

IPM 1/30

14 October 2015

Jackie Talbot
Workforce Director
Children's Action Plan
P O Box 1556
WELLINGTON 6140

Dear Jackie

**CHILDREN'S ACTION PLAN: WORKFORCE ADVISORY GROUP AND
FRAMEWORK DESIGN TEAM**

For several months PPTA has been involved as an active member of the Workforce Advisory Group and the Framework Design Team workstreams as part of the Government's Children's Action Plan. We became involved because we wanted to see real change and more support for vulnerable children. Unfortunately, we cannot see this happening as a result of these groups and the PPTA Executive has decided to withdraw from further involvement with them.

Our reasons for withdrawing are outlined below and are largely based on a failure of officials to properly engage with the existing systems and competencies within each sector of the children's workforce and a lack of confidence in the process that has been used to either understand the problem or to develop an appropriate response.

In particular, the Framework Design Team was initially established as an independent advisory body to look at whether and what type of core competencies may be appropriate for the children's workforce – in schools, this covers everyone from the caretaker to the Principal. The focus of these competencies was to help build the capability of the children's workforce to identify and respond to the needs of vulnerable children. As previously canvassed with you, we are also concerned that legitimate issues or concerns with implementation are being side-lined within the discussions of the Workforce Advisory Group.

At the beginning of the core competencies project we were presented with what was, frankly, a quick and dirty piece of research that scanned existing competency frameworks of professionals (for example, teachers, nurses, social workers and doctors) to see whether buzz words like "vulnerable children" were used. Unsurprisingly, these specific words did not appear within those frameworks because the term "vulnerable child" is newly coined following the passage of the Vulnerable Children Act 2014.

As a result, the veracity of this research was challenged by members of the Framework Design Team because it demonstrated a failure to comprehend or engage in any meaningful way with the nature of the existing competency frameworks as they apply within each discipline. We were given reassurance by the Chair of the Framework Design team that this research would not be relied on for informing the development of any future competencies and that the Framework Design Team had a clean slate to develop any options or proposals going forward.

We met with you, as the head of the Directorate, and your Principal Adviser to discuss our concerns further and were given assurances that there were no set agendas with the framework design workstream and that any competencies may just be in the form of guidelines alongside existing standards.

The next stage of the work in the Framework Design team's work that we contributed to was the development of a discussion document that was sent out to targeted group of stakeholders from each of the lead agencies. PPTA spent a substantial amount of time helping to draft the discussion document and develop appropriate open-ended questions.

While the consultation process was happening, PPTA was also extensively involved in work with other members of the Framework Design Team to develop a useful resource that would outline core competencies. Many hours of work led to a one page pictorial document that outlined the key competency areas and captured the key sentiments that should be applied to help identify and respond to the needs of vulnerable children. This model was subject to feedback on the discussion document from the consultation process.

The feedback on the discussion document from organisations and professionals was, while supportive of some of the proposed principles to support vulnerable children, was very clear that these currently existed within the existing competency frameworks for professionals (74% of submissions – representing the majority of workers in the sector). There was no support for reinventing the wheel with overlapping or duplicating standards and/or additional regulatory requirements.

What the majority of submitters emphasised was actually needed was time to engage with the existing standards through appropriate professional learning and development. There was also a strong message from the majority of submitters that there needed to be flexibility built into the system so that each sector could tailor any competencies to the nature of work conducted at their workplaces. Generic standards that apply to school caretakers, paediatricians and youth workers, for example, not to mention teachers, would need significant reinterpreting for each context.

This consultation feedback and earlier work on competencies appears to have been ignored by the Children's Action Plan Directorate. At the last meeting of the Framework Design Team that we attended, we were presented with a long and overly specific list of competencies that were intended to apply to anyone that works with children. While recognising that this was a working draft it is clear that, despite assurances, there is a set agenda to push the competencies in an overly

bureaucratic tick-box direction by officials and that scant regard is to be given to the feedback from the sector.

