TITLE: THE CHANGING FACE OF BOARDING HOSTELS

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Report of study undertaken during Principal's Sabbatical
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BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

In recent years it has become apparent that the number and profile of students attending boarding schools has changed and many boarding schools are finding it challenging to fully utilise their boarding hostels. This can mean there are significant educational and often community resources which are under-utilised. The purpose of this report is review changes taking place in boarding hostels and to share ideas and strategies to enhance the use and effectiveness of boarding facilities across the boarding sector.

While most boarding schools are secondary schools the schools differ widely in their size, location, make up of their student profile and the ethos they follow. The range includes primary, secondary and composite, single sex and co-ed, state, state integrated and independent schools. Despite this or perhaps because of it, students who board at school have a unique schooling experience which has an enormous impact on them. The schools cater for a diverse range of students many of whom need to be at boarding school because of their own or their family's circumstances. Boarding schools still contribute strongly to the success and the richness and strength of the New Zealand education system.

The focus of the sabbatical was what schools are doing or changing to ensure the boarding experience is relevant and attractive to students and their families and to consider ideas, strategies or changes to better utilise and future-proof school boarding hostels.

SCOPE OF THE STUDY

In 2002 the Ministry of Education published Student Well-being in School Boarding Accommodation which presented the results of a study it had commissioned to inform the development of regulations for school boarding hostels in New Zealand. The study noted there were 108 schools with student boarding facilities, catering for some 10,000 boarders. Currently according to the Ministry of Education there are 103 licensed school hostels. 92 schools are listed on the website of the New Zealand Boarding Schools' Association (NZBSA) although not all of these continue to offer boarding options to their students. Most of the schools are secondary schools. For this study 73 schools who are members of the New Zealand Boarding Schools Association were contacted.

The sample in the study is approximately representative of locations of boarding schools in New Zealand. Of the respondent schools, 45% were located in major cities (Auckland Hamilton, Christchurch, Wellington/Hutt and Dunedin), 40% were in smaller cities or large provincial towns and 15% were in smaller towns or rural areas. This compares with the locations of boarding schools listed in the NZBSA website of 38% in large cities, 45% in smaller provincial cities or large towns and 16% in smaller towns or rural areas. The hostels represented in the sample are spread throughout New Zealand.

A comparison of types of school hostels of the respondents against types of school hostels listed on the NZBSA website is as follows:

Type of School/Hostel				Size of Hostels	
School Type	Respondents (%)	Total Listed on NZBSA Website (%)		Numbers of students in respondents' Hostels	% of sample
Boys	42.5	33		0-50	17.5
Girls	32.5	37		50-100	27.5
Co-ed	25	30		100-150	35
				150+	20
State	40	40			
Integrated	27.5	31			
Independent	32.5	29			

The sample in the study gives very good representation of types of schools and a good representation of different sized hostels.

If all of the hostels represented in the study were full, the estimated number of students in those school boarding hostels would be about 4750 students. However many hostels are not operating at their capacity and some are significantly below capacity. The closest that can be said is the number of students in boarding in the sample schools is between 3500 and 4500 with a figure near the lower number appearing more likely.

There are 5 fewer licensed hostels than there were in 2002. It appears anecdotally that the number of students in school boarding hostels has decreased in recent years. This is also evidenced in the demise of Maori boarding schools, the closure of some hostels, the renovation of hostel facilities which includes reductions in the number of beds to create individual spaces and the spare beds in others.
 The exact extent of this is difficult to gauge and this was outside the scope of this study but the effect appears to have been greater in provincial boarding schools than those in the main cities.

This is noted in an article from The Aucklander, 6 May 2010, in which John Landrigan wrote:

More Auckland parents than ever are sending their children to boarding school in the city - it's easier than long, twice-daily commutes.

St Kentigern housemaster Brett Meuli points out that a child at boarding school can gain two extra hours each day for study or sports. "We're in a situation where half of our students could commute. It's a lifestyle choice."
Ten years ago, boarders from the provinces dominated St Kent's Bruce House. Now that balance has shifted to Aucklanders.

King's College is much the same. Communications manager Gael Panama says about half of boarders are from Greater Auckland. "There's definitely been a change. Traditionally, boarding was about kids from the country."
As the provinces build up their schools, there's been less need to travel. "It's been replaced by Auckland people.

Anecdotally the major reasons suggested for declining numbers in other areas include:

1. Decline in potential clientele numbers in traditional catchment areas such as rural areas as they decline in population
2. Changing economic circumstances of the provincial and rural sector
3. Greater mobility of families and young people
4. The spread of and access to Information Technology and communication and Virtual learning opportunities
5. Attitudes to the boarding lifestyle which is sometimes seen as antiquated

In retrospect it would have been useful to ask respondents in the study about the actual numbers of students in their boarding hostels and trends in these numbers.

