History of efforts for Support Staff and Science Technicians

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Advocacy for the Profession

STANZ aims to promote and strengthen the role and status of school science technicians. It has done this by collecting, analysing, and disseminating information that helps the profession; forging links with a range of organisations, and endorsing professional guidelines. Advocacy for science technicians with agents of change is central to the organisational purpose. These agents include NZASE, and may include tertiary educators offering courses, science technician associations elsewhere, other professional bodies with common interests, researchers such as those with the Prime Minister's Science Advisory Committee; even our employers.

However, because state and integrated schools employing technicians are so poorly-resourced, most professional issues come from this poverty. Important changes can come through bargaining for collective agreements and enforcing present contracts, so it is important to connect with agencies that deal with these. Some of the professional issues STANZ has identified as common to many science technicians can be addressed through NZEI and ISEA. Since NZEI offers representation to more than 90% of school science technicians, it is well-placed to deal with issues which concern us as professionals. When NZEI actions make gains for its members and potential members these affect the role and status of all science technicians.

Early Science Technician involvements

Efforts to have associate staff in state and integrated schools recognised as more than mother helpers began with the formation of the Educational Services Paraprofessional Association (ESPA) about 1975. Kay Memmott, then science technician at Havelock High, was a foundation member and represented Hawkes Bay, and became a member of the ESPA executive (and later the NZEI executive). ESPA aimed to represent: "teacher aides, library assistants and laboratory assistants (sic) and negotiated conditions of employment on their behalf." ESPA was backed by NZEI field staff from the primary sector.

One of Kay's first aims was to change the name of "laboratory assistant" to "laboratory technician". She knew how important are words in job descriptions and contract negotiations.

After the Employment Contracts Act was passed in 1991, bringing in voluntary unionism and limiting multi-employer contracts, ESPA combined with NZEI in 1992, and in 1994 NZEI also began to represent clerical and administrative staff in schools. (The title of "laboratory assistant", which Kay objected to, disappeared in the 1997 NZEI Support Staff contract. Science technicians were finally both renamed and recognised for the actual responsibilities.)

State school support staff employment context

Most support staff when first employed in schools are mothers wanting work that allows them time to look after their children. Turnover is low because there are few alternatives that allow them to balance work and other family and community responsibilities which change over time. For these reasons they may stay on after their offspring have become adults.

Under the Tomorrow's Schools reforms which commenced in 1989, support staff pay has been bulk-funded through the school's operations grant. Schools have needed a growing number of support staff to cope with increasing educational requirements. The 7 000 support staff in 1989 increased to more than 24 000 in 2010.

Howard Fancy, former Secretary of Education, concluded that the reforms "underestimated ... the kind of supports, information infrastructure and systems principals and teachers would need." This conclusion was confirmed by NZCER surveys between 1989 and 1999 which showed 61% of principals wanting more support staff.

The NZCER surveys also showed that government funding of the operations grant became less adequate over time, so schools came to rely on fundraising to meet budget. The Ministry of Education never included the school requirement for support staff in its funding formula, so did not increase funding when schools needed to employ more of them.

As state schools have become poorer, it has been harder for NZEI to negotiate better support staff pay and conditions. During a 20 year period when other groups of women have had major advances, gains for this group of (mainly) women have been more modest. Nurses, primary teachers, kindergarten teachers and early childhood educators have all achieved a major step change by being fairly paid, but support staff have not - because they are being paid from an empty purse. The government policy of paying support staff wages through the operations grant has led to hard-nosed employer resistance to reasonable wage claims.

This policy is a gender inequity because it turns some of the public cost of education into a private cost. (It costs families more to care for their children and have a community role). While the government has a policy to provide free childcare to some parents, this bulk-funding policy denies fair wages to other parents who are vulnerable to such government influence because of childcare (and possibly other) responsibilities.

Science technician workforce

Science technician surveys in 2007 showed that women are 92% of all school science technicians, compared with a 91% average for all school support staff. The poor pay and conditions fits a common pattern found in types of work where there are few males.

