



PSA Submission

On the Education and Training Amendment Bill 2024

July 2024

About the PSA

The New Zealand Public Service Association Te Pūkenga Here Tikanga Mahi (the PSA) is the largest trade union in Aotearoa New Zealand with over 95,000 members. We are a democratic organisation, representing members in the public service, the wider state sector (Te Whatu Ora, crown research institutes and other crown entities), state owned enterprises, local government, tertiary education institutions and non-governmental organisations working in the health, social services, and community sectors. The PSA has over 3,000 members in the education sector. Our members work in the Ministry of Education, TEC and NZQA, universities, residential schools, and other smaller entities.

The PSA has been advocating for strong, innovative, and effective public and community services since our establishment in 1913. People join the PSA to negotiate their terms of employment collectively, to have a voice within their workplace and to have an independent public voice on the quality of public and community services and how they're delivered. The PSA is an affiliate of the New Zealand Council of Trade Unions Te Kauae Kaimahi (CTU).

This Submission

Our submission outlines our opposition to charter schools and the conversion of public schools to charter schools and is based on our principles and approach to public services.

The PSA endorses the submissions of NZEI and PPTA and believe that workforce and education select committee should give the collective voice of the workers in our schools considerable weight.

PSA opposes charter schools

The PSA opposes the re-establishment of charter schools. The PSA believes that public services, including education, should be high quality, publicly owned, democratically controlled, responsive to local communities and accessible to all. Introducing charter schools is an active step backwards.

Charter Schools do not address any of the problems in our education system. Our current education is flexible and allows innovation and addressing community needs. The decentralised *Tomorrow's Schools* model gives individual schools a lot of flexibility. Integrated schools also allow many different types of schools to exist within the state system. The form of the charter school does not offer more opportunities for innovation and addressing community needs than current schools.

Charter Schools would weaken our education system. The difference between Charters schools and existing schools are not pedagogical, but structural. They allow more opportunities profit-seeking and to bypass existing agreements between education workers' and their employers about terms and conditions. Profit extraction and reduced rights for workers result in worse public services.

Charter Schools are not a good use of education resources. Neither the previous experience in New Zealand, nor international evidence suggest that Charter Schools are a good use of resources. Establishing charter schools is an expensive way of getting similar or worse outcomes. Out of the 10 partnership schools open in 2017, just 40% delivered satisfactory student achievement.

PSA opposes the conversion of public schools into charter schools

The PSA opposes the conversion of public schools into charter schools. Converting public schools into charter schools is an act of privatisation that removes a key resource from local communities. The PSA opposes privatisation as it leads to less democratic oversight and removing resources from the public good. Schools' current governance systems ensures that they are connected with and accountable to their local communities. Charter schools would not have the same level of accountability or connection. **The provision to convert public schools into charter schools must be removed.**

The Bill proposes a very low bar for the conversion of a public school to a charter school. Allowing a single community member (with a supporting organisation) to apply to convert a school is wrong. Considering the privatisation of a community resource, with local governance arrangements and community connections, on the request of a single individual is anti-democratic. The current provision would allow the conversion of a school to a charter school against the opposition of the local community. If the provision to allow conversions remains, then a high level of community support must be required for a conversion. **Consultation requirements must be clearly articulated in the bill and require that substantial community engagement must show high levels of community support.**

The Bill gives the Minister of Education the power to direct a board to apply to convert to a charter school. There are no checks and balances on this power and no obligation to consult with the local community. Giving the Minister of Education this power over schools and local communities runs absolutely counter to a local approach to public services. **The power for the Minister to unilaterally direct boards to apply to be converted to charter schools must be removed.**

PSA opposes restricting the rights of workers in charter schools

The PSA opposes restricting the rights of workers in charter schools. Just days before the submissions to the select committee closed the Minister announced that the Bill would be amended by Supplementary Order Paper to restrict workers collective bargaining rights. Both the proposal to restrict workers' rights and the process followed to do so are appalling.

Workers in charter schools must have the same rights to collective bargaining as other workers. These amendments run counter to ILO Convention 98, which protects workers right to collective bargain. There is no justification to restrict the rights of workers at charter schools. Restricting the rights of workers does not lead to the better provision of education. Restricting the rights of workers to bargain their terms and conditions is an attack on public services, not a way to improve public services.

The proposed amendments to the Bill that restrict the right of workers to bargain collectively must be rejected.

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