



**National Council of
Women of New Zealand**

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Wahine O Aotearoa

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

The National Council of Women of New Zealand, Te Kaunihera Wahine O Aotearoa (NCWNZ) is an umbrella group representing 283 organisations affiliated at either national level or to one of our 21 branches. In addition, about 260 women are individual members of branches. Collectively our reach is over 290,000 with many of our membership organisations representing all genders. NCWNZ's vision is a gender equal New Zealand and research shows we'll be better off socially and economically if we're gender equal. Through research, discussion and action, NCWNZ in partnership with others, seeks to realise its vision of gender equality because it is a basic human right. This submission has been prepared by the NCWNZ Education Standing Committee and the Parliamentary Watch Committee after consultation with the membership of NCWNZ.

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1. NCWNZ is appreciative that the process for this legislation included the opportunity to give feedback on a Ministry of Education discussion document in 2015. This time frame meant that our members were able to consider the issues in an unhurried fashion, and give input to the formation of legislation rather than simply responding to decisions that have already been largely made. This proactive involvement is a process that suits our non-governmental organisation. It is a pity that the Communities of Online Learning (COOL) were not also included in the previous discussion document, as many of our members were still unsure as to what this initiative entails and needed more time and information to respond in a more focused way.
- 1.2. This submission focuses on a limited number of the proposed amendments. In general we support the new objectives for the education system, as they meet members' priorities for a broad, inclusive education system that prepares New Zealanders for full participation in our society. The cohort entry policy was likewise cautiously supported, because although members have mixed views, their main criteria were that children start close to their fifth birthday and cohort entries should be multiple times per year. The COOL policy was acceptable to members whilst it remained an exception to the usual education policy of children and young people attending physical schools. There was some concern that a new policy would introduce unwanted competition, and divert funds from extending the capability and responsiveness of Te Kura. Further reservations were around raising expectations of parents, especially when it came to mothers having to supervise young people enrolled in COOLs.

The inclusion of a requirement to provide appropriate career advice is supported by NCWNZ policy because of its link to reducing gender segregation in school and tertiary subject studies, which is a necessary precursor to eliminating the gender pay gap in Aotearoa New Zealand. Finally, NCWNZ would like to reiterate that regardless of who makes the final decision to merge or close schools, our members are clear that wide and authentic consultation with the community must be undertaken first.

- 1.3. There is another point for legislators to consider. The phrase “his or her” is often used when referring to people, to be inclusive of two genders. However, when the phrase is always in male-female order, there is an implicit hierarchy created. Perhaps legislators could alternate “his or her” with “her or his” phrases, to counter this impression.

Clause by Clause

Clause 4: Objectives of the education system

- 4.1. NCWNZ members had three major priorities for any education system objectives when responding to the 2015 Ministry of Education discussion document, and that was that our education system should be broad, inclusive, and should enable people to participate in Aotearoa New Zealand society. We are therefore pleased to see these things included in the updated legislation.

Clause 10: Cohort entry

- 10.1. NCWNZ members had mixed views on cohort entry when responding to the 2015 Ministry of Education discussion document, however there was a general theme that children should not be starting school too early, and that there should be multiple entry points during a year. NCWNZ is therefore pleased to see that the cohort entry policy is organised around the four school terms, and that children will still start school close to their 5th birthday. We would caution that we would not like to see children start school any earlier than this, as they do, for example, in the English system.

Clause 38: Communities of Online Learning

- 38.1. NCWNZ members could see a lot of benefits of accessing learning through online providers, especially for those in rural areas, and those students for whom physical schools are not a good fit or are too stressful. The increased diversity of providers was also seen a positive feature of COOLs.
- 38.2. Members were clear, however, that they saw accessing COOLs as a supplement to the current education system and not a replacement. Socialising and socialisation of children and young people was seen as a major function of the education system (as is being proposed in this Amendment Bill, Clause 4), as well as providing opportunities for co-curricular activities such as sport.
- 38.3. However, it was recognised that Te Aho o Te Kura Pounamu already offers this service. There were mixed experiences dealing with Te Kura – some found it a good service, and some found it lacking in many aspects. Questions were raised as to whether money spent in organising accreditation of new, private education providers would be better spent in raising the capability and responsiveness of Te

Kura. Members have been consistently clear over a number of years and various submissions that they expect the government, not private providers, to be responsible for ensuring there is appropriate educational options for all New Zealanders. Members have also been consistent in their opinion that increasing competition in the education system is not as effective at meeting the needs of students as increasing cooperation.

- 38.4. A further concern was the impact on mothers with the introduction of COOLs, as it is still predominantly the mothers who are involved in the education of their children and are likely to be the main supervisors of children and young people who do not attend a physical school. This is a valid choice for some families, but NCWNZ members would not like to see a woman's choices eroded by creeping expectations. For example, early childhood education is not compulsory – except for children of welfare beneficiaries, who now have specific social obligations. Attendance at school is not compulsory for 5 year olds, but there is great social pressure for this to occur, and now this Bill proposes to create penalties for irregular attendance for 5 year olds. These are examples of how the social reality is more prescriptive than the legislation.
- 38.5. Further, there were concerns that schools could take the easy option and exclude students because there is the COOL option, rather than working to keep them at school. It would be mothers who would be forced to arrange supervision of their children in this case. Another concern is that homeschoolers could be pressured to use a COOL instead of providing their own arrangements. Women's and families' right to opt for an alternative education could be affected. These are possible scenarios which we would not like to become the norm because of creeping social and legislative pressures.

Clause 49: Careers advice

- 49.1. NCWNZ supports the provision of good career advice. Work on the NGO alternate report for the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) Committee, led by NCWNZ, has highlighted the central role of sensitive and informed career advice to break down the gendered participation in different school and tertiary subjects and qualifications. Good career advice has the potential, for example, to encourage girls to consider trades as a career option, and boys to consider roles in the caring and health sectors. The breaking down of gender segregation in different types of studies and subsequent employment is a necessary part of addressing the gender pay gap that is large and persistent in Aotearoa New Zealand. NCWNZ's vision of a gender equal New Zealand requires elimination of the gender pay gap.

Clause 110: Closing and merging schools

- 110.1. The clauses on merging and closing schools state that the Minister will have absolute discretion on the final decision. We understand that this is after consultation has been carried out. NCWNZ members in their response to the 2015 Ministry of Education discussion document had various ideas on merging and closing schools, but were adamant that widespread and authentic consultation was an essential step in any such decision. We would like to reiterate that point here.

Conclusion

The views of NCWNZ members reflect a wide cross section of our society, with a variety of knowledge about the details of the education system as it is today. Their views highlight the importance of education and schooling to local communities, and support the continuing wide consultation regarding anything that radically changes the education system. NCWNZ is also concerned with the effect of education on women's future life opportunities and employment, as well as the way education changes affect women's roles as parents. We encourage the Select Committee to review this legislation from a gendered perspective.

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