

Sabbatical Report – Roger Moses, Wellington College

- 1) Title “Some reflection on appraisal processes with a particular emphasis on the needs of senior management teams in large secondary schools.”
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- 3) Acknowledgements

At the outset, may I acknowledge how grateful I was to both the Wellington College Board of Trustees, my Senior Management Team and the Ministry of Education for allowing me to enjoy a sabbatical beginning in the last week of Term 2 and concluding at the end of Term 3. After 21 years of being in the role of Headmaster at Wellington College, it was important both to enjoy a period of refreshment and to examine critically how different schools and government agencies (including the Education Council, E.R.O. and the Ministry of Education) were approaching the new requirements of teacher appraisal. The focus of my study narrowed from my original proposal of ‘appraisal’ in general terms, to a more specific focus on the needs of Senior Management Teams in large secondary schools. This change emerged from a growing conviction that the Practising Teacher Criteria (PTC’s), mandated by the Education Council as a prerequisite for teacher registration, concentrated more on the needs and competencies of the classroom teacher, than the crucial and diverse tasks undertaken by Senior Managers, which often enable others to teach effectively and ensure the smooth running of schools. It is clear that, for all teachers, the gathering of a ‘portfolio of evidence’ on an annual basis is mandatory for renewed, teacher registration. This process must now form a major part of appraisal for all, irrespective of the role the teacher may hold in the school. It can be argued that a senior manager’s role may often incorporate the 12 PTC’s. However, it seemed to me, and to other principals to whom I spoke, that such a ‘one size fits all’ approach may well detract from the emphasis of a senior manager’s appraisal which, in my firm view, should focus primarily on the effectiveness with which that particular role was being fulfilled in the context of an individual school. Improved performance for the senior manager (and indeed the management team as a whole) should remain the cornerstone of SMT appraisal, rather than the gathering of evidence which fulfils the requirements of a predetermined model of teacher competence.

I am very grateful to the ten secondary principals whom I visited, the two highly experienced former principals I interviewed who both have acknowledged expertise in SMT appraisal, and to the wonderful leaders of The Education Group, whose excellent seminars on appraisal, I had the privilege to attend.

- 4) Executive Summary

It is somewhat ironic that, just at the very time a number of leading international companies are ditching the concept of an annual appraisal (eg. Accenture, Deloitte, Microsoft), New Zealand educational authorities, such as The Education Review Office and The Education Council are increasing the emphasis on teacher annual appraisal as a key focus for improving both educational outcomes and teacher accountability. A central feature of this emphasis is the incorporation of the 12 Practising Teacher Criteria (PTC’s) which must be assessed on an annual basis to facilitate

teacher registration. In addition, secondary teachers need to comply with The Professional Standards for Secondary Teachers (as outlined in the collective contract) as well as being familiar with the cultural competencies outlined in Tataiako (produced by the Ministry of Education). Despite the considerable overlap, the three sets of criteria all reflect attempts by different educational agencies to encapsulate the essence of what constitutes good teaching. The clear assumption permeating this heightened emphasis on appraisal is that a more rigorous, formalised process will lead to better educational outcomes for students and, therefore, demonstrably better schools. At this stage, it is probably too early to ascertain whether such a mooted improvement has actually occurred as a result of this new approach. It is my conviction that, in the interest of an evidence-based approach to policy, such an analysis of educational outcomes should be made within the next few years to evaluate whether the PTC's, as a key feature of appraisal, have actually made a difference.

