



PPTA TE WEHENGARUA ANNUAL CONFERENCE 2020

SCHOOL LABORATORY MANAGERS

A PAPER FROM THE WAIKATO REGION



The role of laboratory manager is a legislative requirement that requires an additional workload, but is not well managed and not resourced in the majority of schools. This paper seeks to scope the size of the role and recommend future actions to meet the requirements.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That the report be received.
2. That PPTA commissions an external job-sizing exercise for the laboratory manager role in a range of schools, to determine appropriate time and remuneration levels, and report these findings to the 2021 Annual Conference.
3. That a paper on the wider issues of hazardous chemical management in schools be prepared for the 2021 Annual Conference.

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1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The Health and Safety at Work Act (2015) [HSWA] requires all boards of trustees (BOTs) to ensure people do what is reasonably practicable to keep a workplace safe. Boards should show their commitment to the health, safety and wellbeing of workers and others in their school through the development, monitoring and review of health and safety policies.
- 1.2 Prior to the Tomorrow's Schools reform in 1989, chemical safety in schools was monitored by local body Dangerous Goods Inspectors according to the 1974 Dangerous Goods Act (and 1978 Amendments). This legislation was superseded by the Hazardous Substances and New Organisms Act 1996, and the 2001 HSNO Regulations, including the Hazardous Substances (Exempt Laboratories) Regulations 2001. The phase-in period of the new legislation lasted until July 2006.
- 1.3 Prior to 2007, the ultimate responsibility for safe use, storage and control always rested with school governance. Documentation such as the Safety in Science (2000) guidance manual specified that policies should be developed by BOTs and the Teacher-in-Charge of Science (HOF).
- 1.4 The position of 'Laboratory Manager' was first introduced in the gazetted Code of Practice for School Exempt Laboratories (2007) [HSNO CoP 15-1], a document produced by the New Zealand Association of Science Educators (NZASE) in conjunction with government agencies. The purpose of the HSNO CoP 15-1 was to provide practical guidance for schools to ensure greater compliance with HSNO.
- 1.5 The HSNO CoP 15-1 required schools, through their BOTs, to specifically appoint a laboratory manager who would be in charge of all hazardous substances used and stored in science laboratories and preparation rooms. Laboratory managers needed to be suitably qualified to carry out these duties and appointments had to be in writing.
- 1.6 In 2015, with the new HSWA legislation and changes to HSNO looming, NZASE worked with MoE to produce a new guidance document for schools for the HSNO CoP 15-1. The 68-page booklet *Guidance to the Code of Practice for School Exempt Laboratories overlaid with information about duties under the Health and Safety at Work Act 2015* was released in 2016, with workshops held throughout New Zealand to assist with dissemination. Once again, this guidance document highlighted the importance of the role of the laboratory manager.
- 1.8 After the Hazardous Substances Regulations (2017) [HSR] were introduced, NZASE, MoE and WorkSafe continued to work together to develop guidance and compliance documents to replace the HSNO CoP 15-1. In 2020 this work is ongoing, and the writers of this paper would like to acknowledge the continued work of the individuals and organisations who contribute to this space. At this stage, schools are recommended to continue to use HSNO CoP 15-1, and the 68-page booklet produced in 2015.
- 1.9 Schools are not obliged to follow the Code of Practice. However, if a school chooses not to adopt the Code of Practice, then the BOT shall ensure that management of hazardous substances fully complies with all sections of the HSWA and HSR. Methods of compliance should be documented. This means, that if the school decides against designating a suitably

qualified member of staff to be laboratory manager, they should have documentation which fully complies with all aspects of the hazardous substance legislation.

2. LABORATORY MANAGER - ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

2.1 HSNO COP 15-1 and subsequent guidance from the Ministry of Education states the following:

The duties of the Board of Trustees (PCBU) and Principal (Officer)

- *The Board of Trustees/Governors shall ensure that any room (including prep. rooms and storage areas) in which a hazardous substance is used is built safe for purpose.*
- *The School Board of Trustees/Governors shall designate one or more suitably qualified member(s) of staff to be Laboratory Manager(s).*
- *The terms and conditions of the designation shall be recorded in writing, and specify the areas under the control of the Laboratory Manager(s).*

2.2 For schools that do not designate (in writing) a laboratory manager appointment, the PCBU and Officer should ensure they have met the hazardous substance legislation as an organisation.

