



PPTA TE WEHENGARUA ANNUAL CONFERENCE 2019

LOOKING AFTER EACH OTHER: TEACHER MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING

A paper from the PPTA Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland Region



RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That the report be received.
2. That PPTA lobby the Teaching Council of New Zealand to amend Section 1 of the Code of Professional Responsibility and Standards for the Teaching Profession to include the words “attending to the general well-being of my colleagues” as part of individual teachers’ commitment to the teaching profession.
3. That a taskforce:
 - a) be convened to report to annual conference in 2020 with recommendations on how members can appropriately attend to the general wellbeing of their colleagues
 - b) be limited to not more than five individuals
 - c) be appropriately funded for the Association year beginning 1 February 2020

CONTENTS

Recommendations.....	1
1. Following on from 2018	3
2. So what do other professions do?.....	3

1. FOLLOWING ON FROM 2018...

- 1.1. At the 2018 Annual Conference, the Tamaki Mākaurau Auckland region presented a paper entitled Looking After Yourself, which called for changes to the Code of Professional Responsibility and Standards for the Teaching Profession. This paper had two substantive recommendations. The first proposed that the words “attending to my own health and well-being, and to the health and well-being of my colleagues” be added to Section 1 of the Code. This first recommendation was rejected by the 2018 Conference.
- 1.2. The second recommendation called for the Ministry and Minister of Education to require all schools to provide access to external employee assistance programmes. This recommendation was adopted by the 2018 Conference.
- 1.3. The first recommendation was rejected because delegates felt its scope was restrictive, and that it had the potential to create a stick that some senior managers could use to beat an already over-stressed and unwell teacher. After all, if it was to become unethical to fail to attend to your own health and wellbeing, then a person might say, “Aha! I see you’re stressed, tired, over-worked, and feeling run-down. You know it’s unethical to fail to attend to your own health and well-being!” The way the recommendation was worded implied that if someone were sick due to stress, and if they worked through that stress and soldiered bravely on, then they would be unethical. The recommendation implied that the fault would lie with the individual teacher struggling valiantly to cope with an increasingly unwieldy workload, rather than with any harsh taskmaster creating that workload in the first place.
- 1.4. Instead, the 2018 Conference called for further investigation into how other professions deal with similar situations, and whether other professions have similar provisions in their codes of conduct and ethics.

2. SO WHAT DO OTHER PROFESSIONS DO?

- 2.1. In writing this paper, we contacted a number of professional bodies in New Zealand, Australia, the United Kingdom, and Ireland:
 - (i) Within New Zealand
 - For the health sector in New Zealand: the Medical, Midwifery, and Nursing Councils of New Zealand
 - For the emergency services: the New Zealand Police Association and Fire and Emergency New Zealand
 - For social workers: the New Zealand Social Workers' Registration Board
 - For lawyers: the New Zealand Bar Association
 - (ii) Abroad:
 - In Australia: the Teachers' Registration Boards in each of the states and territories
 - In the United Kingdom and Ireland: the Chartered College of Teaching, the General Teaching Councils for England, Scotland, and Northern Ireland; the Welsh Education Workforce Council; and the Teaching Council of Ireland

