EVERY KID CAN ACHIEVE
- MAKING THE EDUCATION SYSTEM WORK FOR ALL OUR CHILDREN

OUR CHANGING CLIMATE
- IS NEW ZEALAND KEEPING PACE?
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Public Sector is printed on environmentally responsible paper produced using ECF, third party certified pulp from responsible sources and manufactured under the ISO14001 Environmental Management System.
This issue of Public Sector is largely devoted to exploring aspects of education in New Zealand, and much of this column will also be devoted to this subject. However, before coming to this I want to make some observations on another issue that emerged – briefly – early this year.

In the most recent Transparency International rankings of corruption and probity in countries around the world, New Zealand dropped from second to fourth (after having been at the top of the rankings not so long ago). Of course this is still a good result, but nevertheless there should be warning signs flashing about the trend that the TI rankings are revealing. We are not doing as well as we should – or could. As I have observed in earlier columns, New Zealand’s high TI ranking is one of the trade and investment advantages New Zealand enjoys. The Government must move to restore New Zealand to the top of the list if we are not to lose that advantage. Open government in particular is not a “nice to have”; it’s a “must have”.

Another advantage that New Zealand enjoys is that its education system is on the whole pretty good. It’s not “best of class” and could be better, but on the whole it performs well. One notable area of weakness, however, is that there is a long ‘tail’ of under-achievers and poor performers. In many cases this is an inter-generational problem where those struggling come from households in which most of the adults too had similar problems and as a consequence often don’t understand the real value of education in the next generation. New Zealand is not good at overtly valuing teachers and education. If we are to improve our educational outcomes across the board we need to do more to make teaching a profession that is respected across the board. If teachers are valued by the community – and paid and treated by parents and employers accordingly – then education itself will be more highly prized.

Much has been said in recent years about how the nature of work is changing and that most young people coming now into the workforce will probably have to re-train and change careers several times during their working life. There is also the challenge of technology ‘hollowing out’ the workforce; technology may over time usurp even more of those middle-level jobs and professions that lie between the highly skilled, innovative leaders and managers at the top and the more manual, largely unskilled tasks that are unlikely to be able to be fully automated.

To me, this suggests that education and learning will become even more important in the future than it already is. I hasten to add that this does not mean we should put an even greater focus on university education. Tertiary or post-secondary education, yes, but the forms that this education should take must be flexible and varied. To the maximum extent possible, those leaving secondary school should go into further training and upskilling, not least those leaving secondary school. To me, this suggests that education and learning will become even more important in the future than it already is. I hasten to add that this does not mean we should put an even greater focus on university education. Tertiary or post-secondary education, yes, but the forms that this education should take must be flexible and varied. To the maximum extent possible, those leaving secondary school should go into further training and upskilling, not least to equip them for a world where new skills are likely to be required on an ever more frequent basis.

One area that should get more attention than it does at present is trade training and apprenticeships. These lead into jobs that are unlikely ever to be taken over by technology (although technology will very likely change aspects of how these jobs are done) and are therefore likely to equip those who have come through the system with skills that will support their continued employment over the years.

Incentives, both active and passive, may also be needed. We read in the newspapers in February that many schools are having to coax teachers out of retirement to teach mathematics and science, as there is a shortage of qualified teachers in younger cohorts. Why has this come about? In part – in my view at least – it is that for many decades the majority of those who go into primary teaching have less interest (and, in some instances, perhaps less facility) in maths and science than in other parts of the curriculum, and this manifests itself in less enthusiasm for these subjects. This can affect subject, and hence, career choices made by their students.

Further, if we want to encourage more graduates in the STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) subjects, we also need to ensure that there are jobs available for graduates in those subjects. Science in particular is badly paid in New Zealand, and the signal that is sent by government when it cuts back on funding for the limited number of research institutions in New Zealand does not encourage young people to enter these fields. It makes no sense for Ministers to lament the low numbers of STEM graduates whilst at the same time removing job opportunities and career paths for them. It is exactly this kind of inconsistency that MBIE was established to address, but there is little obvious evidence that it is doing so.

These are but a small number of areas where we need to be better in New Zealand. We need to identify what’s good and build on these areas, and we need to identify where we can do better and create improved approaches that serve all New Zealanders well. New Zealand prides itself on having a fair society as one of its fundamental principles, and providing every one of our young people – no matter what their background – with a good foundational education is probably the best possible way in which we can hard-wire fairness into future generations. And in this regard, Labour’s policy on tertiary education released earlier this year ticks many boxes.
Social Investment Approach to Continue

The Government is committed to the social investment approach for social services, the Hon Bill English, Deputy Prime Minister, told public servants at his IPANZ annual address in February.

This will mean more rigorous budget requirements, centralisation of some functions, and outsourcing to other social service providers, he said.

In response to a question – to which some in the audience clapped and cheered – about why outsource when the public service had the flexibility to be responsive to social needs, Mr English said, “We have been flexible but it’s not enough; monopolies do what they do and the market will help drive improvements. There are limits as to what you can do with the constraints you have; for example, in the health sector those most at risk don’t show up in hospitals.”

The Government has set up a Social Investment Unit which will identify those elements of social investment that need to be centralised and which operational matters will stay within agencies. “Services will be centralised to some extent,” he said. The Unit will set data and evaluation standards and how to estimate return on investment for selected spending.

The recent review of Child, Youth and Family was a test model. It recommended greater data, evaluation and feedback in decision making.

MANAGEABLE

The use of data is central to understanding people’s needs and to be able to make decisions based on the evidence. “It makes the size of the problem manageable,” he said.

“At the heart of the toolkit is the Integrated Data Infrastructure, developed by Statistics New Zealand, which is already giving us useful insights. It brings together data from the Ministries of Social Development, Health and Education, as well as Child Youth and Family, Corrections, Police and Housing.”

An interactive web tool, Social Investment Insights, maps at-risk children and young people up to age 24. It is publicly available and can be used by NGOs and the private sector.

“Inevitably, social investment will also raise questions around what license the Government has to use sensitive information.”

“But the public should accept greater use of data in order for the Government to better target services.

“Publicising data and increasing transparency means more people can come to an informed view on how government should operate.

“The social investment framework will require new ways of working; departments’ advice will become increasingly contestable,” Mr English said.

The Deputy Prime Minister’s full speech is available at: www.ipanz.org.nz

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Dear public sector practitioners,

We are always happy to receive contributions from readers.

If you’re working on an interesting project in the public sector or have something relevant to say about a particular issue, think about sending us a short article on the subject. While we will always look at well written pieces on any public sector subject, it would help if your article touched on or related to one of the journal’s quarterly themes.

Themes for 2016 issues are:

APRIL: education
JULY: Auckland
SEPTEMBER: the future public service
DECEMBER: beyond the rhetoric of customer service

Contact the editor John O’Leary at johtoleary@paradise.net.nz
In the nearly two decades that have passed since then, the importance of education has only increased. Today, we live in a digitally connected, globalised, hi-tech world that demands a skilled, creative, adaptable workforce. Countries that neglect their educational systems risk being left behind. If New Zealand is to remain a prosperous, first-world nation, it has to make sure it is giving its young people the best educational opportunities it can.

But how to do this? What should we be doing at primary, secondary and tertiary level? In particular, how can we make sure that all our youngsters are being educated properly, and that the damaging long "tail" of educational under-achievement in certain student groups doesn’t persist?

In this issue of Public Sector we take a look at what the public sector is doing to improve New Zealand’s education system. In her cover article on pages 5 to 8, Kathy Ombler explores with Peter Hughes, Chief Executive of the Ministry of Education, what his ministry has been working at to make sure all children receive the education they need. She also talks to Roger Moses, the Head of Wellington College, to find out what distinguishes a high-performing state school, and to Cathy Wylie of the New Zealand Council for Educational Research who sounds a note of warning about the dangers of hurrying too fast when implementing change.

A crucial public sector agency in the educational area is the Education Review Office (ERO), which acts as a steward of the country’s education system. In the latest of her popular Q & A series, Rose Northcott talks to ERO Chief Executive Iona Holstead about what this small but influential government department is doing to achieve equity and excellence in education for all children.

New Zealanders spend a great deal of time talking about education, but as columnist and playwright (and former teacher) Dave Armstrong points out in his light-hearted article on page 21, do we really have an education culture in this country? He also wonders if the public service should be getting more involved in education than it currently is.

In our Point of View piece, Chris Whelan, Executive Director of Universities New Zealand, ponders whether a university degree is worth the cost – and comes out with an interesting answer.

Education is important, but it will be of little use if the planet we live on has been irretrievably wrecked by climate change. In this issue, in the first of a series of special feature pieces on “wicked” problems, writer and former Public Sector editor Shelly Biswell considers what the public sector is doing to help the country keep its climatic cool. Watch out for Shelly’s other feature articles on “wicked” problems, which will be appearing in later issues of the journal.

Two thousand and sixteen promises to be an interesting year for Public Sector as it tackles some of the big issues facing New Zealand’s public sector (next up is Auckland and how to deal with its rapid growth). To help improve the journal’s look, we’ve refreshed the design – we hope you like it.

John O’Leary
Editor
A focus on clear roles, on improved systems for the Ministry and on leadership in the sector, along with new, collaborative programmes aimed to help the long ‘tail’ of underachieving students, have been the key drivers to a dramatic rise in NCEA qualification achievement. But there is still much to be done, including major legislative reviews, says Peter Hughes, Secretary for Education.

KATHY OMBLER reports.

Tomorrow’s Schools is now yesterday’s policy. In its place is Investing in Education Success (IES), government’s drive to help raise achievement levels, in particular for under-performing Māori and Pasifika students. IES brings a new focus on collaboration across schools and, already, the results are positive.

