



New Zealand Nurses Organisation

Submission to the Education and Science Select Committee

On the

Education (Freedom of Association) Bill

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ABOUT NZNO

The New Zealand Nurses Organisation (NZNO) is the leading professional body of nurses and nursing union in Aotearoa New Zealand, representing over 44 000 nurses, midwives, students, kaimahi hauroa and health workers on a range of employment-related and professional issues. Te Runanga o Aotearoa is the arm through which our Te Tiriti o Waitangi partnership is articulated.

NZNO provides leadership, research and support for professional excellence in nursing, negotiates collective employment agreements on behalf of its members and collaborates with government and other agencies throughout the health sector. Nurses are the largest group of health professionals comprising half the health workforce.

The NZNO vision is “Freed to care, Proud to nurse”. Our members enhance the health and wellbeing of all people of Aotearoa New Zealand and are united in their professional and industrial aspirations to achieve a safe, sustainable and accessible system of public health care for all New Zealanders.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. The New Zealand Nurses Organisation (NZNO) welcomes the opportunity to comment on the Education (Freedom of Association) Bill.
2. NZNO has consulted its members and staff in the preparation of this submission, including Professional Nursing, Legal, Industrial, and Policy Advisers, Te Runanga, Regional Council and Board members and members of our specialist Colleges and Sections, in particular the Student Unit.
3. NZNO is a member of the New Zealand Council of Trade Unions and the Save Our Services Coalition and fully supports their submissions which we will not reiterate here.

4. NZNO has a good working relationship with the New Zealand Union of Student Associations (NZUSA) which has included undertaking joint and original research relating to New Zealand students.
5. NZNO is well aware of the wide range of services the NZUSA provides for its members through universal levies, and the benefits and savings that accrue to students because of this.
6. There is considerable empirical evidence indicating that with the removal of such levies and subsequent diminishment of services, the drop-out rate will rise; the costs of servicing students' health will be higher and the uptake of will be lower; student representation on relevant academic and other committees will be limited, as will the range of activities and collaborative opportunities that are an intrinsic part of student life in independent, first-class education tertiary institutes the world over.
7. NZNO also acknowledges the expertise of the NZUSA negotiating the diversity of institutions, courses, government and other agencies, on behalf of the student populations they represent, while NZNO provides support and guidance on professional nursing issues. This partnership model is mirrored with other professions such as teaching, medicine, and engineering.
8. Without a strong and truly representative NZUSA, the student voice is unlikely to be heard (and minority student issues are even less likely to be aired) and that will pose some serious issues for policy makers and planners. Weakening the communication/information links with the largest body of intelligent young people does not seem a sensible way to develop robust strategies for the future.
9. The title of the bill is misleading and offensive. NZNO does not believe that 'freedom of choice' includes the freedom to choose not to pay for necessary services, just as wage-earning citizens are not free to choose whether or not to pay taxes, on the basis of whether or not they use publicly funded services.
10. NZNO believes that the net result of this unnecessary bill would be to further increase educational, health and socio-economic disparities; squander

precious human and financial resources; and increase the risk of inadequate and ill-informed future planning.

11. NZNO **does not support** this bill.

DISCUSSION

12. NZNO's student unit comprises 3, 976 nursing students (as at 31 March 2010, NZNO) studying for Nurse Assistant (Enrolled Nursing) Certificates, Bachelor of Registered Nursing and Post Graduate degrees for Advanced Practice and Nurse Practitioner roles at tertiary institutes though New Zealand. In addition, many nurses undertake short courses on specific areas of health, professional development programmes (as required under the 2003 Health Practitioner Competence Assurance Act) return to nursing programmes, and competency and bridging programmes for overseas trained nurses.

13. Thus we represent nurses of all ages, levels of education, and ethnicities at the majority of university and polytechnics in New Zealand, each of which is independent with different protocols for assessment, discipline, academic procedure etc.

14. Clearly we cannot be familiar with all the academic and institutional requirements for every tertiary institute in New Zealand, nor could we resource the support services and representation the NZUSA provides to ensure students have access to social services that are affordable and that they are treated fairly and decently.

15. No organisation representing only part of the student population could afford to perform those functions without charging prohibitive fees; the bottom line will be that the government will have to pick up the tab when students get ill, drop out (with a student debt that will be more difficult for them to repay) or need to challenge the institution. In practice that will mean that the

government will have to take over the functions of the NZUSA and taxpayers rather than students will have to pay.

16. It is unlikely however, that government officials will be able to represent the student voice, which will essentially disenfranchise an extremely important segment of the population at a critical period. With an aging population and global competition for young skilled people, NZNO suggests that it is critical to maintain strong communication links with the student population to inform future policy to encourage young people to stay.
17. NZUSA's networks have been critical to research work we have undertaken in collaboration with them, for example an investigation into the impact of student debt on nurses (NZNO and NZUSA, 2004). The robustness and credibility of such research is largely dependent on the fact that it is representative of the whole student community not a select group. Without universal membership the logistics of conducting such research will be more problematic and the results less reliable.
18. The title of this bill is both misleading and insulting. Compulsory membership of the NZUSA simply ensures that all students contribute to their running of their institution in the same way that compulsory tax collection ensures that all wage earners contribute to publicly funded services. Freedom is what Nelson Mandela was granted on his release in 1990; to use the word 'freedom' in the context of a bill which will certainly entrench disparities is extraordinarily cynical.
19. Universal student association fees ensure that all students have access to services they may otherwise not be able to afford; that support them in their learning, professionally and academically; and that offer specific help to disadvantaged and vulnerable students.
20. Students have not asked for this bill, they do not support it.
21. NZNO **does not** support the bill and **recommends** that the Committee does not recommend it proceed.

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