

PPTA

NEW ZEALAND POST PRIMARY
TEACHERS' ASSOCIATION

TE WEHENGARUA

www.ppta.org.nz

SUBMISSION

**Education [Freedom of Association] Amendment Bill
March 2010**

This is a submission on the Education [Freedom of Association] Amendment Bill on behalf of the NZ Post Primary Teachers' Association (PPTA).

PPTA is the union representing around 18,000 teachers in state secondary, area, manual training and intermediate schools, as well as tutors in community education institutions and principals in secondary and area schools. PPTA membership is also available to tertiary students in ITE programmes. PPTA represents the professional and industrial interests of its members, including those working in alternative education centres and activity centres. More than 90% of eligible teachers choose to belong to the union.

We do not wish to speak in support of our written submission.

Our members' activities/interactions with students include:

- preparing students for tertiary study
- supporting a minority of secondary school students with tertiary study whilst still enrolled at secondary school
- supporting school practicum placements for students in initial teacher education (ITE) programmes by acting as associates. Each ITE student spends at least seven weeks per annum on placement in schools

General position

We oppose this Bill because it will:

- allow individuals to freeload by accessing services funded by others
- encourage selfish individualism rather than seeking to build responsible communities
- devastate important student association services to students – see below
- reduce the quality of tertiary education
- remove the democratic right of students to determine how best to organise themselves at each university campus around the country

Quality services to students

If this Bill were to pass, vitally important services to students would be reduced including;

- welfare and academic advocacy
- faculty and class representatives
- financial assistance
- legal assistance
- counselling services
- student social events (including Orientation week)
- student clubs
- student societies (Law Students' Association, Medical Students' Association, Pacific Island Students' Association, Maori Roopu)
- campus recreation facilities, and;
- university sports.

Students would be extremely vocal about losing such services which are so much a part of the 'student experience'.

Quality of tertiary education

Both the New Zealand Vice Chancellors Committee (NZVCC), and the Institutes of Technology and Polytechnics New Zealand (ITPNZ) support the representation and advocacy work done by students' associations. These bodies view these complementary services provided by the association as being both useful and relevant to students, and consider they enhance the quality of the education experience offered at their respective institutions.

Research on student retention and completion rates consistently shows a strong correlation between academic success and positive student engagement opportunities. The 2008 Australasian Survey of Student Engagement (AUSSE) findings also affirm this. The student association experience, as part of the wider tertiary experience, contributes to the diverse opportunities and positive educational outcomes available to students.

Good governance is fostered and enhanced at students' association-backed institutions. Organised, legitimate students' associations are crucial to ensuring informed contribution and participation on behalf of students at Council level. Additionally, the governance experience gained by student representatives at their own students' association provides an excellent base for governance at their institution's Council level.

Loss of student voice

The current legislative framework is both flexible and inclusive, allowing for both voluntary and universal membership of students' associations. This framework allows students themselves to be the decision makers on whether their association is voluntary or compulsory through transparent democratic referenda.

Students at a number of tertiary institutions have chosen voluntary associations (such as Auckland University), others have consistently chosen to remain compulsory, and others who moved to voluntary membership have made the change back after recognizing the significant benefits of compulsory membership, particularly in the areas of advocacy, services, and representation and (Waikato Students' Union, Unitec Students' Union). We believe it is up to students to make these decisions, not for Parliament to interfere in the activities of independent, autonomous Incorporated Societies.

Current legislation already provides choice regarding an individual's membership of a students' association. Section 229A of the Education Act 1989 allows for students to be exempted from membership of their association due to financial hardship, and also on the grounds of conscientious objection.

We believe that student associations make up a fundamental part of civil society as do employee unions.. We are concerned that this bill will undermine the voice of students as a group in society. New Zealand is a democratic country and this will undermine the student voice in democracy.

Finally, it is not appropriate that a parliament in a democratic society should abrogate its responsibility to encourage and support community-based associations because of the irresponsibly selfish views of an ideological minority.