



**National Council of  
Women of New Zealand**

Te Kaunihera  
Wahine O Aotearoa

National Office  
Level 4 Central House  
26 Brandon Street  
PO Box 25-498  
Wellington 6146  
(04) 473 7623  
www.ncwnz.org.nz

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**Submission to the Ministry of Education on "Legislation for Learning"  
A discussion paper on making the Education Act work better for students**

The National Council of Women of New Zealand (NCWNZ) is an umbrella organisation representing 46 nationally organised societies. It has 35 branches spread throughout the country to which women from some 150 societies are affiliated.

NCWNZ thanks the Ministry of Education for the opportunity to comment on this discussion paper and is pleased to report that 21 of our 35 Branches responded. Given that the discussion booklet "Legislation for Learning" did not become available until October and responses were requested by 22 December 1999 it was decided to simplify the questions relating to the 9 issues for our members. In spite of this 5 of our Branches did complete the Response booklet and these are attached to the collated responses to the 9 questions published in the November issue of the NCWNZ Circular 428. The very good response from our membership indicates the importance that NCWNZ members place on the provision of a sound and equitable state education system in New Zealand.

The responses are given under the headings of the questions asked of our members.

**QUESTION 1: *One size does not fit all. Should we have a system that allows schools to operate differently, provided students benefit and costs are reasonable?***

1.1 A national system requires a uniform, base standard within which schools can operate to meet the needs of their community but which is still within the parameters of the national standard.

1.2 It is suggested that schools should have charters that specify both the outcomes they plan to reach and the processes which they wish to use. This would allow those who wish to contract for greater self-management to do so but also combine, within a location, for a common charter for specific aspects where schools would co-ordinate or combine.

1.3 Realising these objectives however will depend on the viability of such actions, the competence of the Board of Trustees (BOT) and the level of community and professional support.

1.4 Several responses urged the provision of liaison officers/advisors appointed from the ranks of experienced teachers to 'case-manage' and monitor a specified number of schools. Such an advisory system should also be available to supervise curriculum delivery and ensure national coherence. These latter points are seen as particularly important given the mobility of New Zealand's population.

**QUESTION 2: *Setting up schools to meet different student needs is difficult. What are the criteria for setting up schools and how flexible should they be?***

2.1 Most respondents believe that we should avoid a fragmented or tiered system.





2.2 Any variation from the national curriculum framework should be determined from criteria which demonstrate the ability to deliver the curriculum in full, including all the essential skills.

2.3 This objective can only be attained provided schools are staffed with trained, skilled and registered teachers, have a safe, clean and attractive environment and a balanced curriculum, meeting both the needs of the students and the requirements of the Ministry.

2.4 Several of our respondents believe that there is still need for an improvement in the delivery of education for special needs students, including 'gifted' students. The question is how to be responsive in money terms for 'alternative' programmes.

**QUESTION 3: *The rules of governance are not flexible enough. Should we have a more flexible approach to how schools are governed?***

3.1 NCW respondents were in agreement that the core principles underpinning school governance should be parental input and professional support, based on a national standard.

3.2 It was considered by our respondents that BOTs must be given the flexibility to respond to community needs within national guidelines

3.3 One group of respondents indicated that BOTs did not always distinguish between governance and management and this needed to be made very clear.

**QUESTION 4: *Schools are not encouraged to work together. Should it be made easier for schools to share administration, governance or management? How does the government need to be involved?***

4.1 Many respondents stated that the competitive environment created by "Tomorrow's Schools" was counter-productive for schools seeking to work together.

4.2 Our respondents applaud the idea of schools working together where the schools wish to do so and it is practical but believe that government policy has made it very difficult for them to do so.

4.3 It was suggested that Community Forums, initiated by the Ministry of Education, would be a good starting point for providing opportunities for inter-school cooperation.

4.4 Respondents said it is commonsense to combine resources, personnel and expertise but it is equally important to ensure that money is well spent and educational standards maintained.

**QUESTION 5: *Accountability requirements are not clear enough. There is a need to clarify what schools report on. Should reporting focus more on educational achievements?***

5.1 Different respondents put different interpretations on accountability but the majority chose to interpret it as reporting on student progress and achievement.



5.2 The consensus was that parents should, and for the most part do, receive a written report on the individual student's progress, supported by parent teacher interviews which should aim to identify strengths and weaknesses of the student.

5.3 In turn it was suggested that a standard schedule for reporting to government should be provided for schools, covering learning outcomes, financial and service performance and professional development.

***QUESTION 6: The Charter is not used as it was intended. What should be done to make school Charters more relevant partnership documents.***

6.1 Many respondents regarded the Charter as a 'mission statement' and suggested that from it a strategic plan should be drawn up which would meet the objectives of the Charter.

6.2 They believe that a strategic plan is a more realistic working document which can be developed as new initiatives are introduced.

***QUESTION 7: Government cannot always intervene effectively in struggling schools. Should there be a better system for early warnings of difficulties and government allowed to intervene in a range of ways?***

7.1 Most respondents agreed that there need to be mechanisms for identifying when a school is having difficulties.

7.2 There is a need for a range of agencies who can provide professional development, BOT training and advisory services and who can work with schools to identify potential problems and guide them to find solutions.

7.3 It was pointed out that identifying a problem is not enough. There is a need for resourcing to allow for efficient follow-up once a problem is identified.

***QUESTION 8: Rights and obligations are not clear enough. Would the working partnership be more effective if all the parties interests were clearly set out?***

8.1 While most of our respondents believe that there is a need for rights and responsibilities for schools, BOTs and parents to be identified, there are dangers if they put any of the parties in strait jackets by insisting on strict definition and adherence.

***QUESTION 9: The Act and regulations are not user-friendly. Should the regulations be based on the key principles which underpin the education system?***

9.1 The majority of our respondents agreed that the language of the Act and regulations was not user- friendly.

9.2 They also agreed that it is important to establish some key principles on which regulations can be based. At the same time it was pointed out that legislation must be unambiguous to lawyers and not just friendly to the general public.

**OVERALL COMMENTS:**

1. Some of our respondents were critical of the content and presentation of this discussion paper. They were of the opinion that the paper lacked substance, that the colour and size of the print and 'busy' artwork made it difficult to read. Some of the language was very vague and many statements were not backed up by evidence. In fact no research was provided in support of some of the sweeping conclusions drawn.

2. Respondents objected yet again to the leading, open-ended questions and did not feel that their considered opinions, based in many cases on personal experience, were being sought.

3. One respondent went so far as to say that the references to the Education Act in the Foreword are both inaccurate and patronising.

4. Another group of respondents suggested that, although the objective of the exercise was clear, the process for achieving that objective was not at all clear. They suggested that it would be more effective to go through the Act systematically and just change the clauses that need to be changed and in this way gain some consistency.

5. Overall, while NCWNZ members were pleased to have the opportunity to examine these important questions, we regret that the document was presented on the eve of a general election with an initially very tight time-frame to prepare comment and then having extended the time for acceptance of responses to announce that the process had been abandoned. It is not surprising that the general public are very cynical about government departments under such circumstances.

6. While a number of our respondents were pleased to see the recognition of the importance of the teacher in the education process they were alarmed by the on-going promotion of market-driven ideology for education and the fact that competition rather than cooperation between schools was going to deliver New Zealanders with a better education. The members of NCWNZ who responded to this paper clearly do not subscribe to either of these views.

Barbara Glenie

Dorothy Meyer

**National President**

**Convener  
Education Standing Committee**