

## Employment and Continuing Professional Education of New Zealand Psychologists

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A survey of members of the New Zealand Psychological Society was carried out to provide basic profile data on employment, education and training, continuing professional education opportunities and opinions of aims, types of provision and funding of continuing education activities. Results indicate a reasonable level of current continuing education involvement. Updating and extending knowledge, rather than refreshment of basics, is seen as the primary aim and less formal individually oriented activities are seen as best achieving these aims. Substantial employer funding with individual contribution is seen as most appropriate.

Recent recognition of obsolescence of knowledge and the consequent reduction of professional competence (Dubin, 1971, 1972; Lindsay, Morrison & Kelley, 1974) has led to consideration of professional continuing education for psychologists (Fagan, 1976; Korman, 1974; Lewinsohn & Pearlman, 1972; McNamara, 1975, 1977; Ross, 1974; Schoenfeld, Kobos & Burstein, 1974; Stratford, 1976; Webster, 1971). Most of the studies and discussion on this topic have come from the United States, with scant consideration elsewhere. Some of the impetus for consideration appears to have resulted from legislative action: a number of States have implemented or are implementing measures to require continuing education pre-requisites to license renewal (Jones, 1975).

Psychology has only recently considered its needs and responsibilities in continuing professional education. Other professional bodies (including some in New Zealand)

have for some time been actively involved in providing programmes and activities for their members. In some cases evidence of continuing education activity has been legislated for and in others professional bodies have voluntarily taken it upon themselves to provide and require participation in continuing education programmes (Jones, 1975). In part this may be due to the nature of psychology as a profession. Other professions which emphasise the unitary nature of the profession may be better placed to agree on and provide for professional education needs (Ross, 1974). Ross further suggests that

We have only just recently recognised the problem of professional obsolescence, having so long been involved with professional adolescence.

Apart from general surveys of characteristics of psychologists in the United States (Boneau, 1968; Boneau & Cuca, 1974) there have also been a number of surveys for the purpose of gaining information about professional psychologists' interests and needs in continuing education (Katahn, 1970; Lewinsohn & Pearlman, 1972; McNamara, 1977; Schoenfeld et al., 1974).

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Little is known of the psychology profession in New Zealand with regard to activities and needs of a continuing professional education nature. Information about the characteristics of psychologists in New Zealand that might provide the basis for consideration of such needs is sparse. The only study that provides some profile of New Zealand Psychological Society membership is that of Leland and Trainor (1976), but that study focused on first employment prospects for psychology graduates. The survey reported here is an attempt to gain more detailed data on New Zealand psychologists' current employment and educational history, and relate these to their continuing education activities and perceived needs.

### Method

A questionnaire together with a covering letter and postage paid return envelope was sent to 395 members of the New Zealand Psychological Society with New Zealand addresses listed in the 1976-77 membership list. Student subscribers and subscribers were not included.

The questionnaire consisted of 21 questions arranged in four sections dealing with (a) Employment, (b) Training and Education, (c) Current Continuing Education Opportunities, and (d) Continuing Education Needs.

### Results

#### *Questionnaire Response*

Of the 395 questionnaires sent out, 259 were returned completed (65.6% response), 2 were returned unanswered and 3 were returned undelivered. Questionnaires were returned during the period from February to July, 1977. This response rate is a little higher than that obtained by Leland and Trainor (1976). Schoenfeld et al. (1974) interpreted the low response rate (38%) they obtained in a survey about continuing education for psychologists in Texas as perhaps indicating a lack of interest in continuing education endeavours. On this interpretation the response to the present survey is a healthy sign.

Instructions on the present questionnaire asked that where more than one response category for a question was appropriate then all applicable categories should be checked. Consequently the percentages given in the following results did not always add to 100%.

