



## **Acting President's speech to Issues and Organising seminar**

**Saturday 4 March 2023**

Tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou, katoa.

A very warm welcome to all of you to our first kanohi ki te kanohi Issues and Organising event for two years! I'm stoked that we can all be together in person. Zoom meetings are definitely better than nothing but you can't beat the camaraderie, the informal catch ups, the laughs – and of course the sausage rolls – that make I & O the magnificent event that it is!

At the front of all of our minds, of course, is the massive destruction and upheaval that Cyclone Gabrielle has wreaked in some North Island regions. Our hearts go out to those members, their whānau and friends, and school communities who have been affected.

As someone watching the devastation unfold, I find it impossible to imagine where you would start to recover in the face of such destruction. But, as we have seen in other recent disasters and tragedies, community strength, support and resilience come shining through.

In our own union we have become all too familiar, sadly, with helping members in times of crisis. We know what to do. I'd like to thank Ahmad Osama, one of our field staff, for agreeing to be the cyclone response

coordinator - your efforts in this role will be greatly appreciated by many members.

I'm relieved that the cyclone does not seem to have prevented anyone from attending I & O – but I know that at least one person had to change their travel plans because of road closures. It is fantastic that everyone can be here.

I'd like to specially welcome Te Amohia Taua-Glassie, our new Te Hapai ō, Māori Vice President here today. Te Aomihia brings a wealth of experience and skill to her role and we're very lucky to have you on our leadership team.

I would also like to acknowledge someone who would have loved to be here today – Melanie. I don't know anyone who loves the Brentwood and our gatherings here more than Mel. I know I speak on behalf of you all in wishing Mel much love and strength and we look forward to seeing her back with us at her beloved Brentwood before too long.

This year is going to be a very significant one for our union and our profession. This year, more than most, feels like we truly are at the crossroads, where we need to stand up and fight for our profession, our ākonga and the future of secondary education.

If you leave here today, or tomorrow morning, with nothing else, I hope that you at least will have a clear picture of what's really important for PPTA Te Wehengarua this year and why. And the crucial part that you and members in your regions will play.

First and foremost is the collective agreement negotiations – and I will talk more about this a little bit later. As you all know, we have been in negotiations with the Ministry of Education since May last year for new collective

agreements for secondary teachers, area school teachers, area school principals, and adult and community education and out of school music tutors.

It's great to know that the secondary principals have settled and I know many are really pleased in particular about the \$6000 wellbeing allowance for professional coaching and support. I'm also pleased that the Ministry, as part of the settlement, will contribute \$100,000 towards the streaming summit in June. It acknowledges the Secondary Principals' Council's and PPTA's leadership in this space.

After all the disruption of the last three years, teachers would have loved nothing more than for 2023 to be a really settled year. We have told the Ministry this on many occasions and we have made it clear what we need from a new collective agreement: salary rates and conditions that will keep highly experienced and skilled teachers in the profession, attract new graduates into secondary teaching and encourage the thousands of ex-teachers in Aotearoa to return to the job they love. It's pretty simple but the Ministry and Government don't seem to think so. More about this later.

On the professional front, you may well be wondering what's happened with annual conference's call for a pause to the Review of Achievement Standards, RAS. Well, the Ministry is certainly aware of our major concerns about the need for the Curriculum Refresh work to better align with the NCEA changes, and for our call to slow down the RAS development to allow this to happen.

We've been able to raise our concerns at numerous meetings - some of these were specifically arranged by those leading the work in the Ministry because our member representatives were so vocal at much larger forums. While we can say the Ministry has listened and is aware of our concerns, we cannot say

they are taking these on board – there seems to be a trend here! They will not be changing the timelines and we haven't seen anything of the rethink that was promised around sequencing of pieces of work to help with the alignment, nor the communications to ALL learning areas about how the Curriculum Refresh might play out.

So Executive has approved the development of a specific media campaign to ensure our key messages are more widely heard. The NCEA workshop this afternoon - and it's repeated tomorrow morning - is a great opportunity for you to get involved in helping shape these messages.

