



New Zealand Nurses Organisation

Submission to the Education and Science Committee

On the

Education (Polytechnics) Amendment Bill

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. The New Zealand Nurses Organisation (NZNO) welcomes the opportunity to comment on the Education (Polytechnics) Amendment Bill.
2. NZNO **does not** support the Bill.
3. NZNO supports the Council of Trade Unions submission which opposes the bill on the basis that:
 - it is unnecessary, since perceived financial difficulties faced by *some* Polytechnics can and have been addressed through existing mechanisms;
 - the proposed changes to the constituency of Polytechnic Councils will increase political control and decrease community influence on Polytechnics, impeding their prime function of delivering educational opportunities and training to benefit the regions they serve; and
 - a financially focussed model of governance is inappropriate for these educational institutes and poses a risk to meeting Polytechnics', and government's, broader social and economic objectives.
4. The majority of undergraduate education programmes leading to qualification as a Registered Nurse are provided in Polytechnics. Polytechnics also provide access to post graduate, re-entry to nursing programmes, second level nursing qualification programmes and some offer national certificate courses for caregivers. This type of education is vital for improved outcomes in the health and disability sector.
5. The nursing education that Polytechnics provide is fundamental to addressing current health disparities because it is the primary means of recruitment for

Māori, Pacific and others that are currently underrepresented in the professional health workforce.

6. Health professionals who are representative of the communities they practice in are one of the key identified factors to enhance health and reduce spending on higher acuity care. It is a proven route to reducing dependency and maximizing productivity and quality of life. Healthy people are productive people.
7. NZNO notes the proposed structure of Councils would entrench a power imbalance essentially sidelining community input in favour of central government control.
8. NZNO recommends that the vital role of Polytechnics, as tertiary education bodies distinct from Universities and Industry Training Organisations (ITOs) ITOs is recognised and valued and that the flexibility allowed by the current Council composition is retained.

ABOUT THE NEW ZEALAND NURSES ORGANISATION

9. The New Zealand Nurses Organisation (NZNO) is the leading professional body of nurses and nursing union in Aotearoa New Zealand, representing over 43 000 nurses and health workers on a range of employment related and professional issues across the public, private and community sectors.
10. Te Runanga o Aotearoa comprises our Māori membership and is the arm through which our Te Tiriti o Waitangi partnership is articulated. The majority of our members are nurses and midwives, with kaimahi hauora, health care workers and allied health professionals comprising a significant minority.
11. The NZNO vision is “Freed to care, Proud to nurse”. Our members enhance the health and wellbeing of all people of Aotearoa New Zealand and are united in their professional and industrial aspirations to achieve a safe, sustainable and accessible system of public and primary health care for all New Zealanders.

CONSULTATION

12. NZNO has consulted its staff and members in the preparation of this submission in particular Professional Nursing and Education Advisers, Policy Analysts, Te Runanga, Regional Advisors, and allied organisations.

DISCUSSION

13. NZNO is particularly concerned that the Bill completely undercuts the relationship that Polytechnics have with their communities. They are the only post-secondary educational institutes that provide wide access to community-based and community-driven occupational education and training and as such reflect the diverse needs and nature of New Zealand communities.

14. Polytechnics are key providers of nursing education and enable multiple entry points to professional nursing careers from diverse communities throughout Aotearoa. Having a regulated health workforce which reflects the community is an essential strategy for addressing current disparities in health and there is abundant evidence that the strong community component of Polytechnic Councils is responsible for delivering the required innovation and recruitment from underrepresented communities.

15. Recruitment from Māori and Pacific communities through programmes designed to meet their needs have been highly successful because of the strong community partnerships *reflecting the community* established by current requirements. Diverse initiatives from many Polytechnics like Whitireia with truly representative Councils, not token and isolated appointees, have delivered more health professionals from the communities most in need of them, than valiant, but inevitably centrally-led, Ministry programmes. Research shows that having a professional health workforce able to communicate directly with local communities leads to better health through higher rates of immunisation, better self management and fewer and less acute hospital admissions. That equates to a massive increase in productivity

and decrease in costs. Ministerial appointees, by definition, can never command the same community buy-in or reflect the same diversity.

