

PERFORMANCE APPRAISAL OF PRINCIPALS IN THE HUNTER REGION OF
THE N.S.W. DEPARTMENT OF SCHOOL EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

The aims of this study were first to consider from a theoretical perspective performance appraisal as a concept and as it is practised in the Hunter Region of the NSW Department of School Education. Secondly, perceptions of the functioning of performance appraisal held by school principals in the Hunter Region were sought by questionnaire. Opinions of the principals on several dimensions of the appraisal process were measured, and appropriate scales developed. On the basis of questionnaire responses, subsequent interviews of a small number of targeted principals were also conducted to provide more qualitative data for analysis.

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The Background to Performance Appraisal of Principals

Interest in the appraisal, evaluation, or assessment of teachers and their teaching has burgeoned over approximately the last 15 years (Lokan and McKenzie, 1989), and can be seen as part of a much wider demand for accountability (Wragg, 1987; Wyatt and Ruby, 1990). Specific interest in the appraisal of principal's performance has been much more recent, especially in Australia. Australian state education systems have used various selection criteria for principals (Chapman, 1984) but procedures specifically for principals' professional development or accountability have only been evident in the private sector. For example, the Sydney Catholic Education Office, has increasingly introduced evaluations for lay principals seeking the renewal of contracts. In the United States, where a new wave of accountability is sweeping education programs at all levels, there is a movement towards reviewing principal performance in considerable detail, adopting methods commonly used in teacher appraisal. In the U.K. the review system appears to be based on more global principles and not narrowly tied to accountability. In Australia, demands for qualitative improvement and enhanced accountability in schooling tend to dominate Australian educational politics at both state and federal levels. The systems of evaluation introduced in Queensland and South Australia aim to review, systematically and regularly, the effectiveness of education in order to improve learning opportunities for students (Wyatt and Ruby, 1990). Until recently most of the literature on teacher appraisal has emanated from the United States and that on principal appraisal from the United Kingdom. Very little of what has been written is research based.

With respect to the mechanism of appraisal, McCleary (1979) insists that at its heart there is a system of evaluation which Shipman (1979) claims should be a basic management tool in all organisations. Given that staff appraisal is a necessary part of staff development (Erskine, 1990) and an encouraging part of personal professional growth (Marland, 1986), McCleary's (1979) claim that self development of the principal should be the focus of any evaluation, is an extremely pertinent observation.

The school effectiveness movement has emphasised the need for an all embracing system of evaluation covering organisation, management, curriculum and staffing. However, Blase (1987) suggests that the ongoing evaluation of school principals is not receiving sufficient attention. If principals are to improve their performance, Harrison and Peterson (1988) emphasise that the system of evaluation must be clear, specific and understood by both the evaluators and the evaluated. If principals are to be committed to, and gain most benefit from, an appraisal system, they ought to be involved in its development. This will require some training because, as Williams and Mullen (1990) found with teachers, although they were prepared to be involved in appraisal programs, their knowledge of the practical operation was generally very limited, frequently inaccurate and

often based on hearsay. More research in the field and practical experience in the process of evaluation is necessary before an appraisal process for principals can be developed. Such a process will need to account for the diverse range of schools in any system and the qualities of leadership required to administer them effectively. Indeed, Leithwood and Montgomery (1986) developed a profile describing leadership types linked to school improvement, although profiles of leadership effectiveness were able to be described, how such leadership traits were acquired remained elusive (Leithwood et al, 1990).

The process of evaluation is equivocal. Marland (1986) suggests that in-school evaluation is the corollary of the autonomous school and staff appraisal is an integral component of this. However, Murphy (1985) argues that there is a need for a formal process, and Duke and Stiggins (1985) consider a uniform appraisal process to be desirable. The process according to Deal (1977) should be continuous, collaborative and lead to general professional improvement and development.

Some necessary pre-conditions should be met if performance appraisal for principals is to be uniformly introduced into a system. First, there is the question of who should be involved in the process. A wide variety of appraisal schemes reviewed by James and Newman (1985) were typically hierarchical. Conversely, Duke and Stiggins (1985) considered peer evaluation to be very desirable, and Blase (1987) suggested that teacher feedback should be included in the evaluation of school principals. The choice of appraisers was also considered to be crucial by Williams and Mullen (1990) who perceived the danger of personality clashes. Secondly, reliability and utility should be the appropriate measures of effectiveness of the performance appraisal process, if the process is to be objective (Ginsberg and Berry, 1990). Thirdly, it is argued that appraisal schemes should be properly resourced (James and McKenzie, 1986; Williams and Mullen, 1990). Finally, if performance appraisal schemes are to be improved, there is a need for a data base from which sound decisions about various processes may be made (Ginsberg and Berry, 1990).

