

Government put on notice

While MPs were debating the “unjust and undemocratic” Education Amendment Bill (No 2) PPTA president Angela Roberts ensured each one was clear about the profession’s concerns through a letter.

Dear Minister,

I am writing to you to express the association’s grave concerns about this bill. Secondary teachers regard the process and the content of this bill as nothing short of a travesty of democracy.

In the first place, the proposed new council will have no elected teacher representation on it whatsoever; all members of EDUCANZ will be government appointees. This lack of democratic input from the profession which is supposed to “own” the body is unprecedented. As far as PPTA is aware, no other New Zealand professional regulatory body operates without any positions elected by the profession they are supposed to serve. This concern was expressed over and over again by the hundreds of secondary teachers who submitted to the Education and Science Select Committee but to no effect. Teachers will not see this new body as having any legitimacy.

Secondly, while teachers accept the necessity of funding a body to oversee the registration and deregistration functions and entry and exit to the profession, they are implacably opposed to the extra powers this undemocratic body will have to impose fees on teachers for a range of functions and activities that are unnecessary, or that duplicate work done by other bodies or that are more properly the financial responsibility of the employer.

Clause 383 of the bill empowers the new council to charge teachers a series of additional costs in no way related to its prime purpose. Clause 383 (f) authorising the council to fix fees for “the provision of professional leadership” is the most egregious of these potential charges because it has no limit. It is left up to a future council to make whatever determinations it likes about what activities constitute “professional leadership” and sheet the cost home to teachers. Further, clause 381 (i) which calls for what appears to be on-site scrutiny of principals’ decisions about the issue and renewal of practising certificates in some 250 schools and 437 early childhood centres per year, involves setting up a costly auditing system. There is absolutely nothing to stop the new council from charging teachers for this low trust and wasteful duplication of work, most of which is already done by the Education Review Office.

This bill is unjust and undemocratic. The government is using its legislative powers to set up an unelected quango with no accountability to the profession whatsoever and then giving it almost unfettered powers to impose extra taxes on teachers.

There is no possibility of EDUCANZ meeting its stated purpose of “raising the status of the profession” when teachers can have no confidence in either its legitimacy or independence. Nor should it be assumed that teachers will meekly continue to fund a body which does not represent them and cannot act in the best interests of the profession.

PPTA understands there are a number of supplementary order papers that seek to ameliorate the worst excesses of this bill. I urge you to support them.

Yours sincerely,

