Outdoor Education Stands Now

- **Currently:**
 - OE courses are assessed in a number of ways:
 1. Using only Achievement standards, most commonly PE Achievement standards but also Education for Sustainability or other learning areas Achievement standards. Using PE achievement standards means students can gain UE.
 2. Using only Unit standards (often from Outdoor Recreation, Māori Environmental Practices, First Aid, or other domains.) This means students can get credits but not UE.
 3. Using a combination of Achievement standards and Unit Standards.
- **Progress made:**
 - After years of advocacy, OE was formally recognised as a senior subject in 2021.
 - A full set of OE achievement standards was developed (Level 2 was due for release).
 - These standards would have allowed OE to be offered as both an academic and vocational subject (when combined with the existing Unit standards), finally opening the endorsement and UE pathway with OE achievement standards that assessed the distinct body of knowledge of Outdoor Education.

The proposal now scraps that progress.

2. What the Government is Proposing

The government plans to replace NCEA with new qualifications:

- **Year 11 → Foundational Skills Award**
 - English and Maths compulsory only in Year 11.

- **Year 12 → New Zealand Certificate of Education (NZCE)**
- **Year 13 → New Zealand Advanced Certificate of Education (NZACE)**

Timeline:

- 2026 – Industry Skills Bodies are created and may begin developing vocational subjects
- 2028 – Foundational Skills Award launches
- 2029 – NZCE launches
- 2030 – NZACE launches

3. Two Types of Subjects in the New System

- **General Curriculum Subjects**
 - On a minister-approved list (not yet released).
 - Developed by the Ministry of Education.
 - These are typically your “traditional academic subjects.”
- **Vocational Subjects (VET)**
 - Developed by Industry Skills Bodies (from 2026).
 - Designed to feed directly into industry qualifications (e.g., Building, Hospitality).
 - Standardised content nationwide.

Students:

- Must take at least 5 subjects each year (Y12 & Y13).
- Must pass 4 out of 5 to gain their qualification.
- To gain University Entrance (UE):
 - Will likely need at least 3 general subjects (universities will set the rule; currently it's 3).

4. New Assessment & Grading System

- Every subject must provide a mark out of 100.
- Students receive both a numerical score per subject (out of 100), a letter grade (A–E) and a total score for their 5 subjects out of 500.
- This replaces the current “Achieved / Merit / Excellence” system.

5. Why Unit Standards Won't Fit

- **Unit Standards = Achieved / Not Yet Achieved.**
- They do not produce a mark out of 100, so they cannot feed into the new qualifications system without significant fundamental modification.
- Under the vocational model, each subject must:
 - Generate a 100-point result.
 - Use a single national programme, designed by industry bodies.
- This means unit standards would have to be rewritten, they cannot just continue as they are.

The belief that “unit standards will keep OE safe” is incorrect.

6. What This Means for Outdoor Education

- Outdoor Education is **not on the general subject list** (the draft list excludes it).
- This means OE would only exist as a **vocational subject**:
 - Content set nationally by an Industry Skills Body.
 - Same in every school – **no local design or flexibility**.
 - Leads only to vocational outcomes, not UE.

Key losses if OE becomes vocational only:

- Students won't be able to get endorsement or UE through OE.
- Schools lose flexibility to tailor OE courses to their local environment, strengths, and students.
- Teachers lose autonomy in course design.
- Students lose recognition of OE as a valid academic subject.

7. Why This Matters

Outdoor Education:

- Builds leadership, teamwork, resilience, and critical thinking.
- Keeps disengaged learners connected to school.
- Prepares young people with transferable skills valued across all industries and professions.

If OE is locked into a vocational “skills-only” box, we risk losing its broader academic and personal value.

Useful Links:

- EONZ campaign page: eonz.org.nz/Home/NCEA-Outdoor-Education-Proposed-Changes
- Ministry of Education consultation: education.govt.nz/have-your-say/consultation-proposal-replace-ncea/details
- PPTA campaign info: ppta.org.nz/campaigns/have-your-say-on-the-ncea-changes