Early in December PPTA Te Wehengarua made an Official Information Act request to the Ministry asking a number of questions relating to the plan for PLD for NCEA, including Literacy and Numeracy Te Reo Matatini me Pangarau and the Curriculum Refresh. We also asked questions about budget, staffing and advice the Ministry has received on how things are going. The Ministry has used every tactic to stall a response - waiting until Christmas week to seek clarifications from us, using our shutdown period to delay starting on the work and finally, requesting a one month extension from the Ombudsman on the day the response was due, about 10 days ago. Naturally we are very disappointed with these delay tactics and have protested this extension, asking the Ombudsman to investigate this. We will keep you informed of the response and our next actions.

Two of our professional advisory staff – Adele Scott and Kathleen Kaveney – are also very keen to hear from members about any pilots they have been involved in last year and this year, for a pilot feedback project they are working

on. If you want to talk to them more about this, today and tomorrow are excellent opportunities.

Of course, another really important priority for PPTA Te Wehengarua is the general election. We need to raise awareness among our members and school communities about what is at stake for education and what really lies behind simplistic campaign one liners.

ACT's education policies, in particular are deeply concerning and if the party's poll ratings continue to rise, the more likely National will adopt them if it wins government with ACT.

Charter schools will not raise the achievement of our children. They will not close any gaps. They will not level any playing fields. The only thing charter schools do successfully is reward mediocrity by using scarce education money to prop up private owners.

Charter schools directly compete with public schools for scarce educational resources. There is no evidence they work for New Zealand children, they open the door to privatisation and they are not transparent or accountable to the New Zealand public.

ACT's school attendance policy would give schools a lot more work to do in terms of registering attendance daily and punish families whose children do not attend school regularly. Non-attendance at schools is definitely hugely concerning, but it is a complex social issue that requires much more than simplistic, ineffective, failed policies.

Clearly, PPTA Te Wehengarua has disagreements with all governments of the day but we do acknowledge some of the many positive initiatives that this current government has created: abolition of charter schools; equity index

funding; the healthy lunches programme; introduction of the Aotearoa New Zealand histories curriculum; the replacement of performance appraisal requirements with professional growth cycles for teachers and principals; and providing teacher only days to support the NCEA and curriculum changes.

It is imperative that members are active in our communities explaining to parents and others the threats that this election poses for public education.

It's imperative also that we settle our collective agreements within the next few months as being part of an election campaign is not likely to do us any favours whatsoever. If we have a change of government, we effectively have to start bargaining again from square one, and if the incoming government is National-Act, we would be facing an entirely different negotiating situation than we currently are. One that is much less likely to result in significant salary increases or improved conditions.

You, like me, will have heard suggestions that we should shelve or reduce our claims because of the economic impact of the devastation caused by cyclone Gabrielle. You will also have heard some members argue that we should not take industrial action that will impact on the students they are currently teaching because they have had far too much disruption in the last few years.

I want to tell you why I respectfully disagree with them.

To step back a little, in 2016 the Ministry of Education, School Trustees Association and PPTA Te Wehengarua produced a joint report which agreed that salary and other conditions of work are significant factors in recruiting and retaining teachers, just like they are for other workers.

We agreed about the poor perceptions of teaching as a profession, which mean people do not see teaching as an attractive career, but which unfortunately, are based on the reality of relatively low pay and workloads that, for many of our members, are unmanageable and unbearable.

We agreed that often schools hide their recruitment problems, are forced to make compromises on quality to fill jobs and do not advertise positions they believe they can't fill.

We agreed that the number of people going into secondary teacher initial education had been in decline since the early 2000s.

And we expressed concerns about retention of middle leaders, new teachers and relief teachers, and the impact of our significantly ageing secondary workforce.

That was seven years ago. Back to today.

Much of what I am going to say next is from a 2022 Ministry of Education paper to Cabinet. See if you can distinguish between what we say publicly and what the Ministry says privately.

Secondary teacher supply is in a poor state and several key indicators are now pointing to an increased and more urgent teacher supply challenge in schools. Between 20121 and 2022:

- secondary teacher retention fell by 2.9%
- new secondary vacancy advertisements increased by 27.4%

- re-advertisements increased by 94.8%.

The Ministry itself estimates that if the current trends continue, up to one thousand more secondary teachers, than in 2021, may leave regular teaching over the next year.