- 2.2. We asked each organisation the following questions:
- (i) *How are registered professionals in your industry or sector expected to ensure their workload, and the workload of their colleagues, does not become unduly burdensome or affect their or their colleagues' physical and mental health and well-being?*
 - (ii) *Are there any provisions in any codes of conduct or ethical standards obligating registered professionals to attend to the physical and/or mental health and wellbeing of themselves or their colleagues?*
 - (iii) *Are there any provisions in any codes of conduct or ethical standards obligating registered professionals with responsibility for junior colleagues (such as senior nurses and junior nurses, senior fire-fighters and junior fire-fighters, or heads of department and beginning teachers) to prevent, so far as practicable or reasonably possible, the workload of those junior colleagues becoming unduly burdensome and/or limiting any effect on their physical and/or mental health and well-being?*
- 2.3. We did not receive any answers to our questions from the Medical or Nursing Councils, the NZ Police Association; Fire and Emergency; the Social Workers' Board; from any of the Australian teacher registration boards; from the British Chartered College of Teaching; from the English, Scottish, or Northern Irish General Teaching Councils; from the Welsh Education Workforce Council; or the Irish Teaching Council.
- 2.4. The New Zealand Midwifery Council and the New Zealand Bar Association provided helpful responses. These are attached as appendices to this paper.
- 2.5. Midwives must ensure that they are fit and able to carry out the practice of midwifery, and they must “ensure their workloads or client numbers are not so large as to compromise the quality of care.” Since most midwives are self-employed, they are required to develop and maintain policies to support their own (and their clients’) health and safety. Under the Health Practitioners Competency Assurance Act, they are obliged to notify appropriate authorities of any inability of any health practitioner to undertake the required functions of their profession.
- 2.6. In relation to mental health and wellbeing, barristers and solicitors rely on services provided by the New Zealand Law Society. The Society operates a “National Friends Panel”, which consists of New Zealand lawyers willing to be confidentially contacted by their peers with questions or concerns. It provides members with discounted rates with Lifeline, and employee assistance programmes through Vitality Works. It also operates the Legal Community Counselling Service, which is available to everyone who works in legal settings in New Zealand.
- 2.7. Since we only received responses to our questions from midwives and lawyers – and not from nurses, doctors, the police, our emergency workers, social workers, or from any teaching regulatory authorities in Australia, the United Kingdom, or Ireland – it is difficult to determine quite how we should proceed. The 2018 Conference tasked us with finding out how other professions ensure the mental health and wellbeing of their workforces; with only information from the Midwifery Council and the Bar Association, we are rather limited in what we can recommend.
- 2.8. Nonetheless, we know that teacher workloads are increasing, and we know that those increasing workloads will impact on the lives and wellbeing of those teachers. We know that an individual’s stress increases commensurately with increases to their workload, we know that stress causes more stress, and we know that stress affects our overall health. We know too that no teacher will

be able to have good classroom practice if they are so stressed that their personal health has been impacted.

- 2.9. What, then, is to be done? We cannot be expected to act as nurse and psychiatrist to our colleagues, however fatigued and debilitated they become. Equally, we cannot say to the stressed and overwrought teacher that they are being unethical or unprofessional by continuing to work despite their stresses – to do so would be to add literal insult to literal injury.
- 2.10. Based on the requirements expected of midwives and lawyers, we suggest that it is important for all teachers to have an eye to the general well-being of their colleagues. They cannot be expected to counsel or diagnose, and they cannot be expected to “dob in” a colleague who is unwell, but they ought to be expected to care about the person working in the classroom down the hall. We do need to take care of one other – we are colleagues and professionals, all working in the best interests of the nation’s rangatahi. There is a great deal to be gained from holding unkindness to be unethical.
- 2.11. Just as we did in 2018, we propose an amendment to the Code of Professional Responsibility and Standards. Currently, Section 1 of the Code, entitled “Commitment to the Teaching Profession” states the following:

I will maintain public trust and confidence in the teaching profession by:

- 1. demonstrating a commitment to providing high-quality and effective teaching*
- 2. engaging in professional, respectful and collaborative relationships with colleagues*
- 3. demonstrating a high standard of professional behaviour and integrity*
- 4. demonstrating a commitment to tangata whenuatanga and Te Tiriti o Waitangi partnership in the learning environment*
- 5. contributing to a professional culture that supports and upholds this Code*

We propose adding a sixth criterion to this section:

- 6. attending to the general well-being of my colleagues*

- 2.12. This would not mean that teachers would now be expected to monitor the mental health of the other people in the staffroom. It would not require us to all become experts in depression, or anxiety, or fatigue. It would not mean that we could have our practising certificates revoked if we did not provide specific help to a specific teacher. However, it would mean that we would have a broad duty of care for our colleagues. It would mean that we would be obliged to occasionally check that the teacher down the corridor isn’t drowning in a flood of too-much-work-and-not-enough-time. It would mean that there would now be an explicit onus on each one of us to make sure that each of us can truly bring out our best.
- 2.13. This paper does not call for the creation of a club with which to cudgel teachers, nor does it call for teacher A to be blamed for the stress currently affecting teacher B. Rather, it simply asks for us to look after each other, for we are all of us in this together.