Appraisal has sometimes been linked to remuneration, but Marland (1986) contends that its practicality for salary assessment is doubtful. However, there is some indication that principals and teachers would accept an appraisal system which has implications for promotion, as with the Scottish system (Erskine 1990). Nevertheless, the general trend in the U.K. and Australia has been more towards appraisal with strong links to professional development.

Historical Perspectives on the Introduction of Performance Appraisal to the N.S.W. Department of School Education

Interest in performance appraisal by the NSW Department of School Education surfaced in the mid 1980's, resulting from concern by Federal and State Governments for more cost-effective and responsive management practices in

the public sector. In NSW school inspection had been replaced by a form of within-school appraisal in 1978. A subsequent development was the Teacher Assessment Review Schedule (TARS), an annual summative appraisal of teachers, completed by the principal but which has no developmental thrust. This system was seen to be ineffective and an attempt was made to replace it in 1986 by a developmental process called the Teacher Efficiency Review (TER). Its focus was performance accountability and professional development and it also included the principal within the target group. However, the emphasis was considered by teachers to be directed at the inefficient teacher and the TER was withdrawn after pressure from the NSW Teacher's Federation.

Discussions continued and in April 1986, a document, Good Teaching Practice: Agreed Statement of Principles, was accepted by the Federation and Department leading to the cooperative development of an in-service program entitled The Effective Schools Development Program. With a change of government in 1988, the issues of accountability and development were again brought into focus. A management consultant Brian Scott was contracted by the Government to review the organization and management of the public school system. Consequently responsibility was devolved from the centre and a Senior Executive Service of the Department of School Education was established. School clusters overseen by cluster directors who are responsible for a geographic collection of High Schools and their feeder primary schools were introduced. There has been a movement away from the old seniority list system for promotion to selection on merit, a change which is planned to take place between 1991 and 1994. A move towards a Performance Appraisal system was hastened by Scott, who in his management review recommended that:

The present Teacher Assessment Review Schedule should be replaced by a system of on-going Performance Appraisal which links teaching responsibilities to School Renewal goals, and which provides feedback, encouragement and support on a continuing basis.

(Scott 1990, p.245 Recommendation 149).

By 1991 a Performance Planning and Review Scheme for the Senior Executive Service of the Department of School Education was in place. It is based on renewable, individually-negotiated contracts which have "well defined management objectives with rewards and sanctions based on rigorous evaluation of performance" (Department of School Education, 1990 p.2). The Scheme's contract details a list of duties and specific performance criteria include strategies, performance targets and performance indicators, which are meant to supplement and formalise the Senior Executives' process of feedback, review and development.

The Senior Executive Service appraisal scheme has set a precedent for a system-wide performance appraisal approach. The Teachers' Federation and the Department of School Education have been discussing goals, procedures and roles for system-wide implementation and should agreement be reached it

is expected to be implemented. Such a system should augment the relatively new role of the cluster director, who is the interface between the bureaucracy and the school community and whose role, in part, it is to enhance school improvement generally. Some support structures for an effective appraisal process exist. For example, within the new provisions for the devolution of financial responsibility, some allowance has been made for professional development with a significant amount going to schools.

Currently a performance appraisal scheme for principals is being trialled in order to develop a cohesive process which can both address accountability requirements and identify developmental needs of school personnel. The appraisal trial for principals was announced formally in April 1991 when a discussion paper, Performance Planning, Review and Development (Performance Appraisal Scheme) for Principals was released by the NSW Department of School Education. Details of the Scheme were prefaced by a letter from the Director-General of School Education, Dr. Fenton Sharpe, who explained that agreement for performance appraisal had been reached with the NSW Teachers' Federation and that it was planned for all staff by 1994. However, negotiations as to the nature of the process are still continuing.

The Sharpe document stresses the development of a professional and collaborative relationship between principals and cluster directors, individual professional development, school-centred management and the achievement of the Department's corporate objectives.

The Performance Appraisal Scheme has four stages: a planning stage, progress review, formal annual review, and implementation of decisions and agreed development plan. In the planning stage principals and cluster directors discuss and reach agreement on key responsibilities, goals, targets and performance indicators. The key responsibilities are those activities that focus on school priorities. Goals are statements of intent and targets are statements of outcomes to be attained by a specified date. Performance indicators are described as pieces of information which define how the achievement of agreed targets will be measured. As such they are likely to be a combination of quantitative and qualitative measures which enable the achievement of a specific target to be demonstrated.