Table 1  
*Occupation Sectors of Respondents*

	N	%
Government Department	86	33.2
Local Body	30	11.6
Teaching		
(i) University	97	37.5
(ii) Teachers' College	11	4.3
(iii) Technical Institute	5	1.9
(iv) State secondary school	4	1.5
(v) Private secondary school	0	0.0
(vi) State primary school	2	0.8
(vii) Private primary school	0	0.0
Total Teaching	120	46.3
Private Service Organisation	16	6.2
Private Enterprise	26	10.0
Other Types of Occupation Sectors	24	9.3

#### *Section A: Employment*

Table 1 shows categories of employment and indicates the largest single group of psychologists are those involved in teaching, the majority of those being in Universities. Leland and Trainor (1976) found that 33% and 61% of psychologists obtained their first employment in tertiary education and government and local bodies respectively. The comparable figures for employment in tertiary education and government or local bodies in the present sample were 44% and 45%, suggesting a subsequent career movement from government to tertiary education employment.

Table 2 summarises respondents' perception of their job characteristics for the total sample and for the major employment categories. Pure research is not overall a very widespread activity and is accounted for mainly by university personnel. Applied research is even higher for this category but is also a significant activity for other employment groups. Clinical work and counselling is a major activity in all employment categories except universities and involvement in management is higher in government and private sectors. Teaching and training is widely indulged in over all categories. Advising other personnel is at a moderate level but is less so among university employees.

The second part of Table 2 shows how respondents perceive various areas of psychological knowledge and method contributing to the requirements of their job. The categories are those into which psychology is frequently broken in text chapters and

Table 2  
*Job Characteristics of Sample*  
*(Per cent respondents in each category)*

	Total Sample	Gov	Univ	LB	Priv
N	259	86	97	30	26
(a) Type of activity involved in occupation					
Pure research	23	1	54	7	4
Applied Research	53	45	72	37	46
Clinical and Counselling	57	74	32	97	69
Management	22	34	14	17	50
Teaching or Training	80	71	98	70	69
Advising other Personnel	52	67	41	63	62
Other	10	6	7	7	12
(b) Contribution of areas of psychology					
General psychology	70	64	79	77	50
Behavioural psychology	76	83	67	90	77
Comparative psychology	16	20	18	10	8
Perception	36	36	35	33	31
Personality	67	70	53	83	85
Measurement and testing	78	92	67	87	77
Social psychology	61	64	56	67	69
Developmental psychology	63	65	59	70	42
Statistical and Mathematical psychology	48	45	60	40	50
Physiological psychology	30	34	29	40	12
Ergonomics	6	5	7	7	8
Abnormal psychology	56	66	42	90	42
Other	22	22	25	20	19
Discipline/s other than psychology	44	38	49	47	54

course material. Distributions over employment are relatively constant for most areas of psychology. The comparatively higher contribution of behavioural and abnormal in the local body group reflects the work of hospital board clinicians. Government employees also show higher contributions in these areas.

#### *Section B: Training and Education*

Table 3 shows the distribution of highest academic qualifications over the total sample and the major employment categories. For the total sample the figures are similar to those obtained by Leland and Trainor (1976). The distribution reported by Boneau and Cuca (1974) discloses much higher

Table 3  
*Training Characteristics of Sample*  
*(Per cent respondents in each category)*

	Total Sample	Gov	Univ	LB	Priv
N	259	86	97	30	26
(a) Highest qualification					
Bachelor	13	9	3	10	35
Master	39	45	39	23	27
Doctorate	23	3	47	20	12
Post-graduate Diploma	25	41	7	47	31
(b) Enrolment in Higher/Further Degree					
Currently enrolled	25	23	32	13	23
Not currently enrolled	67	69	58	83	69
(c) Time since completion of last formal training					
Less than 1 year	11	7	13	7	12
1-5 years	37	49	30	43	50
6-10 years	22	21	22	17	35
11-20 years	21	16	20	23	0
More than 20 years	6	2	10	10	0

Table 4  
*Continuing Professional Education Activities and Opportunities*  
*(Per cent respondents in each category)*