In my research topic, I was keen to determine what systems of appraisal best suited those teachers working in senior management teams. So much of the emphasis evident in the PTC's (e.g. "conceptualise, plan and implement an appropriate learning programme) and the Professional Standards for Secondary Teaching, pertains to the very important role of the classroom teacher. In a typical large secondary school, however, many senior managers spend little, if any, of their time in actual classroom teaching, but rather in creating and administering efficient systems which enable good teaching to flourish. In my own school for example, Wellington College, there are five managers exclusive of the Headmaster and Business Manager. The Associate Principal is responsible for day-to-day management and has an overall oversight for student discipline issues. He does not teach a class. The four other Deputy Principals each have specific portfolios. One is in charge of Curriculum, another Pastoral Systems, another Staffing and another Timetabling and Ministry returns. They all teach one class only. It is, therefore, only sensible that their appraisal should focus on the work they do and not necessarily on the compilation of a portfolio of evidence which simply satisfies the requirements of the PTC's.

In my view, the Education Council which mandates the PTC's, needs to allow significantly greater flexibility in acknowledging that the portfolio of a senior manager in a large secondary school will often differ substantially from that of a regular classroom teacher or even senior managers in a smaller school where the teaching component is much greater. The clear assumption permeating this increased emphasis on appraisal is that such a rigorous process will lead consequentially to enhanced academic outcomes and, therefore, a demonstrably improved schooling system. Despite this apparently widely held assumption, there appears to be scant evidence as yet available in New Zealand that such rigorously applied appraisal systems actually produce significantly better outcomes in such important academic indicators as NCEA or Scholarship. That is why some thorough evaluation of these new requirements is imperative in the relatively near future.

In my research, I was keen to ascertain what systems of appraisal best suited those working in a Senior Management Team as, has been stated, so much of the emphasis evident in both the Practising Teacher Criteria and the Professional Standards for Secondary Teaching pertains to activity within the classroom.

My discussion with all the principals of the schools I visited confirmed the feeling that the new model of appraisal, incorporating the 12 PTC's on an annual basis, was often an awkward fit for

senior managers in large secondary schools. No one questioned the need for self-reflection, professional development or goal-setting. However, there was general agreement that the more specialised roles of the SMT in large secondary schools required a modified approach to appraisal. The best models I observed all agreed on the imperative of clear job descriptions, realistic performance criteria and regular conferencing throughout the year. All PTC's would not always be fulfilled on an annual basis because of the more specialised roles. Nevertheless, it is clear that the senior manager may well have fulfilled her/his key role in an exemplary manner by helping to create a school-wide environment which enabled the classroom teacher to grow and flourish. Many colleagues to whom I spoke also believed that the overall performance of the management team as a whole should be a focus of appraisal, rather than just an emphasis on the individual manager. This reflected an increasingly collaborative style of leadership which is implicit in building an effective team.

5) Purpose (as in proposal)

The initial purpose of my proposal was to examine models of appraisal for all secondary teachers. Over the past couple of years, most schools have been giving particular attention to this question. However, at the beginning of 2016 I decided to narrow the focus to the appraisal requirements of senior managers. As alluded to in the executive summary, this change of direction emerged from a sense that the mandatory 'portfolio of evidence' required, on an annual basis, to fulfil the PTC's could be problematic for senior managers whose direct focus was no longer in the classroom. Therefore, I wanted to explore good practice in different schools and to read as widely as possible to ascertain what potential approaches were most appropriate for this crucial group of staff in large secondary schools.

6) Activities Undertaken (Methodology)

My project incorporated four separate but closely related activities:

- a) A considerable range of reading material on appraisal from both New Zealand and abroad. (See subsequent reference section).
- b) Ten school visits
 - Cashmere High School
 - Christchurch Boys' High School
 - Rongotai College
 - Hutt Valley High School
 - Wellington Girls' College
 - Paraparaumu College
 - Newlands College
 - Westlake Boys' High School
 - Rangitoto College
 - Auckland Grammar School
- c) Two Appraisal Courses
 - Training for Primary and Secondary School Appraisers - Kerry Mitchell and Nicky Knight – The Education Group

- Appraisal of Principals and Tumuaki – Kerry Mitchell and Nicky Knight – The Education Group

d) Extended interviews with two former principals with considerable experience of SMT appraisal