METHODOLOGY

The study took place over April and May of 2015. The initial scope of the proposal proved too wide to complete in the two and a half week time frame available. The study therefore included:

1. Literature search

An online search for relevant research and literature indicates that there is very little research or literature available on New Zealand boarding schools or on trends in boarding education.

2. Development and analysis of online survey

An online survey was sent by email to 73 boarding schools who are members of the NZ Boarding Schools' Association. 40 responses were received, a response rate of 54.8%. Of these responses 4 were largely incomplete. Numbers of responses to questions ranged from 30 to 40. The questions and results of this survey are included here.

3. Attendance at the New Zealand Boarding Schools Association Conference.

This gave the opportunity to discuss the survey purpose and questions with conference delegates and to encourage participation in the on-line survey. Information was also sought from conference delegates about other research and literature.

SURVEY RESULTS AND FINDINGS

Section 1: BOARDING OPTIONS

92.5% of schools offer 7 day per week boarding, 40% offer 4-5 night boarding and 35% offer casual or flexible boarding arrangements. The casual and flexible boarding arrangements offered are generally to students who are attending the school and whose parents request a short term boarding arrangement to allow them to meet work commitments or who are travelling away for a period of time.

Only 12.5% of schools have reviewed or changed their boarding arrangements in the previous three years and only 27.5% intend to change or review the boarding arrangements they offer in the next 12 months. Those who have changed their arrangements have done so to increase flexibility for families including to accommodate weekend sports commitments.

The predominant boarding arrangement remains at 7 days per week although respondents were not asked what proportion of the boarders in their hostels board for 7 days. The relatively small number of schools reviewing their boarding arrangements to increase flexibility was surprising. My own experience in my school is that families are seeking greater flexibility in the boarding arrangements made. This is an area which schools can consider reviewing to make boarding more attractive to local students.

Section 2: STUDENT MANAGEMENT, ACTIVITIES AND SERVICES

Question 5 of the survey asked about student leave from the hostel and access and involvement in offsite activities. The responses indicate that this is a significant area of change in school boarding hostels with between 41.9% and 35.5% of respondents indicating they had made changes to allow for more student leave and greater student involvement in off-site activities in their local communities. 25.8% and 19.3% of respondents respectively also indicated that they had increased family access and student access to families. This included such things as much more independent and regular phone contact and mid-week visits to the hostel by parents and to home by students. The old stereotype of students being sent to boarding school and having little or no contact with their families and local community has changed significantly.

The way hostels are run is identified as the area of most change in student management with 58% of respondents indicating that student involvement in decision making has increased in recent years and 58% of respondents changing their hostel routines and 41.9% changing their rules. While the study did not require explanation of these changes, anecdotal comment indicates that the changes are generally to make hostels more "student-friendly" and responsive to student needs.

Responses to other items included in this section indicate that hostels are also increasingly responsive to student health and safety needs with 48.4% identifying this as an area of change and with 41.9% identifying their emergency procedures as areas for recent change. This is not surprising given recent events (such as the Christchurch earthquake and highly publicised lockdowns) and the current focus on health and safety legislation and should be an area for on-going review in school hostels.

Increased student access to health and counselling and support services has also been an area of change for up to 32% of hostels.

While results from this section of the survey indicate that many school boarding hostels are more responsive to student needs, there is room for further change and development given that 62.8% of respondents did not intend in the next 12 months to review or change any of the items identified. A limitation of the survey is that it did not identify how responsive hostels are, only whether there had been changes or intended changes in the identified areas.

Questions 7 to 11 related to student access to IT in boarding hostels. It is clear from the responses that this is an area of marked change with 77.8% of hostels making "significant" changes to levels of student access to IT in the past three years. 77.8% of respondents indicated that students have internet access through school systems while wifi was available in 83.3% of cases. Students have access to school IT devices in the case of 27.8 respondents and 69.4% of respondents indicated that students have access to their own IT devices in the hostel environment.

As is to be expected hostels overwhelmingly place some restrictions on access either at set times (41.2%) or until "lights out" (50%) with only one respondent indicating that unrestricted access was permitted.

Respondents indicated that they use a use a variety of measures to manage student use of IT. 88.9% have a signed agreement with students and their families setting out the restrictions, and 86.1% restrict access to sites in most cases through school systems. The other most common way to manage student use of IT was in restricting where devices may be used (33.3%). In these cases restrictions applied to areas of specific use such as the dining room, the Chapel, or during specific activities such as "prep" or during sports activities.

In the fast developing world of IT 66.7% of respondents had no plans to change or review access to IT in their hostels in the next 12 months. It may be that such changes and developments, planned or otherwise, will inevitably take place in most hostels. Rather than embracing it, some school boarding hostels still seek ways to minimise or prevent student access to IT and social media. While not advocating a "free for all", this should be seen as an area with great potential for ensuring hostel students have the advantages of being connected and very much at the forefront as digital citizens and learners.

