



PPTA TE WEHENGARUA ANNUAL CONFERENCE 2017

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# AFFIRMING DIVERSITY

INCLUSION FOR SEXUALITY AND GENDER MINORITIES



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This paper updates members about the continued work of the Rainbow Taskforce. It includes a summary of the work of the group since it was formed in 1993 and makes suggestions for the next steps in our work to make schools more inclusive of minority genders and sexualities. Safe inclusive schools are important for the wellbeing of both teachers and students and the recommendations would have a significant impact on both. This paper discusses areas of concern and highlights the need for proactive leadership and best practice models that ensure schools are meeting the needs of their students and providing safe workplaces for staff.

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## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. That the report be received.
2. That PPTA urge the government to require the Ministry of Education to issue clear guidelines to schools on best practice for safe schools for students and staff of minority genders and sexualities.
3. That the PPTA continues to support schools to be safe and welcoming environments for students and staff of minority genders and sexualities.
4. That PPTA demonstrates leadership by working to meet the Rainbow Standard by December 2018.
5. That the executive consider a claim for the 2018 STCA round to eliminate gender biased language in STCA section, 6.3 Parental Provisions and subsequent to this a similar claim in section 5.2 in the ASTCA.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 There is a range of evidence<sup>1</sup> confirming that young people who identify as sexuality and gender minorities experience a range of issues in schools. These students struggle to fit into traditional models of schools where norm-based practices often exclude diverse sexualities or gender. These students often experience low levels of self-esteem, occasions of bullying (in some cases at a high level of frequency), issues with well-being, and trouble with feeling secure and safe at home, let alone at school. Disproportionate numbers of gender and sexuality minority students are leaving school early and ending up in alternative education streams.
- 1.2 For sexuality and gender minority PPTA members, a range of risks need to be considered. Historically, PPTA help has been sought by LGBTIQ+ (an umbrella term that covers all minority genders and sexualities including, but not limited to, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, takatāpui, intersex and queer) teachers who are being bullied by students for their perceived or actual sexuality or gender identity. Issues around privacy and information sharing have arisen from situations where staff members have been outed by other staff. Additional concerns have come from camps or overnight trips and sleeping or supervision arrangements. Teachers who are transitioning may experience additional issues around dress codes and bathrooms.
- 1.3 A lack of leadership from the Ministry of Education has led to a fragmented approach by schools in support of gender and sexuality diversity. Many schools have made ill-informed decisions due to a lack of clear guidance. Equally many schools have led the way with dynamic decision making, demonstrating the ability to be flexible in their support of individuals. PPTA's observation of the state of sexuality and gender diversity support is that there is some excellent practice taking place, but equally many schools which have barely begun on this journey. It should be noted that the characteristics of any school (i.e. decile, ethnic make-up, secular status etc.) do not correlate with any particular status in terms of how well they are catering for diversity. At the same time, one school characteristic, limiting students to a single sex, does bring up additional issues of complexity for students of diverse gender identities.
- 1.4 A lot of school policy is written from the perspective of gender norms and heteronormative expectations that fail to take into consideration the vibrant diversity of sexual orientations and gender identities.<sup>i</sup> Work in this area needs to be approached with respect and care for individual identities. Issues with confidentiality and informed consent can occur when a values based approach is absent.

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<sup>1</sup> See section 7 on data.

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## 2. BACKGROUND – RAINBOW TASKFORCE

- 2.1 PPTA has a longstanding commitment to diversity. In 1993 the Rainbow Taskforce (originally called the Safe Schools Taskforce)<sup>ii</sup> was initiated with sexuality and gender diverse members making up the group. The initial focus was to support the needs of rainbow members of PPTA. Over time, the group's focus has developed to include focusing on the needs of students as well. Often the needs of students and teachers overlap, because a safe school for rainbow students is usually a safe school for rainbow staff.
- 2.2 The first edition of PPTA's guidelines *Affirming diversity of sexualities and gender identities in the school community* was released in 2002. Since 2012 the taskforce has also presented a 'Safer Schools for All' workshop in over 70 schools around the country.<sup>iii</sup> This workshop is presented by queer PPTA staff and members, and is available free to any school at the request of the senior leadership team.
- 2.3 Earlier this year in May an updated version of the guidelines was released to a media flurry as the public were faced with the idea of gender neutrality and why this is such an important aspect of future-focused schools<sup>iv</sup>. It was gratifying to note that the vast majority of the responses were very positive.
- 2.4 The Rainbow Taskforce continues to be dynamic to the needs and requirements of issues in this area and is committed to creating fundamental change to ensure safer schools for all students and teachers.