Like other support staff, most started in their school roles after producing their families. Female science technicians recruited more than 5 years previously had a median age of 40 at recruitment. Following population trends towards producing later families, those recruited in the last 5 years were recruited at a median age of 42.

The median for hours worked per week was 25, and most employment was term-time only: with school terms totalling 39 weeks, the mean annual employment was 39.6 weeks.

The median age was 51, with only 7% under 40 years of age, 59% over 50, and 8% over 60. Turnover for the previous 5 years averaged 7% per year, and the survey data indicated this rate would continue. (The public sector average annual turnover has been about 20%.)

The science technicians' surveys found a trend for technicians to look for more working hours as their children grew up, and some schools had provided either more technician hours, or other paid work in the school. Some science technicians worked in two or even three schools, while others took extra work outside a school.

Science Technician Progress

The 1990s were a difficult time for support staff and for the education workforce. The stagnant economy led to acceptance of an education wage freeze. In 1996, a remit from Canterbury teachers led NZASE to investigate and report on concerns about the role and duties of school science technicians. Pay was one issue recorded in the 1997 report. After years of pay restraint in schools, the maximum hourly rate for highly qualified state school science technicians fell to only 56% of the public service average hourly rate.

The primary teachers' pay parity campaign ran from 1994 to 1998. Joanna Beresford explained the mood of teachers involved in it: "If people are financially devalued, they feel socially devalued. The rest of the community tends to think the same way." Science technicians at the time were not feeling highly valued either.

Important dates for science technicians were 1997, 2001, and 2002. Before 1997, state school librarians and science technicians were on similar rates; paid as unqualified assistants. In 1997 NZEI managed to get their skills recognised and re-graded as Associate B. In 2001, NZEI negotiated a qualifications allowance, followed in 2002 by changes to grading definitions which put responsible librarians and science technicians on the Associate C scale.

In 2010, a review of school science technician roles was submitted to the Support Staff Workforce Strategy Working Group. It argued that science technicians could be better used in New Zealand schools, doing work they are best qualified to do, in place of higher-paid teachers. However, their role has been so neglected that they cannot help their schools operate more effectively unless there is action on some basic issues. These are: low and variable levels of technician support relative to science teaching hours, better access to basic training and ongoing professional development, pay equity, and routes for (and steps in) career development. Changes in terms of employment, especially in funding, are needed to address these issues. Otherwise science technicians, individually and as a group, cannot advance professionally and play their appropriate roles in school operations.

In 2011, after settlement of the collective agreement, an extension to the tenure of this Working Party allows the group to consider appropriate roles of staff in contexts requiring some increase in costs. This may allow better evaluation of science technician use.

Pay Funding & Gender Equity

The NZEI Support Staff Funding Working Party of 2003-4 carried out a major study of state school support staff funding which considered the changes in schools since 1989, and the needs arising from them. Changes included mainstreaming of special needs students, curriculum and assessment changes, greater school reporting requirements with NEGs and NAGs and other legal or regulatory changes, increased ICT staff and operations costs, increasing behaviour, truancy, and diverse student language issues, decline in volunteers, and more support staff to supervise.

This Working Party also reported that improvements in state school support staff conditions of employment, and changes in grade definitions to recognise greater skills, had made the operations grant underfunding worse, because the operations grant and ORRS funding were not increased by the full amount.

Some of the results of the underfunding had been: a budgeting tension in schools, with reduction in support staff hours or positions; compliance issues arising from the funding gap – with non-payment of increments and allowances; fixed-term agreements that should be permanent; fluctuating hours; lack of professional development; incorrect job descriptions and grading of jobs.

The research concluded there was a need not only for an increase in operational grants, but also in the way that support staff pay is funded. It needed to provide for permanent employment of professional salaried employees, with professional development and career paths, and consistent compliance with the collective agreement in grades and rates of pay.

The working party report also found a classic situation of gender pay inequity for the mainly female support staff group. Many were paid at a low rate, or at a rate which did not reflect their skills and responsibilities, and they were often part-time and in precarious employment, without a defined career path.

