



OTF President's Remarks to the OCT Governing Council February 28, 2019



Diane Dewing
OTF President

Good Afternoon Councillors, Registrar and College Staff,

My name is Diane Dewing and I am pleased to appear before you today, and bring greetings from the Ontario Teachers' Federation/La Fédération des enseignantes et des enseignants de l'Ontario, and from our four teacher Affiliates: Elementary, Secondary, Catholic and Francophone.

As you know, OTF represents the 160,000+ teachers in the publicly funded school system in Ontario, the same teachers who also comprise most of the membership governed by the Ontario College of Teachers.

What you may not know, however, is that OTF, like OCT, is a statutory body that was created by the Ontario Government in 1944 to represent the professional interests of teachers in the Province.

This year, OTF celebrates its 75th anniversary of representing Ontario's teachers, and we will always take a special interest in the governance and regulation of the teaching profession.

And that is why I am here today, to speak to you about governance and regulation of the profession, in light of the report that you received late last year from Governance Solutions Inc.

Earlier this month, we provided you with a submission - comments from OTF and the Affiliates - regarding the governance review report and recommendations prepared by GSI. And you will have noted that we have many concerns with the report and its recommendations.

Foremost among these concerns is the proposal to move away from self-governance and regulation of the teaching profession in Ontario. We were not aware that governance and regulation of the teaching profession in Ontario was broken and in need of fundamental overhaul.

While OTF and the Affiliates may have voiced concerns in the past regarding issues such as College mandate, fees or the disclosure of disciplinary matters, we were simply fulfilling our own statutory duty to represent the profession. These are the healthy tensions that exist within any self-governing profession.

That said, the Ontario College of Teachers has been effectively governing and regulating the teaching profession in Ontario for almost 22 years. In fact, the GSI report specifically states that regulation of the teaching profession by the College is strong and highly effective.

When the College was first established in 1997, the Standing Committee that reviewed Bill 31 was told by the Minister's Parliamentary Assistant that:

"By giving teachers the power to regulate their own profession, we are putting the responsibility for excellent teaching in the hands of those who are best qualified to know what a teacher should and must be, today and in the future . . .

After all, it will be teachers who, like other Ontario professionals, will set the standards by which they are trained and by which they practice their profession throughout their careers . . .

In developing this legislation, we have learned from the same basic public policy that characterizes more than 30 other self-regulating professional bodies in Ontario."

There are over 30 other professional bodies in the Province of Ontario who have been self-governed and regulated for many decades.

Like the OCT, these other bodies (such as lawyers, accountants, engineers, doctors and dentists) have governing councils comprised of a majority of members from the profession, as elected by their peers.

And, like the OCT, these same governing bodies also include members of the public so as to reflect a broader representation and voice.

Each of these bodies, like the OCT, also has a similar mandate to act in the public interest.

Unfortunately, the report that you received late last year makes no reference to these other self-governing professional bodies, and their rich histories of self-governance and regulation.

We are also very concerned with the process and methodology that forms the basis of the report.

You are likely aware that OTF and some of the Affiliates did respond to a governance survey provided by GSI.

What you may not know, however, is that this survey was only provided to OTF and the Affiliates just prior to the survey deadline, and shortly before the report was actually issued.

As well, the 6-question survey was not provided in French.

Although the governance review had been ongoing for 4 months at that point, and although GSI had taken the time to interview certain stakeholders (such as administrators), OTF and the Affiliates were treated as an afterthought.

This, despite the fact that OTF statutorily represents the teaching profession, and most of OCT's members.

We are also very troubled by the lack of input that GSI received in its efforts to survey members of the profession and the public. In both cases, the response rates were so low as to be virtually meaningless.

We recently polled the teaching profession regarding certain proposals in the GSI Report - specifically those that would eliminate the current majority of OCT members on Council and their election to those positions.

In just two weeks, we received almost **10,000** responses, **92 %** of which were in favour of maintaining the existing Council structure and **91%** the existing election process.

Many of our fundamental concerns stem from the assumptions in the report that self-governance of the teaching profession in Ontario is not working and ought to be significantly overhauled, and that the democratic process of electing profession members to Council is flawed and ought to be abandoned.

We fail to see any evidence to support either proposition.

Other concerns arise from the misguided notion that there is so much confusion as to what the College does that, after 22 years of effective regulation, the OCT ought to be renamed similar to other, non-professional, regulatory bodies such as the Financial Services Regulatory Authority.

And this, despite the fact that many other professional regulatory bodies in Ontario have also historically used the term "College".

In conclusion, we applaud the College's initiative in undertaking a review of its governance structure and practices. This is a very healthy and worthwhile endeavour. So, what might the College do next?

At the very least, we would suggest that a more fulsome review of the College's governance structure and practices be undertaken and measured against other self-governing professional bodies in the Province.

As we noted in our submission, there are many other professional bodies in Ontario, whose long histories of self-governance could provide relevant and important comparators for the College.

We would also suggest that any changes that may result from such further review may require an appropriate transition period, so as not to jeopardize the proper functioning of Council and the regulatory effectiveness of the College.

Thank you for the opportunity to address Council today.

Diane Dewing
OTF President