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## 3. AFFIRMING DIVERSITY

- 3.1 This paper is promoting the need for the government to require the Ministry of Education to issue clear guidelines to schools on best practice for safe schools for gender minority students. In this section of the paper, we will briefly unpack what issues currently require clarification and leadership to ensure safer schools for all. For more information on these ideas, members should consult the PPTA publication *Affirming diversity of sexualities and gender identities in the school community*<sup>v</sup>. These areas need clarity and guidance over what is best practice, and leadership would involve setting targets from a forward thinking and proactive government.
- 3.2 LANGUAGE
  - 3.2.1 Inclusive language is important to ensure people of diverse genders and sexualities feel welcome. Conversely, harmful language like homophobic, biphobic and transphobic terms can have a harmful effect on not just individuals, but the wider culture of any workplace or school environment. Regular professional learning on this matter is important to expand the understanding of teachers and enable reflection on the importance of the language we model in the classroom, as well as how we regulate and respond to the language of our students. Ensuring funding for organisations equipped to deliver professional development to schools on inclusive language is one way that the Ministry of Education could address this. Furthermore, ensuring that language used in all

guidelines and instructions to schools models the inclusive way that policy should be written is important as well.

### 3.3 TOILETS AND CHANGING FACILITIES

3.3.1 Toilets and changing facilities contain additional challenges for gender and sexuality minority students. These environments can be unsafe for students who do not conform to binary views of gender. Earlier this year the issue received significant media attention when the PPTA advocated for gender neutral options to be available in all schools. The Ministry of Education has been reluctant to share clear guidelines on this, instead deflecting the decisions back to schools and their communities. This avoidance is putting off a significant need which could be addressed by ensuring all new school buildings have a gender-neutral bathroom option, or that all schools have this in their mid-term planning.

### 3.4 UNIFORMS

3.4.1 Another area where a binary approach to gender can lead to exclusion is uniforms. Traditional approaches to uniform can be harmful for students who do not conform to gender norms. Once again, the Ministry of Education has deflected decisions around uniform back to schools and their communities whereas taking a leadership role on this issue would require them to publish clear guidelines that ensure uniforms are not discriminatory.<sup>vi</sup> This is simple to do, by simply having a uniform that involves a range of options and no gender demarcation of any of the options.

### 3.5 INFORMATION SHARING AND PRIVACY

3.5.1 For sexuality and gender minorities there are a range of challenges around information sharing and privacy. Some PPTA members have experienced being 'outed' by colleagues to other students or through the job application process. Some students participating in their school's diversity group or Queer Straight Alliance have been photographed and had their attendance shared on social media. Some students have had information shared inappropriately when they changed schools. These examples capture just some of the situations where information sharing and privacy are problematic. On this matter more dialogue needs to occur to ensure the correct support is in place to ensure that information sharing and privacy of sexuality and gender minority students and staff are respected.

### 3.6 OTHER AREAS

3.6.1 There are other areas lacking best practice guidelines and proactive leadership. PPTA members who come out as transgender and transition at school may face considerable challenges. This is linked to the above areas including staff dress-codes, pronouns and gender indicators on schools' internal databases, toilets and changing facilities, and the sharing of private information.

3.6.2 Other areas of school life where gender is often approached in a binary way are also problematic. School camps are an area where sleeping arrangements may

be a challenge to students who do not follow gender norms. Any overnight trip is problematic if genders are segregated and there is no provision for students of diverse genders and sexualities. This can impact on both students and staff. It is important to interrogate the reasons for this segregation and consider alternative arrangements. This issue goes well beyond gender and sexuality as well, to socialisation. A male student may not identify as a sexuality or gender minority but might feel more comfortable being in the same room as female students, or vice-versa.