Feedback from support staff indicated frustration about limited hours, unpaid holiday breaks, lack of job security, and pay rates which did not recognise levels of skill and qualifications. However, they were often reluctant to seek better pay and conditions, even those they were legally entitled to, in recognition of school budget constraints.(Recent research on gender pay gaps suggests a major reason is that most women will not make a claim for just pay if it requires confrontation.)

Later reports prepared by the Ministry of Education (2006) and the Education Review Office (2006) supported NZEI's conclusions that there had not been the increase in operations grants corresponding to the large increase in staffing to meet changed educational requirements.

In 2005-6 NZEI developed ideas about how pay scales should be restructured if there was proper funding, and possibilities for career paths, and included them in bargaining for the 2007 collective agreement. The Admin and Associate scales would be integrated, with occupational definitions, and occupational entry and exit points. Job content would be evaluated, and an appropriate wage level set for each job, with a limited number of annual step increases available. There would be an extra step for a qualification of Level 6 or above. Suitable professional development to allow movement between roles would then provide career paths. The government has yet to provide the funding to enable support staff to be fairly employed and adequately paid as in this plan.

Compulsory Schooling Pay & Employment Equity Review

As part of the government's 2004 Action Plan for New Zealand Women**,** the Pay and Employment Equity Taskforce produced a pay and employment equity plan. The first priority was addressing the gender pay gap in the public service, the public health sector, and the public education sector (including employees in state and integrated schools). The goal for 2008, the end of its 5 year equity plan period, was:

"By 2008, genuine and durable pay and employment equity for women will be a feature of the New Zealand Public Service and public health and education sectors, the gender pay gap in those sectors will have been significantly closed, and all practicable steps to close the gender pay gap will have been taken." This expectation has proved too optimistic.

Pay & Employment Equity reviews carried out by most departments were regarded as Human Resources exercises, carried out with union assistance to produce an agreed outcome. However the review of the Compulsory Schooling Sector proceeded on an adversarial basis, with Ministry of Education, School Trustees Association, and union appointees. With every point being contested, it took four years to complete, and was reported to the Minister of Education in September 2008, but was not publicly released until I requested and was able to obtain a copy in April 2010, under the Official Information Act.

Apparent oversights in the review may be accounted for by the adversarial nature of the review group slowing progress and delaying school surveys until close to the end of the 2007 school year. As a result, only three schools of the intended twenty completed the first survey, and from the 120 schools in the second survey, support staff member responses averaged only one per school. The resulting data were too limited to fully cover equity issues for the different support staff occupational groups. In the absence of definitive data to cover the review brief, recommendations of the review group were conservative.

The support staff focus group believed that work was undervalued and rewards for support staff were not equitable. The focus group discussions and second survey also raised concerns that pay rates did not take into account relevant qualifications.

The report conceded that it is possible that support staff work was undervalued because of historical gender bias, but recommended pay investigations only for teacher aides and cleaners (although three-quarters of the focus group providing the information were not teacher aides). Reference was made to valuation of work by librarians. The steering group believed school librarians might be included in a public sector pay investigation. Confirmation of a serious pay deficiency for school librarians (and hence also science technicians) later came from the 2009 LIANZA pay survey by MM Research, which found school librarians so poorly paid (underpaid by in excess of 25%) that researchers were unsure why librarians worked in schools. (The absence of similar findings and appropriate recommendations in this Compulsory Schooling P&EE Review indicates something of the shortcomings which arose from the difficult process followed.)

Strategies were proposed to deal with support staff not receiving pay increments when due, being placed in the wrong grade or on the wrong step, and being employed wrongly on a fixed term agreement. The unjustified use of fixed-term agreements was related to inadequate operations funding. The suggested response was for the Ministry of Education in 2009 to look into the cost of fixing the funding deficiency. This recommendation has been ignored.

Tony Ryall, Minister of State Services, in 2009 also refused the recommended teacher aide pay investigation as “unaffordable”, thus acknowledging that teacher aides were in line for substantial increases. Primary teacher pay parity was similarly dismissed in 1994 by Alf Kirk of the State Services Commission as “prohibitively expensive”, although an independent evaluation showed it to be merited.