Since 2008, level 2 achievement rates for 18-year-olds have risen 16 percentage points. It’s an upward curve headed in the right direction to meet Better Public Service Result 5, government’s target that 85 percent of 18-year-olds will leave school with NCEA Level 2 or equivalent by 2017. These results are stellar, says Peter Hughes, Secretary for Education. Particularly significant are the improvements shown by Māori and Pasifika students.

“This is the business of the ‘tail’. We’ve had these appalling statistics around Māori and Pasifika achievement. In 2008, for example, Māori NCEA Level 2 achievement was 44.6 percent. From 2011 to 2014, that has risen by 10.6 percentage points. Pasifika students have shown a similar lift. These are dramatic shifts.

“In our system NCEA Level 2 is regarded as the silver bullet. We know from the evidence that if you achieve at that level it correlates with just about every social outcome. If you haven’t got NCEA Level 2 you’re more likely to end up with poor health, on a welfare benefit and in the criminal system.

“Imagine if we could have 85 percent of all kids, including Māori and Pasifika, leaving school with NCEA Level 2. Think how many lives could be transformed. Imagine the profound impact that would have in the New Zealand community.”

So how have these ‘stellar’ results been achieved? By the Ministry working at the systems level as well as the individual school level, Hughes says.

Back-tracking a little, Hughes says his first three years in the job have been devoted to achieving clarity in the role of the organisation. “Our job is to focus on education systems, not sector leadership. That’s what school principals are: they are school leaders. I have to talk about backing those people to win. The roles are complementary.

“The old Ministry was about command-and-control, and pretty hierarchical. We want an organisation where people are motivated by raising kids’ achievements and their mana comes from their contribution to that, not their job status. So three years down the track we are working very differently with people in the sector.

“At the systems level we’ve done a number of things”, he says. “First, we have a focus. Every school charter...
now has a focus on raising achievement. We’ve also powered up the sector with data, so we’re now able to identify individual kids at risk of not achieving NCEA Level 2.”

Leading this data power-up is the Ministry’s new Evidence Data and Knowledge (EDK) Group, lifting knowledge and information capabilities and relating it back to individual levels and learners.

“Basically what we do is work side by side with principals in the schools where there are large numbers of kids at risk of not achieving NCEA Level 2. Because we’ve got the data we can help, and we take a really practical approach. We know young Johnnie is at risk, so what does he need to get over the line? Is he enrolled in the right subjects? Does he have the books he needs for those subjects? Does he come from a home so it’s better for him to go home via a homework centre? Basically it’s a plan for each individual child. We help the schools put that together.”

There are a number of programmes that are variants of this approach, says Hughes. Examples include Year Nine Plus, which targets secondary school students at risk, and Positive Behaviours for Learning, which aims to strengthen relationships and support across home and school environments.

COMMUNITIES OF LEARNING

Powering up all of these programmes are new Communities of Learning, whereby schools ‘cluster up’, collaborate and share teacher leadership roles. The communities are an essential feature of the IES funding boost. They also represent the first systems-level changes since Tomorrow’s Schools, which fostered independent, self-managed schools, says Hughes.

“Collaboration is in the DNA of the teaching profession; we just needed more of it between schools.

“Communities of Learning are asking schools to cluster up around the learners’ pathways, feeding from early childhood education, through primary schools to secondary schools that exist in those communities.”

Each Community of Learning will have a set of achievement targets, he adds. “It’s going to be really powerful because not only are individual schools focused on raising achievement, as they are now, there will also be focus on raising achievement across the community.’

And they have resources for that, with IES funding allocated for 5000 new ‘within-school’ teacher roles and another 1000 ‘across-school’ teacher roles, says Hughes.

“We have some fantastic teachers out there, but at the moment they are all locked up in individual classrooms in individual schools. Under Communities of Learning, those teachers will probably get appointed as a within-school or across-school community teacher. Their job will be to help all the teachers in the school or across the school do their teaching better in relation to those achievement outcomes.

“For example, let’s say one Community has a target around raising maths achievement, so there will be some across-school mentoring of all the maths teachers; maths teaching clinics and forums perhaps, and common resources that they share. They’ll use all sorts of exciting, creative stuff.”

The new Centre for Leadership Excellence, currently being developed by the Education Council of Aotearoa New Zealand with $250,000 of government funding, will focus on support for principals appointed as Communities of Learning leaders, says Hughes. “We have some outstanding school leaders; this is about how we get more out of them, how we grow them.”

So far there are 96 Communities of Learning established throughout the country, representing 789 schools and more than 250,000 students. Communities in Blenheim, Rotorua (Catholic Faith Based) and Mid-Bays (Auckland) are the first three to have signed off achievement challenges to lift their students’ achievement, in areas such as reading, writing and maths.

“We are about a third of the way in terms of approved Communities of Learning, and we’ve got expressions of interest either approved or waiting to be approved from over half the schools in New Zealand,” says Hughes.

He acknowledges that people cannot be forced to collaborate. “This is why we’ve taken a voluntary approach. There was also a risk in shifting to a culture of collaboration across schools where there has been past competition. We’re doing some things to assist that, straight culture building.”

Some initial resistance to the concept from teacher unions had also
been worked through, he adds. “Everyone is behind this policy now and I think it's going to make a huge difference. There is some real, innovative, creative stuff out there. Leading a management change across the system has to be done in a particular way. It is challenging but we're on our way.”

Wellington College principal, Roger Moses, applauds the focus of targeting lower achievers. “I think IES and Communities of Learning are right. In focusing on areas of under-achievement, you need good governance. I applaud what the Ministry is trying to do, really targeting this.”

Competition has been an issue in the past, he adds. “Definitely with the bigger schools getting bigger, the gap between the haves and have nots has become greater as smaller schools start to lose numbers. The perception is they are no good, yet there are some very good small schools.

“The IES has been an attempt to move away from that competitive model. You can be a rival, but have a higher view and share your expertise.”

DECILE DILEMMA

The decile system, while a good funding model, also raises perception issues, says Moses. “The underpinning philosophy is good, trying to equalise schools in terms of opportunities. The problem is that in parents’ perceptions the decile rating equates to the quality of the school. That's a nonsense yet it's become tough for lower decile schools; kids leave, there are fewer students so teachers leave, and it's a downward spiral.”

Hughes (who recalls his own ‘world class education’ in a decile one-type school) agrees there is a problem and it needs fixing. “Additional resources are required for some kids to start with a level playing field and that's what the decile system is attempting to achieve. The problem is we've done it from around the socio-economics of the community on quite a crude basis. So the decile has become a crude proxy for the challenges individual kids in a school face. The worst thing is there are good schools and good teachers being defeated by the circumstances of the community. We don't want that because every kid can achieve in any decile school.

“We need to fix that and there is a review underway, which is looking at funding across the whole of the systems level, including the decile system.”

Also under review is the Education Act 1989, for which public consultation closed late last year. The review is well overdue, says Hughes. “The current Act reads like a wiring diagram for one of those machines in a Dr Seuss book. It is all about the engineering. It does not mention achievement, kids or parents. The review will be looking for consensus across the whole sector.”

TEACHER, TEACHER

When it comes to education success, the key is having good teachers. It's as simple as that, says Moses. He speaks with some authority, after 20 years at the helm of arguably one of the highest-achieving schools in the country.

“I can talk until the cows come home, about structures, self-managed schools and collaboration and they will all be valid matters for debate. The bottom line is if you get good teachers, with good knowledge, you can inspire kids and get good results.

“My father (teaching runs in the blood here) said he could run a decent school in a bar if he had the right teachers.”

However, Moses is concerned. “We have an imbalance in that we have strong teacher numbers in the arts and PE, but there are key areas, maths, science, commerce, IT and some languages, where there are major teacher shortages.”

At the Ministry, Peter Hughes agrees. “Overall we don't have an undersupply problem but there are issues. One is supply in particular subjects, for example maths, science and te reo.

“If you're a science graduate, business and industry are after you. So we are working with the professions to try to ameliorate that. Teaching scholarships, for example, can be very successful where undergraduates who are working in industry are given some teacher training and placed in lower decile schools.”

Hughes says options are currently being assessed. There is also the pilot scholarship scheme, Teach First New Zealand, partnered by the Ministry and Auckland University. Meanwhile annual Kupe Scholarships, encouraging Māori and Pasifika high achievers into teaching, are currently offered by the Ministry.

“We are appealing to those people who really want to do something that's making a difference, so we're appealing to that intrinsic motivation. It’s like working in public service; it’s a vocation, and that’s the basis on which we want people in teaching.”

Moses acknowledges the Ministry's efforts. “It saddens me that few of our ‘top shelf’ boys, who would make good teachers, see teaching as a career of choice. I do think there is a sense of Pollyanna in teaching. You don’t necessarily go into the job to make money, there is a sense of vocation, so I think we need to look at alternative ways, and that is partly about money, and partly about how the job is valued by society.”
LEADERSHIP COUNTS

You can have very good teachers, of course, but if leadership is lacking then education success will be much harder to achieve. In the Ministry of Education’s Wellington office, a striking artwork draws the eye. Entitled Leadership, it encapsulates everything about the value of good leadership, as Peter Hughes explains.

“This artwork is by students at Sylvia Park School, a decile two primary school in Auckland. Around a quarter of the students are Maori and over half are Pasifika. It was a struggling school until Barbara Ala’alatoa went there as principal, in 2006. It’s now in the top 25 percent of primary schools for maths and around the top third for reading.”

The Education Review Office’s 2014 findings state: “Sylvia Park is a dynamic and successful school. Effective school leadership maintains and extends the school’s very good performance.”