- 3.6.3 A vital component of addressing any of these areas is communication with community groups and agencies that work in this area. Organisations like RainbowYOUTH and InsideOUT have expertise and experience in navigating these areas and connections between schools and these relevant groups is important to ensure that informed decision making occurs. The government can support these groups by ensuring they are funded to provide these kind of services and be actively involved in supporting more inclusion in our schools.
- 3.6.4 For schools to provide environments where everyone is empowered to be themselves, it is clear that more guidance and leadership is required from the Ministry of Education. Schools need to be more equipped to be more inclusive of minority sexualities and genders and a proactive approach is vital to ensure our young akonga are able to achieve their full potential as learners. This paper implores the government to require the Ministry of Education to issue clear guidelines to schools on best practice for safe schools for sexuality and gender minority students.

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#### **4. SEXUALITY EDUCATION GUIDELINES**

- 4.1 Released in 2015, this guide was written by the ministry to support effective sexuality education programmes and “to support the positive and holistic development and health of all students in New Zealand primary, intermediate, and secondary schools”<sup>vii</sup>. The guidelines go beyond the health classroom and affirm that sexuality education is the responsibility of the whole school community, and not just that of the health and physical education department. It also makes wider comments about neutrality: “School uniforms can reinforce gender norms, so schools may consider offering gender-neutral clothing choices when uniforms come up for review.”<sup>viii</sup> The guidelines are useful for schools to use as support for the implementation of safe and welcoming environments for sexuality and gender minorities. The PPTA will continue to endorse this document and ensure that the full implementation of these guidelines in all schools is achieved. At the same time, we would argue that they do not go far enough.

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## 5. RAINBOW STANDARD

- 5.1 This paper proposes that the PPTA lead the way by implementing NZ Standard 8200:2015.
- 5.2 Rainbow-inclusive workplaces: A standard for gender and sexual diversity in employment, outlines the requirements to be met for organisations to be recognised as inclusive and safe workplaces for people of diverse sexual orientation and gender identity. International research shows that people from LGBTIQ+ communities still face discrimination and exclusion in the workforce; in recruitment, retention, training, and advancement opportunities. This is an infringement of human rights.<sup>ix</sup>
- 5.3 For the PPTA to truly lead the field in this area, this paper proposes that it audits itself against this standard for an inclusive workplace. The audit of the PPTA as an organisation would not directly impact on the actions of any branches, but it would send a clear message that the PPTA is leading the way in this aspect of workplace safety and inclusion. The ripple effect to branches would be positive as the progress towards meeting the standard would raise awareness of the steps that any workplace can take.

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## 6. GENDER NEUTRALITY

- 6.1 Earlier in the year when the PPTA released the updated *Affirming diversity of sexualities and gender identities in the school community' guidelines*, some media reports misrepresented the idea of gender neutrality. The implications are that many new to this discussion may not have fully understood the issues that were raised<sup>x</sup>.
- 6.2 A gender neutral approach is all about giving our students choice and is by no means a challenge to either end of the gender spectrum. There is no challenge being made to anyone's right to identify as a man or a woman. It acknowledges however that for many of our students, a binary approach to gender is not inclusive and other options need to be presented so that every person feels emotionally and physically safe. The notion of choice aligns with other causes, such as cultural expressions of identity that can be repressed by uniform. Gender neutrality is all about providing the options so that all young people feel included and safe.

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## 7. DATA

- 7.1 A range of data exists to support the discussion in this document. The Youth 2000 surveys run by the Adolescent Health Research Group from the University of Auckland, took place in 2001, 2007 and 2012, and have collected data on both-sex and same-sex attracted students.<sup>xi</sup> They found: "between 2001 & 2012 there were some improvements. Fewer sexual minority students reported cigarette smoking and a greater proportion are 'out' in 2012. However, there have been no improvements in relation to depression, suicide attempts and bullying for sexual minority students."<sup>xii</sup> The 2012 survey was the first year that data was collected on transgender students, and 3.7%



reported being transgender or not sure of their gender. The data showed that these students were 4.5 times more likely to be bullied at school at least weekly than non-transgender students and five times more likely to report attempting suicide than non-transgender students.