Science Technician experience and qualifications

Because most NZ school science technicians are sole technicians, their competence is particularly important. As the majority of applicants are science-trained mothers (from a variety of science backgrounds) returning to the work force, they usually commence with ability and maturity to meet basic requirements. They need then to find a way to acquire any professional development that is lacking. In 2007, they had acquired an average of 11 years school experience.

Of NZ state/integrated school female school science technicians, 70% had qualifications equivalent to Level 6 or better on the NZ Qualification Framework; independent schools had 94% (in the survey, all but 1 technician, who had two relevant Level 5 diplomas in science).

This information gives a strong vote by NZ State schools to accept the minimum of a Level 6 qualification proposed in Victoria for science technicians, while independent schools have essentially achieved it.

Compared with this 70% of science technicians who were qualified at Level 6 or above, the Statistics NZ 2006 Census showed only 19% of the NZ population were so qualified. Data from that census showed that Central Government and Public Sector groups better match qualifications of school science technicians than does the NZ all-sector average:

Science Technician Qualification (Comparisons from 2006 Census)

NZQF Level	Scitechs	Central Govt	Public Sector	All sectors
6 and above	70%	55%	52%	19%
7 and above	45%	42%	40%	14%
8 and above	23%	16%	15%	4%

Science Technician & Librarian Pay Trends

Statistics NZ has carried out a Quarterly Employment Survey (QES) since 1989, (the year support staff pay was first bulk-funded through the school's operations grant) so comparative pay data is available since then. Up until June 2009, the industrial group "M" (Government Administration and Defence) used in the QES closely approximated the Central Government group of the Census, so data from average pay rates for Industrial "M", the Public Sector, and the all-sector average have been compared with maximum rates for science technicians.