- Mr Bruce Murray QSO, former Principal Tawa College
- Mr Ian McKinnon CNZM, QSO, former Headmaster Scots College

7) Key Findings

- a. Just as the education sector is endeavouring to make formal teacher appraisal more rigorous (with the express purposes of self-improvement and teacher accountability), many leading international companies (such as Microsoft, Dell, Accenture, Deloitte, Cigna, G.E. and Adobe) are ditching the formalised, annual review in favour of more regular, less structured meetings between the ‘appraiser’ and ‘appraisee’. G.E.’s Head of Human Resources, Susan Peters, stated that ‘We think over many years, it had become more a ritual than moving the company upward and forward.’ At the very least, these emerging trends are a reminder for our education sector, that any system of appraisal must have at its heart a quantifiable improvement of an individual’s performance and also that of the school in which she or he is working. Without clear evidence of improvement as a direct result, the whole exercise needs to be scrutinised.
- b. With the clear assumption that more rigorous appraisal of teachers will produce enhanced educational outcomes, the Education Council of New Zealand, has placed more emphasis on a formalised approach to appraisal and re-registration since its inception in 2015. Central to this philosophical approach has been the introduction of the 12 Practising Teacher Criteria. (P.T.C.’s). In the words of the Education Council “The PTC’s describe the criteria for quality teaching that are to be met by all fully certificated teachers in Aotearoa New Zealand.” It is mandated by the Education Council that the PTC’s are to be met annually by all teachers in schools, attested by a portfolio of evidence. An audit of this evidence will be undertaken by the Education Review Office as part of their cycle of evaluating schools.

Quite unequivocally, these new requirements have had a significant impact on the appraisal model of all teachers, deliberately moving the process in a very specific direction in which annual compliance with the 12 PTC’s is of paramount importance as a prerequisite for teacher registration.

In my opinion, this new set of criteria is worthy in its intent (if somewhat repetitive) but focuses too specifically on the role of the classroom teacher. While this emphasis is understandable, I believe that it fails to recognise adequately the role played by a significant number of teachers who are part of a senior management team in a large secondary school. For that central group, classroom teaching will often be a small, or even non-existent part of their portfolio. Rather, their focus will be on creating and administering systems which enable others to teach effectively. Their extensive portfolios may oversee such vital components of school life as curriculum, pastoral systems, staff selection and training, timetabling, discipline or student leadership. Manifestly, the focus of their appraisal should be on the efficacy of their school-wide role, rather than searching for evidence which simply fulfils the requirements of the mandated PTC’s. I have no doubt that most members of a senior management team would be able to construct such a portfolio of evidence on an annual basis. However, I fear there is a

real danger that such a process could become more a 'box-ticking' exercise to fulfil prescribed requirements, rather than a genuine appraisal of the role the senior manager is undertaking. This concern was shared by many of the principal colleagues whom I visited during my sabbatical.

There were a significant number of excellent ideas for SMT appraisal that I gleaned from my reading and interviews with principals. While the following list is by no means comprehensive, it does suggest a number of steps that may be useful in creating a meaningful appraisal system for senior managers.

- Reflection prior to end-of-year appraisal meeting

Before the key meeting at the end of a year between the principal and senior manager, the manager should produce a written reflection on the year which acts as a basis for discussion. At one school, the reflection focussed on a number of general questions such as the following:

- "In considering your role as part of the SMT, what do you think have been some of the outstanding achievements for the school over the last year?"
- What particular successes have you had in your portfolio?
- What challenges have you had to overcome in reaching your leadership goals this year?
- What areas of leadership responsibility do you think you could have done better?
- Looking forward to next year, what do you think should be your main goals in your area of leadership?
- What significant changes in your leadership role, if any, would benefit you and the school next year?
- How has your leadership role this year benefitted the students of the school?"

The importance of this written reflection lies in the raising of any issues that the senior manager may wish to raise during the end-of-year meeting.