The Review Process includes structured, regular meetings and reporting arrangements as well as informal processes in the course of the principal's normal duties. These processes complement the progress review and also that of a formal annual review. The progress review is to occur at least once in a twelve month review cycle. It is a less formal process which focusses on key responsibilities and progress in achieving agreed targets. The annual review is the formal meeting in which the principal and cluster director:

- . complete the evaluation of the principal's performance during the year;

- . make decisions based on that performance;
- . formulate targets and indicators for the ensuing year; and
- . agree on an appropriate development plan.

The outcomes will be documented and copies of agreements and reports signed and retained by both the principal and the cluster director. Copies of reports are to be retained by the cluster director for two years before being returned to the principal concerned. All principals and cluster directors will be trained in objectively reviewing their own performance and the performance of others and in preparing and reviewing individual development plans. Every five years the principal's tenure will be also considered in the annual review. A grievance procedure has been proposed to settle any disagreements that might occur.

The Study and the Sample

This study was undertaken to gauge the response of principals in the Hunter Region to the Principal Performance Appraisal procedure. It involved the development of a questionnaire based on the principles outlined in the "Performance Planning Review and Development" document. The performance appraisal questionnaire was forwarded to all of the 266 principals of government schools in the Hunter Region. A total of 122 principals returned the survey, a response rate of 46 per cent. It would seem that the low response rate was related to the political climate at the time. During 1991 the principals had received conflicting directions: from the NSW Teachers Federation advising them not to be involved in the performance appraisal process (Hennessy, 5/91, 6/91) and from the Department of School Education encouraging participation during the 1991 voluntary implementation phase (Sharpe, 4/91, 7/91).

Survey forms were returned by 58 per cent of the region's secondary principals, 48 per cent of class-free primary principals, and 35 per cent of teaching primary principals. Only 19 per cent of principals from the smallest schools (fewer than 26 students) returned forms. This suggests that size of school was also a factor determining the rate of response. About 22 per cent of responses came from female principals and this matches the ratio of female to male principals in the region.

Some 45 per cent of the males and 36 per cent of the females indicated that they were involved in trialing some form of performance appraisal. Those trialing the process tended to be younger and less experienced in their present school and as a principal. Older principals reported gaining their understanding of performance appraisal from departmental documentation, whilst female principals and younger principals more often derived their understanding from pursuing a personal interest.

In summary, the typical respondent to the survey was a male principal aged about fifty years who has been a principal for about six years and in his current small urban primary school for five years or less. His

understanding of appraisal had been obtained mainly through Department of School Education documents and briefings. Less typical were the significant minorities of younger principals, female principals and secondary principals.

Design and Results of the Survey Instrument

The questionnaire developed was in two parts (Part A seeking general background information on respondents, and Part B seeking perceptions of performance appraisal), and was followed by an interview of a small number of selected principals from those who had volunteered to be interviewed when they completed the questionnaire. In fact, two-fifths of the respondents indicated they were prepared to be interviewed. Six principals were selected for interview based on their age, experience, type of school, location in the region, and familiarity with performance appraisal. The interviewees were encouraged to elaborate as far as possible on their responses to the last section of the questionnaire. Specific attention was directed towards the last question, "have you alternatives to performance appraisal?", because this question had not been answered in depth.

Results from each question from Part B of the survey instrument are now described briefly. The first several sections looked at the concept and criteria of the appraisal process and the latter sections at specific aspects of the process itself. All statistical analyses were performed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS, 1988).

Reasons for the Introduction of Performance Appraisal

The first question of the survey sought to discover the perceptions principals hold of the reasons for the introduction of performance appraisal. This was a series of questions where respondents were asked to rate the reasons given for the introduction of performance appraisal. They were also asked to indicate what reasons should have influenced the introduction of performance appraisal (The five categories of response offered have been collapsed into three in presenting the percentage distribution of responses in Table 1.)

TABLE 1. PERCEIVED ACTUAL AND IDEAL REASONS FOR THE INTRODUCTION OF PERFORMANCE APPRAISAL

INFLUENCES	& Actual			& Ideal		
	MIN	MOD	GRT	MIN	MOD	GRT
Trade off for salary increase	24	14	63	85	11	4
Accountability	2	12	85	12	34	54
Linking teaching to school goals	21	29	50	5	19	76

Principal's professional development	25	34	41	6	16	78
Government's corporate plan	4	13	82	58	25	16
Public confidence in educ.	21	25	53	41	30	29
Individual career planning	37	28	36	20	20	60
Improved student outcomes	35	33	32	8	14	78
Aid principal's planning	36	31	33	15	14	71

The most influential reasons perceived for the introduction of performance appraisal were "accountability" purposes and to satisfy the "Government's corporate plan". The least significant reasons were perceived to be "improved student outcomes" and to "aid the principal's planning".