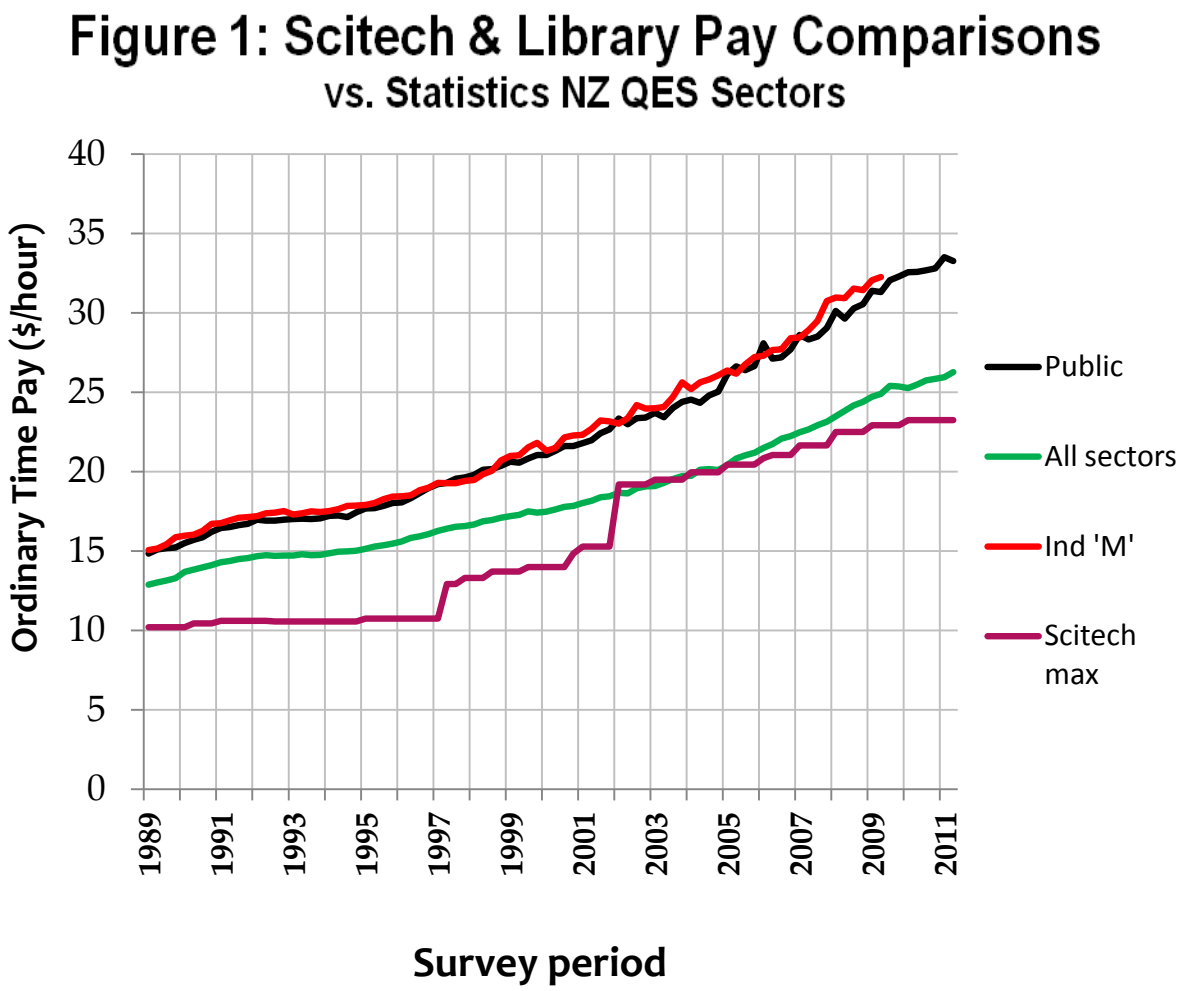

Figure 1 plots science technician/librarian maximum scale pay rates on the same axes as average rates for these other employment groups.

Despite science technicians having better (and needed) qualifications than the all-sectors average, than the Public sector, and the Industrial "M" central government group, their maximum pay has generally lagged far behind the averages for all these other groups.

Key steps in the graph occur in 1997 and 2002. As explained earlier, librarians and science technicians were paid as unqualified assistants until 1997, when their skills were recognised by re-grading to Associate B. In 2001 a qualifications allowance produced a small increase, and changes to grading definitions took effect in January 2002, putting responsible librarians and science technicians on the Associate C scale. So in 2002 for the first time, (some, not all) librarians and science technicians were paid on a scale with a maximum above the all-sectors average ordinary-time hourly rate. This was a major advance, yet still modest for the requirements of these positions.

However, much of the gain made has since been eroded. It can be seen that the science technician/librarian maximum rate again fell behind the average all-sector wage, and the gap has continued to widen, as it has with the other groups represented on the graph.

