

International Schooling for Tomorrow Forum Forum international L'école de demain

June 6–8th, 2004

Toronto, Canada

6 au 8 juin 2004



LEAD COUNTRY PAPERS:
NEW ZEALAND



Supported by the Ontario Ministry of Education
Avec la participation du ministère de l'Éducation de l'Ontario



New Zealand's Secondary Futures Project:

Origins and Early Beginnings

Briefing paper for OECD Schooling for Tomorrow Project

The Toolbox for Forward-Thinking, Innovation and School System Change

Toronto Forum
Metro Toronto Convention Centre

New Zealand Ministry of Education
and
Secondary Futures

June 2004

The Secondary Futures Project *Hoenga Auaha Taiohi* was announced by the Minister of Education in September 2003. The project aims to develop a broad-ranging and inclusive discussion about what secondary schooling should be like in 20 years' time.

Origins

The project follows on from a commitment in the NZ Labour Party's 2002 election policy documents to establish: *a Secondary Education Advisory Group - an independent body that will envisage what secondary schools might look like and how they might function 10, 15 or even 20 years from now, so we can shape our system to best help children achieve.*¹

Ministry of Education's strategic policy briefing to the newly (re)elected government in 2002 also highlighted the need for government to work with the schooling sector and the community to generate a discussion about the purpose and direction of secondary schooling, and to refocus professional debate in the sector on quality teaching, student outcomes and responsiveness to diversity.

It also reflects a widespread view amongst sector stakeholders (unions, principals' groups, school trustees) that a structured approach to promoting futures thinking in the sector is needed.

An appetite exists across the sector for applying methods such as those in the OECD toolbox. The OECD scenarios for the future of schooling have had a relatively wide audience and have been well received. There is significant interest in developing an "indigenous" project that can reflect the unique aspects of New Zealand's context and communities.

¹ New Zealand Labour Party - 2002 Early Childhood and Compulsory Education Policy www.labour.org.nz

Context

The project is beginning in a “window of opportunity” to initiate this kind of discussion:

- The Government has implemented the key elements of the education policy agenda it was elected with in 1999. In the education area and across other areas of government there is an appetite to invest in futures thinking.
- Major reform strategies have been developed in the tertiary education and early childhood education sectors. Work is underway to develop a medium-term strategy for the schooling sector that draws together the range of change programmes already underway and sets out priorities for the next 3-5 years. It is recognised in beginning this work that a longer-term exercise is needed – a process that is less constrained by current institutional arrangements and policy commitments.
- The secondary schooling community is seeking an opportunity to discuss future directions after years of significant policy change that have left much of the sector showing signs of fatigue, and after a difficult period of industrial dispute.

While the project will consider primary schooling, the focus is on the secondary sector (Years 9-13).

- This reflects a perception that the primary sector has a relatively stronger sense of purpose and priorities - with a focus on literacy and numeracy, early intervention and supporting transitions into secondary schooling. A number of national strategies are underway that have momentum and widespread support.
- The secondary sector appears to have greater need and opportunity at present for futures thinking work. It faces more varied and conflicting demands from the community. Many of the key outcome indicators of concern at present are in the secondary sector – especially student participation and engagement and school leaver qualifications.
- After years of debate and work to implement a new qualifications system, the teaching profession and government are looking for ways to refocus professional debate on quality and responsiveness. Secondary sector leaders are looking to respond to the opportunities and risks that the NCEA offers through increased flexibility and customisation of learning and assessment. This could have a fundamental impact on the way schooling is organised.

Significant changes in the New Zealand schooling sector in recent years have included:

- Introduction of a new standards-based qualifications system in upper secondary school (the NCEA)
- a new planning and reporting system for schools
- implementation of a new curriculum framework over the last 10 years
- restructuring and reform of special education
- growth of the Maori-medium education in both mainstream and Kura Kaupapa Maori schools
- rapid growth in the number of international students in schools

Outcomes

- High average achievement (PISA) with a long tail of underachievement. Disparities in achievement between groups – with the growing minority groups over-represented amongst those in the tail.
- Some progress in improving literacy and numeracy in primary schooling, but persistent gaps in achievement between Maori and Pasifika students and others.
- No improvement in recent years in the percentage of school leavers with upper secondary qualifications (new qualifications system likely to change this).
- Areas of significant concern in social outcomes from schooling - disengagement, suspensions, truancy, bullying, etc.

