



**National Council of
Women of New Zealand**

Te Kaunihera
Wahine O Aotearoa

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**Submission to the Education and Science Committee on the
Tertiary Education Reform Bill**

The National Council of Women of New Zealand Te Kaunihera Wahine O Aotearoa (NCWNZ) is an umbrella organisation representing 43 nationally organised societies. It has 35 branches spread throughout the country to which some 150 organisations are affiliated. It also represents a number of individual women.

NCWNZ commends the concept of setting up the Tertiary Education Commission, and believe the consequent changes outlined to the Tertiary Education Reform Bill will result in a tightening of the accountability of tertiary education providers. Likewise, the inclusion of the industrial training organisations under the umbrella of the Tertiary Education Bill will increase the accountability of this sector.

However, members are concerned that diminishing the current autonomy of institutions could produce a government-dominated tertiary education system. We accept the importance of having clear goals and direction for the system to ensure that New Zealand has a well-qualified workforce, robust research, and the depth and range of scholarship that enables us to take our place in the world. However, independence, opportunities for new initiatives, and the traditional role of universities in particular as 'the critic and conscience of society' should not be compromised. We believe these attributes are fully compatible with the government's overall objectives.

Issues

1. Scope

a. Members of NCWNZ consider that all four reports published by the Tertiary Education Advisory Committee should have been taken into account when drawing up this Bill. The fourth report, which focuses on funding would seem to play an important part in planning for the future of tertiary education organisations.

b. There was also concern that the only consultation up to this stage has been with other Government agencies, with no opportunity for input from the wider community. The changes set out in this Bill are so far-reaching that they warrant full consultation with NGOs and other groups with a special interest in this field.

2. Costs (See Explanatory Note page 22)

This Note sets out the range of costs that will be incurred in implementing the changed system. We note that there will be transition costs to setting up the organisation and discontinuing the existing framework, and that there will inevitably be increased costs of administration and management both at government level and throughout the sector. Compliance costs of Charters and Profiles could be high. Members are extremely concerned that these costs will decrease funding available to the institutions themselves, and affect staffing and the innovation of teaching





and research programmes which have the desirable outcomes in the development of New Zealand as a “knowledge nation”.

3. Public Policy Objectives (Explanatory Note pages 19-20).

The objectives described in these paragraphs are entirely laudable, and NCWNZ hopes they can be achieved. However, members are also concerned that they appear to curtail the autonomy of the tertiary institutions, requiring responsiveness to external stakeholders, possibly to the detriment of aspects of scholarship such as pure (or ‘blue skies’) research. It is important to recognise that outcomes of scientific research are unpredictable and often multiple avenues must be explored. While it may not be the intention of this Bill to make it even more difficult to obtain funding for research, it may well be one of the effects.

4. 159D Composition of the Commission

It is important that appointees to the Commission have a wide range of knowledge and ability. There is a danger that this body could become a vehicle for government direction and dominance. Members of the Commission must therefore not only be unbiased in their judgement, but also have the respect and confidence of the community. They must be prepared to debate strategy and any directives (**see Clause 159J**) with the Minister from a base of sound knowledge and experience. Extensive advertising for positions is necessary to ensure that the best possible field is available from which appointments can be made. NCWNZ also recommends that the process of appointment should involve more consultation than that indicated in Clause 159D. In particular, women of New Zealand should be involved in consultation and be appropriately represented.

5. 159R and 159ZC. Charters and Profiles

NCWNZ notes that the Bill requires only those institutions and establishments that are seeking public funding to prepare a profile. We have some concerns about the lack of a similar clear mechanism for quality assurance of private establishments, and would like to see some form of registration procedure even if public funding is not involved. We believe all students entering training should be able to trust that the provider is appropriately equipped to meet their needs.

6. Clause 18 Amendments to NZQA

There is some concern regarding the responsibility given to the above organisation. The Bill does not indicate whether the current committees set up through the NZ Vice-Chancellors’ Committee – that is, the Committee on Academic Programmes and the NZ Universities Academic Audit Unit – will continue to exist in their current form. Members of NCWNZ believe that the functions of these organisations are essential to maintain quality assurance through peer and international review, especially at the country’s central institutions which should set the standards and offer leadership in scholarship and innovation.

Conclusion

NCWNZ thanks the Committee for the opportunity to participate in the consultation process

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