

Submission of

**Te Hautū Kahurangi | Tertiary Education
Union**

to the

Education and Workforce Committee

on the

***Education and Training (System Reform)
Amendment Bill***

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1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1. Te Hautū Kahurangi | Tertiary Education Union (TEU) welcomes this opportunity to respond to the *Education and Training (System Reform) Amendment Bill*.
- 1.2. The TEU is the largest union and professional association representing 12,000 academic and general/allied staff in the tertiary education sector (in universities, institutes of technology/polytechnics, wānanga, private training establishments, and rural education activities programmes).
- 1.3. The TEU actively acknowledges Te Tiriti o Waitangi as the foundation for the relationship between Māori and the Crown. We recognise the significance of specific reference to Te Tiriti in the Education Act and the emergent discourse resulting from this. We also accept the responsibilities and actions that result from our nation's signing of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.
- 1.4. The TEU expresses its commitment to Te Tiriti by working to apply the four whāinga (values) from our *Te Koeke Tiriti* framework as a means to advance our TEU Te Tiriti relationship in all our work and decision-making – with members and when engaging on broader issues within the tertiary sector and beyond – such as our response to the *Education and Training (System Reform) Amendment Bill*.

Tū kotahi, tū kaha – We are strong and unified; we are committed to actions which will leave no-one behind; we create spaces where all people can fully participate, are fairly represented, and that foster good relationships between people.

Ngā piki, ngā heke – We endure through good times and bad; we work to minimise our impact on the environment; we foster ahikā – the interrelationship of people and the land, including supporting tūrangawaewae – a place where each has the right to stand and belong.

Awhi atu, awhi mai – We take actions that seek to improve the lives of the most vulnerable; we give and receive, acknowledging that reciprocity is fundamental to strong and equitable relationships; and we work to advance approaches that ensure quality public tertiary education for all.

Tātou, tātou e – We reach our goals through our collective strength and shared sense of purpose, which are supported through participatory democratic decision-making processes and structures.

1.5. Our response to the *Education and Training (System Reform) Amendment Bill* stems from our commitment to the whāinga expressed above and our wish to see these enacted in the tertiary education sector and in our society and communities.

2. Preamble

2.1. TEU opposes the Education and Training (System Reform) Amendment Bill and recommends that the Bill does not proceed.

2.2. The Bill represents a major centralisation of political control, expands privatisation, weakens community voice, and undermines Te Tiriti o Waitangi. The lack of meaningful consultation and the end-of-year timeframe is unreasonable and undemocratic.

2.3. Although targeted at schools, these reforms set precedents that threaten the autonomy, stability, and public-good purpose of the tertiary sector.

2.4. We strongly support the submission put forward by NZCTU Te Kauae Kaimahi.

3. Politicisation of curriculum

3.1. The Bill gives the Minister the power to directly set and amend curriculum statements without professional input, transparent review, or consultation. This introduces unprecedented political control over what ākonga learn. It also risks further marginalising Mātauranga Māori and localised curriculum design. No evidence base or Regulatory Impact Statement has been provided for this change.

4. Undermining the Teaching Council

4.1. Shifting standard-setting and certification functions from an independent professional body to the Ministry places teaching under direct political influence. Reducing elected representation on the Council further undermines professional autonomy and sector trust. No other regulated profession is subject to this level of political oversight.

5. Weakening inclusive and community-responsive education

5.1. Restricting principals' ability to grant attendance exemptions removes flexibility to meet individual, cultural, disability-related, or wellbeing needs – particularly affecting Māori-medium settings. Replacing community consultation on the health curriculum with mere notification removes an important democratic safeguard and risks poorer outcomes for rainbow and disabled learners.

6. “Schools of serious concern”

6.1. The creation of this label, without definition, encourages stigma rather than genuine support. Compressed timelines and mandatory interventions override collaborative approaches and may provide a pathway to forced structural change, including charter-school conversion.

7. Expansion of charter schools

7.1. Allowing sponsors to operate multiple charter schools and vesting reconversion decisions with the Minister extends privatisation. The automatic termination of all staff when a converted school returns to the state system – despite staff being given priority, with no guarantee, when re-applying – is inconsistent with decent work and employment stability.

8. New Zealand School Property Agency

8.1. The new agency would have power to impose action plans, audits, and construction or maintenance costs on schools – even where no additional funding exists. For Māori-medium settings, this represents further Crown intrusion into land and spaces central to rangatiratanga.

9. Mandatory system monitoring studies

9.1. Compulsory participation in studies chosen by the Minister removes professional discretion and opens the door to increased standardised testing. This centralises control without evidence that such approaches improve learning outcomes.

10. Te Tiriti o Waitangi

10.1. Across its provisions, the Bill sidelines Māori voices, centralises Crown authority, and undermines Māori-medium autonomy. It is inconsistent with the Crown’s Te Tiriti obligations to uphold tino rangatiratanga and actively protect Māori educational authority. A public education system that does not honour Te Tiriti cannot meet its obligations to learners, staff, or communities.

11. Implications for the tertiary sector

11.1. Although framed as a school reform, the Bill signals a system-wide shift toward:

- political control of teaching and learning,
- diminished professional self-governance,
- punitive accountability mechanisms, and
- expanded privatisation.

11.2. Such changes directly threaten the independence and academic freedom essential to quality tertiary education.

12. Conclusion

12.1. The Bill centralises political power, undermines Te Tiriti, weakens professional autonomy, and opens the door to privatisation across the education system.

12.2. TEU urges the Committee to withdraw this Bill and commit to collaborative, evidence-based, equitable reforms that strengthen public education in Aotearoa.