

Report: Further advice on subjects

To:	Hon Erica Stanford, Minister of Education		
Date:	15/09/2025	Deadline:	17/09/2025
Security Level:	In-Confidence	Priority:	High
From:	Pauline Cleaver Acting Hautū Deputy Secretary, Te Poutāhū	Phone:	9(2)(a)
Drafter:	Anya Pollock	METIS No:	1353215

Why are we sending this to you?

- You are receiving this because you have asked for further advice on some of the subjects that are not currently planned to be progressed as stand-alone Ministry-led subjects as part of the refresh of the national curriculum.

What action do we need, by when?

- We are seeking your direction on whether the approach to these subjects should be adjusted from what was communicated publicly on 11 September.
- Please return the signed paper by 15 September.

Key facts, issues and questions

- Concerns have been raised about some secondary subjects following announcement of the planned Year 11-13 subjects, so we have revisited our advice on these subjects.
- For **Agriculture & Horticulture Science at Year 12 and 13**, you could choose to:
 - agree to this being progressed as a standalone Ministry-led subject
 - commit to reviewing the approach once further work on the Ministry-led science subjects and proposed industry-led subjects has been progressed.
- We continue to recommend that **Agriculture & Horticulture Science at Year 11** is integrated as part of the planned two Science subjects.
- We continue to recommend that content currently covered by **Agribusiness** is integrated into Business Studies and that content currently covered by **Home Economics (Food & Nutrition)** is integrated into the Health Education.
- We continue to recommend that Year 12 and 13 **Outdoor Education** and **Tourism**, which are not a current NCEA Achievement Standards subjects, are planned to be progressed as part of work on potential industry-led subjects.

Alignment with Government priorities

1. This report helps to progress actions in the delivery plan for the Achievement Target under the 'clearer curriculum' and 'smarter assessment and reporting' priorities.

Concerns have been raised about some secondary subjects

2. Following announcement of the senior secondary subjects being developed for the national curriculum through the curriculum refresh (Ministry-led subjects) and proposed future work with Industry Skills Boards (industry-led subjects), significant concern has been expressed about the direction for some existing or previously planned NCEA Achievement Standards subjects. Feedback to date has particularly focussed on:
 - 2.1. Agribusiness (existing NCEA Achievement Standards subject)
 - 2.2. Agriculture & Horticulture Science (existing NCEA Achievement Standards subject)
 - 2.3. Home economics (existing NCEA Achievement Standards subject but previously planned to be replaced by a Food & Nutrition NCEA Achievement Standards subject as part of prior review of NCEA)
 - 2.4. Outdoor Education (not an existing NCEA Achievement Standards subject but previously planned to become one as part of prior review of NCEA)
 - 2.5. Tourism (not an existing NCEA Achievement Standards subject but previously planned to become one as part of prior review of NCEA)

Concerns about access to learning

3. The currently planned approach, as announced last week, is not expected to lead to a reduction in access to learning in these areas in senior secondary school. Under the currently planned approach, the knowledge will be covered in an integrated way in other subjects and/or in planned industry-led subjects. Teachers and kaiako will also have the flexibility to use these areas as a lens through which they teach other subjects (e.g. a Tourism focus in Geography or an Agribusiness focus in Business Studies).
4. Despite this intention, there is significant sector concern that the direction announced will reduce access to this learning. Draft curriculum content for planned subjects is not yet available and there is still uncertainty about industry-led subjects proceeding as part of proposed changes to the qualifications, and what they might cover if they do.
5. There is also concern that, without a specific subject curriculum, teachers and kaiako will not be well-placed to deliver other subjects through some of the lenses currently served by a standalone Achievement Standards subject, or which were planned to be. Since the announcement, we have been provided with an evaluation of Agribusiness in Schools (AIS) that shows the difference that a well-supported dedicated subject can make.¹ It should be noted that the subject association has raised concerns that in the past the explicit teaching of Agribusiness has been left to chance as part of generic Business Studies course. They have shared their concerns that this poses a risk to engaging students and growing a pipeline highly skilled people to work in sector.
6. 9(2)(a) _____
_____ was asked to undertake a very rapid review of the current Agriculture & Horticulture

¹ Scarlatti, February 2025: *Agribusiness in Schools Evaluation Final Report*. This included findings that overall, between 2017-2020, both the number of AIS students and those progressing to related tertiary training generally increased, highlighting the success of exposing students to agriculture as a career option beyond farming.

