



We Need Chief Psychologists

National Psychologists Stop Work Meetings Discuss Future Workforce Settings and Employment Arrangements in Public Sector

During September and October, over 200 APEX psychologists across Te Whatu Ora, Ministry of Education and Oranga Tamariki attended 22 stop work meetings from Whangarei to Dunedin to discuss a cross-sector approach to public sector psychology workforce and our recommendation on the future of employment agreements for psychologists.

Overall, APEX members were strongly supportive of a cross sector approach and would like to move towards a single collective agreement with pay parity for psychologists. We had good debate and discussion around the potential benefits and risks of the approach, and understood why we were looking at this strategy for change.

There was particularly loud support for the concept of pay parity for psychologists across the government

sector, for the establishment of a chief psychologist position(s) working either within each agency or across the whole public sector and potentially on a bicultural model, and for better coordination around the workforce pipeline including transfer and relocation costs at appointment and guaranteeing employment for psychologists after internship year. Repeatedly we heard at Te Whatu Ora and Ministry of Education meetings that the pay is too low to recruit and retain psychologists and there were frequent complaints about merit progression/SPP processes in particular, and the need to remove this barrier to retaining senior psychologists. Some were surprised by how much further ahead the OT psychology scale was than the Te Whatu Ora and MoE scales. We also heard very clearly that psychologists do not feel supported by Allied Health leadership in Te Whatu Ora. In fact, APEX members told us a lot they often felt undermined

and resented by Allied Health managers, who take the side of the system against the clinician.

At each meeting APEX members voiced pessimism and cynicism about the future of public sector psychology, especially in health and education. We want to change that.

As we discussed at the stop work meetings – we have now written formally to OT, MoE and Te Whatu Ora to outline our proposal, consult with them, and get an indication of their support or otherwise for our direction of travel.

Moving to a single national collective agreement for public sector psychologists in the next year was already technically challenging. This is because Oranga Tamariki psychologists are currently in bargaining, the Ministry of Education will be implementing a radical salary redesign when the collective agreement expires in January 2023, and the Te Whatu Ora psychology agreement does not expire until May 2023.

On top of this there are now the added complexities of both pay equity and now the public sector pay adjustment (PSPA) processes underway. This means that there are a lot of moving parts and it can be hard to keep track of the sea of acronyms and different bureaucratic processes.

So although our original plan was to ballot all APEX members in early November on a cross-government collective agreement for psychologists. However we are now going to hold off on this until we know exactly what employers are prepared to offer psychologists under PSPA.

And because of the differences in expiry

dates of collective agreements, we expect we may not be able to form a single national collective agreement for psychologists until June 2024.

This will mean that in 2023 we will probably end up focusing on bringing the separate contracts for APEX psychologists closer into alignment through co-ordinated bargaining, especially looking to equalise salary rates for psychologists, and senior psychologists to fix the workforce crunch.

But we do expect to also continue to work in a cross-sector way with the three agencies to better improve the workforce pipeline with better funding and employment conditions for intern psychologists and to look to improve professional leadership through the establishment of chief psychologist position or positions.

Welcome to Psychologists at Serco and ACC

Warm welcome to our new members who have joined APEX recently including psychologists at Serco – Auckland Men's Prison and to psychology advisors at ACC. We are looking forward to negotiating collective agreements for both employers and ensuring the contracts ensure pay and conditions are fair and commensurate with the level of skill, responsibility and risk psychologists carry.

Te Whatu Ora - Discussion Document – Senior and Consultant Psychologist Titles

APEX has recently received for consultation two documents relating to the titles of consultant and senior psychologists from Canterbury and the formerly Central Region (Capital & Coast, Hutt, Midcentral, Whanganui, Hawke's Bay and Wairarapa). We are now circulating a discussion document with our view on the proposed future of the titles within Te Whatu Ora. In summary, we consider the senior psychologist title remain an automatic title but be used only after completion of five years' experience as a registered psychologist, and the MECA be amended in 2023 to provide for this. And that the consultant title (grandparenting any current practice) become a title applicable to psychologists on steps 11 and above. This would prevent the double up of assessing competency against Schedule C in a merit and title application – i.e. assessing whether an employee is "undertaking work at the level expected of a senior practitioner"; and the MECA be amended in 2023 to provide for this. An interview with a senior colleague could be used.

Our discussion document is available [here](#).

Ministry of Education – Remuneration Redesign Update

As part of the working group for the remuneration redesign at the Ministry of Education the Ministry presented their proposed pay scale for psychologists to us on 10 October. The salary scale is as shown and would start at \$89653 and move to \$117198 with a "gate" to senior psychologist and further automatic steps to \$135415. We are now planning to have discussions about some of the issues we foresee including translation to the new scale, moving the auto steps to at least \$120000 and ensuring the gate to senior psychologist is objective, transparent and fair.

Step	Value
1	89653
2	91214
3	94036
4	101929
5	107573
6	114120
7	117198
Senior psychologist	
8	120000
9	125000
10	130000
11	135415

Explore/Gains – Collective Bargaining Update

After being offered a 4% increase early in bargaining, which we did not accept, bargaining has been delayed by the employer but we are due to meet again with the employer on Monday 14 November when we have been assured we will receive a full offer to settle the collective agreement.

APEX Delegate Gaps – Te Whatu Ora – Southern / BoP / Midcentral

Welcome to all our new APEX delegates, including in Waitemata, Counties Manukau, Auckland and Waikato. Delegates are an important part of workplace representation and provide local support and advice to union members, as well as playing a critical role in our collective bargaining process. Our only current gaps in our delegate team are now for new delegates at Te Whatu Ora - Southern, Bay of Plenty and Midcentral districts. If you would like to volunteer or have made a group decision please email us at psychologist@apex.org.nz.

Increased Funding for Psychology Intern Positions

You may have seen the following [announcement](#).

In summary the government has increased the number of intern placements they pay for to 38 in 2023 and then 40 in 2024. It is expected that the internships funded by DHBs will continue so this will see a real increase in the number of interns coming through.

An RFP (Request For Proposal) for 4 intern hubs is currently out for consideration by interested parties. There will be 5 interns per hub (20) plus the additional 18 spread across NZ. A focus on Southern is expected as they have historically had disproportionately less positions available.

Two questions remain unanswered:

1. Will there be sufficient supervision for the increased numbers of interns coming through; and
2. Are we seeing an increasing number of students in programmes now we have more security for them?

We are also interested to see an evaluation of the increasing resource application to this issue, to assess success (or otherwise).

"We Increase Everyone's Quality of Life"

Interview with Connolly Bourn, an APEX delegate at Explore.

Where do you work and what do you do?

I work for Explore Specialist Advice as a registered psychologist. The day to day of our work is we have client visits, working with clients and their families and support networks to change challenging behaviour and increase everyone's quality of life. At Explore we work with children right through to 65. I work mainly with children.

Why did you decide to become a psychologist?

I enjoy working with people and being a

psychologist and working with people and children with disabilities was a natural fit, so that's what drew me to Explore.

Why did you join APEX?

I joined when APEX was first presented as an option in 2020. The idea of doing a collective agreement for psychologists was a good idea because there was a lot of pay disparity and we needed a clear pay scale and equity.

How have you found being a delegate?

It's quite good - it sounds more daunting than it is! It's been useful to be part of the conversations and negotiations and made it easier for me to explain the benefit of the collective agreement to my colleagues and why they should join.

You've just been in bargaining – how have you found that?

It was good. It went as I expected discussing through what we had proposed and then going away and reconvening with a counter offer. And we will see where it goes from there.

What do you like doing outside of work?

Cooking and eating food.