Demographic Trends

- Current roll growth in the secondary sector – the largest cohort in the population bulge moving through NZ schools has just entered secondary schooling. Secondary rolls will peak around 2012. Primary school rolls are now falling and further consolidation of the schooling network is required to focus resources on teaching and protect quality of provision.
- As with other OECD countries, teacher supply challenges exist with an ageing workforce, roll growth and increased international mobility.
- The ethnic profile of schools is changing – with an increasing percentage of Maori and Pasifika students, new immigrants and students whose home language is not English.

Beginnings of the Secondary Futures Project in 2003

The Secondary Futures Project was initiated in 2003 following publication of the Government's new overarching policy statement for the education system: "*Education Priorities for New Zealand*"². This included an undertaking to commence work on a school sector strategy and initiate the secondary futures project.

Developing the Concept - Sector Leaders Working Group Discussion Paper

A working group of senior people from a range of school sector stakeholder organisations was formed in late 2002. This included the heads of central government education agencies, union leaders, leading secondary principals, tertiary education sector leaders, and senior principals from Kura Kaupapa Maori schools. This group was facilitated by a senior adviser in the Minister of Education's office. The approach taken was slow and iterative to build trust, and to ensure that all participants had an opportunity to engage and to brief their organisations. The group met on four occasions (with a lot of email between meetings) over a period of 6 months to agree on the approach to the project, establish a set of principles for its work, and agree on the membership of the "guardians" group. The attached discussion document was the product of this work.

This document and the group's nominations of 4 Guardians was endorsed by Cabinet in August 2003.

The approach adopted is fairly unique in the New Zealand government context. While government is a sponsor and active participant in the project, the intention is to give the project a high degree of autonomy, and to build collective ownership of the project by the secondary education community.

Important elements of this process in gaining support for the project were:

- Demonstrating government's genuine willingness to "let go" and engage as a participant rather than owner of the process;
- Establishing in the principles for the project that this is to be a positive exercise – identifying and celebrating success rather than simply identifying problems.
- Writing the discussion document in a less "dry and analytical" language – using metaphors and images, worrying less about precise definition of the scope of the project. This was positively received by educators "*at last they're talking in a language we can understand*".
- Not specifying deliverable products and timelines – the process is explicitly stated as being as important as any particular output.

Structure

The project was structured to facilitate the process as follows:

- A group of four "**guardians**" leads the project. Their role is primarily to protect the integrity and autonomy of the process – creating the safe space for a dialogue to develop and to protect this from the impact of shorter term policy and industrial debates.
- A small **secretariat** team leads the work on the project, accountable to the guardians. It is accommodated as an autonomous team within the Ministry of Education. This arrangement provides access to research and information resources, administrative support and corporate infrastructure without compromising the autonomy of the process.
- A "**touchstone group**" functions as a reference group and conduit to key education sector organisations.

Progress to Date

- The Guardians have now met a number of times and are building a clearer picture of how they will work together and progress the project.
- The Secretariat's leader and staff have commenced work.
- The Guardians have been briefed on the OECD toolbox project and have agreed to use this as a key resource for the Secondary Futures project.
- A workshop was held on 17 December 2003 to demonstrate the potential of the toolbox and trial some approaches to its use in New Zealand. A group of 20 sector stakeholders and representatives participated in the workshop led by Tony McKay and Riel Miller.

² www.minedu.govt.nz/goto/educationpriorities

- The Guardians used a “Secondary Futures” conference initiated by the secondary teachers union (NZPPTA) to launch a visible presence.
- The Guardians have launched a website.

Ongoing work programme in 2004

- Initiate compilation of NZ education indicators and wider trends to inform futures thinking work
- Development of web-based environment to support involvement in and to promote the project
- Initiating the operation of the touchstone group.
- Initiating consultation with key stakeholder groups including projects to highlight student and young peoples’ voices
- Initiating a series of workshops to apply and further develop toolbox resources with a range of groups.
- Commission and disseminate further research and discussion papers across the sector;
- Support and participate in a range of events scheduled by stakeholder organisations during the year to develop futures thinking and discussion amongst their constituents.

