



PPTA submission on the Education Service Agency

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Who we are

PPTA is the union representing approximately 20,000 secondary principals and teachers in secondary, composite, and intermediate schools.

Education Service Agency: Better support for the whole system

Introduction

The Government has decided that there needs to be a better balance between what should be provided and supported from the centre, what services should be provided locally and what is best delivered by schools and their communities. The design and development of the Education Service Agency (ESA) is key to providing local support.

The Education Service Agency

PPTA Te Wehengarua supports the establishment of the ESA as local support will be necessary if we are to address the inequity and lack of achievement highlighted by the Tomorrow's Schools review.

Consultation

PPTA is committed to the agreement made at the International Summit of Teaching, Portugal 2018 to co-construct the design and implementation of change and is therefore happy to give some initial thoughts about the ESA design before Christmas, as you have requested. However, please be clear PPTA Te Wehengarua does not consider asking peak bodies to answer three questions is adequate consultation, nor does it, as the request suggests, ensure that there will be a diversity of views.

We are also concerned about the timing of this request (just before Christmas), the timeframe (three weeks), the ultimatum - in a COVID year (if no reply we will continue on the basis of what we have heard from you), nor the tone "we'll come back and have a chat in the new year".

With respect to the comment that "we will continue on the basis of what we have heard from you", our view is that the experiences, insights, and advice elicited through the Education Conversations while relevant in identifying key concerns about the system are, on their own, insufficient to grapple with how to go about building a more responsive, accessible and integrated system.

Accord subgroup

At the January Accord Governance Group meeting it was agreed that a subgroup would be set up to explore how to answer the question, "What would engagement (partnership) with front line staff (including those in early childhood education) and principals look like, to ensure the voices of teachers are heard and responded to?"

In March, the subgroup agreed that the change management paper developed for the Accord Governance Group provides useful information for incorporating into design processes. Here are some of the other ideas identified:

- Processes need to be cognisant of the feelings of the sector and proactively address the feelings of low trust
- Sector members need to feel that that process is valuable through being able to see that their input is having an influence on development. They need to have confidence that their voice is being heard.
- Clear information must be provided to everyone. This is likely to mean new systems and practices (other than the Ed Gazette and Pitopito Korero) that reach members directly. Information should include a road map for development as well as information about progress.

The subgroup decided that further work needed to be done to progress the thinking shared during the wide-ranging conversation to turn it into a plan that engages the sector and ensures that teachers, principals and support staff have a strong voice in the design of the ESA. This includes:

- Direction from the Accord Governance Group about developing a change programme and specific actions
- Improve communications with the sector and provide information in relevant places
- Ensure the plan includes a balance of sector voices and Ministry officials and avoids a 'Wellington work-group' model

Planning group

PPTA Te Wehengarua believes that to achieve this 'balance of sector voices' a planning group needs to be established with representation from those representing principals and teachers - PPTA Te Wehengarua and NZEI Te Riu Roa, and those speaking on behalf of those over-represented in the underachievement and wellbeing statistics (Māori, Pasifika, students with learning needs and students from low socio-economic communities).

Once the planning group has been identified, the members need to be brought together. The group's first task should be to design and develop a high-level overview. Next, the support structures that need to be put in place need to be considered and decisions made as to where these structures are best placed - centrally, regionally or locally.

Other areas the Planning Group will need to focus on are:

- What are the core purposes of the ESA?
- How will the principles of Te Tiriti o Waitangi be explicitly and authentically enacted?
- What cultural and structural changes will need to be made?
- What skills, capabilities and knowledge will be required from people in the ESA to ensure success?
- How might the changes impact on other parts of the system?
- How will the more complex changes be phased?
- What might be the unintended consequences of the changes and how can these be mitigated?
- What outcome, process and relationship evaluation indicators will be used to make judgments about the efficacy of the changes?
- How do we ensure changes are sustained?
- Are the changes adequately resourced?
- What should be the timelines for implementation?

Answers to the three questions – as requested

1. How would you like an ESA to be able to support you/your members at the frontline?

Schools need and value local support. This must be provided by staff with the necessary experience and credibility. The secondment of teachers and principals may be one way to do this.

The areas needing more support that are continually brought to PPTA Te Wehengarua's attention are: equity, disability and learning needs, curriculum and PLD, leadership development, streamlining the system, and governance capability.

Equity

The lack of equity in the education system has been further highlighted by the pandemic. The ESA needs to address this urgently. Much comes under the equity umbrella - engaging with Te Tiriti o Waitangi, access and choice, staffing, support for schools in low decile areas, schools that struggle with governance, and schools with underperforming principals.

The Education and Training Act requires school boards to give effect to Te Tiriti o Waitangi by:

- working to ensure that their plans, policies and local curriculum reflect local tikanga, mātauranga Māori and te ao Māori;
- taking all reasonable steps to make instruction available in tikanga and te reo Māori; and
- achieving equitable outcomes for Māori students.

The sector needs to be fully supported to do this. This should be an ESA role.

We note that fair access to their local school should be a student's right. The ESA has been identified as the body that will intervene to make sure that schools have fair zoning policies. It should also facilitate schools working together, helping determine the facilities and specialisations across the network to avoid inefficient duplication.