Question 12 asked about changes in catering and food options and given the traditional prominence given to this in boarding hostels and the stereotype of boarding schools offering stodgy, cheap and badly prepared food, it is not surprising that most respondents indicated significant changes had been made to menus (66.8%), increased "healthy" options (75%) and increased consultation with students (66.7%). Increased self-catering (19.5%), catering more for individuals (41.7%) and giving more choice (30%) and variations in meal times (22%) are also noted as significant changes.

Catering and food is an area where boarding hostels are increasingly responsive to student needs and it may well be helpful to those promoting boarding as an option to consider ways to demonstrate the widespread improvements that have occurred in most hostels. Other changes in this area related to catering arrangements with hostels opting to outsource catering to contractors or in a couple of cases to return to employing their own staff to provide catering services.

Section 3: HOSTEL BUILDINGS AND FACILITIES

Questions 13 to 15 asked about changes to hostel buildings and facilities.

Unsurprisingly upgrading of IT networks featured strongly here with 66.8% of respondents indicating that this was an area they had renewed or upgraded in the last three years. Upgrades of dormitories and bedrooms also featured strongly with 63.6% or respondents' hostels having undertaken upgrades or renewals. Also significant was the upgrading or renewing of bathroom facilities which had been upgraded in 42.4% of cases.

Increased attention to the safety of students (and perhaps to monitoring them!) was indicated in the 48.5% of respondents who had renewed or upgraded their security monitoring. Such devices as CCTV cameras, security alarms and lighting are becoming increasingly common in schools and around boarding hostels.

The reasons for these upgrades were mainly attributed to planned or scheduled maintenance (63.6%) and modernisation programmes (57.6%). There is a significant response to family and student expectations around the facilities provided (36.4%). The upgrade or renewal of facilities in response to earthquake strengthening was surprisingly low (24.4%) and may become an area of greater change once the results of engineering assessments for earthquake risk currently being undertaken in schools and hostels are evaluated.

Most boarding schools undertake significant and on-going upgrades and renewal or modernisation of their facilities. It was outside the scope of the survey to identify specifically what these upgrades are but dormitories with individual spaces which offer greater privacy are becoming the norm. It would seem that most hostels are responsive to the changing needs of their students in considering the facilities they provide.

Question 16 asked about utilisation of hostel facilities and all but 3 respondents indicated they used hostel facilities for outside groups during school holiday time. This was higher than expected although the occupancy rate during school holidays is not known. Two hostels were also utilised by outside groups during term time and given that some hostels have spare capacity this may be an area schools could look to in the future. There could also be opportunities for weekend hire of hostels.

Section 4: HOSTEL STAFFING AND HOSTEL PROMOTION

Responses to Question 17 indicate there have been a variety of significant changes to staffing in school hostels. Nearly half (46.7%) of the respondents have changed rostering arrangements in the past three years to include night shifts. This is in response to the "sleep over" rulings which require staff to be paid if they are on call at night and may also account for some of the changes in duties identified by 40% of respondents. Staff professional development is increasingly seen as important with a third of hostels in the survey increasing staff access to this. This is indicative of increasing professionalism amongst staff in boarding hostels. The comparatively small number of respondents (10%) indicating they have changed staff access to IT and the way they use IT was surprising. This would seem to offer significant opportunities for improved administration and communication with students and families.

Question 18 asked about promotion and advertising of school hostels. With word of mouth (88%) and family connections (79%) being seen as by far the most important way of promoting and, by implication, recruiting students a boarding style education still seems to

be the domain of traditional sections or associated groups. Half of the respondents also saw the internet and promotional visits or events as important so perhaps this is slowly changing. It would seem however that most boarding schools are still largely relying on their traditional clientele to fill their hostels.

Question 19 asked respondents to provide comment or information about ways they were looking ahead to cater for the needs of 21st century students in school hostels. This question received the fewest number of responses and these can be summarised as follows:

- Hostel improvements in general
- Electronic leave system (2 responses)
- More privacy for students (3 responses)
- Private vs public schools – it seems harder for public schools to compete with private schools
- Look to cater for all sorts of overseas students who are looking at programmes that may not be academically based eg sports who and may be here for a short (eg 8 week or 6 month) stay. Look to accommodate them in a flat type situation with a support person or parent with them if needed
- Providing well maintained facilities which make students feel comfortable and want to be here
- Modernise refurbish facilities (2 responses)
- Increase parent and student involvement in Hostel policy making
- More access to recreation facilities, (eg common rooms , swimming pool, eating areas)
- More access to IT including sound proof IT suite or studio
- External improvements such as parking, signage
- Develop individual personal growth plans for students

The comparatively small number of responses and range of ideas in this section suggests that there is room for more innovative thinking around the future direction and development of boarding hostels.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

While a good cross section of New Zealand's boarding schools are represented in the survey the sample size (40 out of 103 licensed hostels) is a limiting factor in drawing definitive conclusions from this survey. The study was conducted in a short time frame and raises many more questions and areas for further research. Despite this, some useful suggestions may be made.