The reasons that should have influenced the introduction of performance appraisal were ranked differently by the respondents. A group of three: principals' professional development; the linking of teaching and learning to the plans and goals of the school and improved student outcomes were the most preferred reasons. Those considered least important were a trade-off for a salary increase; satisfying the Government's plan for school corporate management and ensuring public confidence in public education.

Using the difference between the means for actual and ideal reasons as an indicator of dissatisfaction for each question, the greatest difference in principals' perceptions occurred between the Government's plan for school corporate management, and a trade-off for a salary increase. In the reverse direction, principals perceived the largest discrepancies between the reasons which lead to improved student outcomes and the professional development of the principal. Table 2 illustrates the discrepancies between actual and ideal reasons for the introduction of performance appraisal, with the items re-ordered from high negative discrimination (indicating actual reasons were less important than ideal) to high positive discrimination (indicating actual reasons were more important than ideal).

TABLE 2. DISCREPANCIES BETWEEN ACTUAL AND IDEAL REASONS FOR THE INTRODUCTION OF PERFORMANCE APPRAISAL

INFLUENCES	Actual		Ideal		Discr MEAN
	MEAN	S.D.	MEAN	S.D.	
Improved student outcomes	2.9	1.2	4.1	1.0	-1.2
Principal's professional devel.	3.2	1.1	4.1	0.9	-0.9
Aid principal's planning	3.0	1.1	3.8	1.1	-0.8

Linking teaching to school goals	3.5	1.1	4.2	0.9	-0.7
Individual career planning	3.0	1.2	3.6	1.1	-0.6
Public confidence in education	3.5	1.2	2.8	1.2	0.7
Accountability	4.3	0.8	3.6	1.1	0.7
Government's corporate plan	4.3	1.0	2.4	1.1	1.9
Trade off for salary increase	3.6	1.2	1.7	0.9	1.9

The Departmental assumption seems to have been that school-based appraisal schemes would be a natural progression from the implementation of performance appraisal with the Senior Executive Service (Sharpe, 1991 p.1). This assumption is questionable given that principals have indicated that they consider political expediency may have been the most influential factor.

Negotiation of the Appraisal Process

A negotiated process is the basis of the appraisal scheme being trialled. Negotiation is expected to take account of the context of the school community and the school's renewal plan. The scheme is expected to reflect and support the School's Renewal Plan; the Regional and Cluster management plans; the Department's corporate and strategic plans; and the areas of emphasis. Question 2 examined principals' perceptions about the negotiated appraisal process, the results of which are seen in Table 3. In this table, the original five-point scale has been collapsed into three categories to give the percentage distribution shown. The items have been re-ordered in the table from least likely to most likely results of performance appraisal.

The principals as a whole did not indicate strong views (the average mean at 3.1 was just above the mid-point of the scale) about the extent to which the negotiated appraisal process would result in the outcomes listed. With the exception of two potential outcomes, more than half of the respondents indicated that the process would be achieved, to a moderate, substantial or great extent. The exceptions were fostering conformity in the cluster and inhibiting individual creativity and leadership, where the majority of respondents indicated that these would be achieved to a "nil" or "minor" extent.

TABLE 3. RESULTS OF NEGOTIATED APPRAISAL PROCESS

RESULTS	Scale	Responses %		
	1 - 5 MEAN	NIL/ MINOR	MOD- ERATE	SUBST/ GREAT
Inhibits individual creativity and leadership	2.5	57	21	22

Fosters conformity within cluster	2.6	53	22	26
Establishes career paths	2.8	37	34	29
Ensures Government's goals for schooling	2.9	35	34	31
Develops corporate style Public Service	3.0	38	26	36
Accelerates school renewal process	3.4	20	33	47
Improves management skills	3.4	18	34	48
Gives valid and reliable feedback to principal	3.4	15	36	50
Enriches individual professional development	3.4	17	33	50
Develops agreed measurement process for school outcomes	3.5	14	30	57

When asked whether the appraisal process should be the same for all principals, a clear majority (59 per cent) said "no". Many of these respondents added that they had reservations about simply indicating "no". The reasons for their reservations were very similar to the reasons given by those who answered "yes" to the question. There was a generally-held opinion that, since principals and schools are very different, the appraisal process should have at least some individualised elements to it. On the other hand, there were comments to the effect that there should be some common elements to the process based on a need for reliability, objectivity and credibility within the system.