	Total Sample	Gov	Univ	LB	Priv
N	259	86	97	30	26
(a) Type refresher courses in psychological topics attended since completion of initial training					
University Extension	29	37	18	47	23
Teachers' College	3	2	2	3	0
Technical Institute	1	1	0	3	0
Employer organised in-service	51	77	29	53	38
Privately organised	18	24	11	20	27
Professional/learned society organised	41	45	39	50	38
Correspondence	2	5	0	0	0
None of above	22	7	36	13	12
(b) Attendance in previous two years at meetings which psychological topics discussed					
Public lectures	62	49	71	63	42
New Zealand Psychological Society meetings	74	69	80	87	73
Meetings of other learned societies	67	58	73	67	54
None of above	5	8	4	0	8
(c) Opportunity to meet other psychologists in work setting					
Visiting overseas psychologists	65	56	87	43	54
Psychologists from other areas in New Zealand	74	77	89	63	62
Psychologists working in other fields	69	57	90	60	54
Psychologists working in own field	85	92	91	77	85
No opportunity to meet other psychologists	4	3	1	7	4
(d) Employer contribution to continuing professional education expenses					
Study visits or leave	46	38	57	30	27
Course attendance	49	60	36	50	58
Conference attendance	76	73	79	93	81
(e) Present and previous entitlement to study leave					
Entitled to study leave	51	27	79	43	46
Not entitled to study leave	46	66	19	47	50
Respondents not currently entitled to study leave:					
N	119	57	18	14	13
Previously entitled	18	18	17	14	46
Not previously entitled	82	82	83	86	54

levels of qualification in the United States. Government employees have mostly Master degrees and post-graduate diplomas equally as their highest academic qualification. University personnel have a higher percentage of doctorates than other groups. Local body psychologists have a similar percentage of post-graduate diplomas as those in government departments, but this is accompanied by a relatively higher percentage of doctorates when compared with the government group. Those in the private sector tend to have lower academic qualifications.

Per cent respondents indicating that they are currently enrolled for a higher or further degree are also shown in Table 3. The figures for the total sample reveal a

slightly better situation than that found by McNamara (1977) for Ohio where 91% were not actively working toward an advanced degree. University staff show the highest enrolment proportion.

Time since completion of last formal training is given for the total sample and various employment categories. This distribution is comparable to that obtained by Boneau and Cuca (1974), although they had slightly fewer (5.4%) in the 1 year or less category, and slightly more (13%) in the more than 20 years category. No particular patterns are discernible except that in the private enterprise category there is a concentration of graduates of less than 10 years standing.

Table 5  
*Continuing Professional Education Needs*  
*(Per cent respondents in each category)*

	Total Sample	Gov	Univ	LB	Priv	
	N	259	86	97	30	26
(a) Perceived aim						
Up-date on latest techniques and knowledge	94	95	91	100	92	
Refresh basics	32	36	26	30	35	
Expand into new areas	85	92	74	97	92	
(b) Types of activities seen as best suited						
Short courses at tertiary educational institutions	56	66	38	73	62	
Short in-service courses by employer	37	53	20	57	19	
Extended tertiary courses	16	16	9	27	23	
Occasional lectures	33	24	36	27	27	
Regular study leave	70	69	78	73	38	
Personnel exchange schemes	42	48	42	43	19	
Visits between organisations	53	50	57	67	54	
Conferences	59	55	62	60	77	
Personal reading	72	65	76	77	73	
Correspondence courses	9	10	1	13	8	
Other	5	7	5	3	4	
(c) Preferred sources of costs incurred						
Individual alone	4	2	2	0	12	
Individual with employer contribution	17	12	10	27	23	
Employer with individual contribution	54	63	48	63	27	
Employer alone	20	24	21	27	8	
Govt. funding of tertiary institutions	31	27	37	33	31	
Govt. funding of special continuing training schemes	26	27	21	27	27	
Other source	5	2	6	3	19	

### *Section C: Current Continuing Education Activities and Opportunities*

Table 4 gives the types of courses on psychological topics attended since completion of initial training. A course was defined for respondents as a "seminar, lecture series, workshop, or any formal instruction more than a single lecture". In-service courses run by employing organisations are the most attended particularly for government and local body psychologists. These two employment groups are also greater attenders of university extension courses.

To gauge the extent of the more restricted commitment of scientific and professional meeting and public lecture attendance respondents were asked to indicate attendance in the preceding two years. These data are given in Table 4 (b). There appears in general to be more activity at this level of commitment in all categories, except perhaps in the case of government personnel.

