

The middle leadership problem

SUMMARY

This paper updates members on continued work by the Middle Leadership Taskforce since their report to Annual Conference 2015. It includes a summary of findings from the survey of members conducted in Term 1 this year which revealed that 40 percent of current classroom teachers have no wish to be curriculum middle leaders in the future, because of the high workload for the time available, and payment which is inadequate compensation for the extra responsibilities. Significant demands on curriculum middle leaders include performance appraisal, digital technology change, NCEA quality assurance, data management and BOT reporting requirements. Deans are also feeling under considerable stress because of workload. The paper recommends continued investigation of these issues, and the development of STCA claims for the 2018 industrial round.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- ~~1. That the report be received.~~
- ~~2. That during Term 4 2016, PPTA branches and regions use the discussion paper that will be provided to consider ways to address the problems of work overload and stress that are causing a chronic undersupply of middle leaders.~~
- ~~3. The Middle Leadership Taskforce continue its programme of research, including convening focus groups with members during Term 4 2016.~~
- ~~4. That the Middle Leadership Taskforce continue to develop ideas for STCA claims for the 2018 industrial round.~~
- ~~5. That the Middle Leadership Taskforce report further to Annual Conference 2017.~~



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1. Introduction

- 1.1. PPTA's Middle Leadership Taskforce reported to Annual Conference in 2015 on its initial scoping of the issues for curriculum middle leadership. The report said that the group had spent time identifying the “enormous range of responsibilities of curriculum leaders” and concluded that: “It is clear that the workload has expanded well beyond what is reasonably manageable, and that one of the major contributors to this is the NCEA and the increasing load it is imposing on middle leaders in particular.”
- 1.2. The 2015 report identified the following as significant factors in the stress associated with curriculum middle leadership:
 - 1.2.1. The tensions between trying to do an excellent job as both a middle leader and classroom teacher
 - 1.2.2. Constant change that is poorly managed, so that there is never a stable state during which to reflect and evaluate
 - 1.2.3. The pressure to constantly drive up student achievement, leaving no room for work/life balance for teachers, especially middle leaders
 - 1.2.4. Competition for students between departments and schools leading to a drive to increase student achievement at all cost
 - 1.2.5. Low trust, compliance-focused approaches in some schools
 - 1.2.6. The variability of school-based decision-making about allocation of time and units to middle leaders
 - 1.2.7. Low rates of applications for middle leadership positions because of the unmanageability of the job.
- 1.3. The Taskforce signalled its intention to bring to the membership a set of proposals on how to turn middle leadership from an unmanageable job into a role to which teachers aspire, which is able to be done along with a good work/life balance, and is well rewarded and recognised for its significant contribution to the learning and wellbeing of students and teachers.

2. The survey

- 2.1 After Annual Conference 2015, the Taskforce embarked on developing a questionnaire that sought to analyse members' views about middle leadership. It was decided that although the initial focus of the Taskforce had been on curriculum middle leadership, the survey should try to identify what the issues were for pastoral care middle leadership as well, i.e. for deans.



- 2.2 The survey was emailed directly to nearly 14,000 members, and there were over 4,000 responses, a 31 percent response rate. The survey opened on 25 February, and closed on 18 March 2016.
- 2.3 The respondents were a representative balance of secondary teachers, as follows:
- 25 percent were classroom teachers with no specific leadership responsibilities
 - 19 percent were teachers in charge of a subject or a level of a subject
 - 24 percent were heads of department or heads of faculty/learning area
 - 7 percent were deans
 - 7 percent were senior leaders
 - 19 percent were in other roles.
- 2.4 The [full report of the survey](#) is on the website but its main conclusions are summarised as follows:¹
- 2.4.1 40 percent of classroom teacher respondents were adamant that they would not wish to be a curriculum middle leader in the future, and only 31 percent were definitely aspiring to make that move.
- 2.4.2 Among those who were either keen or might consider applying to be curriculum middle leaders in the future, their reasons were largely professional, in terms of wanting to have more influence over the teaching of their subject, and to be passionate advocates for their specialist area.
- 2.4.3 For the 40 percent of classroom teachers who had no ambition to be curriculum middle leaders in the future, their reasons were predominantly that the workload was too high for the time available, and the pay increase was insufficient recompense for the extra responsibilities.
- 2.4.4 Interestingly, this same view of middle leadership was reflected among senior leaders sampled. Among those who said they would not like to be curriculum middle leaders in the future, the main reason for them was, as would be expected, that they were already senior leaders. However, significant numbers of them also said that the workload of middle leadership was too high for the time available, and the pay was insufficient.
- 2.4.5 Among those currently holding some form of curriculum middle leadership role, the initial attraction had largely been around having more influence over the teaching of their subject.
- 2.4.6 However, once in the job, this aspiration to have more influence over the teaching of the subject had been eclipsed by conflicting demands.
- 2.4.7 The most significant negative impact on their ability to do the role to their satisfaction was changes in performance appraisal requirements. This was

¹ Or enter PPTA middle leaders research in the search box at www.ppta.org.nz



followed by changing demands around digital technologies, NCEA quality assurance requirements and data management and Board reporting requirements.