Principal Ala’alatoa has also been appointed chair of the Educational Council of Aotearoa New Zealand. In 2015 she was made a member of New Zealand Order of Merit for services to education.

If you ever met Barbara you’ll know instantly why she has been able to lift performances in the school. It’s all about leadership, says Hughes. “We have some decile one, two and three schools outperforming some decile ten schools and that’s simply because of the quality of school leadership and quality of teaching in them. If you go to those schools it’s exhausting. It’s like they are on something.”

Back to the artwork, which Hughes ‘commissioned’ on the theme of leadership for the Ministry building. “Barbara turned that into a project. All these kids researched what does leadership mean and who are good leaders, so there is a whole provenance to this artwork and it was a learning thing for them. It’s fabulous. I’d send my kids to Sylvia Park any day.”

COLLABORATION YES…HURRY NO

IES, Communities of Learning, a review of the Education Act, initiatives to attract the right people into teaching – it sounds like things are on the move, education wise. Cathy Wylie, chief researcher at the New Zealand Council for Education Research, sounds a note of warning however.

Moving on from Tomorrow’s Schools and developing a more collaborative, coherent national system is the right approach, she says. But she does have concerns about the current pace of change, and its funding.

“MY fear is that so much IES funding has gone on the lead roles, for example head teachers, that there isn’t enough left for people to be collaborating across the schools.”

Wylie, who was an academic group representative on the IES Advisory Group, says tackling better quality education and outcomes is not something that can be done rapidly.

“No other country has achieved a big lift from individually managed schools; they cannot lift the whole system. When you’re looking at systems overseas that have succeeded, it’s because they have a coherent approach, they link schools – there’s a sense and understanding in which people need to work together.”

“The big challenge for us now is developing a more coherent national system. There are a lot of hopes pinned on Investing in Education Success (IES) and Communities of Learning, but it’s actually going to take a lot of time and work for that policy to be a game changer.”

Wylie also worries that changes are being rushed. “The Education Council has been tasked with designing the new Centre for Leadership Excellence, to support Communities of Learning. People want the system to be up and running before it’s ready. We also have a funding review, and on top of that we have the review of the Education Act 1989. The sense of urgency makes it difficult to achieve in a way that engages people, she warns. “People are ready for a long-term horizon. The reaction to the updating of the Act was positive and people felt it was great to have discussions in terms of more coherence in the system. However, to do that properly we need more time, yet the timeframe has already been allocated.

“There is too much going on, a lot of uncertainty, and quite a difficult environment – how the Ministry manages all that is going to be very important in terms of long-term work.”
When it comes to education, we don’t normally think of the New Zealand Defence Force as a player. But the NZDF is doing a surprising amount to help young people fulfil their potential, as KATHY OMBLER found out.

Five youth development programmes, supported or run by the New Zealand Defence Force (NZDF) in partnership with other government departments, have collectively helped turn around the lives of hundreds of at-risk, unemployed and offending young people, leading them instead to NCEA qualifications, jobs and, critically for many of them, a new sense of self-worth.

This isn’t core Defence Force business; however, it is a valuable contribution to ‘New Zealand Inc’, says Brigadier Broadley, Director General of Reserve Forces and Youth Development.

“Overall this is a great story about how some government departments and community organisations can work together to help develop the youth in this country. These programmes provide a number of avenues for potential at-risk youth to be great New Zealanders.”

But don’t call them boot camps! That’s not what they are about, Broadley says. “The keys are the values we instil in each of the trainees. Generally speaking, the base training is focused on understanding what is right and what is wrong. In the courses and camps everyone does the same, so there is a team-based culture. The students start self-policing, looking after each other. They’re eating well and sleeping well and it becomes transforming for a lot of those young adults.”

What is being achieved with these courses has seriously impressed Principal Youth Court Judge Andrew Becroft. At first he was concerned, in particular about the proposed Military-style Activity Camps for serious young offenders, when they were initially described as ‘boot camps’.

As it turns out, Judge Becroft says the ‘boot camp’ label was a misnomer. “The New Zealand model does have some military focus and is highly challenging but the substance is much wider. They have a holistic life approach; they are about team building, problem-solving, facing the stresses of life and they can be a good environment to think about moral and spiritual issues. We’re talking about our top-end young offenders - they are tough and demanding and the camps have built a platform for significant changes in their lives.”

The courses being run by NZDF include:

**Military-style Activity Camps (MAC)** - nine-week camps run with Child Youth and Family (CYF) for young offenders convicted of quite serious offences, held in a secure CYF facility. The camps aim to turn these offenders around through physical exercise, discipline, education, adventure, team building—learning musical instruments, even.

**Service Academies** - run by the NZDF for the Ministry of Education. They target mainly Year 12 and 13 students, in particular Māori and Pasifika who are “starting to drift”, says Broadley. The 12-month, part-time programme encompasses leadership skills, outdoor activities and mini basic training, and culminates in a challenging team adventure.

**Limited Service Volunteers** - a six-week developmental course for long-term unemployed youth (aged 18 to 25), funded by the Ministry of Social Development’s Work & Income Department. This encapsulates what we do, says Broadley. “They are selected by MSD, often on the recommendation of former graduates. Initially it’s about getting some of them off drug and alcohol addictions - it’s uniforms, short or tied back hair and no ‘phones. Then we get into it: team building and ‘the longest day’ physical challenge, counselling, budgeting, grooming and manners. We bring in police mentors, social workers and civilian psychologists.”

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We are proud to announce the appointment of Kate Terlau to the H2R Policy recruitment team. Kate has a background in central government and has experience working directly with policy managers and their teams. She understands the machinery of government and what managers are looking for to achieve their objectives from an in-house perspective. Kate will team up with Kirsty Brown specialising in permanent policy roles.

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FOCUS: STUDENTS

IMPROVING STUDENTS’ ACHIEVEMENT

Getting all students to achieve better is crucial. What practical measures are being taken to reach this goal? MARGARET McLACHLAN finds out.

One of the ten Better Public Services goals is to increase the proportion of 18-year-olds with NCEA Level 2. The rationale is simple - that success in education is important for the country and for the individuals to gain employment and reach their potential.

Year-on-year more students are gaining NCEA level 2. Since 2008, level 2 achievement rates for 18-year-olds have risen 16 percentage points.

The snapshot of BPS results (July 2015) says the BPS target of 85% of 18-year-olds to have NCEA level 2 by 2017 is on track.

What’s behind these statistics, is success universal, and does it mean our kids are learning more?

Lisa Rodgers, Ministry of Education, Deputy Secretary, Early Learning and Student Achievement - Ministry of Education

Dr Michael Johnston, Senior Lecturer - School of Education, Victoria University of Wellington

QUESTIONING WHAT’S BEHIND THE STATS

The statistical data shows student achievement has improved, though not at the same rate for all. But is this a useful measure and does it mean the quality of education has improved? Dr Michael Johnston, senior lecturer, School of Education, Victoria University, says it’s “extremely dangerous” to use targets, such as NCEA pass rates, as it can lead to schools focusing on credit accumulation rather than coherent course design in order to meet the targets.

“The learning of powerful disciplines such as mathematics, science and history, is done a disservice if standards are treated as curriculum units, to be ‘taught’ and assessed in a sequential manner. This approach often results in material being learned out of the context of the discipline itself. A good teacher contextualises curriculum elements in relation to the bodies of knowledge from which they are derived, and runs activities that build learning, as well as providing assessment evidence.

“We should be creating courses based on sound pedagogy and engaging students to learn rather than putting all the focus on accumulating credits. The best teachers do this well.”

Johnston attributes the rise in achievement rates to the shift, since 2013, to greater use of internal assessment, compared with external assessment.

“I’m a fan of internal assessment if it’s used well, achievement rates are better from internal assessment, across all demographics, including socio-economic. Internal assessment provides greater opportunities to demonstrate achievement and places fewer barriers, such as pressure and time limits, in the way of students. But it needs to be integrated into courses rather than being seen as simply a summative process for the awarding of credits.”

INITIATIVES HELP ENGAGE STUDENTS

There are many approaches to keeping students at school and engaged in learning. It’s a complex issue for schools, and the Ministry has helped by funding a number of initiatives and encouraging greater use of data around “numbers, names, and needs” so individual kids get exactly the help that they need.

Initiatives include:

• The Achievement, Retention and Transition programme, which in 2014 increased to 212 participating schools, and over 4,700 students (1361 Māori, and 917 Pasifika). Data from 2014 show at least 2,744 students (776 Māori, 582 Pasifika) achieved NCEA L2.

• Trades Academy places – to support many students (who may have otherwise become disengaged with school) to achieve NCEA Level 2 and transition into further study or careers. Funded places increased to 5250 places in 2015. In March 2015, 1800 Māori and 650 Pasifika students were enrolled.

• Building on Success helps schools respond to the learning needs of Māori students and actively manages them to help them achieve.

• Year 9 Plus – a new programme based in the wider Gisborne region supports at-risk students, using ‘champions’ for each student.

• Pasifika Powerup, and NCEA and the Whānau – programmes that engage with families to help them support their kids.

• “Count Me In”, a programme to assist around 2000 Māori and Pasifika 16-18 year olds who have left school to re-engage with education or begin vocational training.

Rodgers says these initiatives contribute to a “profound shift in approach and it’s making a serious impact for kids and families.”

The biggest initiative is Communities of Learning – groups of schools collaborating and sharing quality teaching.

Rodgers says, “This is a system-wide response aimed at tackling some long-standing issues, it will help schools work together to lift achievement, not just raising achievement for key groups but for every student.”

Communities of Learning (CoL) has been embraced by almost a third of New Zealand schools.

By February 2016 there were 96 approved CoL, in ev-
CoL schools are required to set achievement challenges and measure progress for every student. So far, 18 Col have had their achievement challenges approved and 150 CoL leaders, and across-school and within-school teacher roles have been appointed.