- End-of-year Appraisal Meeting

The principal and senior manager should timetable at least a couple of hours for this meeting, probably after the Year 11-13 students have left for external examinations. It should be an uninterrupted time when the two participants can focus fully on the professional development needs of the senior manager. Discussion should cover the following areas:

- Any issues that may have emerged from the written reflection.
- A thorough discussion of the current job description and any modifications that may be requested.
- A discussion of key tasks, desired outcomes and performance indicators that may have changed from the modified job description. These draft changes should be confirmed by the beginning of the following year.
- A discussion of two potential specific goals for the following year should also be mooted, linked preferably to school-wide strategic goals.

At one excellent school that I visited, each member of the SMT had overall responsibility for one strand of the strategic plan as part of her portfolio, and her personal goals came directly from that overall responsibility. These two specific goals for the senior manager should also be confirmed by the start of the following year.

- Regular scheduled monthly meetings throughout the course of the year

As mentioned previously in the first of the key findings, one of the changing practices of many international firms, is the regular scheduling of less formal meetings throughout the course of the year. This recognises the reality that annual goals may become quickly outdated in a dynamic work environment where there is an increasing emphasis on a team rather than individual performance. Regular feedback and less formal discussion is seen as increasingly relevant to the improved performance of the company. I believe that the same is probably true of large secondary schools in New Zealand. One very large and highly successful school I visited had introduced this system of regular monthly meetings between the principal and his direct reports. Both the principal and the senior managers had found such a regular meeting to be mutually beneficial. While the scheduled half hour meeting may only last five minutes, it nevertheless provides a regular and formalised opportunity for discussion of any issues which may have arisen. This simple, but highly effective step, provides real meaning to any subsequent summative appraisal that may occur later in the year.

- External Feedback

A number of schools found it useful to generate some external feedback from those people with whom the senior manager was working. This approach was not necessarily an annual event, but perhaps undertaken on a triennial basis. It provided some objective data on how others viewed the performance of the senior manager, highlighting those elements of the role which were well-regarded and any areas which may require some professional development. One school used its own questionnaire which the senior manager gave to relevant staff to complete. The principal informed me that this approach was very effective. Another school used the very thorough system developed professionally entitled 'Appraisal Connector.' As the principal in this school was relatively new in his role, this report proved to be a very valuable tool for discussion with his management team. It was also used by the principal himself to ascertain how his own performance was being viewed by others. While this external feedback may be sought at any point of the appraisal cycle, it is only sensible that this data should be generated well before the final appraisal discussion in Term 4.

- Annual Appraisal Report

While, in one sense, this report can be completed by the principal at any stage of the year, it is preferable that it should be completed in Term 1, after goals for the year have been finalised. This leaves ample time for any modifications to job descriptions or annual goals to be completed after the formal appraisal discussion which would normally be conducted at the end of Term 4.

c. I have already indicated that, from my perspective, the PTC's should not be the focus for a senior manager's appraisal. In my view, too much time can be spent on the gathering of evidence which is not necessarily relevant to either evaluating or improving the performance of the senior manager in her/his role. It is entirely possible that a senior manager may be doing a superb job in fulfilling the job description's requirements, but not necessarily completing the twelve PTC's on an annual basis. It is absurd that, because of this mandatory requirement, a senior manager may be deemed deficient in applying for re-registration. I believe that some reasonable flexibility is essential by both the Education Council and ERO in assessing the criteria by which senior managers are deemed eligible to be fully certificated teachers. Some thought also needs to be given to reasonable criteria for relief teachers, itinerant music teachers and guidance counsellors. Similarly, some

urgent attention should be given to incorporating the requirements of The Practising Teacher Criteria, The Professional Standards and Tataiako into a single, simplified format.