Risks and Challenges for 2004

- Managing the already high expectations amongst some stakeholders for progress and opportunities for engagement.
- Finding effective ways of engaging key those stakeholders who are not formed into groups or represented on the touchstone group – finding effective ways of introducing students and parents’ voices into the process, and ensuring that New Zealand’s diverse communities are well represented;
- Protecting the project from other events and debates in the sector – e.g. teachers’ 2004 industrial negotiations, controversy over plans to restructure the schooling network in some regions including closure or merger of schools.
- Finding ways of generating interest and engagement in a project with no defined end point or product

Ongoing relationship between the Guardians and the Ministry of Education

With the establishment of the independent secretariat, a new relationship between the project and the Ministry of Education has developed.

In the first instance the Ministry provides support to the secretariat, through provision of corporate services and through provision of data and research information to underpin the project.

Secondly government is an interested participant in the process, along with the other stakeholder groups.

Thirdly the Ministry is interested in the process approach of the Guardians and secretariat as a model for engagement in policy development. Government has used a similar process in its engagement with Māori in the series of hui taumata, designed to develop a new partnership between Māori and the Crown to further education outcomes being sought by Māori.

Fourthly through its participation in the OECD government is interested in the contribution the project can make in the development of the Toolbox for the Future, and that the Toolbox can contribute to policy development in New Zealand.

Secondary Futures The Early Days

Governance and Management Teams

Four Guardians, with high profiles in the fields of tertiary and Māori education, business innovation, education leadership and sporting achievement, have been appointed to lead the Secondary Futures project. In the early days, their focus has been to establish a framework for engagement with the education and other sectors, in order to carry out robust debate to establish a vision for secondary education in New Zealand in twenty years' time. In the coming months, they will use their national profile to create networks and instil confidence in the project.

A small secretariat to the Guardians has been appointed, with two key roles: facilitating conversations, using scenarios as a key tool, and gathering and disseminating information to a range of audiences. A reference group, known as the Touchstone Group, has been established to support the Guardians, by providing a forum to test and debate ideas. Touchstone Group members are drawn from a number of non-governmental organisations, and provide a conduit to a wider membership.

Focus

The focus of Secondary Futures is firmly set around learners, and a future twenty years distant. In the early days of operation, the Guardians have sought and created opportunities to hear from students, to gather a sense of their values and factors contributing to their success as learners, so this can be shared with others. Teachers, school leaders, and the tertiary sector will feature prominently in discussions. Future consultation also aims to increase participation of those groups whose voices traditionally have not been heard in debates shaping education policy, including Māori, Pasifika peoples, employer and business groups, parents and community groups. A feature of preparation for discussions on the future of secondary schooling has been to work across sectors to establish a context for what New Zealand society might look like in twenty years, our demographic profile, opportunities provided by technology, and the changing nature of work.

Activity

- **Scenarios**

The OECD scenarios, which provide an opportunity to leap in to the future, will be a key tool for discussions with groups. Work to date has concentrated on rewriting these as frameworks which are accessible to New Zealand audiences, using plain language, while being faithful to the originals. From these, narratives of characters in the various scenarios are being developed, to help participants in discussion “walk in the shoes” of future New Zealanders. The intention is to provide these in visual form, both static and moving, to make the future come alive. The third element being developed to support this work is a preference matrix, to determine a hierarchy of desirable features of schooling options.

- **Research**

In the early days, information about New Zealand trends and values has been collected. Secondary Futures has a close relationship with the research team at the Ministry of Education, supplemented by contracted research advice. The New Zealand government is fostering futures projects in other sectors, including the labour market, immigration, building sustainable businesses, biotechnology and information and communications technology. Secondary Futures is working with these projects to gather robust information about the context and opportunities for schooling in the future.

Challenges

Challenges confronting Secondary Futures include the lack of defined goals and open time frame for the project. While there is strong support from the education sector at national level, the teaching profession is weary and sceptical of change. The opportunity to widen debate to include new voices and participants means there are diverse expectations about outcomes and the extent to which these new participants might influence debate. An on-going challenge is the processing of data gathered from scenario workshops and using this to effect change at local, regional and national level.