This fear was realised when an adviser of the Directorate started pushing members of the Framework Design Team towards a model that would be “sellable” and able to be “socialised” with the Minister – according to what the Directorate already thought would work – rather than relying on what the evidence supported or independent advice. The earlier white paper that provided some support for the concept of core competencies was not evidence based or engaging with the existing frameworks – this work came later through the consultation process on the discussion document. We were informed by the chair of the Framework Design Team that where these models had been imposed on the UK children’s workforce, there is clear evidence that they are not sustainable.

The current draft competencies are 44 pages worth of detailed standards. We do not want to be part of a group that is importing and imposing a failed model on busy front-line workers that already have a series of standards that meet the core competency areas. This does nothing to help members of the children’s workforce to do their job better and there is no evidence that this will help vulnerable kids. It just makes them busy with paper-work – with less time to respond to the needs of vulnerable kids. Teachers already have to comply with the practising teacher criteria, the code of ethics (from PPTA and those developed by the former New Zealand Teachers Council), and other legal obligations – such as the Vulnerable Children Act 2014 and health and safety requirements.

As the recent report on Modernising Child Youth and Family notes, we should be moving away from a children’s workforce that is tightly bound by “rules, compliance and time-driven practice”.

Our concerns with the core competencies work are shared by other organisations in the children’s workforce who have been involved in the Children’s Action Plan work; for example, the New Zealand Medical Association and the New Zealand Nurses Organisation have both expressed concern about the approach to the overly-bureaucratic regulatory approach that is being driven by the Children’s Action Plan Directorate. Like the majority of submitters on the discussion document, they also agree that what the children’s workforce needs is appropriate training and support. Ultimately this requires resourcing.

For the education sector, there is an opportunity to work on best practice to identify and support vulnerable kids through the Investing in Educational Success initiative, where this is a priority identified by the community. A whole of Government approach should be linking these initiatives and building on best practice.

As noted at the beginning of this letter, secondary teachers care about the welfare of the students that they teach and there are specific needs unique to teenagers and that apply in a secondary school context. Alongside the existing support structures, such as deans, senior management with responsibility for pastoral care, guidance counsellors and (in some schools) nurses, there are a range of initiatives that PPTA and teachers are currently engaged in to support the needs of vulnerable children, including:

1. Whole-staff PLD educating teachers about the prevalence and wellbeing issues of LGBTI students and about ways to ensure that schools are safe and welcoming places for such students. We have provided this to about 60 secondary and area schools since 2012. We also offer the workshops to initial teacher education programmes.
2. Close involvement with the Positive Behaviour for Learning Action Plan, which is showing promising signs of changing school cultures and building pro-social skills in young people;
3. Close involvement with the Positive Behaviour for Learning Action Plan, which is showing promising signs of changing school cultures and building pro-social skills in young people;
4. Initiation and organising of a highly successful Teachers' Refresher Course conference on student, school and teacher wellbeing, October 2015;
5. Support and advocacy for school guidance counsellors as the front-line teachers who work with vulnerable children in schools;
6. Production of restorative practices kete - four books in all covering everything from circles to restorative conferencing;
7. Involvement in BPAG, which produced the bullying prevention guide, and presentations on this to various groups;
8. Involvement in online safety group and resources¹; and
9. Work around change management toolkit and the PLD toolkit implementation in various schools.

We had high hopes that the Children's Action Plan work would provide a momentum for real change but this is not evident from the experiences we have had. It is not a strengths-based model.

While we may choose to continue to make written submissions on any formal proposals, we are not prepared to "rubber-stamp" this work and will not remain involved as members of either group.

Yours sincerely



Angela Roberts
PRESIDENT

c.c. Hon. Anne Tolley, Minister of Social Development
Peter Hughes, Secretary for Education
Members of the Workforce Advisory Group
Members of the Framework Design Team

¹ See, for example: <http://www.ppta.org.nz/communities/ict-teacher-reps/3236-digital-citizenship-teacher-resources?showall=1&limitstart> (last accessed 13/10/2015).