

NZCER 2007 Survey of Careers Education in Schools

Summary of Findings

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Executive summary

Aims, scope, and background

This report documents school-based careers education in relation to the aims of careers education “for individual students to develop self awareness, become aware of opportunities, make decisions and plans, take action (Ministry of Education, 2003, p. 7) and the requirements outlined in National Administration Guideline (NAG) 1.6 which specifies that schools must:

provide appropriate career education and guidance for all students in year 7 and above, with a particular emphasis on specific career guidance for those students who have been identified by the school as being at risk of leaving school unprepared for the transition to the workplace or further education/training (Ministry of Education, 2007).

We report on both principals’ and careers staff views of careers education through their responses to questionnaires. Our sample included all secondary and composite schools (including kura kaupapa Māori) except for 100 schools taking part in the new Creating Pathways and Building Lives (CPaBL) initiative.

For the purposes of this report, “careers staff” includes staff known as careers teachers, careers advisors, transition educators, work experience co-ordinators, Designing Careers co-ordinators, Gateway co-ordinators and STAR (Secondary Tertiary Alignment Resource) co-ordinators. Our definition of careers education includes what is variously referred to as “careers guidance” and “career information, advice, and guidance (CIAG)”.

The overall aim of this research is to contribute insight that will guide and support decisions about the direction, focus, and resourcing of careers education in New Zealand schools. It stands alone as baseline information about how schools organise careers education, what careers staff think about their role and the purposes behind what they do, and the range of activities in which they engage students.

This research also forms part of the “Education Employment Linkages” (EEL) collaboration between NZCER, Lincoln University, and Victoria University of Wellington, funded from 2007–2010 by the Foundation for Research, Science and Technology. Education Employment Linkages aims to answer the question: How can formal support systems best help young New Zealanders to match education choices and employment outcomes to benefit themselves, their communities, and the national economy?

The backdrop for this report is a number of New Zealand research studies and evaluations which have found evidence that careers guidance delivery remains haphazard in some schools (Vaughan & Boyd, 2004; Vaughan & Roberts, 2007). For the teachers, there has been comparatively less careers-related professional development available than professional development for other

aspects of teaching. For those who are careers practitioners, the role is perceived to be of lower status than other management roles (Vaughan & Kenneally, 2003). Furthermore, there is a general tendency for schools to privilege the provision of career information, often through marketing brochures, over guidance and careers development strategies and skills (Wilson & Young, 1998; Vaughan & Kenneally, 2003; Vaughan, 2005; Education Review Office, 2006). Other New Zealand research has found that these unresolved systemic issues can have a significant impact upon young people's ability to make successful transitions into tertiary study and training and/or employment (Vaughan & Boyd, 2005; Higgins & Nairn, 2006).

There is also evidence that some schools are working innovatively in relation to the requirements spelt out in NAG 1.6. Some schools are catering for at-risk students by combining programmes and sources of funding (such as STAR, Gateway, and Youth Training) to design transition programmes that support and “staircase” students from school into post-school training, study, and employment (Boyd, with McDowall, & Ferral, 2006; Ministry of Education, 2006). Some schools are thinking in future-focused ways about school qualifications and attempting to collaborate with industry and community in ways that help students link school with post-school careers (Hipkins, and Vaughan, with Beals, Ferral, & Gardiner, 2005).

An emergent emphasis on *career development* signals an end to the kind of vocationally-oriented forms of career planning and guidance with which schools have tended to favour working. This shift is precipitated—demanded—by the very different challenges faced, and expectations held, by individuals and contemporary society, including the end of one job for life, active management and “production” of career through self-as-portfolio, and the hybridisation of formerly different fields of work and study (Vaughan, Roberts, & Gardiner, 2006). This shift, encapsulated career *development* as encompassing “services assisting people at any age or point in their lives making choices about education, training, and occupation and managing their careers” (Third International Symposium on Career Development and Public Policy, 2006), suggests that NAG 1.6's “appropriate career education and guidance for all students” (NAG 1.6, Ministry of Education, 2007) needs an interpretation which emphasises the *processes* involved in the transition from school and choice(s) of career(s). Existing research, and a growing body of anecdotal evidence in New Zealand, strongly suggests we need to move things in this direction—something the new CPaBL initiative aims to address through its reorganisation of careers education into a school-wide endeavour.

Findings in brief

We found that careers staff as a group tend to be older, more likely to be female, and with more teaching experience, than their (noncareers) teaching counterparts. Few hold careers-specific qualifications, though most hold professional association membership. The majority work within a careers/transition team although, not surprisingly, this is less common in smaller or composite schools. The careers workforce also appears very stable. Most careers staff intend to remain in

their current position and at their current school over the next five years (though we note that around a third of respondents gave no indication of their plans).

