



PPTA TE WEHENGARUA ANNUAL CONFERENCE 2019

SCHOOL GUIDANCE COUNSELLING IN CRISIS: SUPPORTING OUR COLLEAGUES



E tipu ai te pakiaka tangata, me whakatō he purapura wairua. Whakahaukūtia te whenua ki te waiora pūmau kia puta ai ko te Hauora.

For the roots of humanity to grow well, spiritual seeds must first be sown. Irrigate with the enduring waters of life, and Hauora will result. The most precious gift we are given is life itself. Our duty is to nurture and care for this precious inheritance. Our children are the leaders of the future. By caring for them and fostering their learning, we assure future life for all. (Te Pakiaka Tangata, 2017)

This paper has been developed by the PPTA Guidance Counsellor Taskforce, a group appointed specifically for this purpose. The last paper relating to guidance counsellors presented to an annual conference was in 2001, with a report in 2006. Over this time, little has changed in the way the profession of school guidance counselling has been supported and resourced, with previous recommendations being largely ignored. Since 2006, the position of school guidance counsellors has become more complex and even more precarious with the profession fighting to ensure safe practice around their work with students in an increasingly difficult employment landscape.

This paper identifies the challenges facing school guidance counsellors, and proposes some recommendations that work towards providing some possible solutions.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That the report be received.
2. That PPTA acknowledges the critical role that school guidance counsellors have in promoting student wellbeing in secondary schools.
3. That this conference reaffirms the importance of having tagged guidance counsellor positions (or part thereof) in all secondary and area schools.
4. That PPTA actively supports the Te Pakiaka Tangata guidelines and that branches remind boards of trustees that these are working documents that they need to embrace.
5. That PPTA encourages the Education Workforce Strategy Group to enter into dialogue with school counsellors as stakeholders in the changing shape of education and the development of new processes and policies to ensure student safety and good practice in keeping with Te Pakiaka Tangata.
6. That PPTA explores an additional pathway for qualified counsellors to enter the teaching profession.
7. That branches work to ensure that:
 - a) school guidance counsellors are consulted as an integral partner in the development of systems and curricula in wellbeing
 - b) school guidance counsellors are included in the development of policies and practices at a school level such as timetable policy, pastoral meetings, and middle leadership meetings
 - c) senior leadership teams recognise that it is important for school guidance counsellors to model health and wellbeing, and support them to do so in the important specialist role that they perform.

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1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1. We urgently need to support the role and status of school counsellors as specialist teachers, who take the lead in responding to psychological distress and students' emotional safety. Over the last 20 years, it has become harder to attract and retain experienced practitioners due to growing workload and complexity of casework, and an increased number of traumatic incidents including suicides, natural disasters, and – recently – acts of terrorism. This problem is exacerbated in rural areas by limited resources and restricted access to RTLBs, and allied services such as mental health services and other community agencies.¹
- 1.2. School guidance counsellors are “spending more time reacting to critical incidents rather than developing proactive and preventative programmes to meet student needs and continuing to work with students they were already seeing”.²
- 1.3. Early in 2019, the Office of the Children’s Commissioner and Oranga Tamariki – Ministry for Children published a report, ‘What Makes a Good Life?’.³ The report asked children and young people their views on wellbeing. Secondary-aged young people specifically identified good mental health as one of the factors that for them makes a good life. Almost 45 percent of young people in secondary schools identified that support for mental and emotional wellbeing needed urgent government effort.
- 1.4. In 2013, ERO had concerns regarding “the capacity of guidance and counselling staff to effectively manage an increasing workload and address the complex nature of some of these problems”.⁴
- 1.5. Students need to be able to access a qualified school counsellor who is an integral part of their community in an easy and timely manner. We support the provision of culturally responsive approaches to supporting students and community in distress. We need to commit to supporting the wellbeing of counsellors as members of the teaching profession.
- 1.6. The government’s Education Review Office (ERO) recommends that schools “develop an integrated approach to guidance and counselling, rather than seeing guidance and counselling as a series of actions, with staff working in isolation”.⁵ There are anecdotal reports of school guidance counsellors leaving the profession, changing to part-time hours, or returning to the classroom. Stress and burnout is becoming a greater reality for some of these professionals. It is time to address the conditions under which our school guidance counsellors operate, before this becomes an even bigger crisis.