- 2.4.8 Interestingly, in terms of PPTA's supply work, the availability of suitably qualified staff was also a significant negative factor for curriculum middle leaders.
- 2.4.9 Among respondents who were deans, the most significant attraction of the role by far was an enjoyment of pastoral care roles.
- 2.4.10 However, deans are also feeling under considerable stress, with the sheer size of the workload by far the most significant stressor.

3. Further research needed

- 3.1 While the survey has been very revealing, the Taskforce feels there are a number of areas where more in depth information is required from members.
- 3.2 For example, we need to know more about the recent impact of changing performance appraisal requirements on the workloads of curriculum middle leaders. Performance appraisal, when it is functioning well, can be a powerful opportunity for leadership of teaching, and part of what attracts people to middle leadership roles in the first place. On the other hand, if the main function of performance appraisal is compliance with school and Education Council requirements, a box-ticking exercise, then it will not serve that positive purpose at all. Moreover, if the time available for performance appraisal is inadequate, the value of the exercise and any professional satisfaction associated with it are potentially reduced.
- 3.3 The Taskforce had already identified that there is significant variability from school to school in the allocation of management units and therefore time, among senior and middle leaders. Some schools have relatively few units allocated to senior leaders, releasing more to middle leaders, both curriculum and pastoral care. Other schools use large proportions of their units for senior leadership, leaving relatively few for middle leadership. These decisions affect the pay available and also time, because of the one hour per permanent unit up to three units under the STCA 5.2.5.
- 3.4 There can also be variability between curriculum areas, where units have been used to attract teachers in shortage subject areas. For example, a school might offer a permanent unit for a Teacher in Charge of Physics (a shortage area), whereas they would be unlikely to offer a permanent unit for a Teacher in Charge of Health Education (not a shortage area).
- 3.5 The Taskforce has decided that the survey information will be supplemented by focus group research during Term 4 2016. In the survey, respondents were asked if they would be interested in being part of focus groups of middle leaders. About 700



respondents expressed an interest in contributing further. Where there are geographical clusters of such respondents able to be identified, they will be contacted to participate in focus groups.

4. Discussions in regions and branches

- 4.1 As a further source of information, the Taskforce is preparing a discussion paper and a process that will give members an opportunity to contribute their ideas on how to make middle leadership roles more attractive to teachers.
- 4.2 A trial run for such discussions was conducted at the Subject Association Forum in April 2016. Participants were asked to focus on what they saw as the most important purposes of middle leadership roles, what the career pathway into middle leadership should look like, what ongoing training, support and resourcing should be provided to existing middle leaders, and how to ensure that middle leaders are sufficiently resourced in terms of time and remuneration.
- 4.3 The discussion paper, and explanation of the process for submitting responses, will be available by the beginning of Term 4 2016.
- 4.4 The Taskforce hopes that members will be keen to contribute to this process.

5. Conclusions

- 5.1 Perhaps the most significant aspect of middle leadership in schools is that our middle leaders are teachers first and foremost, and their credibility as leaders depends on their being seen as good teachers.
- 5.2 This is perhaps unusual. In business, people are appointed to be managers, and that is their role. They are not generally expected to be also doing the same work as the people they lead.
- 5.3 This double role of the middle leader in schools causes significant tensions, and yet is also strength. The role needs to be resourced with adequate time so that middle leaders can do their teaching job well, and at the same time support and lead their colleagues. This is not the case at the moment for most middle leaders.

2016 Annual Conference Minutes

Minutes of the Annual Conference of the New Zealand Post Primary Teachers' Association (Inc) held at the Brentwood Hotel, Kilbirnie, Wellington, commencing at 9.45 a.m. on Tuesday 27 September, continuing at 9.00 a.m. on Wednesday 28 September and 9.00 a.m. on Thursday 29 September 2016.

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C16/71/08

1. THAT the report be received; and
2. THAT during Term 4 2016, PPTA branches and regions use the discussion paper that will be provided to consider ways to address the problems of work overload and stress that are causing a chronic undersupply of middle leaders; and
3. THAT the Middle Leadership Taskforce continue its programme of research, including convening focus groups with members during Term 4 2016; and
4. THAT the Middle Leadership Taskforce continue to develop ideas for STCA and ASTCA claims for the 2018 industrial round; and
5. THAT the Middle Leadership Taskforce report further to Annual Conference 2017.

Carried