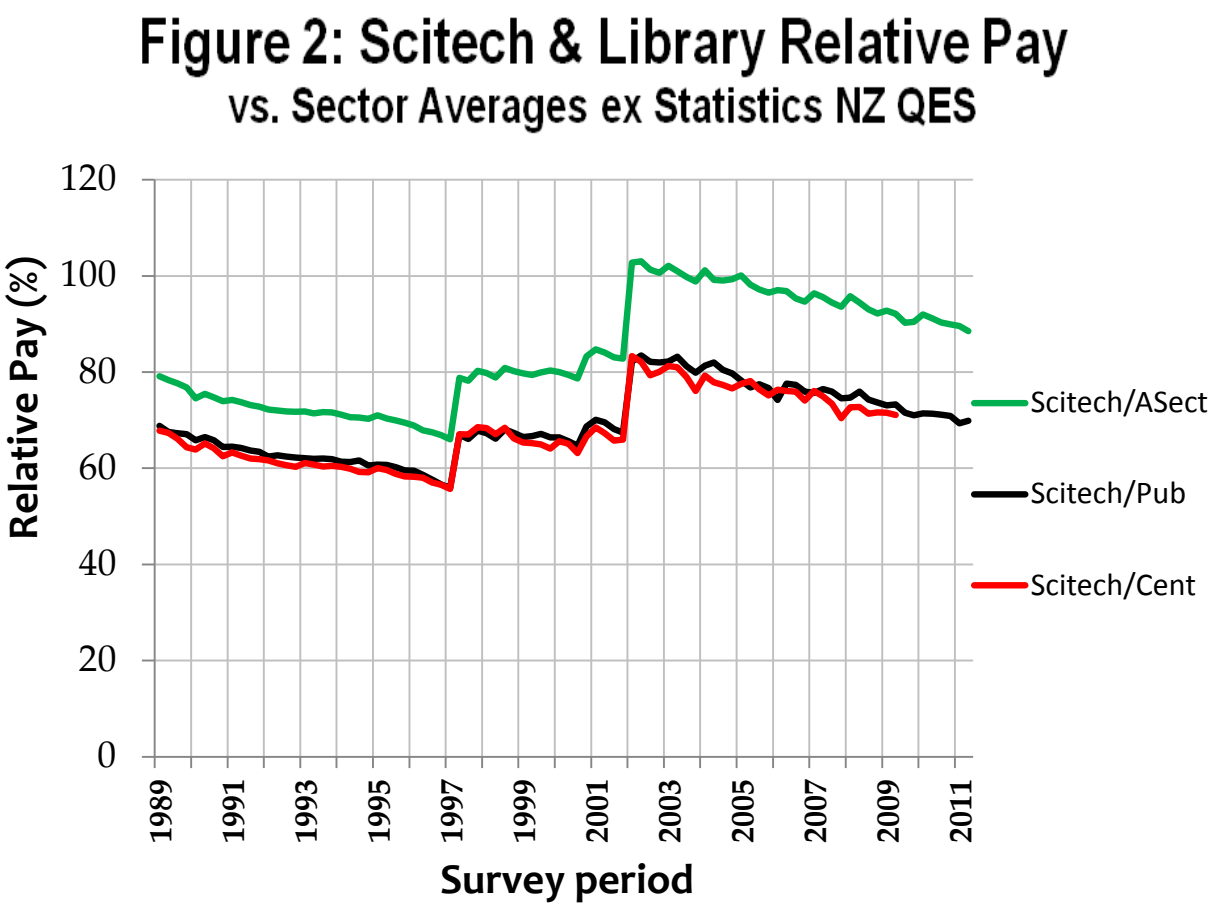

Figure 2 shows the same pay data, with science technician maximum scale rates represented as a percentage of the average pay rate of the other sector groups considered: All sectors, Public sector, and the Central government group "M'.

Note that the 1997 regrading to Associate B only enabled science technician and librarian pay to almost recover the relativities they had with the Public Sector average and all-sectors average pay rates in 1989 (when they were regarded as unskilled assistants). The further regrading to Associate C enabled the science technician maximum to reach above 82% of the average Public Sector wage in 2002, but NZEI has been unable to keep this relativity.

In May 2011, science technicians at the top step of their scale (with maximum qualifications allowance), could receive just 69.4% of the Public Sector average. This is again little different from the 68.8% of the Public Service average wage they received in February1989 as supposedly unskilled assistants. However, relative to the all-sector average wage, science technicians did improve their position over this period, from 79.1% to 88.5%. By this measure, the continuing injustice is shown to now be smaller.

The rates negotiated in collective agreements are not always paid. In a 2007 NZ workforce survey, 31% of state school technicians were paid below the C scale. It is likely that a few of these were in larger schools working in a subsidiary role under a head technician, but also compliance issues are indicated. The workforce survey further found 8% were not receiving the appropriate qualifications allowance.

2010 Support Staff Pay Investigations

In December 2010, Celia Briar reported a support staff pay investigation commissioned by NZEI. (This was reviewed in the STANZ Term 3 newsletter.) The investigation looked at pay rates of a sample of positions to represent Support Staff: Admin A, B, C and Associate A, B, C grades. Science technicians will be interested in the resulting recommendation for a 43% pay increase at the first step of Support Staff Associate C and Administration C scales. This recommendation is in line with the relationship shown between recent scale maximums and public sector average rates.

Dr Briar also recommended:

(1) Staff with recognised qualifications should receive a higher hourly allowance for these.

(2) It should be possible to claim an allowance for more than one recognised qualification.

(3) Support staff should be paid for the school holidays as teachers are.

(4) Support staff should be paid by the Ministry of Education, as teachers are.