¹ Andrews, J. (2018) ‘Results of NZAC Executive Portfolio Holder survey’, Dunedin

² Education Review Office (2013) Improving Guidance and Counselling for Students in Secondary Schools, p.20

³ <https://www.occ.org.nz/publications/reports/what-makes-a-good-life/>

⁴ Education Review Office (2013) Improving Guidance and Counselling for Students in Secondary Schools, p.5

⁵ Education Review Office (2013) Improving Guidance and Counselling for Students in Secondary Schools, p.26

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, the position of guidance counsellor was developed in secondary schools in New Zealand. It was a response to the recognition that vocational guidance counsellors were not able to meet the needs of students in terms of personal, social, and educational guidance.
- 2.2. In 1989, all schools with a roll over 400 were expected to employ a guidance counsellor. There was a formula for guidance counsellor staffing that meant school with rolls under 200 received no additional funding. Schools that had 200-400 students were able to appoint a 0.6 guidance counsellor position. Larger schools generated additional positions at rolls of 1200 and 1800. Guidance counselling was seen clearly as a teaching role, with guidance counsellors being trained and qualified teachers who had been released for part-time study to gain a guidance counselling qualification. All this changed in 1995 when all tagging of positions was removed.
- 2.3. In the more than 20 years since the removal of the tagged positions, it has become harder to attract and retain experienced guidance counsellors. School rolls and counselling caseloads have increased, often without a comparable increase in guidance counsellor full-time teacher equivalent FTTE. The needs of students have become increasingly complex.^{6,7} Access to specialist support services outside of school has become more difficult.
- 2.4. Re-tagging of school guidance counsellor positions was called for in a paper received from the Bay of Plenty and Waikato regions at the 2001 PPTA annual conference, and reaffirmed by PPTA in 2006. PPTA also endorsed the position that guidance counsellors should not only be trained and qualified teachers, but should also have undertaken a course of training approved by the New Zealand Association of Counsellors (NZAC)⁸.
- 2.5. In addition, schools are operating counselling positions in counselling departments without adequate administration support. One option could be to provide administrative support at a similar level to that utilised by careers staff. The absence of support for administration adds to counsellor workload in these schools.

3. STUDENTS' WELLBEING

- 3.1. In a recent survey carried out by Jean Andrews (school guidance counsellor and member of the executive of NZAC), 91 percent of school guidance counsellor respondents indicated that they were unable to see all of the students who wished to be seen.⁹ In addition, 91 percent indicated that they had a waiting list, and for 14 percent of respondents this waiting list was longer than 10 days. One respondent commented:

“Our waiting list was in excess of 100 by the end of Term 1 this year. With some additional casual counselling made available, the waiting list numbers were able to be reduced by the end of term 2, but there were still approximately 60 students waiting with a huge effort made to decrease the waiting list size. It was impossible for the waiting list to

⁶ Education Review Office (2013) Improving Guidance and Counselling for Students in Secondary Schools

⁷ Hughes, C; Barr, A; and Graham, J. (2018). School counselling conversations: clients and their concerns

⁸ Guidance Counsellors: A Report To The 2006 PPTA Annual Conference

⁹ Andrews, J. (2018) 'Results of NZAC Executive Portfolio Holder survey', Dunedin

be reduced as there were up to 28 new referrals for counselling appointments coming in each week.” (p1)

- 3.2. Research highlights concerns that students experience delays in accessing counselling support in relation to mental health issues: "29 percent of students seen had to wait three or more school days for a counselling appointment. The majority of these had to wait six or more days." It also identifies the impact on school counsellors trying to manage excessive workloads that prevent students being seen in a more timely manner.¹⁰