2.3 The booklet *Guidance to the Code of Practice for School Exempt Laboratories overlaid with information about duties under the Health and Safety at Work Act 2015* states the responsibility of the laboratory manager is to coordinate hazardous substances management (safe work policies and procedures) in science laboratories.

2.4 There are a number of responsibilities of laboratory managers which encompass supervision of hazardous substances and associated laboratory activities. These include:

Security, signage, inventory and labelling, storage and handling, emergency response planning, protective clothing and equipment, maintenance, disposal, training, documentation and usage.

2.5 While laboratory managers may delegate responsibility to a laboratory teacher, they are still required to conduct regular safety checks at appropriate intervals on significant hazards.

2.6 Laboratory teachers have additional duties under the code of practice which relate to storage, use, instruction and disposal of hazardous goods in their laboratory.

3. CURRENT STATUS IN NEW ZEALAND SCHOOLS

3.1 The Waikato region in conjunction with the PPTA National Office conducted a simple, six-question survey in June 2020 to gather information from heads of science around the country. There were 158 responses to the survey. An analysis was completed and the following key themes were identified:

3.1.1 HOF Science

In 44% of the responses, the role of laboratory manager is the HOF Science. Concerns around this are:

- This is often assumed by default, with no specific appointment. HOFs often feel compelled to take on the role.
- HOFs may not be chemistry experts, and could lack the relevant experience and qualifications to appropriately carry out duties.
- There is often no specific job description for the role.

3.1.2 Principal and board of trustees

In 81% of responses, schools have identified that the principal does not take an active role in supervising laboratory management in schools. Additional concerns identified are:

- Principals do not understand the legislative responsibilities with respect to hazardous substances.
- Principals are supportive of positive health and safety measures within schools, however find it difficult to fund initiatives adequately.
- Negotiations for remuneration and time allocation for the position of laboratory manager are carried out between key staff and school leaders.

3.1.3 Remuneration, training and time allowances

In 45% of schools, the laboratory manager does not receive any remuneration or time allowance. The majority of schools offer no additional training or professional development to support staff to carry out the duties associated with this role. Additional concerns identified are:

- Training or professional development for this role is limited and often expensive.
- The inconsistency between schools in terms of remuneration, training and responsibility requires resourcing and guidance from the Ministry of Education.
- The responsibilities of the role cannot be prioritised ahead of teaching and learning when there is limited remuneration and/or time allowances.

3.1.4 Legislation and safety

Because of changes to the legislation, many respondents indicated a lack of clarity with respect to what is actually required in terms of laboratory management.

- Health and safety implications for teachers and SLT are misunderstood in terms of laboratories, best practice and hazardous substance management and control.
- Some schools have been able to manage inventory, procedures and safety to an appropriate level. Others indicate the challenges associated with banned substances, inadequate shelving, storage and disposal systems, and outdated policies and procedures.
- Complacency has arisen due to the infrequency of serious incidents.

3.2 The science teaching community frequently raises concerns online about the position, conditions and responsibilities of laboratory managers. These anonymous comments from

the Science and Chemistry Teachers' Facebook pages represent the general opinion of science teachers:

"Lab managers out there - what do you get paid? How do you get paid?"

"I wouldn't agree to it unless you get time and money ...it is a legal requirement to have one and your board will be at fault if you don't have one"

"The Lab manager position cannot be tacked on to any other job description, e.g. HoD, or HoF. I was on the verge of resigning as Lab manager as I was getting no response to my request for a discussion around pay and time"

"No one can be compelled to take it on and it can't be made an automatic part of the HoF's JD. It 's up to you to negotiate terms. Walk away if you don't like it."

"I have managed to negotiate 1hr per week and the scraps in the barrel of funding (2-3 MMA) for this year only, then a review."