- 7.2 In 2015 Ara Taiohi published *Snapshot*<sup>xiii</sup>, a report on the support sector for rainbow young people. The report identified strong practice in the sector, but under resourcing was a common trend, leading to an inability to address issues like culturally appropriate practice, increasing suicide rates, homelessness and absence of proper healthcare. The report noted that “There are no Ministry of Education level best practice guidelines for Rainbow education and no accountability for education environments to Rainbow young people”.<sup>xiv</sup>
- 7.3 Earlier this year the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) released their third volume on student wellbeing from data that was collected in 2015.<sup>xv</sup> The report showed that 15 year old New Zealanders have the 2nd highest rate of bullying out of the 51 countries involved in the study. Other studies show this bullying rate disproportionately impacts sexuality and gender minority students in New Zealand.

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## **8. COLLECTIVE AGREEMENT GENDER BIAS**

- 8.1 The final proposal in this paper is to bring up to date the Secondary Teachers’ Collective Agreement (STCA) section 6.3 Parental Provisions. The current agreement is outdated and uses gendered language that is discriminatory. Currently 6.3.2 specifies that the provisions are only accessible to “a female teacher”. This excludes not only male teachers who are adopting (as a single parent or in a same-sex relationship) but also male identifying teachers who might find themselves pregnant. While the latter scenario is rare, it has happened a number of times now globally. In order to protect the rights of all PPTA members, this section needs to be updated to use gender neutral language as per the rest of the collective agreement. This is a human rights issue and it should be addressed as quickly as possible. The paper recommends that the executive consider a 2018 STCA claim to address this as a human rights and equity issue.

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## 9. ENDNOTES

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- <sup>i</sup> For more information about sex, sexuality and gender including useful definitions, we suggest using RainbowYOUTH's publication ['Queer and Trans\\* 101'](#)
- <sup>ii</sup> [Members of the Rainbow Taskforce](#) – PPTA Rainbow Taskforce
- <sup>iii</sup> [Safer classrooms for all. Anti-homophobia workshops in schools](#) – PPTA Rainbow Taskforce
- <sup>iv</sup> [Affirming diverse sexualities and genders in schools](#) – PPTA News and Media
- <sup>v</sup> [Affirming diversity of sexualities and gender identities in the school community - Guidelines for principals, boards of trustees and teachers \(pdf\)](#) – PPTA Rainbow Taskforce
- <sup>vi</sup> More detailed information about toilet and changing facilities and uniforms is addressed in the Rainbow Taskforce publication: [Affirming diversity of sexualities and gender identities in the school community\(pdf\)](#)
- <sup>vii</sup> [Sexuality education: a guide for principals, boards of trustees and teachers](#) – Ministry of Education
- <sup>viii</sup> [Sexuality education: a guide for principals, boards of trustees and teachers](#), p.27 – Ministry of Education
- <sup>ix</sup> [First standard in the world for rainbow inclusive workplaces](#) – Standards New Zealand
- <sup>x</sup> For examples of this, see [Mike Hosking: 'There are real issues in schools and gender identity isn't one of them'](#) – One News TVNZ and [Prime Minister weighs in on gender neutral uniforms](#) – Newshub
- <sup>xi</sup> [Youth'12 The Health and Wellbeing of Secondary School Students in New Zealand: Results for Young People Attracted to the Same Sex or Both Sexes.](#) - Lucassen, M.F.G., Clark, T. C., Moselen, E., Robinson, E.M. and the Adolescent Health Research Group. (2014). University of Auckland Faculty of Medical and Health Science.
- <sup>xii</sup> [Youth' 2000: What do the results tell us about transgender and sexual minority school students in New Zealand](#) (pdf presentation) – Dr Terryann Clark, Dr Fiona Rossen, Aych McArdle, Dr Mathijs Lucassen and the Adolescent Health Research Group. University of Auckland Faculty of Medical and Health Science
- <sup>xiii</sup> [Snapshot 2015](#) – Ara Taiohi
- <sup>xiv</sup> [Ara Taiohi recommendations](#) - pg 5 Snapshot 2015 (pdf)
- <sup>xv</sup> [PISA 2015 results – Students' wellbeing, Volume 3](#)