Learning and disability support

Schools will welcome support that is provided locally. If this were enacted, parents would, for the first time, be able to feel confident that there was a local organisation concerned with, and competent to, advise on their child. An integrated approach would help schools manage the administrative demands of needs assessments and funding applications.

Curriculum support and PLD

We need to return to a national system of professional learning and development that respects teachers' knowledge and expertise and supports them to share best practice. The adoption of a contracting system has, in many cases, eliminated local provision and led to a loss of expertise lost to the system when contracts finished. As a result of a lack of nationally provided PLD, many schools spend considerable sums employing contractors to deliver whole school PLD which is often not in areas where teachers had identified that they needed help. PLD should be publicly funded and delivered, not outsourced. This way the Ministry has control over the content and quality and expertise is built and retained.

We acknowledge that the subject associations and the Networks of Expertise have improved the situation, but these still largely operate on the goodwill of teachers. There is a need for PLD to be delivered by an

advisory service or the ESA (as suggested in the TSIT report), with people employed by the ministry or seconded to it.

We also see a role for Senior Subject Advisors, a national network of subject specialists, who could be employed by the ESA to support the NCEA changes.

Leadership

The role of the principal is critical to a well-functioning school, and is the most important appointment. An effective principal can advance the values, vision and goals of the school, and have a significant impact on the learning of the students. However, even an experienced and capable principal needs support. Ineffectual principals can destroy a school and damage the educational opportunities of a whole cohort of children. For that reason, it is critical that they should not be appointed to jobs that are beyond their capacity or capabilities, nor left isolated in schools without support, advice and guidance.

The appointment of leadership advisors in the ESA to provide support to principals in what can be a lonely job is an important acknowledgement of the challenges principals face.

Streamlining the system

One of the products of Tomorrow's Schools was the creation of several agencies to which schools are responsible. Each agency generates administrative demands on schools to demonstrate the school is complying with the legislation it is responsible for enforcing. A multiple agency system can also create problems for schools when there is no agency with a clear final arbiter authority on a matter. The ESA could be a one stop shop to help mediate for a group of schools to reduce these demands.

Governance

In 2017 one in 16 schools was the subject of government intervention within the previous three years - 154 schools either had a limited statutory manager or a commissioner who acted as the board. Sixty-five school boards were under Crown management. These are the extreme cases, and many more schools were merely underperforming. Like a school with an underperforming principal, a school with a struggling BOT will not be providing well for the students. The ESA should provide support and guidance for BOTs before situations reach this level of intervention.

2. Trying to do everything at once is never a good idea; What are the most immediate priorities an ESA should get started on?

Priorities should be decided by the planning group. From a PPTA Te Wehengarua point of view we would prioritise areas that are the most serious or affecting the greatest number of students. These are equity, disability and learning support, NCEA, and leadership and BOT support.

Equity

The Education and Training Act is requiring school boards to give effect to Te Tiriti o Waitangi as of 1 January 2021.

BOTs need to be fully supported to do this, otherwise it won't happen or will be done once over lightly. The ESA can play a key role in supporting schools to understand the legislation and how to apply it to their particular school. To do this effectively the ESA would need to employ people with the necessary knowledge and skills to support schools to give effect to Te Tiriti in a deep and meaningful way.

Disability and learning support

Around 16% of learners need some form of support for their learning, so the scale and consistent complaints mean that this area needs to be one of the priorities of the ESA.

NCEA

The Education system is about to embark on the largest change to assessment in a generation. The introduction of NCEA was not supported by adequate teacher development, it had rushed implementation, and was insufficiently resourced. As a result, students' learning was affected, teachers' workloads shot up, morale plummeted and many teachers left the profession.

We must learn from past mistakes. Every teacher, in every subject, is going to be asked to implement new achievement standards and to assess learning in different ways. This is going to require significant PLD, and the development of new teaching programmes, resources and assessment activities.

The ESA can play a key role in working with teachers so that they are ready to implement the new NCEA Level 1 in 2023.

Leadership and BOT support

Schools that are not governed or managed well cannot provide excellent education for their students. As mentioned above there is a large number of schools that struggle with governance and many where the principal lacks the knowledge, skills and experience to satisfactorily do the job. Therefore principal and BOT support should be a high priority.

3. Thinking about our work together during COVID, what opportunities do you see for us to stop “doing what we’ve always done, the way we’ve always done it”, and do things differently?

Public education should ensure that all students have the teachers, resources and facilities to learn. COVID has highlighted the inequity within and between schools. COVID also showed that the system at every level was not equipped to deal with the crisis.

These failings highlight the areas we need to work on.

It became clear that:

- some subjects are more easily taught online. Those with specialist equipment or software, or activities that require other people, were the most adversely affected.
- schools did not know which students had access to devices or connectivity.
- if teachers are to use more blended learning they need to expand their pedagogical knowledge, their understanding of student wellbeing, their knowledge of assessment.
- teachers have tremendous goodwill and for short periods of time can make most systems work even under the most trying conditions.
- some students preferred working remotely, at least for a short period of time; for others face-to-face interaction was vital and without it their engagement dropped markedly, with some even dropping out of school. How do we capture the best of both worlds?

Conclusion

Fundamentally, PPTA Te Wehengarua believes that a quality public education system needs to address the learning needs of all students, and this sits within a wider societal commitment to valuing all young people, reducing inequities, and meeting needs.

Local support at the school level through a well-designed ESA will contribute to this.