"My last school I got an MMA and no time. Totally NOT worth it!"

"2 years ago when I did it I had a MU and 1 hour time allowance, but I had to fight for it."

"There cannot be a default Lab Manager. It has to be an agreement between the BOT and individual. Reimbursement is optional."

"In my previous school I got an MMA for being lab manager which was not nearly enough for the work."

"1000+ students, no time and 1 MMA from the 2nd year."

"Do not agree to do it for no allowance or remuneration. I was lab manager and got an allowance but when I became HoF it got disestablished."

"after some negotiation, our Sci. Tech. has an extra 5 hours a week at a higher support staff grade (still not enough time or pay)."

"it's all about passing the potential blame up the chain until someone says 'ah we better do something!'."

"the role of manager can take some load of serious supervision from HOD and teachers."

"The thing that REALLY annoys me about this, is that all of us are having to navigate this path with our Boards individually."

3.3 The Science Technician's Association of New Zealand (STANZ) has highlighted the issues around appointment and remuneration for laboratory managers for a number of years. STANZ have identified the following key points:

- In a number of area and secondary schools (15-20%), the science technician is also the laboratory manager.
- Like teaching staff, technicians also struggle to receive the appropriate time, remuneration and training required to carry out the duties associated with the role of laboratory manager.
- Technicians are often responsible for storage, signage, disposal and control of hazardous substances in schools.
- Laboratory technicians fall under the NZEI collective agreement for support staff.

- 3.4 There is a consistent message from the science teaching community. In order to do justice to the position of laboratory manager in schools, additional time, remuneration and training are required.
- 3.5 Teachers (and science technicians) frequently find school management reluctant to offer remuneration, and there are inconsistencies in time and financial compensation across the country.
- 3.6 By commissioning a job-sizing exercise in a range of schools, PPTA will have a better understanding of the impact of laboratory manager duties for teaching staff in terms of workload and legislative responsibility. A report to the 2021 Annual Conference should indicate:
- Current, typical time provisions in relation to school size and whether these are sufficient to carry out legislative responsibilities;
 - Current, typical remuneration in relation to school size, and whether this accounts for any additional workload, qualifications and skills;
 - Recommendations on appropriate time, remuneration and training provisions for area and secondary schools;
 - An indication of the number of schools who do not formally appoint a laboratory manager.
- 3.7 This report will give members more certainty about whether to support laboratory managers through increased operations funding, collective bargaining or another alternative.
- 3.8 Presently, laboratory managers are required to control the use, storage and disposal of hazardous substances. Given that the risks within a science learning environment extend into the biological and physical sciences areas, which have their own associated hazards, the responsibility of this role needs to be expanded in support documentation from the Ministry of Education.

4. CURRENT PROVISION FOR SPECIALIST ROLES IN STCA

- 4.1 There is no provision in the STCA which specifically recognises the work of laboratory managers.
- 4.2 Non contact time is to be utilised for duties (other than classroom teaching) that need to take place while the whole school is open for instruction. The overall supervision of hazardous substances in school-exempt laboratories falls into this category, and cannot simply be left to the Head of Science as an additional responsibility.
- 4.3 The following are examples of the current STCA's provision for specialist roles within schools:
- Specialist classroom teachers receive a time allowance of four hours per week and receive an allowance equivalent to two units.
 - Careers advisers receive an allowance of \$2250 per year.
 - Bus controllers receive a daily allowance of at least \$3.61 (depending on how many bus routes there are to and from the school).

- Teachers instructing in Te Reo Māori receive an annual allowance of \$2-4000 depending on the level of immersion.
- Resource teachers (Learning and Behaviour) are paid at a higher step on the pay scale or an additional \$995 if they are already at the maximum pay increment.
- Kāhui Ako within school teachers receive a time allowance of two hours per week and an additional \$8000 per year. Across school teachers receive a time allowance of eight hours per week and an additional \$16000 per year.
- Heads of department are allocated an additional allowance of one hour per week for each Year 1 and Year 2 beginning teacher in their department.

5. REFERENCES

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