



SUBMISSION on the Education Act (Update)

Amendment Bill

Paper 083/16

Prepared on behalf of COMET Auckland, November 11, 2016

Whakatauāki

E kore e taea e te whenu kotahi
ki te raranga i te whāriki
kia mōhio tātou ki ā tātou.
Mā te mahi tahi o ngā whenu,
mā te mahi tahi o ngā kairaranga,
ka oti tēnei whāriki.
I te otinga
me titiro tātou ki ngā mea pai ka puta mai.
Ā tana wā,
me titiro hoki
ki ngā raranga i makere
nā te mea, he kōrero ano kei reira.

The tapestry of understanding
cannot be woven by one strand alone.
Only by the working together of strands
and the working together of weavers
will such a tapestry be completed.
With its completion
let us look at the good that comes from it
and, in time
we should also look
at those stitches which have been dropped,
because they also have a message.

- Kūkupa Tirikatene

About COMET Auckland

COMET Auckland, Te Hononga Akoranga (Community Education Trust Auckland) is a charitable trust and Council Controlled Organisation (CCO) of Auckland Council. Our role is to support education and skills across Auckland, contributing to the relevant social and economic goals in the Auckland Plan.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the consultation document on the Education Act (Update) Amendment Bill. We are interested in presenting an oral submission, if this can be done in Auckland.

Coverage of the proposed system-level objectives

We welcome the inclusion of system-level objectives in the Act. However we are disappointed to see (for example in Part 1AA, 1A, clause (3)) that the proposed objectives of the system are restricted to early childhood and compulsory education, and therefore do not cover tertiary education. In our view, this siloed thinking is not helpful to enabling the Act to be student-centred.

Other recent changes from government indicate recognition that we need to think beyond separate education sectors to a pathway approach. For example, the Ministry of Education now handles tertiary policy, and several recent government documents show evidence that government is integrating planning across education sectors:

- The Ministry of Education Four Year Strategic Plan, which incorporates all three sectors
- The Blueprint for Education System Stewardship published by the State Services Commission, Treasury and the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet
- The 2016 Education System Performance Improvement Framework, which outlines a joint response to the Blueprint from MoE, Careers NZ, TEC, NZQA, ERO and the Education Council.

Given all these indicators that government is thinking in a more integrated way, it makes little sense to set objectives for early learning and schooling only.

Recommendation: The objectives in the Act should be expanded to include tertiary education as well as schooling and early learning.

System-level objectives

We endorse the proposed objectives of the system (Part 1AA, 1A, (3)). We specifically support:

- Objective (3)(a), “to focus on helping each child and young person to attain educational achievement to the best of his or her potential”, as the first and central objective;
- Objectives (3)(b)(i) to (iv);

- Objectives (3)(c)(i), (ii) and (iv).

We would like to propose a change to objective (3)(c)(iii). The objective as written limits the appreciation of the importance of languages to only the official languages. This limitation is not consistent with the need to value all languages and cultures, not just those that are official to Aotearoa. Given that 160 languages are now spoken in our nation, that globalisation is increasing the need to intercultural communication, and that Auckland is already super-diverse and other parts of the country are rapidly following, an understanding of the importance of language and culture needs to encompass as wide a range as possible.

Recommendation: Objective (3)(c)(iii) should be changed to remove the words “the different official”, so the objective then reads “to instil in each child and young person an appreciation of the importance of... cultural knowledge, identity, and languages”.

We would also like to propose two additional items within objective (3)(b). Firstly we believe the goals of education should include ensuring learners are confident in their own language and culture and that they have the knowledge, skills and attitudes to enable them to actively engage with other languages and cultures. This is more than just having an “appreciation of the importance of” cultural knowledge, identity and language. It means actually building a strong identity as a person and as a member of a culture or cultures, gaining knowledge of their own and others’ cultures and languages, and gaining skills in engaging with people of other cultures and languages.

Secondly we would like to see a focus on lifelong learning, rather than only on what young people know and can do at the end of their schooling. The rate of change in technology and in the workplace make this even more important than it was in former years, as New Zealanders will need to be able to update their skills and qualifications throughout their working lives. Schools and tertiary institutions will need to consciously build the skills and attitudes needed for successful lifelong learning, so it is important to include an explicit objective on this.