4. STAFFING

- 4.1. Last year's PPTA claims for the new Secondary Teacher Collective Agreement included a claim for a Guidance Counsellor Working Group to focus on staffing.¹¹ The Ministry refused to engage on this claim, arguing that the Education Workforce Strategy Group was already doing the relevant work. However, guidance counsellors are concerned that without representation on this group, the nature and complexity of their work will not be understood. Decisions are already being made without appropriate consultation and communication with school guidance counselors, who know best about the tasks they are employed to address. In the recent Tomorrow's Schools and Mental Health reviews, school guidance counsellor invisibility is of immense concern.
- 4.2. Traditionally, guidance counsellors have been teachers who have moved from the classroom into a guidance role. They have then completed appropriate guidance counsellor training (allowing for membership of NZAC) to become qualified as a guidance counsellor. Guidance counsellors who are also qualified teachers are employed under the STCA, and have access to the trained teacher scale. The Guidance Counsellor Training Study Award is a TeachNZ award to support teachers wishing to gain a guidance qualification.¹² It requires someone to be in a counselling role for a minimum 0.6 FTTE, and provides support to allow them to study either full-time for a year or part-time for three years to become qualified. There are four FTTE awards per year. This award is only available to those already working (unqualified) in a guidance counsellor role. The availability of the number of awards is of concern. In today's climate of managing complex and high-risk caseloads, having appropriate counsellor training is critical for those employed.
- 4.3. The second way people have traditionally entered the profession is where schools have appointed trained counselors – usually holding a Masters-level counselling qualification – to fill vacancies where often there is no teacher-qualified counsellor available. In order to be employed under the conditions of the collective, they are required to hold a Limited Authority to Teach (LAT), as guidance counselling is seen as a teaching role. It is not possible to hold a LAT and be permanently appointed. It also means that these guidance counsellors are paid on the untrained teacher scale. They can apply for the Secondary Teacher Study Award through TeachNZ to have a year's paid leave to complete teacher training, but they compete alongside all other teachers applying for this award.¹³ Many struggle to be accepted into a teacher education programme as

¹⁰ Hughes, C; Barr, A; and Graham, J. (2018). School counselling conversations: clients and their concerns, p.28

¹¹ <https://www.ppta.org.nz/dmsdocument/731>

¹² <https://www.teachnz.govt.nz/professional-development/study-awards-sabbaticals-and-study-support-grants/secondary-study-awards-sabbaticals-and-grants/guidance-counsellor-training/>

¹³ <https://www.teachnz.govt.nz/professional-development/study-awards-sabbaticals-and-study-support-grants/secondary-study-awards-sabbaticals-and-grants/secondary-teachers-study-award/>

they may not hold a relevant subject degree for a senior teaching subject (which potentially they may never actually teach). However, this is currently the only way for them to access the trained teacher scale. It is critical in today's school counselling environment that any new appointees to school counselling positions already have specialised counselling skills at an appropriate counselling training level, recognised by NZAC. The qualification recognition for access to the trained teacher pay scale was fine when most people entering the profession came from a teaching background. However, it is less fit for purpose when school guidance counsellors do not come from a teaching background, yet are still doing exactly the same work.

- 4.4. This was recently discussed by the Guidance Counsellor Taskforce, and there is no easy answer. It may be that a micro-credential that does not yet exist is a better way to ensure that school guidance counsellors understand the complexity and conflicting needs in a school setting. This includes – but is not limited to – understanding of the teacher experience of the classroom, NCEA and the impacts that can have on student wellbeing, and understanding the dynamics that exist between teacher and student. It will require some research and exploration to investigate whether there is a possible alternative for experienced school guidance counsellors who do not hold a teaching qualification.
- 4.5. Increasingly, PPTA is seeing guidance counsellors employed under the pay scales and terms similar to that of the NZEI Support Staff agreement.¹⁴ This agreement specifically excludes guidance counsellors, so in effect they are being employed without union coverage and unable access to the conditions under the Secondary Teachers' Collective Agreement (like study awards and sabbaticals). Some of these staff are also being employed during term time only, and with pay rates lower than the untrained teacher scale.
- 4.6. The workload of school guidance counsellors has increased since the removal of the tagged staffing in 1995 by the Ministerial Reference Group on staffing. An unpublished survey by Canterbury counsellors conducted in 2018 found that the potential caseload of school guidance counsellors in the region varied dramatically. The potential caseload is calculated by dividing the school roll by the number of guidance counsellors in the school. In Canterbury, this potential caseload varied from 315 to 1257. Even under the old tagged counselling provision, a school with 1200-1399 students generated 2 FTTE. In the joint advice from PPTA and NZAC, the old formula could be used as an 'absolute minimum'.¹⁵ However, since the publication of this advice, NZAC has made a recommendation that counsellors are employed in schools at a ratio of one counsellor to 400 students.¹⁶ A ratio of 1:400 takes into consideration the increased complexity of the issues being dealt with by school guidance counsellors.
- 4.7. Currently, school guidance counsellors can only manage their workload by prioritising the students who want to see them. They often give up early intervention work because they have no time, with the potential for issues to worsen over time placing students at further risk and resulting in many counsellors forfeiting STCA non-contact provisions because of students' needs. This elevates workload as non-contact time is needed for caseload requirements such as preparation