Science Achievement Standards to advise whether the same content could be comfortably covered in a Year 12 and Year 13 food and fibre industry-led subject. His view was that there was stronger science content than would comfortably fit with the type of new industry-led subject he would expect to see developed by the ISB.

Concerns about the status of these subjects

7. The proposed new industry-led subjects are intended to strengthen student pathways to employment and tertiary study, sitting alongside Ministry-led subjects in a single pathway as part of the curriculum. While not being progressed immediately, proposed industry-led subjects are planned to be developed for implementation in the same timeframe as the Ministry-led subjects (Year 12 in 2029 and Year 13 in 2030) and both types of subjects will have the same value and rigour.
8. Despite this intention, there is disappointment about the planned approach to some of these subjects that reflects the value given to their existing or planned status as 'academic' subjects, due to them being/becoming assessed through NCEA Achievement Standards and that being associated with University Entrance (UE) and, in many cases, Scholarship. Note that:
 - 8.1. Agriculture & Horticulture Science is an existing UE and Scholarship subject currently.
 - 8.2. Agribusiness is not an existing UE subject due to there being an insufficient number of Achievement Standards credits, but a full set of Achievement Standards had been previously planned which was expected to lead to it being approved for UE.
 - 8.3. Home Economics is an existing UE subject.
 - 8.4. Feedback during the 2021 engagements on changes to NCEA subjects indicated that the sector anticipated Outdoor Education and Tourism likely being approved for UE once they were developed as Achievement Standards subjects.
9. NZQA set the requirements for UE in consultation with universities. NZQA and universities will need to consider what changes to the curriculum and any future changes made to the qualifications mean for UE, including in relation to proposed industry-led subjects and whether all Ministry-led subjects should remain on the list.
10. In the context of this uncertainty, there is a perception that recognition for UE may be less likely for industry-led subjects and that this could lead to a perceived lack of esteem for those subjects. There are also concerns that students taking industry-led subjects could have reduced access to pathways supported by university qualifications. This needs to be considered in the context of proposals for the new qualification to be based on five subjects, and UE currently requiring achievement of three approved subjects.

We have revisited our advice on the approach to certain subjects

11. Given the reaction to the announcement, we have revisited our advice on the subjects in paragraph 2. This background to previous advice, including previous adjustments made to advice during the process, is summarised in Annex 1.
12. It is clear there is a high degree of comfort with the Ministry leading development of subjects relevant to the primary sector, reflecting successful industry partnerships in the past. It is also clear that, despite our intent, there is concern that industry-led subjects may be perceived as less valuable or may not cover the same content as existing subjects.
13. Given this we are now recommending you revisit the approach to **Agriculture & Horticulture Science at Year 12 and 13**. You could choose to:

