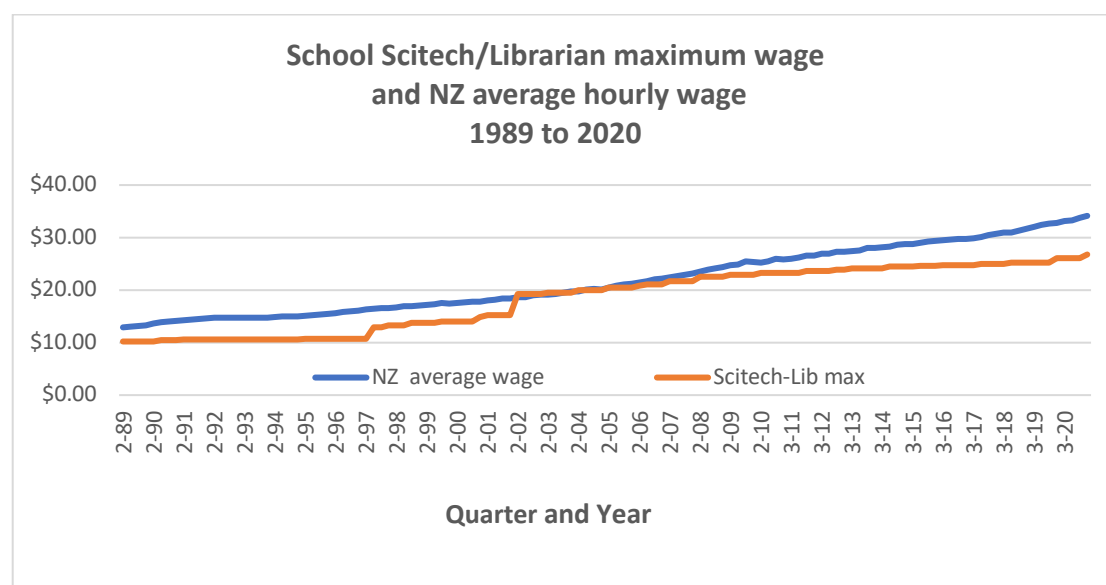


School Science Technician and Librarian Pay

Relativity to the average hourly wage, 1989-2020.

Data from all-sectors ordinary-time average hourly wage data was obtained from the Quarterly Employment Survey produced by Statistics NZ, and this is compared in the graph below against the maximum hourly wage indicated for school Science Technicians and Librarians in the various collective contract pay scales from 1989 to 2020.

In 1989, qualified Librarians were labelled as Library Assistants, and Science Technicians as Lab Assistants, and the pay rates reflected this view of their positions and competence. They were paid in February 1989 at 79% of the then average ordinary time hourly rate. During the public sector wage freeze in the 1990s their pay relativity dropped further to merely 66% of the average wage rate, but in 1997-99 the pay rate was restored to about the 1989 relativity, at 78-80% of average rates.



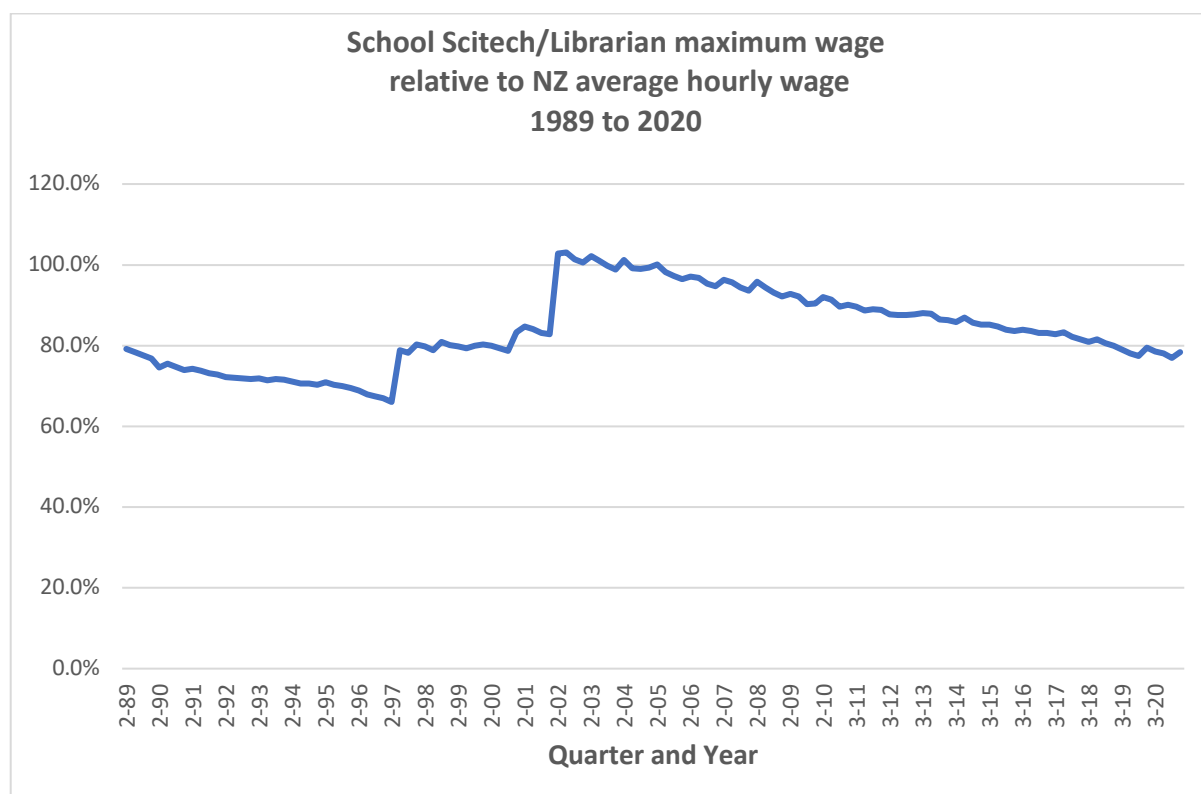
However, a push to have professional competence more appropriately recognised and rewarded, led first to a small qualifications allowance (maximum 58c/hour) being paid from 2000, and then an upgrade to the Associate C scale in 2002. At this stage, at the top of the new scale, and with the maximum qualifications allowance, it was potentially possible to receive 102% of the average hourly rate. This seemed more reasonable for the skill levels, qualifications, and work responsibilities.