16. Currently the Nursing Council of New Zealand (NCNZ), the Responsible Authority for nursing under the 2003 Health Practitioners Competence Assurance Act (HPCAA) makes no distinction between University or Polytechnic nursing graduates, since both types of institutes run approved nursing programmes, equally subject to NCNZ audit. In fact the demands of the Peer Based Research Funding which puts nursing and indigenous research at a disadvantage (see *Collating for Collaboration: Tertiary Education Funding Structures*¹), also reduces Polytechnics access to research funding in comparison with Universities, so they are competing for nursing students on very unequal terms.
17. NZNO strongly urges the committee not to throw away the very real gains that have been made in the excellent nursing education that polytechnics provide.
18. NZNO does not accept that the make-up of the Councils is responsible for financial mismanagement in some Polytechnics, nor that it is widespread. The current global recession is evidence that financial mismanagement is not an artefact of *community* governance¹, but rather corporate greed and lack of regulation, which indicates the need for a stronger emphasis on wider community input and outcomes rather than a purely fiscal focus.
19. The proposed council structure offers no assurance that the Minister's appointees will be either more competent or motivated to serve the community's needs and vision than the latter's careful selection of people with the appropriate skills and knowledge. However, it could be an advantage if the Minister made a list of people with appropriate skills available for Polytechnics to co-opt and/or seek advice from.

¹ Anne Brinkman. 2008. *Collating for Collaboration: Tertiary Education Funding Structures*. Wellington: NZNO.

20. There are risks associated with a financially focussed model of governance which is not fully aligned to the government's broader social and economic agenda. For example, it is extremely cost effective in a narrow sense for some Polytechnics to recruit overseas nursing students, without regard to how that fits in with health workforce planning, the regulatory environment or immigration. In fact, often overseas students who have invested considerable sums in their training, fail to get jobs here because of language or immigration restrictions. There is also an over-representation of overseas trained nurses who find themselves before Nursing Council on competence based issues. This is a lose-lose situation: their fees do not cover the full cost of education; their training does not deliver the registered nurses anticipated and obfuscates workforce planning; there is no advantage to the health of New Zealand communities in having overseas rather than local nurses trained; and the overseas student nurses have lost a lot of money.
21. Strong community representation and partnerships with employers providing workplace education which benefits the local community, provides a proper balance to a narrow, short-term business model which is not compelled to align education with employment. i.e. jobs for people and people for jobs.
22. NZNO notes that Polytechnics need to be properly resourced so that they are not dependent on inconsistent sources of income, such as overseas students, which are highly subject to external influences.
23. NZNO also strongly supports union, occupational and employer representation. We have had very positive feedback about the Employer Partnerships Groups which, for nursing, are mandated by the NCNZ, but which many Polytechnics utilise across all occupational groups. Professional Nursing Adviser Kate Weston notes that "these provide very useful and worthwhile fora for timely discussion of professional and workplace issues to ensure that the Polytechnic is delivering quality nursing graduates who are work ready. Bringing industry employers and educators together to better

inform future curriculum development is a cost effective means of getting industry input (both worker and employer) into the quality and relevance of training.” Having Professional Nursing Advisers who are able to offer a far more comprehensive perspective than a single “community” representative demonstrates the usefulness of Union input that this Bill cancels.

24. We note that unions, employers, staff and professional organisations are very aware of the need to get appropriate people with the right skill mix on Councils and work very hard to do so. We question whether the Minister would have the same extensive local networks to drawn on for appointees.
25. The diversity of New Zealand communities precludes a single representative. The proposed structure disempowers community governance in favour of central government control. Similarly student representation, without staff or community representation merely ensures a power imbalance. One, usually young, representative is hardly in a position to challenge or influence a Council stacked with ministerial appointees.
26. NZNO notes that the proposed legislation is not an isolated assault on community access to publically funded education, but follows funding cuts gutting Adult Community Education and proposed Tertiary Education Commission cuts to ITPs. In such an environment, there is a real risk to the viability of many polytechnics, the loss of which would threaten access to tertiary education outside the main centres and have disastrous effects regional development, and the culture, employment, industry and skill base of rural and provincial communities.
27. NZNO questions whether it is the government’s intention to offer funding security to tertiary ITOs and Universities alone?

CONCLUSION

10. In conclusion NZNO **does not** support the Bill and recommends that you:

- **Note** that NZNO supports the Council of Trade unions submission;
- **Note** that Polytechnics are key providers of nursing education and recruit from a wider and more diverse constituency than Universities, which has positive benefits for New Zealanders health and productivity;
- **Note** that Polytechnics' Employer Partnership Groups are providing a cost effective and efficient feedback mechanism to ensure education is timely and relevant;
- **Agree** that Union, occupational, staff and employer representation is largely providing the community representation and skill mix needed to ensure Polytechnics' are delivering local education and training to benefit their regions, enhancing New Zealanders productivity, and quality of life.
- **Agree** that diverse communities cannot be adequately represented by a single person;
- **Agree** that mismanagement by a small number of Polytechnic councils is not a rational basis for whole sale changes to the composition of councils
- **Note** that a pool of recommended people with appropriate skills would be a more positive, less disruptive and less risky contribution the Minister could make.
- **Note** that having ministerial appointees comprise half of all Councils is undemocratic; a barrier to meeting regional needs; and, for practical reasons, unlikely to be successful.

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