- 13.1. agree to this being progressed as a standalone Ministry-led subject, so there is certainty that content will continue to be able to be taught in depth as a specialisation
- 13.2. commit to reviewing the approach once further work on the Ministry-led science subjects and proposed industry-led subjects has been progressed, so that final decisions are well informed by an understanding of what can be appropriately covered in other subjects and the benefits of a standalone subject
14. In relation to **Agriculture & Horticulture Science at Year 11**, we continue to recommend that this is integrated with other sciences. Note that two Science subjects are now planned at Year 11 instead of just one as we had initially recommended, and that Biology and Chemistry to NCEA Level 3 are currently highly recommended subjects for students wanting to specialise in agriculture or horticulture science at university.
15. We continue to recommend that **Agribusiness** is integrated with Business Studies at Year 12 and 13. This is consistent with advice from NZQA. As we draft the curriculum content for Business Studies, we will work with the subject association to explicitly include knowledge relevant to Agribusiness, including as a specifically supported context choice where constrained choice is provided (e.g. for a research study).
16. Consistent with our advice throughout, we continue to recommend that **Home Economics (Food & Nutrition)** be integrated with other aspects of health studies into a holistic Health Education subject. We think that some of the reaction reflects misunderstandings about the nature of Home Economics and how food-related learning is delivered in schools now:
- 16.1. Home Economics Achievement Standards focus on analysis of food and health issues. For example, food-choices, nutrition, determinants of health, sustainability, provision of care, health promotion, ethics, influence of advertising or multinationals.
- 16.2. Practical skills, such as food preparation, cooking and hygiene, are currently assessed with Unit Standards that are also recognised by industry. In the future, these are proposed to be covered in an industry-led Hospitality subject.
- 16.3. Food-related product development (e.g. designing a new food product) is currently assessed using Technology Achievement Standards. In the future, this will be taught through the Materials & Processing Technology curriculum subject.
17. Also consistent with our advice throughout, we continue to recommend that **Outdoor Education** and **Tourism** are planned to be progressed as potential industry-led subjects. We are concerned that, if this position is not maintained, there will be a missed opportunity to create subjects that provide clear pathways to industry qualifications and employment as intended by the proposed industry-led subject model. It could also undermine work towards creating parity of esteem for Ministry-led and Industry-led subjects. We note that there has been feedback from students about some NCEA Achievement Standards based subjects not having as much practical learning as they had anticipated, which is a risk if subjects are designed with university as the intended destination.

Annexes

Annex 1: Background to decisions on subjects focussed on in this Report

Recommended Actions

The Ministry of Education recommends you:

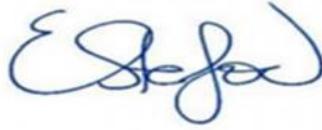
- a. **note** that concerns have been raised about some secondary subjects following announcement of the planned Year 11-13 subjects, so we have revisited our advice on these
Noted
- b. **agree** that **Agriculture & Horticulture Science at Year 12 and 13** is:
 - i. **EITHER** confirmed for development as a standalone Ministry-led subject (*change*)
Agree / Disagree
 - ii. **OR** reviewed once further work on the Ministry-led science subjects and proposed industry-led subjects has been progressed to inform a decision on the need for a standalone Ministry-led subject
Agree / Disagree
- c. **agree** that **Agriculture & Horticulture Science at Year 11** is integrated as part of the planned two Science subjects (*no change*)
Agree / Disagree
- d. **agree** that the content currently covered by **Agribusiness** is integrated into Business Studies subject (*no change*)
Agree / Disagree
- e. **agree** that the Year 12 and 13 **Outdoor Education** subject is planned to be progressed as part of work on potential industry-led subjects (*no change*)
Agree / Disagree
- f. **agree** that the Year 12 and 13 **Tourism** subject is planned to be progressed as part of work on potential industry-led subjects (*no change*)
Agree / Disagree
- g. **agree** that content currently covered by **Home Economics** (Food & Nutrition) is integrated into the Health Education.
Agree / Disagree

Proactive Release:

- h. **agree** that the Ministry of Education release this paper once your decisions have been communicated, with any information needing to be withheld done so in line with the provisions of the Official Information Act 1982.
Agree / Disagree

Ellen's recommendation to me, after reconsidering the Ministry's original recommendation, is to leave ag-hort science as a standalone subject, and I will accept

this updated recommendation.