Rodgers says, “Communities of Learning will look at the data, look at the pathway for students, then ask ‘what are the challenges?’, and then work together to reach those challenges. For example, it might be writing for boys, a teacher with expertise in that area would be able to share professional practice with other schools.”

Achievement challenges so far include achievement goals for mathematics, reading, writing, boys’ education, achievement by Māori and Pasifika students, and NCEA Level 2 attainment.

Rodgers is confident the Communities of Learning approach will work, as one of a series of tools.

“Schools are using data to understand the profile and likely trajectory of students, and tailor achievement for them.”

NCEA ASSESSMENT

Does that mean schools are just making easier pathways for some students to gain NCEA? We’ve all heard of kids who know exactly how many credits they need for an NCEA qualification and the easiest way to get them.

Rodgers says the standards for NCEA have been tightened up, for example, literacy and numeracy requirements have increased in recent years. University Entrance requirements (mostly the inclusion of NCEA Level 3) were also changed for 2014 – resulting in a drop in 18-year-olds with UEB 47% in 2015, compared with 52% in 2013).

She acknowledges that some may suggest that some students may be taking “easy standards” in order to get NCEA. But with initiatives like Vocational Pathways, which lists standards students need for particular career choices, this is less likely.

“For example, we’re seeing a growth for Māori and Pasifika doing maths and science credits,” she says.

Dr Johnston questions how schools typically use the ‘standards’ at present: Some may offer standards with no clear context in a programme of learning, or structure courses as sequences of standards, as if they were curriculum units, rather than using the standards as specifications for assessment, which is what they are designed to be.

“Even in a well-designed course, teachers must carefully consider when the students are ready for assessment, not just that they can demonstrate knowledge on a particular day, but that what they will know support the next layer of learning. Coherent course design is critical.”

STARTING YOUNG

Of course, the earlier a child’s education begins, the better. And another BPS education target is: in 2016, 98% of children starting school will have participated in quality early childhood education. Lisa Rodgers says that target is close to being met.

The biggest increases in participation between 2010 and 2015 have been in Māori, Pasifika and low socio-economic communities.

“Ministry people are out in the community, sitting down with some of the hardest-to-reach communities to see what early childhood options are available, for their children.”

She cites some innovative solutions, for example, Rugby League clubs providing playgroups in their clubs and encouraging members and players to get their kids into education early.

And we are now able to measure how children are doing at primary school after the introduction of National Standards from 2010.

National Standards describe what students should know and be able to do in reading, writing, and mathematics at different points of their schooling from years 1-8.

The Progress and Consistency Tool (PaCT) has helped support teacher judgements and ensure consistency across schools.

MORE TO DO

So are we seeing improved student achievement? The statistical data for NCEA Level 2 suggests we are. However, this is but a snapshot of a student’s educational journey, and some groups still are not achieving the same as others. Used badly, the NCEA goal may be used as a target to get children across the threshold.

As with all educational initiatives, sound pedagogy and coherent course design, developed with clear and measurable assessment, is at the core of improving student learning and achievement – there is still more work to do.

VOCATIONAL PATHWAYS a Hit at Wintec

One day a week, a 15-year-old Year 11 high school student might be learning how to build a mini-bike on a manufacturing/technology course – while gaining NCEA level 1 credits.

Wintec’s Trades Academy, based at five sites throughout the Waikato, has 350 students from 35 schools taking part in its programmes. There are over 6000 Trades Academy places in New Zealand in 2016 (up from 600 when the programme first started in 2011).

Manager Johnny Gordon says, “Students get work experience, gain knowledge and get credits.”

He says there’s more demand than places for students to take part in the programme – and over 80% of those who complete the two-year programme go on to further study or work.

Currently Wintec offers courses across four of the six ‘vocational pathways’, areas of study linked to the school curriculum and NCEA standards.

It’s also trialling an engineering programme at NCEA Level 3. Around 30 Year 12 and Year 13 students from two Hamilton high schools will spend two days a week taking part in mechanical and civil engineering courses at Wintec.

During the other three days, their maths and physics school subjects will be specifically contextualised toward engineering. A Wintec engineering tutor will work with the schools to incorporate projects into their curriculum which teaches the theory through hands-on application.

“It’s an exciting, integrated programme. We hope the graduating students go on to study for a level 6, technician engineering qualification, helping to address New Zealand’s skill shortage in engineering,” Mr Gordon says.
**ERO: A Catalyst for Change**

*Chief Executive - Education Review Office*

The Education Review Office (ERO) is one of a group of agencies that together act as stewards of New Zealand’s education system. Its role is to advise government and the public about the quality of education and care in our early childhood service and schools. Chief Executive Iona Holsted talks with ROSE NORTHCOTT about what this small but influential government department is doing to achieve equity and excellence in education for all children.

**What is the biggest issue facing New Zealand’s education system?**

While the New Zealand education system is characterised by a high degree of excellence, there are also long-term, persistent disparities. Around 20% of the population who are Māori and Pacific don’t achieve well educationally. While there has been some minor and reassuringly good shifts, for example the percentage of Māori and Pacific achieving NCEA Level 2, fundamentally the system is still not performing well for these students.

**What progress is being made towards solving this issue?**

A huge amount of effort across the sector has gone into solving this disparity. People get up every morning wanting to solve it. ERO knows that to change the outcomes for all children is to engage with them on a level and in a way that genuinely connects them with learning.

We also know from research that where Māori children achieve well, other children achieve well. One of the reasons is that the conceptual underpinnings of what works for Māori children will also work for non-Māori – the concepts of manaakitanga, whanaungatanga, ako and mahi tahi. This is the way you engage with children, the meaning to which you give their presence in the classroom, and the respect with which you treat them. These are deep and at times difficult concepts to translate into a system that works well, not just for most children, but for all children.

**What is ERO doing differently to achieve equity and excellence in education?**

Our whakatauki is ko te tamaiti te pūtak o te kaupapa – the child is the heart of the matter. By doing everything needed to connect with that child and connect them with learning, we will get results.

ERO is now taking quite a different look at how we evaluate what’s going on in schools. We are trialling new School Evaluation Indicators – Effective Practice for Improvement and Learner Success which provide boards, principals and teachers with strong guidance about what they need to do to achieve equity and excellence. The revised indicators reflect our deepening understanding of how schools improve and the role of evaluation in that improvement process.

In the past, what we’ve asked schools generally is: “Overall, how is student achievement in this school?” And subsequently, “How are Māori achieving as Māori?” To be frank, we haven’t joined up Māori achieving as Māori with overall student achievement. We know that for Māori children to succeed really well, they have to be succeeding as Māori and feel comfortable succeeding as Māori. But that’s not the whole story. To ensure they have the same outcomes and opportunities for success as other children we need to make a stronger connection with the achievement story.

To reflect that focus, our new opening evaluation question is: “How are you accelerating learning for those children who need it, especially Māori?” We are trialling this in full primary and contributing schools first to see if it has an impact.

It is very exciting. We are characterising everything we are doing as an opportunity to fix the persistent disparity challenge. I was talking to principals in the Far North recently. This is a subject dear to their hearts and one of them said, “Finally, we are not talking about this in terms of a problem, but a solution”.

**Is your role to provide guidance to schools?**

No, that would compromise our position as the evaluator. What we do is find evidence of effective practice and we share that so that every school has the available material. For example, we’ve produced a good practice report on how to accelerate Māori and Pacific Island student achievement where a cross-section of schools tell stories of what they’ve done to achieve results.

**How effective is ERO at influencing education outcomes?**

The questions we ask as evaluators have a lot of power. Asking good evaluative questions helps leaders, principals and parents to change their practice in a way that will produce the outcomes we want. That’s our distinctive and specific role in the system.

At the same time we have a role to define sector good practice which others can then use, such as the new School Evaluation Indicators. This is a very important document from our point of view – it will inform the Education Council about professional standards and the Tertiary Education Commission about what teacher education needs to look like. It provides boards, principals and teachers with strong guidance about what they need to do to achieve equity and excellence.

One of ERO’s real strengths is that we are the only part of the system, other than teachers, that are in schools every day, all the time. Out of our 220 staff, around 160 are reviewing. That provides us with a rich vein of understanding and knowledge.

We are on the ground and we understand the pressures, desires and aspirations of teachers.

**What informed the new Evaluation Indicators?**

This work was led by ERO together with an academic expert group. We drew on best evidence synthesis – a really rich body of evidence of what works.

To join the indicators to the sector and the system, we are trialling the document for one
year. Overall, the feedback from the sector is really positive. It resonates with teachers because it connects all the parts with the learner at the centre.

What are NZ’s key differences as compared with the international experience?

Equity and excellence in education are concepts that other countries are also struggling with. In the UK it’s not ethnicity that’s the divider, it is poverty and social status. Clearly there is an overlap between poor social outcomes generally and Māori, but New Zealand research reveals that when you connect with Māori children through manaakitanga, the magic happens. So New Zealand’s got an answer to the disparity challenge. That’s very heartening.

In New Zealand the disparity is within schools, not so much between schools. Crudely speaking, in the UK if you live in a richer area, all of the education outcomes will be better than if you live in a poorer area. That’s not the same in New Zealand. Even in schools in well-to-do areas, the disparity between Māori and Pacific and non-Māori achievement exists. It is important to unpack those Māori concepts and ensure that teachers from early childhood services all the way through the system engage with Māori and Pacific children in a way that’s going to connect with them, and connect them to learning.

What’s the role of the parents and whānau?

It’s vital. We know if you want to have really good outcomes, connect parents and caregivers to the learning of the child. You as a teacher know what’s going on in the family, the family knows what’s going on in school, and they are working together to support outcomes for the child.

