



PPTA TE WEHENGARUA ANNUAL CONFERENCE 2024

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# ENCOURAGING RAINBOW COMMUNITY LIAISONS

A PAPER FROM THE PPTA WELLINGTON AND HUTT VALLEY REGIONS



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## RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1 That the report be received.
- 2 That the PPTA campaigns for Queer Community Liaison roles within schools and seeks progress towards this through collective negotiations.
- 3 That PPTA Te Wehengarua commits to the protection of Queer Community Liaison roles in schools, so that Queer Rangatahi across Aotearoa have people campaigning for them and their rights.
- 4 That the PPTA continues to support schools to be safe and welcoming environments for students and staff of minority genders and sexualities.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This paper uses the word queer as a reclaimed word to refer to people within the rainbow (LGBTQ+) community.
- 1.2 High School can be a challenging time for all students, but it can be especially difficult for those who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or other queer variants (LGBTQ+ or queer). During these years, students are developing their sense of identity and are beginning to understand their place in the world. They are also navigating complex social dynamics and dealing with issues related to sexuality and gender.
- 1.3 Recent statistics (see Ref 1) show that approximately 16% of High School aged students self identify as attracted to the same or multiple genders, and around 1% of High School aged students self identified as not attracted to any genders.
- 1.4 Approximately 1% of High School aged students self identified as transgender or non-binary, with a further 0.6% of High Schoolers reporting that they are unsure or are questioning of their gender identity.
- 1.5 StatsNZ estimated that 29% of New Zealand queer population are between ages of 18-24, compared to only 11% of the non-queer population. The proportion of queer population decreases in higher age demographics, indicating a rise in the number of youths who identify as queer (see Ref 2).
- 1.6 For queer students, these years can be filled with fear, isolation, and a lack of support. They may face bullying, harassment, and discrimination from their peers and/or teachers. They may also feel that they have no one to talk to about their experiences or to seek support from. This can have a significant impact on their mental health, self-esteem, and academic performance.
- 1.7 In particular, this can be challenging for queer rangatahi who have not come out. There can be any number of reasons for queer rangatahi to not come out while at school, however many of them may negatively impact their educational success and their overall wellbeing.
- 1.8 Unlike members of other marginalised communities, queer people may not have significant familial support, even if the families are publicly supportive. This is because most people have not experienced the specific difficulties experienced by the queer community. Therefore, they may need to seek support from the greater queer community.
- 1.9 It can be challenging for queer youth to find support within the community, especially if they do not have familial support. These rangatahi may have school being their safe place, so having a queer figurehead in the school to help them find, and access queer friendly community spaces can help queer rangatahi find safe places outside of school and to find others like them in the community for an increased sense of belonging.
- 1.10 Furthermore, when searching for support, queer rangatahi can open themselves up to hate speech. This can lead to either queer rangatahi feeling unsafe, or being unwilling to search for the support that they need to have in order to thrive.

## 2. RATIONALE FOR CHANGE

- 2.1 To address the challenges faced by Queer Rangatahi, it is essential for schools to have a designated queer liaison person. This person can provide a safe and supportive environment for queer students, helping them to feel valued and accepted. They can also provide guidance and support on a range of issues, including bullying and harassment, coming out, and accessing safe and affirming resources.
- 2.2 A queer liaison person can help to create a more inclusive and supportive school culture. They can provide training and resources to teachers and staff, helping them to better understand and support queer students. They can also work with students to create a welcoming and accepting environment; promoting understanding and respect.
- 2.3 By creating a safe and inclusive environment, schools can help to improve the well-being and academic success of these students. Schools must prioritise this role and ensure that they have the resources and support they need to be effective.
- 2.4 In 2023, hate crimes against transgender and gender diverse individuals doubled compared to the previous year (see Ref 3). Public facing Queer Liaison roles in schools can assist with creating safe havens for queer students, and will assist in ensuring that queer students are continuing to receive quality education.
- 2.5 In the current political climate, there has been an emboldening of people to voice their negative opinions towards queer people, both online and in person. This has been noticed empirically by multiple people working within queer spaces.
- 2.6 While working in the queer space, kaiako are opening themselves up to a lot of unwarranted criticism and vitriol from members of the community and the public, simply because they are operating in the queer space. This can lead to kaiako feeling unwilling to step into roles within the queer space, as they are apprehensive to put themselves and their careers at risk.
- 2.7 Having backing from the schools where they work, and recognition from the PPTA Te Wehengarua can help to mitigate these feelings, as kaiako will feel that they are able to do the necessary work in the queer space.
- 2.8 The queer community is a highly varied group, and any one person working in a queer liaison role will be unable to have lived experience in all of the aspects of queer culture. Having a recognised role in schools can provide teachers with a queer liaison role the time needed to explore how best to help students who fall under different areas of queer culture. This would also allow for allies with this role to have the time required to support queer rangatahi.
- 2.9 Currently, many schools rely on the school guidance team to deal with queer issues, largely due to the overlap between being queer, and suffering from potentially traumatic events (PTE's)(see Ref 4). This takes up a lot of time from guidance teams, and not all queer students needing support require it from guidance. Many queer students can have similar benefits from being introduced to support networks as they would get from seeing guidance teams.
- 2.10 Queer liaison people can help to reduce the load that falls on guidance teams, by acting as a queer "filter", liaison people can point queer rangatahi in the direction of safe and affirming

resources, and to ensure that if they require counselling, that they are being seen by a mental health professional, either in school or from an outside provider.

- 2.11 The addition of a clause in future SCTA bargaining similar to that of clause 4.26 in the 2022-2025 SCTA would ensure that schools around Aotearoa would have support positions available for queer rangatahi. This would allow schools to better realise the objectives, priorities and actions of the NELPs (see Ref 5).
- 2.12 Any time allocation in each school would be dependent on the base roll number, and time allowances could be split among multiple people in larger schools.

### 3. PROPOSAL OF FUTURE ROLES

- 3.1 Recognised roles in which teachers are given release time and financial remuneration to ensure support of queer rangatahi across Aotearoa.
- 3.2 The best person for this position would be a queer individual with lived experience that can be utilised, however any dedicated ally would be more than suitable. This has been backed up empirically from the Schools Services Manager at Inside Out.
- 3.3 The best person for this position must also be aware of their own knowledge shortfalls around the queer community, and be willing to reach out to others in order to best understand how to help the rangatahi under their care.
- 3.4 Release time is vital to ensure time is available for planning and organising support, as well as for meeting with community support groups targeted at helping queer rangatahi.

### 4. CONCLUSION

- 4.1 Queer rangatahi in Aotearoa schools are a uniquely at risk group, due to potential lack of familial support, bullying by peers, and the overlap between queer youth and PTE's.
- 4.2 Queer rangatahi are an incredibly diverse group, and different rangatahi will benefit from individualised and targeted approaches, which will best come from specialists in the queer space.
- 4.3 Many teachers around Aotearoa are already completing work with queer rangatahi, however this is unpaid, and kaiako in this role may feel unsupported by the school.
- 4.4 Kaiako in roles like this often support whānau, as well as interact with community groups. It is important that they are supported in these roles as they are public facing and often open to criticism. This role in particular will require interactions with community groups, as well as members of the community. Therefore it is vital for kaiako to feel that they are supported by the school and the PPTA in doing this.

- 4.5 The addition of a queer liaison role in the SCTA will help to ensure that queer rangatahi around Aotearoa will have support, no matter which school they attend. Additionally, kaiako supporting queer rangatahi will feel supported and empowered to continue their work.

## References

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