Pauline Cleaver
Acting Hautū | Deputy Secretary
Te Poutāhū

Hon Erica Stanford
Minister of Education

___/___/___

15/9/2025, 7.20pm

Proactively Released

Annex 1: Background to decisions on subjects focussed on in this Report

18. As part of work to confirm the subjects to be developed through the national curriculum refresh, we indicated in April [METIS 1345245 refers] that:
 - 18.1. The previously planned, but not implemented, Tourism and Outdoor Education NCEA Level 2 and 3 Achievement Standards subjects should be considered as part of work on proposed industry-led subjects. Existing dedicated assessments are Unit Standards based.
 - 18.2. The content that would have been covered in the previously planned Food & Nutrition NCEA Level 2 and 3 Achievement Standards subject (which was to replace the existing Home Economics subject) should be consolidated with Health Studies to create one Health & Nutrition subject at Year 12 and 13.
 - 18.3. The existing Agriculture & Horticulture Science and Agribusiness NCEA Level 2 and 3 Achievement Standards subjects should be developed as standalone Year 12 and 13 Ministry-led subjects through the curriculum refresh.
 - 18.4. The existing Level 1 Agriculture & Horticulture Science subject, along with the other three existing Level 1 science subjects, should be integrated into a single general Year 11 science subject to keep student pathways open longer.²
19. There were also a range of other name changes, reorganisations and consolidations set out, such as Art History no longer being a standalone subject due to low demand and the knowledge instead being integrated with the practical arts subjects. We confirmed this advice in June [METIS 1348233 refers] following further work on the list of subjects. Advice noted that:
 - 19.1. There was support in other ministerial portfolios for the previously planned NCEA Level 2 and 3 Achievement Standards Tourism subject.
 - 19.2. Separate consideration would be given to the approach to practical food preparation skills as part of work on industry-led subjects. Existing dedicated assessments are Unit Standards based.
 - 19.3. We had considered progressing Agriculture & Horticulture Science and Agribusiness and progressing as industry-led subjects but that, as these are existing curriculum aligned Achievement Standards subjects for NCEA, our view was that it would be less disruptive to develop them as part of this year's curriculum writing process. We noted that this wouldn't preclude them potentially shifting to being industry-led subjects over time.
20. Following consideration of this advice, you agreed to the development of the list of subjects we had identified as long as subject associations have all been consulted with. When discussing feedback from subject associations, potential additional subjects were identified in some areas. This raised questions about the manageability of the number of Ministry-led subjects, and we explored further opportunities to consolidate the list of subjects. In doing this we revisited current levels of demand, plans for industry-led subjects and further work on what we had done on the content for each subject, which was reflected in updated advice in August [METIS 1351506 refers].
21. As a result of this work, we updated our advice to recommend that the Agriculture & Horticulture Science Year 12 and 13 subject be progressed through work on proposed

² Biology and Chemistry to NCEA Level 3 are currently highly recommended subjects for students wanting to specialise in agriculture or horticulture science at university.

industry-led subjects, so that it is well aligned to the needs of relevant industries. We also considered planning for Agribusiness to be industry-led, but our updated advice instead recommended incorporating this into the Business Studies subject due to the level of overlap in knowledge. Both Agriculture & Horticulture Science and Agribusiness have relatively low uptake currently:

21.1. NZQA data shows that 752 students were assessed in 14+ Agriculture & Horticulture credits at NCEA Level 2 in 2024. For comparison, for Level 2 Biology there were 13,109 students assessed in 14+ credits.

21.2. NZQA data shows that 110 students were assessed in 14+ Agribusiness credits at NCEA Level 2 in 2024. For comparison, for Level 2 Business Studies there were 4,415 students assessed in 14+ credits.

22. Through this process other opportunities for consolidation were identified that impacted on subjects. This included, for example, incorporating knowledge that would have been covered in an Environment & Society subject (currently taught as Education for Sustainability) into other subjects and combining the separate Materials Technologies and Processing Technologies subjects into a single subject (which would include opportunities to focus in particular areas such as food technology or hard materials).
23. These changes to our earlier advice were not tested with subject associations or other interested parties due to time pressures and calls from the sector for information on subjects to be released to inform their feedback on proposed changes to the qualifications.
24. Following further advice in September [METIS 1352737 refers], which made further adjustments to some other subjects, you agreed that we continue to the list of Ministry-led subjects which would continue to be developed through the curriculum refresh. You also agreed to the public release of the more fulsome list of subjects which also indicated those planned to be developed as industry-led subjects, including a 'Primary Industry' subject. The Year 11-13 curriculum subjects were then released on 11 September.