



## National Council of Women of New Zealand

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Wahine O Aotearoa

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### **Submission to the Education and Science Select Committee on the Education (Establishment of Universities) Amendment Bill**

#### **Introduction**

The National Council of Women of New Zealand (NCWNZ) is an umbrella organisation representing 42 nationally organised societies, some 150 other affiliated societies and a number of individual women. NCWNZ has 33 branches throughout the country.

While NCWNZ endeavoured to consult widely within a short time-frame, this submission is based on responses from thirteen NCWNZ Branches, The NCWNZ Council, one nationally organised society (The New Zealand Federation of Graduate Women), two Branches of nationally organised societies, the Parliamentary Watch Committee and twenty individuals – in all approximately 300 people.

#### **NCWNZ Policy**

NCWNZ has a deep concern for the future of education in New Zealand and for the standard of education provided by tertiary institutions. NCWNZ made submissions to the Ministry of Education on the future tertiary education policy for New Zealand (December 1997) and to the New Zealand Qualifications Authority (August 1997 and April 1998) advocating high standards, rigour and academic excellence. NCWNZ also clearly affirmed the need for qualifications to be made available through tertiary institutions other than universities. These policies are in line with the Statement of Tertiary Education Priorities 2005-2007 disseminated by the Minister in 2004. However, in the submission to the Ministry in December 1997, NCWNZ expressed concern regarding changes that appeared to be politically driven rather than educationally motivated and stressed the need for adequate funding for all tertiary institutions, equity of access and clearly define descriptions of excellence. NCWNZ's response to the Education (Establishment of Universities) Amendment Bill is, therefore, based on established policy and the specific responses of members.

#### **Comments**

##### **Part 1: Amendments to the principal Act**

##### **Clause 4: New Section 162A procedure before recommending establishment of university**

Respondents indicated their understanding of the Explanatory Note to the Bill that Clause 4 establishes a sequential process for Government approval of new universities and that it will allow the Minister to decline an application upon receipt of adverse advice from the Tertiary Education Commission and interest groups consulted at the discretion of the Minister. This step could be taken without having to establish whether the applicant met the academic criteria of high quality teaching, high quality research and appropriately qualified staff.

Recognising that the purpose of Clause 4 is to limit the creation of new universities, the majority of respondents support a limit on the creation of new universities on the grounds that the present number of universities with distributed campuses and distance education programmes meet the





requirements of the current population of New Zealand. There was one suggestion that if there was an unmet need for additional university places, consideration should be given to expanding existing universities rather than creating a new institution.

NCWZ respondents also considered that a greater number of universities would increase competition for scarce financial resources and expertise, and possibly lead to lower standards in courses as universities competed for students as the base funding source. Some respondents expressed concern about the current dependence on overseas students as a source for additional funding for universities. This was seen as a vulnerable practice and possibly unsustainable in future because of internal Asian policies and economies.

For these reasons, the majority of NCWZ respondents supported strengthening the Minister's powers by allowing him or her to make a decision on the basis of the interests of the tertiary sector and the nation as a whole. However, these tertiary/national interests and the criteria of academic standards were not seen as being closely aligned. Respondents expressed concern about a number of perceived poor quality courses being offered in the current universities. More universities with greater competition would not necessarily result in better standards of courses overall, because students would not be aware of the quality of course before completing them.

Many respondents commented on the country's need for more non-university technical courses and qualifications. The failure of many university students to complete university level qualifications is reported in the first *Retention, Completion and Progression Report 2003*, compiled by the Ministry of Education. While this failure is a complex issue with multiple causes, it could suggest a mismatch between university qualification and student ability or suitability for university level education.

Although they supported Clause 4 in general, some respondents expressed concern regarding the source of Ministerial advice. Some hoped that the advice would be based on credible demographic forecasting. While the Tertiary Education Commission represented universities, business, Maori and student interests, the balance favoured those with university connections. The Minister is also required to consult with 'such institutions, organisations, and other relevant bodies as the Minister considers appropriate' Clause 4 (2) (b). The existing universities, through the Vice-Chancellors' Committee, while not specifically mentioned, are a well-known, well organised interest and pressure group which is opposed to the establishment of new universities. This part of Clause 4 places the burden of natural justice and prudent decision making on the Minister alone. Some members expressed confidence in the Minister's judgment and considered that the advice given by Tec and NZQA would be adequate. Others were less optimistic. However NCWZ has a tradition of supporting inter-sectoral governance and Minister's right and duty to make decisions.

It was also noted by one Branch that the door was not locked to future successful applicants for university status.

#### **Clause 5: Minister may consent to registered establishments using certain terms in their names**

The purpose of Clause 5, which allows the Minister to consent to registered establishments using certain protected terms in their names, was not completely clear to NCWZ. Nor were the circumstances in which Clause 5 would or could be applied. The Clause should be reworded for clarity of intention, purpose and use.



NCWNZ seeks a clearer role and definition for the concepts of a university and of an institute of technology or polytechnic, so that these institutions are able to be recognized by the public and the institutions themselves in terms of two distinctive tertiary educational institutions, each with criteria for excellence benchmarked with the best international models of their type. It appears to be a common belief that universities are research-based and institutes of technology are not, whereas the distinction is more often on the type of research which may be theoretical or applied. These institutions should not be seen as competitors or as first class/second class types of educational institutions but as equals in serving the social, economic and particularly the educational needs of New Zealand.

## **Part 2**

### **Application of Amendments to principal Act**

#### **Clause 6: Retrospective application of new sections 162 (3A0 and 162A**

Clause 6 making the Bill retrospective was supported by the majority of NCWNZ respondents because of their support for Clause 4. However, serious disquiet was expressed by some respondents and three Branches who considered that retrospective legislation is unwise and, in general, undesirable.

While recognising that the legislation is aimed at establishing the principles governing the eligibility of tertiary institutions to be classified as universities, concern was expressed by some NCWNZ respondents about the effects of the legislation on one specific institution, namely UNITEC.

### **Conclusion**

The passing of this Bill should constitute encouragement and indeed direction for universities to excel in their field and polytechnics and technical institutes to attain pre-eminence in the provision of technological education benchmarked to the most renowned institutes of technology in the world, while meeting the needs of New Zealand for important vocational and industrial training.

NCWNZ welcomes this opportunity to reiterate its policy on the important subject of high quality tertiary education in New Zealand.

Christine Low  
**National President**

Frances Townsend  
**Convener, Education Standing Committee**