(5) Central government funding should be available to assist with professional development.

Fair Pay in schools

Imagine an education workforce of mainly women, with inequality entrenched in their pay rates. (No, they were not school support staff.) This is how Joanna Beresford, chief negotiator for the 1994-8 Primary Teachers' Pay Parity Campaign, described the central issue of that campaign.

The 1994 primary teacher parity campaign came after a 4 year pay freeze for school employees, while pay of other workers had increased. At the NZEI Annual Meeting in 1993, teachers forcefully voted to get an increase in wages, the NZEI executive proposed an aggressive response, and the pay parity campaign was developed. The parity gap targeted was an average of 12% between primary and secondary teachers of similar responsibilities and qualifications.

Primary teachers strongly supported the idea of pay parity because they were fed-up with being paid and treated like second-class citizens; of feeling a need to apologise that they were "only primary teachers". Their pay was grossly unfair. They saw a moral principle: parity was a matter of right; something they were entitled to; a cause long overdue for solution. Primary teacher pay levels compared unfavourably, not only with secondary teachers, but for work of similar responsibility elsewhere in the workforce.

A wage campaign was difficult to plan in 1993: unemployment was high; the government had cut benefits, housing assistance, and accident compensation. Economic growth was slow; and the government was trying to reduce public debt with tight monetary policy and an extended freeze on school operations funding, with wage restraint across the public sector.

The government had used the Employment Contracts Act against union organisation and collective bargaining, and was prepared to see workers' conditions eroded and real wages reduced. Initially it was thought that pay parity could take years to achieve, or that the claim would fail and discredit NZEI.

However, NZEI members had shown restraint and accepted getting no pay increase when the government claimed serious economic difficulties, and now the government itself claimed New Zealand was getting through those difficulties. All NZEI members had made sacrifices; now it was time (for the primary teacher members) to be fairly rewarded.

The pay parity claim appealed strongly to the sense of fairness of the public, aided by a cartoon character called Susan. Her billing explained that "If Susan wore size 12s her teacher would earn a lot more". Susan's humorous message made her "an absolute winner" for the campaign. With her help, a majority of the public was persuaded that shoe size should not determine pay: primary teachers should be paid more. The public opinion shift in their favour eventually caused the government to concede.

In 2011, school support staff are still an undervalued and underpaid education workforce of mainly women. The difficulties which support staff now face are much like those confronted by primary teachers in 1994.

NZEI's landmark settlement for primary teachers, and its subsequent settlements for kindergarten and early childhood teachers, have greatly improved pay equity in education. However, the continuing unfairness for support staff leaves NZEI no opportunity to rest on the laurels won in other campaigns.

If primary teachers were being paid and treated like second-class citizens in 1994, support staff certainly are in 2011. Their underpayment can be far more than the 12% that primary teachers considered unjust then and, as already outlined, support staff have their hours of work cut to balance the school budget, can expect little or no advancement in their work, their professionalism often goes unrecognised, they are stood down during term breaks and frequently employed on short-term contracts. Principles are very much involved: this is a classic tale of gender inequity and exploitation; of a cause even longer needing remedy. Support staff pay levels and employment conditions compare unfavourably for work of similar responsibility elsewhere in the workforce.

The period since 2009 has also been a difficult time to plan a wage campaign: unemployment has been high; the government has reviewed those on benefits and accident compensation; the economy has been in recession with recovery still uncertain; and the government is reluctantly incurring increasing public debt to keep the economy stimulated so that the country does not slide back into recession. The two major earthquakes in Christchurch have further increased that debt. There is wage restraint across the public sector, and public sector employment has been cut. Also, school operations funding now needs to be supplemented by fund-raising, since increases in school requirements have been underfunded, and little further economy is possible.

Support staff have been modest in their demands. The restraint they showed in the 1990s, when the government claimed economic difficulties, was demonstrated again in settling 2009 and 2011claims. Treasury forecasts before the February 2011 Christchurch earthquake suggested no budget surplus before 2014, and that is still the official position. The government expects further restraint from support staff, but it must be recognised that for too **m**any years support staff have made sacrifices, accepted inferior conditions, been taken advantage of, and failed to receive a Fair Deal.