¹⁴ <https://www.nzei.org.nz/AgreementDoc/SUPP.pdf>

¹⁵ <https://www.ppta.org.nz/dmsdocument/91>

¹⁶ http://www.nzac.org.nz/viewobj.cfm/schoolguidance_finalwebsiteversion.pdf?file_name=schoolguidance_finalwebsiteversion.pdf&objID=2595

of case-notes and referrals, and electronic and phone contact with students, families, and agencies.

- 4.8. Guidance counsellors reported in the Jean Andrews survey that they struggle to take non-contact time.¹⁷ School counsellors who lose non-contact time should be able to access compensatory mechanisms just as subject teachers do. However, they find it difficult to be recognised for their additional hours of work. The survey results show that:

"there is an increasing demand for counselling from guidance counsellors... many guidance counsellors are struggling to manage this increase on existing resources. This has led to a deterioration in their work fulfilment and ability to do good counselling practice...[with a] risk management focus...This is unsafe for the counsellor as the numbers of severe students are now in excess of what they have to see even if they worked in mental health".

...

"[I] try to see all students that require support. This means I have no non-contact periods and seldom stop for lunch. It is not ideal; at times I feel stressed and overloaded.

...

These students get left and are not seen at all or as most often happens, if they are seen, it will be because they present in crisis and have been referred by others because of concerns for their safety. When operating in crisis mode, only those in crisis - with safety concerns - are seen first. This year, our waiting list has been too long to even be able to triage students who have been identified as needing risk assessments or have stated 'urgent' on their appointment request slip. It has been an impossibility to know who else is in fact at risk. I understand that there are students on our waiting list who have made suicide attempts while waiting to be seen, although these have been anecdotal. There have been reports to the principal of three suicide attempts, however, this is just those who have been reported by parents. We do not get to hear of all the attempts as when students present to the emergency department outside of school hours, they are referred directly to Child & Adolescent Mental Health Centre. We do not hear about these students. We are expected to hold students who are unable to access counselling support with CAMHS as they also have a 15-20 week waiting list."

- 4.9. Jean Andrews found that 91 percent of school counsellors surveyed were not able to see all the students they needed to, and demand exceeded availability. 91 percent advised that year-on-year workload is increasing. 96 percent said that the issues students were presenting with were more complex.¹⁸
- 4.10. Managing the tension produced by high counselling demand and the need to see students to assess, monitor, and manage risk has an impact not just on the mental wellbeing of the student, but also on the counsellor. This may reinforce the isolation of the counsellor as they use all

¹⁷ Andrews, J. (2018) 'Results of NZAC Executive Portfolio Holder survey', Dunedin, p.2-3

¹⁸ Andrews, J. (2018) 'Results of NZAC Executive Portfolio Holder survey', Dunedin, p.2-3

available time to try to manage the tasks they feel responsible for.^{19,20} Not managing these demands well may lead to dangerous outcomes for both the students and the school guidance counsellors. These employee working conditions are not sustainable on an ongoing basis for many school guidance counsellors.