Table 4 (c) indicates the degree to which respondents have the opportunity to interact

with other psychologists. As can be seen there appears to be a fairly high level of interaction overall but psychologists in the university setting are considerably better off than other categories for opportunity to interact with overseas psychologists, New Zealand psychologists from other areas, and psychologists working in other fields. Opportunity for discussion with psychologists working in one's own field is more evenly spread.

Respondents were asked to indicate whether any employer (present or previous) has paid for, or contributed to, expenses of various continuing education activities. The results are reported in Table 4 (d). University staff's higher entitlement to study leave would account for their higher likelihood of having had employer contribution to this activity. Assistance with course attendance is less liberal for universities than other employment categories. Overall there seems to be a slightly higher level of employer support than that reported by McNamara (1977) for Ohio.

Table 4 (e) gives a breakdown of entitlement to study leave. University employees have a much higher entitlement than any other employment category, although those in the local body and private sectors are reasonably well catered for. This is particularly true of the private sector psychologists, where of those indicating that they are not currently entitled to study leave 46% have had previous entitlement. This is much higher than any other category.

#### *Section D: Continuing Education Needs*

In this section three questions were asked to assess respondents' views: (a) the aims of continuing professional education, (b) what types of activities would best suit respondents in achieving those aims, and (c) who should pay the costs incurred in continuing professional education. The results are summarised in Table 5.

There is a high acceptance of the aim of keeping up to date on latest techniques and knowledge. Expansion of training into new areas overall has a high acceptance but finds slightly less favour among university employees. Refreshment of basic knowledge is seen as one of the aims of continuing professional education by only about one third of the respondents. These results are generally consistent with those obtained by McNamara (1977).

Of the types of activities seen as best suited in achieving these aims of continuing professional education personal reading is overall the most popular (72%), followed by regular study leave (70%) and conferences (59%). Teaching type activities varied in acceptance with short courses at tertiary educational institutions being the most acceptable (56%) but extended tertiary courses much less favoured (16%). Courses provided by employers or groups of employers (37%) and occasional lectures (35%) had moderate acceptances and correspondence courses were of low acceptability (9%). The interactive schemes of personnel exchange (42%) and inter-organisational visiting (53%) were moderately acceptable.

Table 5 shows some variation from this overall pattern in different categories. Most notable is the comparative lack of enthusiasm for course type activities among the university group. The private sector

group appears to have comparatively less demand for regular study leave and personnel exchange schemes.

Opinions as to who should pay for the costs incurred in continuing professional education indicate that there is little enthusiasm for a strict user-pays principle, although this finds comparatively more acceptance in the private sector. Opinion over all categories tends to favour substantial employer payment of costs but with some individual contribution. Payment by employer alone is favoured more in the public sector than in the private sector.

#### Discussion

Psychologists apparently have a reasonable level of involvement in continuing education activities. Only 22% had not attended any of the types of courses listed in Table 4 (a) since qualification. There was an even higher participation at the lower level of commitment represented by public lectures and learned society meetings: only 5% had not attended any of these in the previous two year period. At the level of informal interaction with other psychologists only 4% had no opportunity to meet and consult with other psychologists in the work situation. There appears to be a greater preference for activities with lower formal commitment.

This preference is reflected strongly in the activities seen as best achieving continuing professional education aims. Personal reading, regular study leave and conferences score the highest; all are activities with largely individual action and less formal educational commitment. Short courses and visits between organisations are the next most favoured. These conclusions lead us to propose that emphasis on continuing education should lean towards activities that are more self-directed and informal, particularly for professions such as psychology which are diverse in specialities and not numerically strong. Thus there should be emphasis on inter-organisational contacts and provision of education leave. In order to foster contact between psychologists, a practical aid could be the provision of a register of New Zealand Psychological Society members' professional and research interests. There is, however, still the necessity

and demand for short formal courses, especially those which aim to update latest techniques and knowledge and to expand training in new areas.

Although there is some variation over groups on the question of who should pay, the overall opinion is that the employer should bear the major responsibility, with a contribution from the individual. The government is also seen as having some responsibility to provide funds. As a general principle, it might be advocated that employers should be prevailed upon to accept a large amount of the responsibility on the assumption that they will benefit most from the increased professional competence, but that some burden should be assumed by employees as they are also benefiting by the acquisition of skills that may increase their attractiveness in the job market.

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