Reliability of Appraisal of Key Responsibilities

Key responsibilities of principals were listed in the Performance Appraisal document and principals were asked if they could be reliably appraised. The results appear in Table 4, with means and standard deviations for the four-point scales shown, together with the total proportion agreeing, the latter being the sum of those who agreed and tended to agree. The responsibilities have been re-ordered from most to least reliable. The majority of respondents agreed that the key responsibilities could be reliably appraised.

TABLE 4. RELIABILITY OF APPRAISAL OF KEY RESPONSIBILITIES OF PRINCIPALS (4 point scale)

KEY RESPONSIBILITIES	MEAN	S.D.	% TOTAL AGREE
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Management of finances and resources	3.5	0.6	95
Curriculum planning, implementing, developing	3.4	0.6	94
Staff professional development processes	3.3	0.7	90
School renewal admin.	3.3	0.7	89
Student welfare practices	3.2	0.7	86
Classroom management practices	3.0	0.9	75
Professionalism in teaching	2.9	0.8	74
Contribution to cluster or region	2.9	0.8	74
Public relations	2.8	0.8	68
E.E.O. principles	2.6	0.9	53

(Total agreement=tend to agree + agree)

Setting Goals and Targets

In the context of the school's renewal plan, the principal and cluster director are expected to list goals and specific targets to be achieved during the review period. The persons and groups whom the principals preferred to be involved in setting goals and targets are listed in descending order of preference in Table 5. Again five categories of response from "nil" to "great" have been reduced to three in reporting the percentage distributions.

In preparing their goals and targets, principals preferred their staff to have the greatest input, followed by input from their own cluster director. It is of interest that principals did not rate highly the involvement of other principals, in contrast to suggestions in the literature. As cluster identity and networking opportunities increase, principals may feel more comfortable with peer involvement. On the whole, principals prefer not to involve students or members of the wider community.

When invited to comment on others who might be involved in target setting for principals, 10 per cent of the principals nominated selected school executive members of staff. There was a variety of other suggestions.

TABLE 5. PEOPLE TO INVOLVE IN SETTING GOALS AND TARGETS
(5 point scale)

% Responses

PEOPLE INVOLVED	MEAN	S.D.	NIL/ MINOR	MOD	SUB/ GREAT
Staff	4.0	1.1	11	17	73
Cluster director	3.6	1.1	17	26	56
Parents	3.0	1.2	31	31	38
School council member	2.8	1.3	40	28	32
Other principals	2.8	1.2	46	24	31
Choice of cluster director	2.5	1.4	57	14	28
Students	2.4	1.2	59	26	16
Members of community	2.1	1.1	67	23	10

Importance of Specific Performance Indicators

Principals were given a set of performance indicators, largely derived from the trial Departmental appraisal document, and were asked how important they were in appraising the principal's contribution to effective schooling. Table 6 ranks the indicators in the order of importance expressed by the respondents. The scale had five categories ranging from "No importance: Should not be emphasised", through to "Most important: Should be strongly emphasised". In the table, the middle category has been omitted and the other four categories collapsed into two extremes: "very or most" important and "little or no" importance.

Of the 23 indicators suggested, only five were supported by at least half of the respondents whilst 13 indicators had a mean of less than 3.0. The indicator with the most support focused on the effort and achievement of students rather than of the principal, and the other four concerned various aspects of school documentation (curriculum, planning and management), and extent of parental involvement. Two other indicators involving parents were considered next most important: parental participation in decision-making and records of school communication to parents. At the other extreme, most principals believed that two indicators, the ratio of computers to students and the value and extent of corporate sponsorship, should not be used as indicators of effective schooling. Additional indicators were suggested by 35 per cent of respondents who focussed particularly on aspects of staff development and school climate.

TABLE 6. IMPORTANCE OF PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

PERFORMANCE INDICATORS	MEAN 1-5	VERY/ MOST	LITTLE /NO
Recognition of student achievement/effort	4.3	86%	1%
Quality of school curriculum documents	3.7	59	9
Extent of parental involvement	3.6	55	7
Documentation of School Renewal Plan	3.5	52	16
Documentation of management of school resources	3.5	50	14

Extent of parental participation in decision-making	3.4	42	11
Records of school communication to parents	3.2	34	23
Staff involvement in after-school in-service	3.0	26	24
Demonstrated commitment to E.E.O. principles	3.0	27	30
Number and variety of school-based committees	2.9	27	31
Percentage of staff involved in extra non-classroom activities	2.9	23	29
Number of staff upgrading qualifications	2.8	20	30
Involvement in Cluster/Regional committees	2.7	15	37
Number of school events occurring	2.7	15	35
Participation and success of students in various external competitions	2.7	16	40
% of progression from Year 10 to Year 12 *	2.6	22	40
Proportion of students involved in voluntary extra-curricular activities	2.6	15	39
Student results in external examinations	2.6	13	41
Columns of publicity in the local newspaper	2.4	8	54
Participation and success in sporting activities	2.5	8	46
Number of staff absences	2.5	21	48
Value and extent of corporate sponsorship	2.0	4	70
Ratio of computers to students	2.0	2	75

* This was the only indicator specific to secondary schools.