When will we start seeing results?

Firstly we need to know if our new evaluative approach is having an impact. We are doing our own internal evaluation to track how it’s going. Then we will be able to see whether or not there is a shift in student achievement – we should know within two years through real-time evaluation in schools if we are on the right track.

What will success mean for New Zealand?

It’s critical we succeed. Equity and excellence in education will make for big, positive changes in our society. We are starting from the mindset that we’ve got the capability to do it. I see the passion and commitment of leaders and teachers all through the system every single day.

Tell us about your career.

I trained as a teacher and taught for about eight years - during which time I moved into student politics for a two-year stint as the President of the Student Teachers’ Association of NZ. I then moved to the PSA in the early 1990s. That was an amazing experience during a time of massive change. It also gave me a very useful insight into government. I left to manage a community health organisation before joining the SSC in 1998 where I eventually became Deputy Commissioner, evaluating departmental and CE performance. I then spent several years as deputy CE in the MSD, holding different corporate, policy and operational roles.

What attracted you to this role?

Coming here was the culmination of everything I’ve done. I wasn’t interested in being a chief executive for the sake of it, but this job was a good fit. It deals with really important issues and I have the privilege of leading a highly professional organisation that has the capacity to really make a difference.

Education is a complex system with lots of moving parts and none of us have the full picture or all the levers. Education Ministry Head Peter Hughes has established an Education Stewardship Forum, a collective of nine CEs. We are working together to think how we make the whole greater than the sum of the parts. New Zealand has around 2500 self-managing schools and around 4000 early childhood education centres. We are always trying to find a way to influence that landscape. It’s challenging and exciting.
FOCUS: TEACHERS

Attracting and retaining good teachers is vital to New Zealand’s educational success. What’s the best way of doing this – and what role does a principal’s leadership play? BRIAR EDMONDS finds out.

A recent Canterbury University study found more than half of high-flying young teachers were struggling with the job after nine years and that a quarter had left or wanted to leave. The study, part of the Teachers of Promise project, published in 2014, took 57 third-year teachers recommended by training organisations and principals as being ‘highly promising’ and followed them for six years. Of the 40 still in touch after that time, 10 had a high satisfaction with teaching, 21 were ‘persevering and coping’, three were detached and thinking about leaving the profession, while six had already left.

These are not good statistics. They’re particularly concerning when we consider that educating the next generation is arguably one of the most important responsibilities of society. So what can we do to attract, keep and support great teachers?

We posed this question to Graham Stoop, Chief Executive of the Education Council. Stoop has been around the block when it comes to education. He has touched all elements of the teaching profession in his 30-year career in education. He has been a teacher, a principal of, at the time, the largest secondary school in Australasia, the Pro Vice Chancellor of Canterbury University and the chief executive of Christchurch College of Education. He’s also been the Chief Executive of the Education Review Office and Deputy Secretary of Education.

“I think it’s really important that we look at compensation and come up with a better strategy for compensating teachers appropriately. But when I say ‘compensation’ – I don’t just mean money, but also things like professional development and other non-monetary benefits of which there are many,” says Stoop.

Stoop also thinks there is room to think about alternative options such as training fewer teachers but paying them higher salaries, which could help attract high-calibre talent. “All the research shows that teaching effectiveness isn’t actually about the size of the class – although there need to be parameters for the sake of teacher workloads and health and wellbeing. Teachers who can really teach have a special set of attributes that they’ve developed. That includes a very strong academic background, and a passion for children and young people’s learning.”

A ‘TALENT STRATEGY’

The concept of a ‘talent strategy’ is another element important for retaining good teachers, which is essentially a planned and tailored approach to developing teachers professionally. “I see it as very important for schools to be offering bespoke professional development pathways that fit the teacher. While we need to develop leadership potential in our teachers, we also need to provide support teachers who want to stay in the classroom and help them develop their skills in that area. Not everyone wants to be or is suited to becoming a principal, which has been the traditional pathway for all teachers. We need to make sure we are appealing to the needs of all types of teachers via differentiated pathways and options.”

Stoop says the Education Council (previously known as the Teachers’ Council) is already working in this space with the Investing in Educational Success programme, which is developing new career pathways. The programme groups schools into ‘communities’ of schools and allows teachers to take on development opportunities throughout that community of schools.

Also critical to attracting and keeping great teachers is the quality of the leadership in a school, and a big proponent of this factor is Denise Torrey, the highly experienced principal of Somerfield School in Christchurch.

“Unfortunately I think we are experiencing a leadership crisis in our schools. It’s becoming harder to get good principals in schools, and especially hard to keep the good ones - which becomes a bit of a cycle because without strong leadership you won’t keep good teachers,” says Denise.

Denise sees the sheer workload placed on school leaders as a big problem that makes it difficult to find excellent people for the job. “As self-managing entities, schools have to take care of complying with...
the wide variety of legislation, rules and expectations of government completely on their own. The workload involved in managing this as a principal is truly phenomenal. It often feels like the expectation is that we will do everything, including save the world. This is especially an issue in small or rural schools where principals have to do everything and anything."

Communities also place very high expectations on principals. Denise says, “Principals are expected to be perfect and I think this is partly because communities see government asking for so much from schools without counterbalancing that with enough recognition of the incredible work that we are actually doing. And there really is so much good teaching and learning happening right under our noses.”

It’s not that hard to see why for many, school leadership is an unappealing prospect. And those who do go into the job are finding themselves without much support. "We’re seeing a high number of principals, particularly in rural and small schools, who aren’t being supported to be able to do the job. And with such high turnover in roles at the principal level, often we’re seeing quite inexperienced people becoming principals without any support."

**Support Lacking**

Denise says it is common right across New Zealand for principals not to have a support system. "I think that is a real worry, especially when you consider the complexity of a principal’s role these days. Northland is a good example of that complexity."

Northland is home to a variety of different iwi, with differing views, and it is a low decile area in many parts which brings its own issues. Denise says, “The complexities involved in being a principal in Northland are much higher than elsewhere in the country yet we are consistently seeing inexperienced principals installed without any real mentorship or support.”

“Canterbury is another area where principals have to be able to handle extra complexity. The earthquakes of the last five years have taken a heavy toll on the mental health of children, parents and staff at schools. The impact of this on teaching and learning, and on running a school is enormous.”

Denise sees a re-think of the way principals are hired as part of the solution. “I don’t think Boards of Trustees are necessarily the right people to be hiring leaders for our schools. There is such complexity involved in running a school, and you need to be totally independent and objective when looking for the right person for the job. Boards of Trustees tend to choose the person they like best for the role of principal, rather than the person who actually has all the attributes and experience necessary to carry out the role.”

“Thankfully there are some things happening now to try to address these problems. The Ministry of Education has put in place two school leadership advisory roles in Northland, and there is also one in Southland now. These roles are there to provide mentorship to those in principal roles, who need the support of an experienced hand.”

“If we can hang on to our good principals - that will go a long way towards helping us hang on to our good teachers. Leadership is such a critical piece of the puzzle.”

Denise also thinks there needs to be more public recognition of the value of New Zealand’s teachers of all stripes. A recent OECD study called the Teaching and Learning International Study (TALIS) ranked New Zealand teachers among the world’s most professional - they came in fourth out of 35 participating countries, behind the Russian Federation, Estonia and Singapore.

“This study confirmed what I already knew and I think we need to do better at talking up our profession. We are a highly professional bunch of people, and I think the public needs to hear that more. Fostering more respect for the teaching profession will also do a lot for attracting and retaining top talent in our schools.”
In December 2015, at the 21st Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP 21) in Paris, an agreement was reached to limit the rise in global temperatures to less than 2°C, with the aim of reducing the temperature goal of 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels. Dubbed the “Paris Moment” by many, New Zealand was one of 195 countries to commit to the accord.

Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon (second left), UNFCCC’s Christiana Figueres (left), French Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius and President of the UN Climate Change Conference in Paris (COP 21), and President François Hollande of France (right), celebrate historic adoption of Paris Agreement. UN Photo/Mark Garten.

New Zealand Climate Change Ambassador Jo Tyndall discussed why the COP 21 was so successful at an Institute for Governance and Policy Studies panel discussion in February.

“There were a number of reasons why the ‘stars aligned’ in 2015. The solid science behind the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change’s Fifth Assessment Report (AR5) kicked things off. Even more importantly, political momentum grew in the 18 months leading to the Paris meeting. And I couldn’t emphasise enough the role of skilled diplomacy on the part of the host country France, both in the lead-up to and during COP 21.”

As UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon describes the agreement, “We have entered a new era of global cooperation on one of the most complex issues ever to confront humanity.”

GLOBAL COMMITMENTS

Amongst developed nations, New Zealand has a unique emissions profile. That’s in part because we have a higher than average proportion of emissions from the agriculture sector (48.4% of total emissions in 2013). We have made progress in reducing emissions per unit product by approximately 1% per year, but New Zealand’s overall emissions related to agriculture have significantly increased since 1990 levels because of the growth of the sector.

Our other sector that has remained high is the energy sector (39.1% of total emissions in 2013). New Zealand has continued to show a persistent reliance on fossil fuels. Although strategies, such as the New Zealand Energy Strategy 2011/21 and the New Zealand Energy Efficiency and Conservation Strategy 2011/16, have been developed to reduce emissions, there is still much work to be done. For example, as noted in New Zealand’s second biennial report under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (2015), “The vehicle recycling rate is slower in New Zealand than many other countries, and fuel efficiency improvements take longer to have an effect in New Zealand relative to other developed countries”.