However, this parity with the average wage rate lasted for only 3 years, and then there was a slow but continuing decline. Maximum pay rates for Science Technicians and Librarians in December 2020 had a similar relativity to all-sector average ordinary-time hourly rates that they had in February 1989; about 79%.

In 2000, when qualification allowances were introduced, the maximum rate (for a Level 7 qualification) was \$0.58/hr; an additional 4.1% added to the maximum hourly rate. This was regarded as a modest interim measure. The qualification allowances have never been increased, and thus have become even more modest: the \$0.58/hr now adds only 2.2% to the maximum hourly rate.

This long decline in relative pay rates is attributed to long-term underfunding of the school operations grant, associated hard-nosed wage bargaining to contain this cost component of school operations, and the weak bargaining position of the predominantly female group of employees with few other suitable employment options suiting their family responsibilities.

The graph below shows the Science Technician/Librarian maximum hourly rates as a percentage of the ordinary time all-sectors average hourly wage from 1989 to 2020.



The brief period in which school science technicians and librarians had a scale maximum hourly rate higher than the average wage shows something of the potential of an equity claim, but both groups should be aiming higher than the average wage.

The qualifications of school science technicians and librarians are generally higher than for the average worker, and they are also more mature than the average worker. Their training and previous experiences provide them with a range of technical, organisational, and relational skills needed to effectively do their work.

Survey data from 2007 and 2018 school science technician workforce surveys are compared with Statistics NZ Census and Quarterly Employment Survey data to show that science technicians have more to offer than the average NZ worker. In NZ we have a stable, replenishing group of school technicians, with generally good science qualifications and previous practical science-related experience. The science technician surveys also found an average of 10 years' experience in the school science role. The following tables show qualification and age groups of Science Technicians, compared to those of the general workforce.

School Science Technician and NZ Workforce Qualifications

NZQF level	Scitechs 2007	Census 2006	Scitechs 2017	Census 2018
No qualification	1%	18%	1%	11%
Levels 1-3	15%	33%	13%	31%
Levels 4-5	10%	16%	8%	15%
Level 6	34%	6%	31%	5%
Level 7	29%	13	31%	17%
Levels 8-10	11%	6%	15%	12%

A Level 6 Diploma or above is generally regarded as a desirable qualification for the Science Technician role. The table shows that 77% of technicians are so qualified, but only 34% of the NZ workforce.

School Science Technician and NZ Workforce Age Profiles

Age bracket	Scitechs 2007	Scitechs 2017	QES March 2020
<40	8%	11%	41%
40-49	33%	30%	16%
50-59	49%	35%	16%
60-69	10%	21%	14%
70+	0%	2%	14%

Technicians also need maturity and experience, as they generally work alone, and are often given requirements which are poorly defined. They must develop and establish suitable systems and procedures, and they must work effectively and efficiently with staff and students. The table shows that in 2017, 89% of science technicians were in the 40+ age group, so the majority have plenty of technical and life experience to offer. By contrast, only 59% of the NZ workforce are 40+.

(It should also be pointed out that, despite guidance from 2002 to schools on interpretation of the collective agreement that Librarians and Science Technicians should be placed on the Associate C scale, more than 30% of schools paid Science Technicians at a lower rate, and 25% still today pay less than the C scale. This is another example of stretching an inadequate operations grant.)

The data suggest, however, that an equity claim settlement should place Science Technicians on hourly rates which exceed the all-sector average for the NZ workforce. If suitable comparators can be found, and a fair assessment of the job contents obtained, that evaluation would be expected to confirm this belief.

The efforts currently being made by NZEI and the Ministry of Education to process equity pay claims for school support staff groups are very welcome.

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20/4/21

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