Compounding this is a recent decline in the number of students enrolling in initial secondary teacher education. This will decrease the number of teachers available to replace those leaving. Between 2021 to 2022 secondary ITE enrolment fell from 1,030 to just 765, a decline of 26% on an already historically low baseline.

These patterns are driven by several factors, including declining unemployment and overseas departures following the re-opening of New Zealand's borders. Of course COVID-19 has added to the disruption to the supply of teachers in New Zealand, and it is still having significant impacts.

We also face intense international competition for secondary teachers, with other countries, including Australia, facing teacher shortages and taking aggressive action to ease their own supply pressure.

Pressure on supply has meant that Cabinet had to approve the addition of "all secondary teachers" to the work to residence tier of the immigration list.

The Ministry's own data shows that the outlook for teacher supply in 2023 is materially worse than previous years and in line with its most pessimistic projections, which we believe under-represent the supply problems faced by



secondary schools in the real world. This term three quarters of secondary schools in the Auckland area alone are reporting that they cannot find enough teachers to fill their positions.

Not addressing the growing pressures will lead to:

- embedded teacher shortages,
- ongoing disruption to education through short-term school closures
- reduced access to a broad and balanced curriculum, and
- a spiral of understaffing worsening teacher fatigue and burnout to further increase the number of secondary teachers leaving the profession.

And the Government's reforms of the curriculum and of NCEA, which we support in principle, depend for success on having sufficient qualified, quality secondary teachers in classrooms all across the motu.

If the government fails to act appropriately many learners are likely to experience poor academic outcomes, particularly those in their final years of schooling, and not just the current cohort of students but a generation of students yet to arrive in our schools will be disadvantaged.

In the current negotiations we are essentially asking for two things: salary rates that will match inflation - the same rates that state pensions and minimum wages will increase this year and which has been offered by employers in many

other recent settlements - and long-delayed improvements to working conditions essential to making the job manageable and attractive.

We consider these the bare minimum to address secondary teacher shortages before they become more acute and more deeply embedded. They are essential and urgently needed.

Yet we initiated bargaining in May 2022. Our collective agreements expired at the end of June last year and in four months' time every member will revert to an individual agreement, with the risks that entails. We see no urgency from the government.

After months of negotiating the government is still only offering us salary adjustments that are significantly less than inflation. Our wages, which have not increased since July 2021, continue to decline both in real value and relative to the many alternative occupations our members could go into. Accepting this would mean agreeing to lock in, and indeed intensify, the secondary teacher supply crisis for at least another four years.

Even the movement there has been, on some of our conditions claims, did not come until after we announced the relief ban and the strike of 16 March.

So, despite all of the evidence of the need for a significant and urgent settlement that addresses workload and pay, there is nothing to convince me that the government will, of its own volition, make an offer any time soon that is acceptable without meaningful, and sustained industrial pressure to do so.

To conclude, I do agree with those who argue that the current national crises created by cyclone Gabrielle and by the poverty wages being paid to low-income workers and beneficiaries are real and immediate problems for the government to deal with.

And I do agree that it hurts us to take action that affects the students we work with each day.

But I will never agree that these things should exempt the government from ensuring that chronic problems in our education system are properly and urgently addressed - to protect the provision of education to current and future students and to give real incentives to our members to stay in their jobs. Nor will I agree that this is a time for us to reduce our industrial pressure.

I acknowledge that effective industrial action will impact on us, and on our students and on communities. But these are the actions that move governments.

It's immensely heartening that members in areas that have been badly affected by Cyclone Gabrielle have reaffirmed their commitment to the March 16<sup>th</sup> strike and want to support their fellow PPTA Te Wehengarua members. However, this year, instead of marching along main streets or holding public rallies on the day they will be volunteering in their communities, assisting with the continuing clean up. Kia kaha!

If we do not take these actions now then we are condemning our members to years of declining pay and our students - those in our classrooms today and those yet to start in our schools - to the chronic effects of teacher shortages for many years ahead.

We are truly at a crossroad and the time for action is now!

Thank you again for being here and I hope the weekend will inspire, invigorate and energise you for the massive year ahead.

Never forget. He wake eke noa – we are all in this together.