The Review Process

Several aspects of the review process itself were investigated by seeking the opinions of principals. These include the level of structure preferred in meetings, the frequency of meetings, and feelings about aspects to be discussed.

Degree of Structure. Table 7 indicates the level of structure preferred by the respondents in meetings to review their performance agreement. Alternatives were ranked by respondents from 1 to 4. The table illustrates that about half the principals indicated that a formal process with a written report was their least preferred option. However, the same option was either the first or second preference of a significant minority (43 per cent). Almost two-thirds gave their first preference to an informal process with written reports, and another quarter had this as their second preference, making a total for this option of almost 90 per cent.

TABLE 7. PREFERRED DEGREE OF STRUCTURE

DEGREE OF STRUCTURE	RANK			
	1	2	3	4
Formal process/written reporting	9%	36%	5%	49%
Formal process/no written report	6	16	57	22

Informal process/written report	64	25	11	1
Informal process/no written report	36	18	22	23

Frequency of meetings. Table 8 indicates the preferred frequency for performance review meetings which principals were asked to rank from 1 to 4. Almost four-fifths of the principals had as their least preferred option meetings which took place more often than once a term. Half of the respondents most preferred meetings twice a year, and a total of almost 90 per cent had this as either their first or second preference. A notable minority (35 per cent) gave their first choice to meetings once a term.

TABLE 8. PREFERRED FREQUENCY OF MEETINGS

FREQUENCY	RANK				
	1	2	3	4	
Yearly		25%	22%	35%	17%
Half Yearly	50	39	11	0	
Once per term	35	24	41	0	
More frequently than once per term	6	8	6	79	

Degree of Comfort. Principals were asked to indicate how they would feel discussing a number of items which would ordinarily be included in review meetings with their cluster director. Items included the discussion of targets and performance indicators and professional development needs. A rating from 1 (agitated) to 5 (very comfortable) was given for each item. The vast majority of principals indicated that they were comfortable discussing such matters. Additional comments from 40 respondents dwelt on their relationship with their cluster director as being a significant factor.

The Interviews

Interviews were conducted with six respondents (two female and four male). Owing to distance, some interviews were conducted by telephone. The areas probed were: accountability and development, the performance appraisal system proposed, performance indicators, the role of the cluster director, and alternatives to performance appraisal.

Accountability or Development

There was some disagreement whether the emphasis of performance appraisal should be on accountability or on professional development since both were extremely important. One principal thought that the two were inextricably bound because proper evaluation leads to an understanding of the need for change which, in turn, leads to development. There was a more general acknowledgment that the Government's "economic imperative" and the

subsequent emphasis on accountability was legitimate. Indeed, one young principal felt that "principals should push themselves".

The Performance Appraisal System

There was strong agreement that the performance appraisal system should be tied to the school's renewal plan. One principal saw appraisal as a "simple solution to a complex problem" but that it at least enabled people to feel that they were "moving". Another saw appraisal as accountability being "sugar coated" by being called developmental. She also thought that the documentation which would be used could act as a "cover up" and might not truly reflect what was going on in the school. One principal voiced the concern that, if appraisal became the norm, there is a danger that the system could become a "mechanical process" due to pressures of time, with the result that no real change would occur.

One principal saw the relative dangers formal and informal approaches, and felt that the trade-off between the two needed more careful analysis. There was a shared understanding amongst these respondents that principals differ in both experience and learning needs and that this should be in some way taken into account and built into the appraisal criteria. Generally speaking, despite their specific concerns, all interviewees saw the process of appraisal as logical and non-threatening, and were in agreement that there should be broad criteria with room for individualisation.

Performance Indicators

Indicators were not highly thought of by the interviewees and also appeared not to be well understood. They were considered to be another way of stating objectives.

