



National Council of Women of New Zealand

Te Kaunihera
Wahine O Aotearoa

Oral Submission to the Education and Science Committee on the Education (Update) Amendment Bill 160-1

by Dr Judy Whitcombe and Suzanne Manning on 2 February 2017

Education and Science Select Sub-Committee

Chairperson: **Jian Yang**, National List; Deputy Chair: **Todd Muller**, National Bay of Plenty; **Catherine Delahunty**, Green List; **Sarah Dowie**, National Invercargill; **Chris Hipkins**, Labour Rimutaka; **Tracey Martin**, NZ First List; **Jenny Salesa**, Labour Manukau East.

(7 of the 11 Committee members were present)

Good morning, my name is Judy Whitcombe and my colleague is Suzanne Manning. We are members of the Parliamentary Watch Committee and the Education Committee, of the National Council of Women of New Zealand. Our submission has been sourced from a background of policy decisions and consultation with the members of our organisation.

NCWNZ has had long involvement in legislation relating to Education with over 40 submissions being made since 2000. Our submission on this Bill refers to the work undertaken on the 2015 Ministry of Education Discussion Document. That 7 page submission to the Ministry dealt with the questions raised in the Document. The timeframe allowed for extensive consultation with our members throughout New Zealand. We were able to make only a brief submission on the next Education Legislation Bill 100-1, where the timing of submissions, due after the summer holidays, did not allow for full consultation.

This Bill addresses a number of important public policy objectives, through amendments to the 1989 Education Act, as outlined in the Explanatory Note. Our submission has focussed on those which had the most importance to our members – many of whom have had contact with the education system as parents, grandparents and teachers. Responses came from NCW branches and affiliated organisations throughout the country.

Clauses in the Bill addressed in Submission S16.25

The **Objectives of the Education system**, as outlined in Clause 4 Part 1AA((3), were supported. As noted in the submission, objectives for education had been featured in the earlier Discussion Document. Here members were clear that “education should enable people to participate in Aotearoa New Zealand society” and the concept of a broad education was supported. Education plays a key role in the empowerment of girls and women.

The **Cohort Entry** proposal, as detailed in Clause 10, does specify children starting school in the term closest to their 5th birthday. Mixed views had been expressed in response to the

question in the Discussion Document. Starting school on the fifth birthday was seen as a long-standing tradition in Aotearoa. While the proposal in this Bill could result in some children starting before age five, it was thought that with the 4 term year, any time at school before the child turned five would be of a relatively short duration and children would benefit from being in a small group.

Communities of Online Learning Clause 38. It was this proposal which caused the most concern among our members. It had not been canvassed earlier in the 2015 Discussion Document.

It was thought that for those children who were geographically isolated or for some with disabilities or special needs, the ability to receive distance education would be beneficial. However, there were many negative views and concerns expressed about the proposal.

Points which members raised were the importance of socialisation in the development of children and young people. This is done by interacting with other young people and some adults and would not be achieved by someone sitting alone with a computer. In the current school system, there are already some virtual learning networks but these operate through the school which the child attends. Participation in sport is also important in the development of young people.

There was concern that a body corporate could gain accreditation as a COOL as this introduces the idea of private provider and competition for profit. (Clause 38 Section 35T (1)) Our members have the view that competition in the education system is not the best way to meet the needs of students.

There were many concerns expressed about the cost of the implementation and management of a COOL system. In the words of one branch “The money spent on COOLs would be better spent on existing schools. Far too much money has gone from the state system to private and charter schools resulting in the downgrading of our once excellent school system. Many private and charter schools are run for profit, resulting in education dollars going into private pockets and not into education.”

The impact on mothers with the introduction of COOLs was also commented on in most responses. In New Zealand children under the age of 14 cannot be left at home alone. If the location for the child’s online learning is to be the home environment, then the full-time presence of an adult is required. Our members did not want to see women’s choices being eroded.

In summary: The COOL proposal, which adds a new Part 3A to the Education Act (and has 22 sections) contains much detailed information on how the COOL system would operate. Our members saw some advantages in the system proposed these were outweighed by their many overall concerns which are summarised in our submission.

Careers Advice Clause 49 The amendment to section 77 of the Act is concerned with Guidance and Counselling under the “Powers and Functions of principals”. Career information and guidance is particularly important for girls who, in the past, have not always received advice of the full range of career options now available for girls. The breaking down of gender segregation contributes to addressing the gender pay gap, as our submission notes.

Closing and merging schools Clause 110 There was concern that the decision to merge “State Integrated Schools” was “in the Minister’s absolute discretion.” (2) although Clause 113 does add some consultation modifications. The importance of widespread and authentic consultation where the needs of the whole community are taken into account, was made strongly in our response to the Discussion Document and has been reiterated in this submission. Our members were adamant that widespread consultation was required in situations where mergers were being considered

In Conclusion

The NCWNZ submission has focussed on 5 areas of this Bill. While there was overall support for some of the changes proposed, it was the Communities of Online Learning where members were most concerned. The impact of the proposed changes has been considered from a gendered perspective.

Thank you for the opportunity to present this oral submission.

Questions

Tracey Martin (NZ First) pointed out that the Bill provides for consultation on closures and merges of schools before a recommendation is made to the Minister, but removes any consultation after the Minister has made a decision. Tracey asked the NCW position on this change.

Suzanne replied that although that nuance was not specifically discussed by members, members generally supported a widespread sequence of consultation right through the process.

Catherine Delahunty (Green) asked about the supervision arrangements for students under the COOL proposal that we had commented on, as she did not think it was satisfactorily covered in the Bill.

Suzanne replied that the Bill did state that adequate supervision would be negotiated with the parents and the COOL, however NCWNZ was concerned that there would be undue pressure on women, because the responsibility for supervision generally defaults to the mother, and not every woman is confident or knowledgeable when dealing with authority. Members were concerned that mothers would be expected to carry out the supervision, regardless.

Catherine then commented that the economic situation for some women would not allow them to give up paid work in order to supervise their children.

Suzanne agreed that members did not want women to be put under pressure, but should be able to make their own choices.

Tracey Martin (NZ First) asked whether NCWNZ members saw online learning as becoming the norm for schooling.

Suzanne said that members were definite that attendance at a school should be the norm for our children, and a good (not sub-standard) online option should be available for those who choose it.