AGRICULTURE SCIENCE

As Dr Harry Clark, Director of the government-funded New Zealand Agricultural Greenhouse Gas Research Centre, explains, New Zealand has invested in a number of ways to mitigate greenhouse gas emissions at both the domestic and international level.

“We have a unique greenhouse gas emissions profile, but as a country we also have a unique – very New Zealand – approach to finding a solution, which includes government, industry and research providers working in partnership,” he says.

“This approach has allowed us to coordinate research and build a coherent, results-focused work programme. We’ve been able to do this, in part, because we’re a small country, but also because we are all interested in achieving the same outcomes.”

At the international level, New Zealand has played a key role in establishing the Global Research Alliance on Agricultural Greenhouse Gases, and hosting the Secretariat. As part of our commitment to the GRA, in December 2015 the Government pledged an additional $20 million in support to the programme to 2020.

NZAGRC’s nitrous oxide programme field experiment involving 18 different plant cultivars confirms that plant genotype can influence emissions.
Due, in part, to our atypical greenhouse gas emissions profile, to meet our international obligations New Zealand has banked on international emissions trading. In fact, in our provisional intended nationally determined contribution (INDC) published in July 2015 it was spelled out that our INDC would remain provisional “pending confirmation of the approaches to be taken in accounting for the land sector, and confirmation of access to carbon markets”.

For the medium to longer term, our dependency on carbon markets may make it increasingly difficult to meet our international obligations. As Dr Adrian Macey from the IGPS and former climate change ambassador explains in his informative article on COP 21 in the February 2016 issue of Policy Quarterly, “Even with unrestricted access to markets, there is a further risk to New Zealand over the longer term. The Paris Agreement requires that each new INDC be a progression over the previous one. But because international carbon units are not permanent reductions, to the extent that markets are used in New Zealand emissions, each time there is a new target New Zealand will begin with a liability from the previous period(s). This means effectively purchasing more units to get back to square one, until such time as real domestic reductions take place.”

A recently published evaluation of the New Zealand Emissions Trading Scheme (NZ ETS) by the Ministry for the Environment (2016) found that the scheme has supported the Government in meeting its international obligations under the Kyoto Protocol. At the same time, the evaluation notes that the NZ ETS appears to have contributed “but only minimally, to changes in behaviour and decisions that have reduced net emissions below business-as-usual levels”.

Specifically, the evaluation found “no sector other than forestry made emissions reductions over Kyoto Protocol Commitment Period One (2008–12) that were directly caused by NZ ETS obligations”.

In 2015, the Government began a review of the NZ ETS. Changes made to the NZ ETS following the review may support a reduction in emissions in some sectors, but it may not be wide enough to bring about the far-reaching changes required, for example, the full inclusion of agriculture in the NZ ETS is not within the scope of the review.

That means to make transformational changes will require using additional levers. Central government has a crucial role to play in this, in both bold mitigation strategy and policy development. Industry too has a significant role to play and a commercial imperative to do so. Business leaders appear to be aware of this. As a Business NZ (Major Companies Group) and Sustainable Business Council survey found in November 2015, over half of respondents said “climate was a material issue that warranted a business response”.

And while much of local government’s work is centred on adapting to climate change, it has an important role to play in developing low-carbon communities, as demonstrated in the Low Carbon Auckland Plan and elements of the Greater Wellington Regional Council Climate Change Strategy.

ADAPTING TO CHANGE

New Zealand uses a risk-based approach when it comes to preparing for and adapting to the effects of climate change. This approach is spelled out in much of our key legislation and guidance, such as how natural hazards are managed through the Civil Defence Emergency Management Act 2002. While one of the key pieces of legislation for adapting to the consequences of climate change, the Resource Management Act 1991 (RMA), does not explicitly include risk assessment, as part of the recent Resource Legislation Amendment Bill, the Government is proposing to include “management of significant risks from natural hazards”.

To assist local government in assessing risk, in June 2015 Local Government New Zealand (LGNZ) and the Government announced an establishment board to investigate options for a local government risk management agency. Working with both local and central government, the board has been asked to identify risk management services that would assist councils and locally owned infrastructure operators. Government officials and local authorities are watching to see what the outcome of this process will be, which may have major implications in how local authorities prepare for and address climate change.

As our knowledge and understanding of certain natural hazards associated with climate change, such as sea-level rise, have grown we are beginning to develop more nuanced approaches to assessing risks. At the 2015 Australasian Coasts and Ports Conference in Auckland, for example, engineers, scientists and planners discussed how changes in coastal hazard lines are used in determining the risks associated with sea-level rise.
Resource management consultant Robin Britton says robust, ongoing public engagement is crucial: “Our national policy directs us to avoid an increase in the risk from coastal hazards, for example, and encourage changes in land use, such as relocating homes or infrastructure, to achieve this. But adaptation approaches through planning or consenting processes are often met with great resistance from property owners, communities and councils.”

This challenge is often exacerbated by the difficulty of communicating hazard information and associated risks based on the long timeframes involved.

Dr Rob Bell, Programme Leader for Hazards and Risk at NIWA, has given this issue some thought in terms of adapting to sea-level rise and says there is a need for a “graduated approach”. As he said in a recent interview for the New Zealand Coastal Society’s Adapting to the Consequences of Climate Change: Engaging with Communities, “For a timeframe of 40 to 50 years, most of the effort and engagement on getting robust planning controls and non-statutory approaches in place should be focused on the residents who are most likely to be impacted... Then property owners likely to be affected in the longer timeframe (50 to 100+ years) can be put on a 'watching brief' with more flexible planning controls, so they can get the medium-term use out of their assets in the meantime.”

The caveat to this approach, Bell says, is that there still needs to be an overarching, long-term adaptation strategy developed for the wider area based on a range of local trigger points (for example, thresholds for sea-level rise, erosion or number of coastal flooding events) with regular monitoring and review to “moderate any further intensification”.

**ENGAGING WITH COMMUNITIES**

Over the past several years a number of local authorities have developed innovative ways to engage with communities about climate change.

Auckland Council’s Coastal Management Services Team Manager Paul Klinac says that’s because, “it’s not enough to show up to a community meeting and put up maps with lines on them to illustrate how sea-level rise might affect an area, for example.

“That style tends to result in community push-back with respect to the process that has been followed, with questions about why the community hasn’t been involved or consulted with from the beginning, and ultimately brings into question how decisions are being made.”

Instead, local authorities are opting for community engagement that includes transparent processes and several points for decision-making. In addition, initiatives like King Tides Auckland, that encourages people from around the Auckland region to photograph the highest tides (king tides) that occur each year to build a visual record of the effects of sea-level rise, are gaining traction as a way to keep people involved in an ongoing conversation about climate change.

Another example is an online tool that Waikato Regional Council recently made available that helps people to better understand the potential impacts of projected sea-level rise in Waikato’s coastal areas. The aim of the Coastal Inundation Tool is to allow the public to interactively visualise what the coastal fringe may look like with various water level scenarios.

Rick Liefting, Senior Regional Hazards Advisor at WRC says, “We want communities to better understand the implications of projected sea-level rise and what better way than for them to see for themselves. We hope that the tool will spark the discussion on the possible implications and start more constructive dialogue on planning for the future.”

An important dimension that needs to be considered in public engagement is Te Ao Māori. As researchers Darren King (NIWA) and Charlotte Severne (formerly of NIWA) and Guy Penny (Housing New Zealand Corporation) wrote in The climate change matrix facing Māori society (2010), while Māori are experienced in dealing with climate variability, new strategies may be needed to adjust to climate change. “Māori will do this in different ways, from defining their own aspirations, collaborating and driving new research and strategies, drawing on customary values and knowledge, and participating in discussion and active solutions at all levels from the marae and kura, to regional and national business and political forums.”

**RESEARCH AND SCIENCE**

A key component in mitigating and adapting to climate change is science provision. New Zealand has some of the foremost scientists in the world working on climate change
issues. In addition to climate science, much of that work is being done in the area of agriculture (see box out), and there’s also much work being done in the areas of biodiversity, oceanography, biosecurity, natural hazards and energy. Several of the 11 National Science Challenges include some aspect of climate change in their research work programme. The aim of the Deep South NSC, for example, is to enable New Zealanders to adapt, manage risk, and thrive in a changing climate.

According to Professor David Frame, an internationally renowned climate researcher at Victoria University of Wellington and Director of the NIWA-hosted NSC, part of the NSC’s work will be to develop an Earth System Model to better predict how the climate will change.

“Research from the Deep South NSC is expected to help New Zealanders to better address challenges and opportunities associated with climate change,” he says.

In addition, the Crown research institutes and other research providers undertake a number of mitigation and adaptation projects, and through collaborative efforts like the New Zealand Climate Change Centre, facilitate our understanding of climate change and its impacts and implications.

VUW’s New Zealand Climate Change Research Institute, for example, is focused on the connection between climate change science, policy development and decision-making. One project the institute is working on is in collaboration with Deltas, a Netherlands-based applied research institute.

Deltas developed a simulation game – the Sustainable Delta Game – for policy-makers to experience making decisions under uncertain and changing conditions. The game helps test the effects of policy options and to develop an adaptive plan using the dynamic adaptive policy planning (DAPP) approach.

Using the DAPP approach enables decisions to be made that can be flexible, whatever the future climate. Deltas and CCRI, working with Greater Wellington Regional Council, Wellington City Council, Tasman District Council and Ministry for the Environment, have created two new versions of the game for New Zealand decision settings – a New Zealand river version and a New Zealand coastal version.

Dr Judy Lawrence, CCRI’s project leader for the game, says the game and the DAPP approach has already been used to assess policy options for flood management in the CBD section of the Hutt River taking increased frequency and magnitude changes of river flows over 100 years into account.