8) Conclusions

- a. Goal setting and evaluation/reflection is crucial both for schools as entities and the individual teachers who work within them.
- b. Any process of appraisal must maintain a sharp focus on demonstrably improved educational outcomes. This focus should always be of paramount thought for both the school and the individual teacher.
- c. The Practising Teacher Criteria are now mandated as a compulsory part of any teacher's appraisal to determine eligibility for registration. Central to this is the production of a 'portfolio of evidence' which must be compiled annually by all teachers. In my view, as an experienced principal of over 20 years' leadership, these newly defined PTC's apply more to the competence of a classroom teacher, rather than to the efficacy of a senior manager who may spend very little, or no time, in actual classroom teaching.
- d. For the appraisal of a senior manager to be truly worthwhile, either for purposes of evaluation or reflection, the emphasis must be on how the performance criteria of the specific job description have been fulfilled. This will relate normally to the enhancement of school-wide efficiencies in such specific areas as student discipline, staffing, student leadership, curriculum oversight or property.
- e. Such a meaningful appraisal system for senior managers will normally include the following dimensions.
 - i. A written self-reflection which precedes any formal appraisal meeting.
 - ii. A formal, two hour meeting in Term 4 which reviews the current job description and evaluates the performance indicators. Two annual goals should be identified which are driven by the school's strategic plan.
 - iii. The scheduling of monthly, half-hour meetings between the principal and the senior manager.
 - iv. Some external feedback on the performance of the senior manager. This may involve a questionnaire, interviews with relevant staff/students/wider community, or the use of an external appraiser.
 - v. A final written report, compiled normally by the principal, sometime during Term 1.
- f. The mandatory compilation of a portfolio of evidence (to demonstrate the fulfilment of the 12 PTC's as a prerequisite for re-registration) does not necessarily fit easily for all senior manager who may have a very specific role in a large secondary school. They should not be penalised as a consequence of their more refined job description.
- g. Both the Education Council (who have mandated the 12 PTC's) and ERO (who are employed in an audit capacity) need to establish a more flexible set of criteria to acknowledge the roles performed by such senior managers. Most principals interviewed during this research believed that the mandated approach was too procrustean and needed modification. A failure to do this could well result in the appraisal of senior managers

focussing far too much on an artificial attempt to gather evidence for a portfolio which did not necessarily result in either improved performance in the role or genuine self-reflection.

- h. The whole object of the appraisal process must be the improvement of demonstrable outcomes, both for the school and the teachers who work there. In the interests of national self-reflection, there needs to be a review of those new mandatory requirements within five years, to determine on the basis of evidence, whether enhanced outcomes have actually been achieved as a direct consequence of the implementation of the PTC's. For senior managers who are committed to the increasing demands of their respective roles, it is absolutely vital that their appraisals are fit for purpose and not merely compliance driven.

9) References and Reading material

- Supporting school improvement through effective principal appraisal, (ERO, May 2014)
- Principal Performance Package, (Ron Scott Associates)
- Visible Learning, (John Hattie, 2008)
- Appraisal of Principals and Tumuaki, (The Education Group 2016)
- Tataiako, (Ministry of Education, 2011)
- Training for Primary and Secondary School Appraisers, (The Education Group, 2016)
- In a big move, Accenture will get rid of annual performance reviews and rankings, (The Washington Post, July 2015)
- Ahead of the curve: The future of performance management, (Ewenstein, Hancock, Komm, McKinsey Quarterly, 2016)
- Microsoft and Dell are ditching employee performance reviews (Geoff Colvin, 2015)
- Why more and more companies are ditching performance ratings, (Kenny, Harvard Business Review, 2016)
- Reappraising the appraisal system, (Dominion Post, October 2007)
- Why GE had to kill its annual performance reviews after three decades, (Nisen, Quartz, August 2015)
 - The end of annual appraisal: what's next for performance management? (Crush, Personnel Today, August 2015)
 - Supporting school improvement through effective teacher appraisal (ERO, May 2014)