What can we do?

1. STANZ information

   Science technicians often have a difficulty with the hours allocated for their work, and a September 2011 initiative from NZASE, asking for an update of the 2007 service factor survey, may be helpful for some in obtaining more technician hours in 2012. In October 2011, STANZ will be working on this, and it would be appreciated if science technicians can provide data for their schools.

2. NZEI local branches

   There are many in the school community who recognise the value of support staff work and some difficulties with how they are paid. Within the NZEI membership it is now widely accepted that something needs to be done about support staff terms of employment. Support staff at paid union meetings have been grumpy with both their pay offer and their union; they expect more from both. These are matters which need to be taken up at local NZEI branches; asking NZEI to provide leadership for support staff in winning broader community support, resolution of injustices, and enabling professional goals to be advanced.

Teachers went to the 1993 Annual Meeting of NZEI looking for action on their pay, and this sparked the 1994-8 Primary Teachers' Pay Parity campaign. It is not too early to be considering whether there should be similar representations on behalf of support staff by delegates at the September 2012 Annual Meeting.

NZEI is currently in the process of planning a new support staff campaign, and part of this is claimed to involve a new approach for professional groups such as science technicians and librarians. The 2006 pay restructuring proposals based on central funding for support staff seem like a suitable framework.

If we are NZEI members, we have the opportunity to inquire at a local branch meeting what will be done about improving the circumstances of support staff, and to expect to be able to help shape that action. A remit to the Annual Meeting may be appropriate, to clearly indicate that another increase below the change in cost of living is not what is being sought. There are rules about the type of remits which can be put forward, so the wording will need to fit within these rules.

In 2010, when science technicians helped with a survey of support staff in 25 secondary schools, the information provided changed the way that NZEI asked their members to prioritise claims for bargaining. If science technicians speak up at their local branch meetings, and seek the help of others in making submissions for support staff, they may achieve much more. The time must come when NZEI acts for support staff to achieve a major step change in conditions, so structured that it is not easily eroded away.

6th October 2011

Technicians Time-line

Year		Pay index
1975	ESPA formed	
1989	Tomorrow's Schools introduced	68.8
1991	Employment Contracts Act	64.5
1992	ESPA/NZEI amalgamation	62.4
1994	Clerical workers join NZEI; separate scales	61.4
1996	Canterbury Teachers remit to NZASE	59.5
1997	NZASE report: Scitechs in NZ Schools	55.9
	NZEI Pay reform: scitechs graded Associate B	67.0
2000	UK school scitech survey by ASE/ Royal Society	66.4
2001	Qualifications allowance introduced	70.1
	Wellington conference: Spratt/McKean	68.1
2002	NZEI Pay reform: scitechs graded Associate C	82.2
2003	Napier conference: Kay Memmott	82.2
	NZEI sets up SS Funding Working Party	81.2
2004	Govt Action Plan for NZ Women	81.3
	Pay & Employment Equity 5 year plan	
	DOL P&EE Unit set up to support reviews	
	NZEI SS Working Party reports on funding	
2005	Admin/Assoc scale amalgamation attempt	78.3
	Christchurch conference: Beth Bradley	
	STANZ formed	
2006	MOE/ ERO reviews of school operational funding	74.2
	NZEI proposes SS pay restructure, needing funding	
2007	Scitech employment & workforce surveys	
	STANZ Cambridge conference: Raewyn Keene	75.7
	STANZ accepts advocacy as executive role	
2008	Compulsory school P&EE review complete	74.7
	Otago Uni modifies Managing Chem Hazards	
2009	ConSTANZ09 in Auckland : Beryl McKinnell	73.1
	NZEI Fair Deal campaign	
	Hackling survey of Australian school scitechs	
2010	PM's Science Advisory Comm: Priorities in SciEd	71.4
	NZEI sets up SS Workforce Strategy group	
	NZEI Pay investigations for support staff	
2011	Workforce strategy group report	69.4
	ConSTANZ11 in Dunedin : Margaret Woodford	