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ARCHAEOLOGICAL
ASSOCIATION

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Aotearoa New Zealand Histories Curriculum consultation
Ministry of Education
P.O. Box 1666
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To whom it may concern

RE: NZAA SUBMISSION ON THE DRAFT AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND HISTORIES CURRICULUM

The New Zealand Archaeological Association (NZAA) is wholly supportive of the decision that the history of Aotearoa New Zealand is to become a compulsory component of the school curriculum. This is an important development in helping all New Zealanders understand where they have come from and who they are. It is critical to ensuring that we all value our past, and see how it makes us unique in the world.

The NZAA would also like to endorse the extensive submission of the Royal Society Te Apārangi Expert Advisory Panel on the draft curriculum. This submission raises a number of concerns about the scope and detail of the draft that are shared by NZAA, including (but by no means limited to) the focus on Māori arrival in Aotearoa, but the absence of detail about what happened between this arrival and European colonisation. The lack of detail about the migration of peoples other than Māori and the European colonisers is also of concern, as is the lack of consideration of Aotearoa New Zealand's history within a global context, and particularly within the Pacific.

As archaeologists, we are also fundamentally concerned about the absence of references to archaeology and the valuable role it can play in helping us understand our past: there is nothing quite so powerful as standing in a place such as Ruapekapeka Pā, or holding an artefact last touched more than a hundred years ago, to connect with the past and see it as something real, as opposed to merely an abstract discussion.

Archaeological sites and features contain unique and irreplaceable evidence of the human history of Aotearoa New Zealand. This value is recognised in the provisions of the Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga Act 2014, which provides legal protection for all archaeological sites that meet stated criteria. Archaeological research has studied all periods of Aotearoa's history, from the first visits by Polynesian voyagers, the exploration and settlement of Aotearoa by the Māori descendants of those voyagers, through to the development of modern cities and industries. Archaeology can provide details about aspects of people's daily lives, such as what people ate, the tools they used and how their houses were constructed. These details are not always captured by traditional, oral or recorded histories, but are vital for understanding past environments, economies and lifestyles. Where traditional accounts and/or written records survive, the combination of these accounts and the archaeological record can provide a more nuanced narrative than would be possible using a single source alone.



The study of the past is rooted in time and place: it is not an abstract concept. Mātauranga Māori is similarly rooted in place, which is in many instances reflected in traditional place names (whether or not in current use). One of the strengths of archaeological evidence is that it shares this association with place: provenance is a critical aspect of any archaeological study. This is manifested at many different scales, from the examination of tiny obsidian flakes and the trade and exchange networks that these help illustrate, up to the archaeological landscapes of North Island pā and garden sites. For students, visiting such places with both Mātauranga Māori and archaeological evidence provided to them provides real-world experiences that cannot be obtained any other way.

Archaeological data is a valuable way of understanding how the world has changed and how human actions have modified the environment. Aotearoa New Zealand was the last major landmass on earth to be settled by humans. As such it presents a unique opportunity to study the impacts of humans on an otherwise untouched natural environment, within a very precisely defined time period. As climate change continues to be a major global concern, archaeological evidence of processes such as coastal erosion and human response to climatic events is an important source of evidence for understanding environmental change.

Critically, archaeology is uniquely positioned to help us understand the 600-year gap in the curriculum that has been identified by the Royal Society's expert panel. In fact, oral histories and archaeological data are the only sources that can help us understand this period of Aotearoa's history. Archaeological evidence of Māori occupation of Aotearoa supplements oral histories and helps us understand the exploration and settlement of Aotearoa and later internal movements of people, as well as the search for and utilisation of natural resources, the adaptation and enhancement of horticultural and maritime economic systems, and the development of Māori culture and society. Radiocarbon dating allows chronologies of this human history to be established, which, used alongside Mātauranga Māori, allow powerful accounts of this period of Aotearoa New Zealand's history to be developed.

Archaeology also helps us understand the migration to New Zealand of different groups of immigrants, their reasons for coming and their experiences when they arrived, be they Māori, English or from elsewhere the world. For example, the goldfields Chinese were the first large-scale Asian migration to New Zealand, and archaeological study of their gold workings and occupation sites has shown how they adapted to this new physical and social environment, while also retaining their distinct cultural identity. This is crucial for understanding very human responses to much larger processes. It highlights the complexities of starting a new life as an immigrant in a country with a very different culture. As highlighted in the Royal Society submission, this will be a process familiar to many school children in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Gold mining evidence illustrates the effect of international economic connections and processes, highlighting two of the areas that the Royal Society submission identified as missing from the draft curriculum: our connections to the world and the importance of economic drivers to our history. The abundance of material culture recovered from rubbish pits in Aotearoa New Zealand's cities and towns reveals just how connected to the rest of the world 19th century Aotearoa New Zealand, and the critical importance of those connections to our 19th century settlers.



Another theme that the Royal Society notes is missing from the draft curriculum is that of poverty and inequality, issues that continue to be front and centre of Aotearoa New Zealand society. Through its ability to connect artefacts with the lives of both specific named individuals and people who have left few (if any) records, archaeological evidence provides a unique window into the day-to-day lived experience of poverty from the 19th century to the present day. Archaeology gives voice and agency to those who have not left any other records: the poor, disenfranchised and disadvantaged. This is one of archaeology's great strengths.

By studying the evidence left behind by people of all backgrounds, archaeology has a key role to play in helping us understand how our identity as New Zealanders has developed. In particular the study of material culture can illustrate how that identity was formed and evolved over time, and how people have often both maintained their unique cultural identity while at the same time embracing a wider New Zealand identity.

Archaeology's particular power is in the physical and the tangible, whether it is the landscape of Tāmaki Makaurau prior to the arrival of Europeans, the Treaty grounds at Waitangi, the remains of alluvial gold sluicing at Bannockburn, or a fragment of porcelain from a 19th century rubbish pit. These sites and artefacts give us a very real and powerful connection to our past, and a sense of place. They are a critical part of sharing and understanding our history, and bringing it to life.

The New Zealand Archaeological Association therefore submits that inclusion of archaeology into the proposed new curriculum is essential if history is to be taught in a comprehensive and rounded way. By supplementing written and oral histories, by providing another source of evidence that can be critically assessed by students, by making history tangible in terms of both place and physical items, and by giving voice to those who would otherwise be completely forgotten, archaeological research should have a critical role in the teaching of our shared history.

Ngā mihi

Lynda Walter
New Zealand Archaeological Association President