Recommendation: Under Objective (3)(b), we propose adding two additional abilities/attributes:

- preparedness for lifelong learning
- strong cultural identity and skills to engage across cultures and languages

Lastly, we would like to see a system-level goal that relates to equity of outcomes, to ensure that the gaps between achievement for learners by ethnicity, gender or socio-economic group are closing over time. As currently worded, it would be possible to achieve all the objectives without reducing

the existing disparities in achievement and long-term outcomes. We therefore feel that an explicit objective is necessary in order to ensure ongoing focus on equity.

Recommendation: Add an additional objective (d) as follows:

- to work towards equity of outcomes across ethnicities, genders and socio-economic groups, at all levels of the system for education and learning

Communities of online learning

While we recognise that communication technologies offer significant potential to support learning, we are cautious about the implied assumption in Part 3A that a solely online learning process can fully replace face to face teaching. Online learning can work well for highly-engaged, self-directed learners who are learning mainly academic content, especially where the online component is supplemented with some face to face provision (as in Blended Learning). However for younger or less-engaged learners, or for subject matter that requires interaction or hands-on practice, online delivery is much more problematic, because relationship is central to engagement.

We are also aware that not all families have access to computers or the internet. This is already an issue for some students at Te Aho o te Kura Pounamu (Te Kura), who have been unable to download and print their learning materials and have had to request for them to be sent in hard copy. We are aware of this happening for students on Great Barrier Island, and even for some students wanting to access Te Kura resources while attending Auckland alternative education sites. Communities of Online Learning will therefore be less accessible to families in remote areas and from low socio-economic backgrounds.

In the past, only students who were unable to attend a face-to-face school were allowed to enrol full-time at Te Kura, recognising that distance learning is a last resort for school-age learners. The proposed Part 3A would lead to a wide range of providers entering the market, each with far fewer resources than Te Kura has had, and for any student to choose to enrol in full-time online learning. The risk is that a plethora of low-quality providers spring up, with little or no capacity to engage directly with students, and that students who would have succeeded in a face-to-face school may disengage and/or become socially isolated in a fully online environment.

We are also concerned at some of the specifics of the provisions for Communities of Online Learning. While the requirements in subsection (3) include pastoral care and an “appropriate”

curriculum, they do not require that every student has direct access to a trained teacher who knows their individual learning needs. This is central to effective teaching and learning, but it is expensive to provide, so if it is not specified, providers will not include it in their model. If Part 3A is to remain in the final legislation, we would at least recommend that an additional requirement be added as described above, and that a minimum ratio of qualified teachers to students be specified, rather than being left to the discretion of the Minister when contracts are negotiated.

In our view, a change of this significance needs much greater consultation than has occurred to date. We would like to see this section withdrawn to allow for wide consultation with educators, researchers, employers, learners and their families.

Recommendation: Delay inclusion and implementation of Part 3A until wider consultation can be completed.

Compulsory attendance from enrolment

We endorse the proposal for school attendance to be compulsory from the time of starting school, rather than age 6. Given the very high rates of unexplained absence for 5-year-olds in some communities, and the impact this has on children’s learning, this change is an important way to support achievement.

Powers and functions of boards

We endorse the proposed objective for school boards (Part 2 (5)(1)) to “ensure that every student at the school is able to attain his or her highest possible standard oin educational achievement”. The inclusion of this objective ensures that boards keep student achievement central to all their decision-making.

We also support the provision of greater guidance for boards on their functions and powers. However we question why only boards that are members of a community of learning are able to resolve to do work for other educational and social services (Part 2 (15)(3)(a)). This seems an unnecessary restriction. We suggest that any school should be able to do work for any organisation if they identify that the work will benefit the children or young people enrolled at the school.

Recommendation: Add an additional clause as follows:

(c) the board identifies that the work will benefit the children or young people who are enrolled at the school.

Redefining the school day

An additional area of flexibility that would be useful and that could be incorporated into the Act is the ability for schools to be able to vary the timing and length of the school day (beyond a minimum number of hours). This would allow schools to be responsive to the evidence that young children work best early in the day while teenagers work best when they sleep later. It would also allow schools to respond to community need, for example prevalent work hours or pressures on school buildings (as happened after the Christchurch earthquakes).

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