The Role of the Cluster Director

An amicable, collegial relationship with the cluster director was thought to be most important by the interviewed principals who expressed confidence and trust in their present cluster director. However, there were some reservations about the cluster director's role in the appraisal process. One felt that if any "punitive" elements crept into the relationship, it would be very easy for a principal to close off communication. The young male principal strongly favoured a formal relationship because the cluster director is his supervisor. He also felt that the cluster director need only have contact with other staff at his school if they were doing something either very good or very bad. An older female principal thought that younger principals need "emotional pats" from the cluster director, whereas older principals usually have a small number of colleagues who give support. The dichotomous role of educational audit and professional development was acknowledged by each principal, even though two older principals felt that the main role of the cluster director was for "technical" or "resource" support. On an extreme note, one even advocated

disbanding cluster directors and splitting their salaries amongst the high schools, allowing them to employ another in-school manager.

Alternatives to Performance Appraisal

Although none of the interviewees had a well-developed alternative to performance appraisal as set out in the Departmental document, there were points they wished to make with respect to the future. The first few concern school climate.

- * When performance appraisal becomes the norm for all teachers, they will need to feel valued.
- * We need a "culture change" towards caring.
- * We need to start building the climate now for five years hence.

With respect to the nature of the process, the interviewees made the following comments.

- * Teachers, principals and cluster directors need to be involved in the development of the scheme to ensure its success.
- * There needs to be considerable role clarification to measure performance against.
- * Principals should set their own standards with a panel of two or three other principals at the same level and/or an "empowered" school council.
- * Independent people should set broad objectives which are then made specific for the principal concerned.
- * Principals should be five-year trained by doing an accredited course in administration.
- * Appraisal should be by a school "balance sheet" which is linked to the renewal plan.
- * Principals need training in understanding and managing change before becoming accountable via performance appraisal.

Relationships Within the Data

The analyses thus far have been descriptive only for each structured item in the questionnaire. Given the amount of specific information collected, it seemed desirable to group individual items into scales to enable more concise analyses of relationships in the data obtained.

Scale Development

Six scales were developed from three different sections of the questionnaire to summarise the opinions of principals about different aspects of the performance appraisal process. For each section the relevant items were factor analysed and scale reliabilities were calculated. Items were discarded if they did not load on the appropriate

factor or if they loaded on any other factor, using 0.3 as the appropriate factor loading in both cases. Items were also discarded if they were found to be reducing the reliability of the scale in which they were placed.

The scales developed directly from the questionnaire items were as follows.

- (1) Two scales were developed from Q.2 concerning the results of the performance appraisal process. They measured the extent to which principals perceived that the process of performance appraisal fostered: (a) professional development, including management skills, and (b) conformity, including the Government's corporate goals. The scales are called Professional Development and Conformity.
- (2) Three scales were developed from Q.6 concerning the importance of selected performance indicators in appraising the principal's contribution to effective schooling. The scales related to the importance of the following: (a) involvement or participation by staff, students and parents in school activities (Participation); (b) school records and documentation (Records); and (c) success of students in external academic and sporting competitions (Competition).
- (3) A single scale was developed from Q.8 assessing how agitated or comfortable each principal would feel in discussing a range of items at review meetings with their cluster director. Items addressed the following potential aspects of interviews: discussion of issues to be taken into account, professional development needs, a review of performance targets, and an open exchange of views (Meetings).

Overall dissatisfaction with the philosophy of the introduction of performance appraisal was measured by summing the discrepancies between the actual and ideal reasons the principals believed had influenced the introduction of performance appraisal (Q.1 of the questionnaire - called the Overall Dissatisfaction scale). Obviously the discrepancy between the actual and the ideal varied considerably for the different reasons suggested. Overall, the mean discrepancy in either direction was reasonably high at 1.3 out of a possible 4.0.

Scale characteristics are shown in Table 9. All scales, except the Overall Dissatisfaction scale, had potential ranges from 1.0 (representing a perceived low level) to 5.0 (representing a perceived high level of the characteristic). On average, the principals indicated that they saw the performance appraisal process fostering a high level of professional development and a lower level of conformity. They saw the keeping of records as an important component of the process, with participation as less important and competition as of minor importance in the process. In general, they felt (or believed they would feel comfortable) in appraisal meetings with their cluster director. Satisfactory scale reliabilities were achieved, ranging from 0.78 for the Conformity scale to 0.86 for several of the other scales.

TABLE 9. SCALE CHARACTERISTICS

SCALE	ITEMS	MEAN	S.D.	RANGE	RELIAB.
Professional Development	3	3.4	0.83	1.3-5.0	0.80
Conformity	3	2.8	0.98	1.0-5.0	0.78
Participation	9	3.0	0.66	1.0-5.0	0.86
Records	6	3.3	0.71	1.0-5.0	0.86
Competition	6	2.6	0.72	1.0-4.7	0.86
Meetings	4	4.1	0.68	2.0-5.0	0.86
Overall Dissatisfaction	9	1.3	0.70	0.0-3.8	0.81

Relationships of Background Variables with the Scales

The possible effects of gender, classification/level, years of experience, and whether the principal had been involved in trialing the appraisal process were tested on each of the seven scales using analysis of variance (SPSS, 1988 pp.364-377). Relationships, including two-way interactions, which were significant at the 0.05 level are shown in Table 10. No higher order interaction was significant. There were no relationships between any of the background variables and the scale measuring the extent to which the negotiated appraisal process assists in professional development.