Generally, careers staff and principals expressed remarkably similar views about careers education. However, that they also saw little to disagree with in terms of the possible purposes and priorities of careers education, painted a very broad “everything and nothing” picture about the meaning of careers education. The one purpose that all careers staff (and nearly all principals) could agree with—*providing information, or access to it, for all students*—and the most easily measurable things such as course enrolments and job take-up, stood out from purposes and priorities requiring a more long-term or life-view of skills and capacities. Similarly, two of the three most popular sources of new ideas for careers education related to career and study programme information gathering and distribution. Only around half of careers staff *strongly agreed* with *helping students develop self-awareness* and only about a third *strongly agreed* with *teaching students decision-making strategies*—two aims spelt out in the *Career Education and Guidance in New Zealand Schools* (Ministry of Education, 2003). That said, careers staff also expressed a strong interest in thinking about careers education through their use of conferences, workshops, professional development, and reading published research findings. Staff were also very clear that they faced new demands for their knowledge and skills, particularly when dealing with new pressures on students and students’ and parents’ (often differing) expectations.

Careers staff considered nearly all standard or well-known careers education activities to be *important* or *very important/vital* in their work. There was a trend for activities carried out with larger groups of students (or sometimes entire year levels) to occur regularly (*annually* or *1–2 times before students leave school*) compared with activities that focused on smaller groups of students with specific careers needs which tended to occur on a more ad hoc basis. The majority of careers staff indicated that their school did track students but there was variation over the groups of students that schools tracked and the tracking period length of time.

There was a close match between the importance and quality of relationships that careers staff had with various individuals and groups within their school, and with organisations and individuals outside the school. Generally they saw their most important and highest quality relationships as being in-school, with the exception of positive and important relationships with local tertiary representatives. Most schools had a standalone careers policy and reference to careers education in several other policies. Careers staff seemed well connected in terms of playing a key role in careers-related decision making, though a third of staff had management positions in the school anyway. Principals and careers staff were more involved in careers funding decisions than boards of trustees or senior management, but interestingly also saw each other as the lead decision maker.

Careers staff were very clear that they enjoy what they do, despite dissatisfaction with aspects of their work and working conditions. The areas of most dissatisfaction, biggest (negative) change in workload, and the biggest barriers to providing careers education were related to lack of time. Careers staff were consistent in highlighting the difficulties in trying to work face-to-face or individually with students and manage the different parts of their workload, especially where

these involved building and maintaining relationships. They perceived a lack of career progression in their role but recognised an availability of professional development opportunities and identified significant achievements related to their own upskilling. They reported significant achievements in relation to the most immediate post-school, measurable outcomes such as *students get jobs* and *students enter tertiary programmes*. Overwhelmingly, judgement of impact involved nondocumented personal experience, except in relation to formal programmes such as STAR and Gateway, where documentation was favoured.

Reading across and “above” all our data, we see that careers staff and principals are deeply committed to an idea of careers education and to meeting the needs of individual students and target groups of students. Although we suspect that *individual* careers staff can articulate what they think careers education is about, their views *as a collective* are noticeably indeterminate, particularly in relation to the immediate priorities of careers education.

Our analysis shows that careers staff are enormously committed to their jobs and very happy doing them. Like most teachers, they would probably say they became involved because they wanted to make a difference to the lives of young people. However, while careers staff highly value professional development (especially the practical and just-in-time), they do not appear to value qualifications (the theoretical grounding in what they do)—and perhaps with some reason, since careers education is one of many roles they perform in the school. We see that careers staff do not think their work has changed much in the past two years and do not see their own careers changing much in the next five, yet they also recognise that they face new challenges as the broad context of careers education, and associated policy demands, is changing around them.

Perhaps this is to be expected; careers education is a big concept encompassing much more than just school and jobs. If you understand “career” in its broadest sense, it does mean thinking about “life” and some of the other big ideas currently being explored in New Zealand that would seem to affect, well, everyone really: a knowledge society; a flexible and skilled workforce; achieving work/life balance; and practising lifelong learning. No wonder careers education seems to be about so much on the one hand and be so lacking in focus on the other.

We suggest a way forward is a re-examination of NAG 1.6 alongside the Ministry of Education’s (2003) publication *Career Education and Guidance in New Zealand Schools*: “self awareness, become aware of opportunities, make decisions and plans, take action”. In relation to these, careers staff are purposeful in the range of activities they undertake with individual students, target groups, and year level groups. However, many of these activities are built upon theories about vocational guidance and models career related to age-and-stage that are passing their use-by date. NAG 1.6 refers to preparing for “the transition to the workplace *or* further education/training” (our emphasis) but it might do better to refer to preparing for “the workplace *and* further education/training”. In other words, careers education is not just about providing information about options and encouraging participation in tertiary learning or the workforce; it is about fostering individual progression and development (Watts, 2001) and crucially encouraging

participation as learner-workers and engaging students with the “production” of their careers (Vaughan & Roberts, 2007).

We have seen the success of well-focused and well-supported initiatives like STAR and Gateway. Now we have the CPaBL initiative which aims to reorganise careers education into a workable school-wide approach. We still need to further understand and develop the focus but a school-wide approach is a great start. Without this focus and reorganisation we risk leaving teachers dealing with “school stuff” and careers staff at the margins, managing an ever-increasing deluge of information (and advertising) and different in-school and out-of-school relationships, while trying to help students link up life, the universe, and everything. The analysis in this report shows that we have a strong basis for building the careers education field within schools and there are clear indications for what the ongoing priority needs to be—an understanding of career *development* and career *management* in relation to career *guidance* and how these can work together to provide careers *education*.

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