- 4.11. When the guidance counsellor is unavailable, DPs, APs, deans and form/whānau teachers end up becoming pseudo-counsellors for some students. This becomes a workload issue for them and may mean they find themselves managing complex student issues outside their expertise. Without the training or supervision available to guidance counsellors, and potentially unaware of key practice issues, they may even face accusations of operating outside of the Code of Professional Responsibility.
- 4.12. Counselling demands are varied and do not just include face-to-face contact with students. School guidance counsellors need to be recognised for the additional tasks they complete in relation to their role.

5. TE PAKIAKA TANGATA

- 5.1. Published in November 2017, Te Pakiaka Tangata²¹ is a set of guidelines designed to assist secondary schools and wharekura in the area of student wellbeing. It covers pastoral care, guidance, and counselling. The guidelines came out of collaboration between the Ministry of Education and a working party that included representation from PPTA and NZAC, as well as STA, SPANZ, and SPC.
- 5.2. The guidelines prioritise student wellbeing and are far more than a guide about guidance counselling. However, the timing of the publication means that it slipped under the radar for many schools. This paper asks that PPTA actively supports the Te Pakiaka Tangata guidelines, and that branches urge their boards to implement them.

6. SCHOOL GUIDANCE COUNSELLORS AS PART OF THE TEAM

- 6.1. Within some schools the guidance counsellor is seen as an integral member of the school leadership team. They are included in decision making processes. Their presence in the school is reflected in the policies and practices of the school. In their evaluation work on this issue, the Education Review Office recommends that schools “develop an integrated approach to guidance and counselling, rather than seeing guidance and counselling as a series of actions, with staff working in isolation”.²²
- 6.2. This is not always the case. In some schools, the guidance counsellor is marginalised, seen as sitting outside of the core business of the school. In the worst cases, guidance counsellors are largely ignored, until suddenly they are expected to provide – without consultation – wellbeing

¹⁹ Hughes, C; Barr, A; and Graham, J. (2018). School counselling conversations: clients and their concerns

²⁰ Education Review Office (2013) Improving Guidance and Counselling for Students in Secondary Schools

²¹ <http://www.education.govt.nz/assets/Documents/School/Supporting-students/Pastoral-Care-Guidelines-Te-Pakiaka-TangataNov2017.pdf>

²² Education Review Office (2013) Improving Guidance and Counselling for Students in Secondary Schools, p26

support for the school community. Their own wellbeing is often disregarded as their caseload grows, along with the complexity of the cases with which they are dealing.

- 6.3. Te Pakiaka Tangata provides good guidance for how the relationship between the guidance counsellor and the principal can work. In a best practice model the guidance counsellor is included in the decision making processes in the school. This is critical when considering wellbeing in the school. The guidance counsellor is the person in the school whose role is dedicated to wellbeing, and they should always be part of the decision making processes in this area. "Guidance and Counselling staff need to be supported by strong leadership, strategic resourcing and robust systems within schools."²³
- 6.4. The Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Education do not always recognise the role and value of school guidance counsellors as specialist professionals. Many initiatives to address mental health are ad hoc and formulated without understanding the school pastoral care environment, and rarely do they utilise the expert knowledge of the school guidance counsellor. While extended teams of mental health professionals would be of benefit to schools, school counselors are in the best position to identify gaps in services and barriers to learning. They are well qualified and skilled practitioners who work extremely hard to address barriers to learning within a school environment. Counselling support is readily accessed by students in the school environment and if Te Pakiaka Tangata and NZAC guidelines are adhered to, it and is delivered by a professional, well-qualified and appropriate workforce.
- 6.5. In an adequately-resourced world, all students should be screened and given the appropriate support to address any barriers to learning and wellbeing. Currently, capacity has outgrown the school counselling resources available to do this preventative work and as such, some students do not have their wellbeing needs met. When screening is done by other health professionals, students requiring support often are referred back to the school counsellor, as other professionals do not have the appropriate training to explore issues and find appropriate responses.

²³ Education Review Office (2013) Improving Guidance and Counselling for Students in Secondary Schools, p 5