

12 April 2018

Consultation on Education (Protecting Teacher Title) Amendment Bill

We are pleased to provide comment to the Education and Workforce Committee on the Education (Protecting Teacher Title) Amendment Bill.

About Te Rito Maioha Early Childhood New Zealand

Te Rito Maioha Early Childhood New Zealand is a national organisation that promotes high-quality early childhood education (ECE) through initial teacher education, professional development, leadership programmes, advocacy and membership services.

Te Rito Maioha is a membership organisation. We represent early childhood education services and the teachers who provide education and care to thousands of infants, toddlers and young children. Our members are drawn from a diverse range of community-based and privately-owned education and care services, home-based services and kindergartens.

Te Rito Maioha is also one of New Zealand's top providers of initial teacher education for ECE teachers, and is recognised as a leader in bicultural teacher education. We deliver a suite of qualifications and teacher education and professional development programmes that are of interest to both domestic and international students.

Te Rito Maioha is committed to high-quality early childhood care and education for every New Zealand child. That has been our purpose for 55 years since our formation in 1963, originally as the New Zealand Association of Childcare Centres and later as Te Tari Puna Ora o Aotearoa | NZ Childcare Association.

Response to proposals to protect the title 'teacher'

The intent of the Bill's proposals is "to lift the status of teachers while removing the ability of those who have not gained ... qualifications ... from representing themselves as 'teachers' by using that title", citing the need to remove the potential for misunderstanding by the public about the qualifications, registration status, and professional oversight of people using the title 'teacher'. While a key setting for this concern is Charter Schools, we can see this may also have relevance to ECE services. It is not uncommon for parents to assume that the adults at ECE services are qualified teachers.

We strongly support moves to restore the mana of the teaching profession and lift the professional image of teachers. Last month we made a submission to the Education and Workforce Committee on the Education (Teaching Council of Aotearoa) Amendment Bill, in which we noted our support for proposals to reinstate elected positions to the Education Council and to expand the membership of the Council to 13. We consider those proposals a meaningful and positive first step towards improving both the status of the teaching profession and public confidence in our teachers.

However, we are concerned that this Bill's focus on the term 'teacher' is out of step with aspects of being a teacher in New Zealand, not least of all bicultural principles and practices. It could be argued that 'teacher' is a very mono-cultural term. Te Whāriki the early childhood curriculum, for example, with its strongly bicultural vision, uses the terms teachers, kaiako and educators, in recognition of the diverse workforce that delivers the curriculum to the wide range of early childhood services. We would be interested to know what ngā iwi Māori say about this proposal.



We note the Bill does not provide a definition in the Interpretation section of the term 'teacher', but instead proposes adding a definition of 'qualified'. In light of the amendments to the offences proposed, we consider that there ought to be a definition of 'teacher'.

We note the proposed definition of 'qualified', which would have teachers required by law to have a three-year Bachelor's degree, or a Bachelor's degree and one-year Graduate Diploma of Teaching, or a four-year conjoint degree that combines study in teaching subjects with teacher training. This represents a shift from the current situation, whereby people with a Diploma of Teaching have met the Graduating Teacher Standards and are able to apply for teacher registration and a practising certificate with the Education Council. The Diploma is currently the benchmark qualification in schools and ECE, and affects funding and ratios for ECE.

While we support in principle a lift in teacher qualification level as part of a suite of initiatives to elevate the status and quality of the teaching profession, we are concerned about the potential significant impact of this change on those teachers who hold a Diploma of Teaching, and the schools and ECE services who employ them.

We recommend that the Committee examine carefully the potential impact of the change before decisions to implement it are taken. For example, will the proposed 'qualified' definition become the new benchmark? Will Diploma holders be required to complete an upgrade to become a 'teacher'? What will the financial impact on teacher registration, funding and salary be – for individuals, schools and services, and government?

Should the lift in qualifications as a benchmark eventuate, we recommend phased implementation to ensure ECE services do not suddenly find themselves operating outside the requirements in terms of quota of qualified teachers or experiencing significant funding reductions as a result, which could negatively impact their viability. Alternatively, it could be determined that the proposed qualification requirement apply from a certain (future) date, and therefore has no impact on current teachers holding diplomas or on funding related to qualified teacher ratios for ECE.

We have reservations about the proposed changes to the wording of section 374(1)(b). While we agree there should be penalties for people who wilfully misrepresent themselves as qualified, registered and certificated teachers, we do not think it practical to restrict the use of the term 'teacher' and impose sanctions on its misuse, unless the Education Act further defines the contexts in which this term can and cannot be used.

What matters most to us is that the people educating our tamariki are qualified to do so and are recognised by the relevant authority. We consider that New Zealand is well served by the rigour of the New Zealand Qualifications Framework and the teacher registration and certification process. The Act currently refers to registered teachers; registration and certification are the next steps up from qualification, and are ultimately a stronger indicator of a person's currency of teaching practice and knowledge, and adherence to the relevant Code and standards, than their job title.

Online submission to Education and Workforce Committee via Parliament website by 13 April 2018

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