“We’ve trialled the game with the Ministry for the Environment and the partner local authorities,” she says. “We’re now planning a wider roll-out of the game this year with local government for application by decision-makers, including as part of public engagement on specific planning issues.”

**PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER**

To find solutions to move to a low-carbon society and adapt to the consequences of climate change will require a transformation in both how we plan for the future and how we operate today. While our international obligations help set the benchmark for what we need to achieve, to put our intentions into action we need to bring the discussion closer to home. What are our obligations to current and future New Zealanders? New Zealand’s biological heritage? Our Pacific neighbours who are on the frontline of dealing with the effects of climate change?

It’s a shift in thinking that is already occurring in many quarters. For example, Te Arawa Federation of Māori Authorities hosted the Climate Change 2016 Conference: Sustainable economic growth that does not cost the earth! in March. The no-nonsense quote on the conference’s marketing materials could be seen as a clarion call for all New Zealanders: “Get your head around climate change, what it is going to mean for New Zealand and your business! ‘Don’t be a frog in the hot pot.’”

If COP 21 is to be remembered as the ‘Paris Moment’ for its global cooperation and multilateralism, it means that COP 22, which is scheduled to be held in November, 2016 in Morocco, could become each country’s moment of truth.
Does New Zealand have a problem when it comes to the education of children with learning disabilities or so-called ‘special’ educational needs? The Ministry of Education would say that it does not. It will point to our high rates of mainstreaming relative to the international average, or to the results of a recent review by the Education Review Office that estimates the number of schools displaying mostly inclusive practices at 78%. It will argue that its financial commitment in this area is significant, in the range of $500 million a year. What it will not be able to do, however, is back up these claims with any meaningful analyses of the disabled student population, since it does not collect the relevant data.

So for instance an ERO team might visit a school and find it inclusive, but it will not know if there are students missing from its roll: that is to say, children that were softly dissuaded from enrolling, or who have left to go to a more inclusive school. A similar argument applies to the rate of mainstreaming, which is certainly very encouraging and a key plank for our system to build on but says little about the quality of the education provided. However, as researchers have pointed out, mainstreaming is not the same thing as inclusion. Being at school is not the same thing as having meaningful access to the curriculum.

A PERVERSE PROCESS

Before the Education Act 1989, disabled children had no rights to attend their local school and in the absence of a special school or unit, many were denied access to education altogether. Despite the breakthrough provided by Section 8 of that Act which legislated for the right of all local children to attend their local school, the resourcing to support teachers and disabled children in the new mainstream classrooms was inadequate from the start.

In response to the slow implementation of this policy, in 1996/7 the National government developed Special Education 2000 (SE2000) which included an Ongoing Resourcing Scheme commonly known as ORS targeted at 1% of school children. Access to the scheme required filling out a very lengthy and complex application highlighting the children’s deficits. Twenty years later, ORS remains one of the key resourcing mechanisms for the delivery of special education. Dressed up as a tool to assess objective need, it consists of a series of criteria under which disabled children as young as five can be enrolled. In reality, however, the scheme is not designed to evaluate children against the criteria but grade them according to the level of need.

As well as restricted to a predetermined number of students, the scheme is a periodically moderated (as opposed to equitable) distribution of resources. To illustrate how perverse this process is, it may be worth bringing up a personal experience. One of the authors has a young son with type-1 diabetes, whose care includes periodic outpatient clinics with a specialist paediatric team at Wellington hospital. If during one of the visits the team finds that his haemoglobin levels have improved, they do not suggest reducing the amount of insulin he is allowed to receive, as this would be absurd. Yet this is precisely what happens in the ORS moderation, where achievement and improvement as a result of funded interventions result directly in a reduction of the funding.

As a matter of fact, in key areas such as learning or communication, there is no direct, straightforward relationship between the severity of a student’s disability and the level of learning support that she will need to access the curriculum. What might have happened from one moderation to the next is that the child has reached a point where she can tolerate being in the classroom. This is where the proper inclusion and teaching can begin, and the most intensive and specialised interventions be effective. But the equation dictates that progress in any area must be inversely proportional to teaching resources. In addition to the moderation process affecting individual children, regional moderation is also in place, to ensure that each area receives a level of funding proportional to the overall number of pupils enrolled at school.

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THE MYTH OF SCHOOL CHOICE

Although the current regime for funding special education goes back to SE2000, it is part of the longer reform programme initiated by the 1989 Education Act. The central plank of the programme, known as Tomorrow’s Schools, introduced competition among state schools with the belief that this would cause parents to reward the best one with their business (i.e. their children) and improve education.

However, education isn’t a consumer product nor, more importantly, are children consumers: children are citizens whose equal right to education is unequally met. Like all other citizens, children come from a range of socio-economic backgrounds and in a range of abilities. And while the reforms did not quite erase the first difference, they gradually obliterated the second.

This attitude is reflected in the two principal means for funding special education in New Zealand: the
In the crudest possible terms: most children can those schools. disabled pupils, thus directing greater resources to rather than learning supports and teaching staff for the schools that spend money on attractive facilities even freer to move, and are more easily drawn to fashion. But the model doesn’t work, let alone abilities be distributed in a statistically uniform worked in its purest form would children of different competition has a downside. Only if the model would mean allowing for the possibility that school schools irrespective of the number of children with special needs on their roll, because to do otherwise would mean allowing for the possibility that school competition has a downside. Only if the model worked in its purest form would children of different abilities be distributed in a statistically uniform fashion. But the model doesn’t work, let alone perfectly. The ablest and wealthiest children are much freer to move, and are more easily drawn to the schools that spend money on attractive facilities rather than learning supports and teaching staff for disabled pupils, thus directing greater resources to those schools.

In the crudest possible terms: most children can choose to go to a school that is not inclusive; disabled children can only go where they are accepted. Therefore the freedom of choice of the former undermines the right to an education of the latter.

INCENTIVES FOR EXCLUSION

While the Ministry of Education lists inclusion as one of its main priorities, its policies ultimately promote exclusion. Consider a child receiving targeted funding under ORS, therefore best positioned to receive the highest levels of support. This funding leaves a shortfall of between $5,000 and $8,000 in the school budget for each child on the scheme. A school that invests in children with high needs will likely attract a disproportionate number of ORS students, thereby increasing the strain on the school’s financial viability even further. This strain could potentially be alleviated by the other main source of funding in this area, the SEG. This, however, as we have seen, is allocated to schools based on its roll and decile, not to schools irrespective of the number of children with special needs on their roll, because to do otherwise would mean allowing for the possibility that school competition has a downside. Only if the model worked in its purest form would children of different abilities be distributed in a statistically uniform fashion. But the model doesn’t work, let alone perfectly. The ablest and wealthiest children are much freer to move, and are more easily drawn to

needs of the children, and can be demoralising for both teachers and parents. To make matters worse, schools are required to include the results among the data reported to the Ministry of Education, but are not allowed to cite the special circumstances of the students. Children with severe impairments are therefore both included in the results and ‘hidden’ inside them. This has a very immediate and concrete repercussion when the Ministry publishes school results on its website, which is used by many parents to compare schools in a system supposedly based on virtuous competition. Schools that enrol a high number of children with learning disabilities will see their academic achievement record penalised compared to those who do not, and no context will be given to explain the poor results. Thus a measure that might be charitably viewed as an attempt to ‘include’ children with disabilities ends up making it even less desirable for schools to enrol them.

The combination of all of these policy settings actively disadvantage inclusive schools, thereby reducing the prospects of children with disabilities to access the same education system as their peers. Conversely, these settings incentivise schools not to practice inclusion, and principals are more acutely aware of them than most. Can we really blame them for working within the system and responding to the signals that the policy sends them?

SHIFTING THE BURDEN

It is our contention that many of our officials and policy-makers are in denial about the long-standing inequities that afflict our system. But we also believe that New Zealand is perfectly capable of forging its own progressive path, and translate some of the strong commitments in our laws into effective policies that value and reward inclusive schools.

It starts with admitting that we have a problem. The set of perverse incentives we have described emanates from a system that is almost pathologically obsessed with costly verification, placing little or no trust in educators and families. Under this regime, it is not probative to say that our levels of expenditure are relatively high by international standards, when so much money is going towards guarding access to resources as opposed to enabling inclusion.

It could start with something little, like a more equitable distribution of the SEG. It could end with something big, like a radical redesign of the funding mechanisms for individual schools and the delivery of specialist supports. In either case it should involve a shifting of the burden. If a parent or teacher reports, and the school confirms, that a child has significant needs, they are unlikely to be lying and should not be subjected to endless assessments and reviews. It should be up to the Ministry of Education, rather, to argue that the need does not exist, or justify why the necessary supports are not to be provided. These are reasonable expectations to place on an education system that values all its participants and is committed to teaching all children.

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It starts with admitting that we have a problem. The set of perverse incentives we have described emanates from a system that is almost pathologically obsessed with costly verification, placing little or no trust in educators and families.
New Zealanders spend a lot of time talking about education. But is there a real educational culture in this country? And what might the public service do to educate its employees? Columnist and former teacher DAVE ARMSTRONG takes a sideways look at the matter.

Dog obedience classes had been going very well. Jolene, my six-month-old fox terrier, could sit, lie down and almost heel on command. Even better, if I called her she came straight to me – most of the time. Jolene basically did what she was told.

The week before the course finished, we did a practice test before the exam. Jolene did brilliantly in all categories. For the very final test in the trial I had to go to a busy city park, walk about 50 metres away then call her. When we’d practised at the local park she’d aced it every time.

I walked the requisite 50 metres then called her name. Jolene’s ears pricked up and off she raced towards me – completely ‘on task’, as a classroom teacher would say. Then she spied a two-year-old child walking with his dad. So keen was she to say hello that, ignoring my increasingly panicked commands, she jumped up onto the child and tipped him onto the grass.