Gender Differences. Gender was the most significant factor overall for the scales. Female principals (whether they were participating in voluntary appraisal or not) were more likely to see the performance indicator scales, Participation, Records and Competition scale as important. Gender also interacted with whether the principal had been involved in the trial appraisal process in its effect on the three performance indicator scales. Male principals showed no relationship between their approach to record keeping and their involvement in the trial, while females who were involved indicated a higher commitment to record keeping. Female principals also felt even more comfortable in meetings with their cluster director than their male counterparts.

Length of Service. Length of service was not independently linked with any of the scaled variables, but frequently interacted with involvement of the principal in the trial of performance appraisal. Longer-serving principals scored highly on the Conformity scale. Those involved in the trial voluntary appraisal process saw record keeping to be more important, and saw indicators in the Competition scale as more important. More senior principals involved in the trial felt comfortable or very comfortable when discussing their appraisal with the cluster director.

Trialing the Process. Principals involved in trialing performance appraisal saw "Participation" as a more important performance indicator

than other principals. More usually, however, being involved in the trialing interacted with either gender or experience to have an effect on different scales. In general, being involved in trialing performance appraisal was linked with greater acceptance of its overall purpose, practice and the indicators suggested for the process.

TABLE 10. SUMMARY OF STATISTICALLY SIGNIFICANT RELATIONSHIPS

SCALE	VARIABLE	2-WAY INTERACTION	DIRECTION
Conformity	-	Level/Yrs principal	Primary & Senior higher
Participation (Indicators)	Gender Involved	Gender/Trial	Females more imp. Trial more imp. Females & Trial more important
Records (Indicators)	Gender	Yrs Principal/Trial Gender/Trial	Females more imp. Senior & Trial more important Females & Trial more important
Competition (Indicators)	Gender	Yrs principal/Trial Gender/Trial	Females more imp. Senior & Trial more important Females & Trial more important
Overall Dissatisfaction	-	Yrs principal/Trial	Senior & Trial lower dissatisf.
Meeting (Comfort)	Gender	Level/Trial	Females higher Secondary & Trial higher

CONCLUSIONS

This survey was developed from a Departmental discussion paper on the trialing and implementation of the performance appraisal of school principals. Both the questionnaire responses and the interviews indicated that principals saw positive benefits arising from an appraisal process if it focuses on their professional development, with appropriate feedback. However, they accept that accountability is also a legitimate concern to be addressed by the process. The context in which they want performance

appraisal to be undertaken is the improvement of student outcomes with teaching linked to school goals.

The process being trialled is a negotiated one and this aspect is seen as essential by principals because it enables the individuality of schools and principals to be recognised. Both the literature and the survey results strongly suggest that, for appraisal to be effective, participants need to be involved in the development of the process, be cognisant of the essential concepts, and be trained for its implementation. Given the new Senior Executive system, a key figure in the principal's appraisal process is the cluster director, and principals believed that for a negotiated appraisal process to work effectively it is necessary for the cluster director to play a positive and collegial role. Overall, the principals were favourably disposed towards involving their current cluster director in setting goals and targets, with most preferring staff involvement in this process. Specifically, principals were comfortable in discussing their performance with their cluster director, particularly if the process was informal.

Principals felt that their key responsibilities can be reliably appraised, particularly those which are quantifiable and documented. In fact, the importance of documentation was a recurring theme in the questionnaire responses. However, the use of the performance indicators suggested in the questionnaire is contentious. More generally, the use of performance indicators was not strongly supported and the principals suggested that other measurement strategies should be investigated.

Overall, the principals responded favourably to the appraisal process, although they saw a considerable discrepancy between the actual and ideal reasons for its introduction. However, it must also be borne in mind that they were reacting to the specifics of a Departmental document which perhaps gave the concept some legitimacy. Even so, it is apparent that they saw positive effects in the process, particularly in so far as it involved negotiation and was focussed on professional development. The positives of performance appraisal were particularly evident to the principals who had been involved in the trial process. This could have resulted from the trial principals being self-selected or could be due to their experiences during the process. In general, it would seem that the future acceptance and usefulness of performance appraisal of principals would seem to depend on its flexibility, enabling it to be adapted to different situations and needs.

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