

9th May 2025

Dear Minister,

We appreciate that you are seeking public feedback on the proposed changes to the RSE curriculum within schools. Setting clear expectations of what our rangatahi should be taught is vital to ensuring young people have a good understanding of personal boundaries and consent, as well as physical and emotional wellness in a sexual context.

Ara Taiohi is the peak body of youth development in Aotearoa, connected to 4,000 people and organisations that work with young people across the motu. Our vision is an empowered ecosystem of youth development where rangatahi thrive. We believe that providing young people with a comprehensive RSE education is key to creating this empowered ecosystem.

We are concerned that the curriculum does not promote a sufficiently diverse understanding of gender, sex characteristics and sexual identities in both Western and indigenous contexts.

RSE is an important pillar in supporting young people's sense of inclusion and should reflect the full, diverse, and wonderful range of gender, sex characteristics and sexual identities that people in our communities experience and identify with. In particular, we call for the curriculum to fully reflect the difference between biological sex and gender, including in the context of conversations around diverse sexual identities. Many rangatahi identify as gender diverse, and know and love gender diverse people in our communities, and it is important that this reality is reflected in their RSE education.

We are concerned that under the proposed framework, intersex people and people with diverse sex characteristics are not introduced to students until they are 14 or 15. Two percent of young people in Aotearoa are intersex (approximately 27,000 people under 18). Rangatahi should be introduced to the fact that some bodies are different, and the message that having a body that is different is ok, at a much earlier age.



RSE education is an opportunity to ensure young people have access to fact-based learning and do not rely on unreliable, misleading and hateful sources of information. The current draft framework has no specific mention of HIV and risks only focusing on heteronormative safe sex.

Unfortunately, we know that introducing 13-14 year olds to laws around sexual violence will be too late for the many 13-14 year olds who are exploring intimate relationships. Discussions around these laws and consent will help rangatahi to identify dangerous situations and to choose safe and consensual behaviour.

A strengthened curriculum will enable schools to support the holistic development of all ākonga. We welcome the opportunity to discuss these recommendations further and work collaboratively with you.

Ngā mihi,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jane Zintl', with a stylized, cursive script.

Jane Zintl

CEO Ara Taiohi