I sprinted over and apologised profusely but the lad’s father was unworried – his boy loved dogs. My instructor was less impressed. “It might be an idea if Jolene repeats the course before she sits the exam,” she said. I agreed. “Fair enough, Jolene gets a bit distracted by children, and I wouldn’t want her to fail.”

The instructor looked at me sternly. “Jolene doesn’t fail; you fail. It’s not about the dog, it’s about the owner.”

Given how much I hate failing at anything, the words hurt, especially since I knew the instructor was dead right. Jolene eventually passed her course with the doggie equivalent of ‘only just achieved’ but the lesson I learned from Jolene’s ‘failure’ was immeasurable.

Today, when I hear politicians blaming the ‘underachieving tail’ in our secondary schools I am reminded of my attempt to blame Jolene for failing dog obedience. We hear the Education Review Office talking about schools that don’t measure up, we hear university lecturers complain about declining standards, we hear parents complain about the incomprehensible school reports they get sent home and the unfathomable NCEA assessment system, we hear complaints from teachers about the government and we hear employers berating schools for not properly preparing their students for the workforce.

Has education in New Zealand become a national blame game where the person blaming is the only one not at fault?

We have a problem here

I think we might have a national problem here. It seems in New Zealand we lack what I would describe as an education culture.

Don’t get me wrong, we love talking about schools and assessment systems and zoning, but how much is the art of teaching and learning embedded into our culture? Go to an urban barbecue and there will be heaps of ‘education talk’ – should we send Jack to the lower-decile school next door or the expensive high-decile school across town? There will be conversations about the curriculum, too – we want Sophia to study physics, maths and chemistry but she has her heart set on performance music, classics and drama. But how much time do Kiwis spend discussing real education?

I dream of attending a summer barbecue where parents almost come to blows over genuine educational debate. Imagine a father screaming, “If you want to successfully teach the subtractive properties of integers to a nine-year-old then you must incorporate the use of physical apparatus at the earliest level.” Then a mother screams back, “But you’re neglecting to emphasise the need for the student to have a solid knowledge of the basic facts of the integer system which must be strengthened by written exercises and rote learning!”

Instead, we hear things like “Ben’s as useless at maths as I was so we’ve enrolled him at Kip McGrath” or “we’re worried about Stella’s English marks so we’re looking to buy in the Grammar Zone.”

If New Zealand did develop an education culture, what would it look like? It wouldn’t have to be everyone meeting at dinner time and doing homework together Singapore-style, but it would be nice if more of us looked at what actually helped people learn, and tried to keep politics out of it.

43 grapes urgently

I remember when my niece - whose parents had shelled out heaps of money for a private school – was having trouble counting numbers above 30. She would accompany us to the supermarket, so when we got to the fruit section I would say, “We need 43 grapes urgently.” My niece would sprint off and carefully count out 43 grapes. Then my wife would say, “Damn, we got it wrong, we need 14 more. How many will that make it?” We didn’t really care how many grapes we bought, but our niece improved her numeracy in a fun way and her parents didn’t have to shell out for a maths tutor as well.

I suspect parents actually engaging more with their kids over learning
might be way more constructive in the longer term than constantly worrying about the decile number and the NCEA pass rates of the local school.

Not that New Zealand's existing education culture is all bad. During the 1960s and 1970s young school leavers were often encouraged to get a 'real job' and not waste their time in the 'ivory tower' that many called university. However, as becoming employed without a university education got more and more difficult, most New Zealanders now accept that education is the key to future economic success.

As our population ages we need the future workforce to be a smart one. We already work longer hours than many other richer countries, and our dairy farming and tourism are approaching capacity, so we desperately need a smart economy with smart people running it. So are we preparing for the future in the right way? I'm not so sure.

I suspect parents actually engaging more with their kids over learning might be way more constructive in the longer term than constantly worrying about the decile number and the NCEA pass rates of the local school.

When I attended school in the 1970s, our demographic was shaped like a pyramid. We had a large Year 9 (form 3) of 8 classes and a small Year 13 (seventh form) of two classes. Only the academic elite went to university. Today, most schools are rectangles with as many students in Year 13 as Year 9. And that is probably a good thing.

Yet with more students attending universities, significant changes have occurred. Education is now big business. Attract lots of students, especially fee-paying ones from overseas, and your institution will be deemed a success. Who cares what they actually learn or don't learn?

More engagement with education has seen standards decline. But is that such a bad thing? There are people attending tertiary institutions who would never have dreamed of it 30 years ago.

But has our interest, some might say obsession, with getting as many young people as possible into education gone too far? Have we thrown out the apprentice and cadet babies with the bathwater? I'm not convinced the best way to prepare a tradesperson, policeman, nurse or even the head of a government department is by having them do a university degree first.

Could there be alternative pathways where younger people spend time in the workforce in a more practical role early on and then later incorporate university or other tertiary study into their life?

As I recently watched students vomiting into the footpath during Orientation Week, I wondered if education, like youth, was wasted on the young?

Some of our greatest politicians educated themselves in their own time thanks to organisations such as the Workers Educational Association (WEA). We all know that in a First World society, learning should never stop. But I can understand that the last thing a 25-year-old – who might have spent two decades in the education system with nothing to show for it but a Master's degree and a massive student debt – wants to do is undergo yet more education.

The other national conversation that we'll probably never have because we're too busy paying off our student loan and saving for a house in the Grammar Zone is what is the real role of education?

Sector groups play up the economic value of education but what about the societal one? The word citizenship is hardly mentioned today. Shouldn't turning out enquiring, democratic minds that are quick to challenge be an essential part of our education system? The trouble is, when you try to debate contentious issues and get students to take risks and do all the things that Pythagoras and Socrates encouraged their students to do, you are met with the question "are we going to be assessed on this?"

PABLO PICASSO AND ERNEST HEMINGWAY

Are we so assessment-obsessed that we're focusing on the wrong things? If Pablo Picasso, Ernest Hemingway and Marie Curie were alive today and applied for a job at a New Zealand tertiary education institution I doubt they'd make the shortlist. After all, they all lack post-graduate qualifications, have little experience with assessment procedures, and have no experience with 'essential' educational software like Blackboard.

So what does a future public service want out of our education system? I suspect most CEOs would say they want smart, engaged, flexible employees but the question is how do we actually produce them?

Perhaps government organisations need to adopt their own education culture. To fully meet future challenges, perhaps they will take a more creative approach – pay less attention to assessment and qualifications and pay more attention to an individual's potential.

Perhaps they will not expect employees to be trained in less important things like process and use of software and will put more store in the intelligence, work ethic and creativity of the individual. In other words, rather than relying on the universities and other tertiary institutions to do their work for them, they will take more responsibility for selecting and then training and educating staff.

I heard a story about a police chief in Mexico who demands that all his staff read at least one novel a month, as he wants them to be rounded individuals. While that may be going a bit far, in the days that the public service took more responsibility for educating their own – with cadet systems, apprenticeships and the like – the sky did definitely not fall in.
DEGREES
– ARE THEY REALLY WORTH IT?

Over the past year I’ve been trying to better understand and to quantify the likely returns from education. It started with a long sequence of passionate, opinion-based debates with officials, ministers and members of the public about the value (or lack thereof) of arts degrees, PhDs, plumbers and/or engineers to New Zealand. It ended with a close, year-long look at all 2.15 million people in employment at the time of the 2013 Census.

The findings were simple. A degree is a smart investment. The more educated you are the more you are likely to earn. And, the more educated you are, the less likely it is you will be unemployed.

Taking just people in full-time employment at the time of the Census, those with a PhD (doctorate) were earning 22% more than people with a master’s or honours level degree. Those with a master’s or honours degree were earning around 9% more than those with just a bachelor’s degree. Those with a bachelor’s degree were earning around 40% more than those with just a school-level qualification.

$1.6M MORE

According to the findings, total annual income of a typical university graduate working full time will be over $23,000 more than that of a non-graduate. Indeed, a typical university graduate will earn around $1.6m more over their working life than a non-graduate and this assumes they have taken years out of work to get their degree, have taken on loans and have then repaid them. The $1.6m is after all those costs are accounted for. If that student progresses to do a doctorate, then his or her working life earnings will typically be over $2m more than those of a non-graduate.

And, interestingly, unemployment rates three years after graduation are lower for arts graduates (typically around 2-3% unemployment) than for plumbers or carpenters (8% unemployed on average). And, even when you account for years of lost earnings while studying and student loans, arts graduates typically have life-time earnings that are double that of those with a trades qualification.

But, how appropriate are the jobs to the qualification, I hear you ask?

I looked at all 723 job titles that graduates aged 29-38 were employed under and found that 88.3% were in jobs that either needed a degree or where a degree was likely to be useful. Only just over 11% of graduates had done a degree they didn’t need for their work.

PAYBACK

My next question was whether New Zealand taxpayers were getting a payback from subsidising two-thirds of the cost of a typical graduate’s education through tuition subsidies. Again, we modelled this and found that just counting the average income tax paid by graduates, graduates typically pay back all the costs of their education plus another $200,000 over their working life. That’s before other contributions through GST and company tax. So even from a government and taxpayer perspective, the outcomes are pretty good.

In 1992, 8.2% of the population had a degree. In 2014 this had risen to 28% and 38% of young people leaving school are now starting university.

New Zealand will always need plumbers, electricians and the vast array of other jobs that just don’t (and shouldn’t ever) need a degree. And, not everyone who gets a degree will be successful or end up enjoying working in jobs that use their degrees. But for most, a degree is more likely to lead to better job security and lifetime earnings. And the more educated you are, the better the returns.
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