At the outset of the study one of the potential benefits of the study was the opportunity to share strategies and ideas on how to maintain and enhance the special opportunities provided by boarding schools in the fast moving IT world of the future. The study found that many boarding hostels are adapting quickly and providing good levels of IT access and support for students and thus opportunities for enhancing learning. An area for on-going development is in utilising IT as a way of increasing family contact and involvement in hostels and therefore schools. While many hostels have made dramatic changes in this area boarding schools still appear often to be seen as places where students are sent and once

there, are expected to have little or no contact with home and family or indeed the "outside world". Boarding hostels need to make it clear that this is no longer the case.

Most students in the modern boarding environment have opportunities to be highly connected through IT and this should be celebrated as a strength of boarding education. With increased student access and use of IT and use of IT in hostel administration there is considerable scope to enhance the boarding experience and relevance for students and improve student management and communications between students, families and staff. In particular there is considerable scope for increasing the use of IT in communicating with families.

Another potential benefit of the study was to consider how to modernise attitudes to boarding schools both in the schools themselves (where needed) and from the perspective of the rest of the community as this could be of benefit to schools and their wider communities. Involvement of boarders in their schools' local communities is increasing and this could also assist with changing attitudes.

The results of the study indicated that boarding hostels are continually and purposefully developing. The modernisation of hostel facilities, changes in rules and routines and flexible boarding arrangements, the considerable and increasing attention paid to the well-being, care, support and development of students and much greater involvement of students and families in hostel decision decision-making also all need to be recognised as part of the changing face of boarding.

Hampering this recognition are the stereotypes which are still prevalent among many of those not familiar with boarding environments. These stereotypes include such things as awful, inadequate or stodgy food, rites of passage which amount to bullying, rigid structures and traditional rule bound hierarchies, spartan facilities, lack of physical comfort in dorms and hostels and lack of individual privacy. That most boarding hostels in the sample appear still rely heavily on their traditional clientele to recruit students may encourage a tendency to entrench those stereotypes held by others. In the light of this it would be useful for those in the boarding sector to cooperate more and be more proactive in breaking down these stereotypes and to energetically and positively promote boarding as a modern and successful and accessible educational option.

A further issue hampering this cooperation is the increasing competition for fewer students. There could be opportunities for some cooperation between schools in finding new potential clientele for example in overcrowded student markets such as Auckland, or in recruiting internationally. Different schools in different locations have different opportunities, experiences and activities to offer. Boarding schools could look to cooperate to offer these differing experiences to their students. An example of potential cooperation could be to provide accommodation to international or domestic students attending other city schools to allow them access to short term rural based activities such as farm or equestrian experiences or outdoor adventure activities available in provincial areas.

Another potential outcome identified at the start of this study was to try to develop ideas and strategies to more effectively utilise hostels including in addition to during the usual school terms. Almost all hostels in the study are already available for outside use during school holidays. Ways of utilising spare capacity during term time and or weekends requires

further exploration. Examples might be short term stays for groups such as sports teams, performing groups, leadership programmes or international students. A barrier to this is ensuring such utilisation, probably by outside groups, does not conflict with the core business of the school or with the school and hostel's special character (specifically in the case of integrated schools).

A further idea for consideration is the possibility offering accommodation to students attending other schools.

Comparatively few hostels offer very flexible boarding arrangements but these could be more widely considered as a means of more fully utilising boarding capacity. Along with this, offering students enhanced services such as transport to and from airports and weekend activities, access to other off-site activities to suit individual needs and interests, flexible living (such as in flat type accommodation) and more flexible catering arrangements are all possibilities to increase the attractiveness of boarding.

In summary, the study does indicate that there is considerable on-going change and development in school boarding hostels in New Zealand. While for some the "charm" of boarding is partially to be found in its traditions, in the 21st century school boarding hostels need to be increasingly forward thinking and innovative in seeking ways to enhance the boarding experience and to promote it as an educational option. They need to be connected, including through IT and social media, with their students, families and communities and to encourage their students to be connected. They need to be responsive to the changing needs of their students and their families and they need to be flexible enough to maximise this responsiveness. They then need to seek ways to cooperate across the sector to share information about the reality of the 21st century boarding experience to reach a clientele who may not be from their traditional catchments.

An area of inquiry not included in the study was the responsiveness of boarding hostels to New Zealand's increasing multi-culturalism and how hostels may be adapting their practices to cater for the needs of students from differing ethnic communities. This is an area which certainly needs further investigation.

This study indicates there still is much work which could be done.

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