Initial Online Survey: Feedback Summary
Sep 2016

We invited teachers and other stakeholders within the profession to provide feedback on an initial set of opening questions about the development of a Code of Professional Responsibility, and the balance between setting out some clear aspirations for the future of the profession as well as providing some clear bottomlines regarding unacceptable behaviours.

Rather than creating a draft document in isolation and sharing it for consultation, our aim is to take the opportunity to design the code in collaboration with the profession. We're looking to employ a range of mechanisms to enable dialogue and feedback, including face to face focus groups and online tools.

This is the first survey in what is intended to be an ongoing series of surveys throughout the development process for the code and we asked two main questions: firstly, we indicated that early feedback suggested a desire for a code that builds on the aspirational nature of the Code of Ethics as well as setting some clear behavioural expectations. We invited people to let us know if they agreed with this two-fold approach (and if not to indicate why).

Secondly, we set out some initial thoughts for the purpose of the code and how it might be used by student teachers, teachers, learners, families/whānau, employers and regulatory bodies. We invited feedback on these initial statements and further suggestions for how else each of these stakeholders is likely to make use of the code.

The survey was open for two weeks with the links being promoted through our Highlighter, our facebook page, and the home page of the Education Council website.

In the end we received 954 responses. The responses showed overwhelmingly strong support for the proposed approach (85%-90% agreement across each question). This document provides a summary of the feedback received and the key themes that were identified through the range of supplementary comments.

Unfortunately, we only asked for further comment in instances where people did not agree with the proposed approach (approximately 10% of participants) – as a result we have a detailed understanding of the 'negative' feedback but no further breakdown on the overwhelmingly positive feedback. We will amend this in the design of future surveys.

DEMOGRAPHICS

We had a great range of responses from right across the profession – with Primary, Secondary, and Early Childhood making up about a third each. We also had smaller numbers of participants from Tertiary, Māori Medium, Area Schools, Special Education and other specialist settings and providers.

The vast majority of participants identified themselves as teachers (47%), followed by those in leaderships roles such as DPs, Deans etc (17%). There were also a number of Principals (12%), Centre Managers (12%), and a small number other support roles (rellief teachers, teacher aides, RTLB teachers, and even a couple of parents/caregivers).

Finally, the breakdown for participants in terms of years of service was as follows:
- *More than 15 years   63%*
- *10-15 years   16%*
- *6-10 years   11%*
- *3-6 years   8%*
- *0-2 years   2%*

As a result, the views of longer serving members of the profession were well represented in the survey results. An area to develop as we continue the surveys will be encouraging those who are newer to the profession to add more of their voice to the conversation as well.

CLARIFYING SOME MISUNDERSTANDINGS

There seemed to be a small number of misunderstandings regarding the process of developing the new code that were evident in some responses. The following points should help clarify these areas:

When the Education Council was formed in 2015, it was required in law to establish updated professional standards and an updated code of conduct. This was simply in recognition of the fact that the current Code of Ethics was developed in 2003 and it the environment we operate within, both professionally and personally, and the needs of our learners may have evolved somewhat since then. Consequently we have been asked to established an updated Code of Conduct/Code of Profesisonal Responsibility for the profession, building on the existing Code of Ethics.

This work will ultimately supercede the existing Code of Ethics but it is intended to build on, not replace or ignore, that foundation – our starting assumption is that the Code of Ethics has been well received by the profession and provides an ideal starting point for considering how the environment around us has changed over the last 13 years and how this needs to be acknowledged in our professsional code.

There were several comments expressing concern that the code will be used as a tool to 'gag' teachers from expressing disagreement with political decision and policy that they feel may adversely impact on teachers or learners. We have followed up on this issue in some detail and have confirmed the following:

Although the Education Amendment Act 2015 requires us to have regard for the SSC Standards of Integrity and Conduct in this process, we have been advised by the SSC that their Standards of Integrity and Conduct have never been applied to teachers and the

reference in the legislation doesn't change that. SSC officials also advised that the impartiality and political neutrality provisions of the SSC Standards are not generally applicable to the teaching profession.

It is worth noting in this discussion that, when we talk about teaching or the profession we are talking about all professional teaching roles, including principals and others as well as 'classroom' teachers.

Finally, we do not have a draft code already. Apart from using the 2003 Code of Ethics as a starting reference point, we have not begun any work on crafting a new code. It is really important that we decide the code in concert with the profession as much as possible – consequently our current focus is on collecting feedback, hosting focus groups and engaging in as much dialogue as we can across the profession. It makes the process a little slower, but we also feel it makes it much richer. As much as possible, we want to co-design the code with you.

We will not begin any initial drafting until we have collecting more feedback and input from across the profession. And once we do begin drafting early versions of the code we will share this with you and invite further input.

In addition to this survey we have run focus groups in Canterbury, Wellington, and South Auckland and we hope to run further workshops wherever the opportunity arises.

The rest of the document outlines the key themes and feedback in relation to each question and signals the next steps in the process as we continue to work to develop the code together.

RESPONSE SUMMARIES

Q1: Early discussions with teachers have signalled that they want a code which builds on the aspirational nature of the 2003 Teachers Code of Ethics as well as setting some clear expectations of standards of professionalism and behaviour. Do you agree with this approach?
There was very strong support for the proposed approach with 90% of participants indicating they agree with the suggested approach.

Of the 10% that disagreed, the responses split into two categories. These categories are outlined below, along with the key themes from the feedback provided.

1) Those who generally agreed with the approach, but wanted to add further suggestions:
    a) *A preference to retain the current Code of Ethics*
    b) *A preference for the aspirational focus of the code, preferring to "treat teachers as professionals" without having to spell out undesireable behaviours*
    c) *Encouragement to keep the code at the principle level rather than having to spell out detailed lists and definitions of inappropriate behaviours*
    d) *Several requests to keep the code simple and concise without being "vague."*
    e) *The code should begin with an assumption of trusting teachers*
    f) *Concern to ensure that "aspirational" is still realistic and practical – it should be an "inspirational code people aspire to" rather than an aspirational code that is never met.*

2) Those who expressed wider concerns about the development of a new code:
   g)   *Uncertainty about why the code needs to be updated at all*
   h)   *Comment on the independence and composition of the Education Council*
   i)   *Concern that the code might be developed without any involvement or consultation with teachers*
   j)   *Concern that the code of ethics will be used to 'gag' teachers from "speaking out" against political decisions and policy that is not seen as in the best interest of learners or teachers.*
   k)   *Concern to ensure the code does not add "even more regulations, aspirations and expectation," placing even greater pressure on teachers*
   l)   *Caution to distinguish between valuing corporate notions of "professionalism" instead of focusing on encouraging a "humane, moral and ethical" environment where teachers provide empathetic, caring role-models.*

Q2: This section tested some initial assumptions and thoughts about how different stakeholders might use or relate to the code.

For <u>Student Teachers</u> it was seen as setting out the fundamental values of the teaching profession to inspire and educate teacher trainees on standards of conduct and professional behaviour expected of all teachers.

This was almost universally supported, with just over 93% of participants indicating their agreement with these thoughts. Of those who added further comment, the key themes included:

- *The need for stronger processes to ensure anyone entering the teaching profession has been well trained – expectations such as those in the code should be clearly set out as part of teacher training, education and recruitment.*
- *That acceptance of the code should be incorporated as part of the registration process*
- *The code could be a useful aid for student teachers on placement*
- *The need for some updated discussion/guidelines regarding social media*
- *The need for greater cultural competency (especially in the pronounciation of Māori names/surnames and understanding the application of the Treaty commitments in education settings)*
- *A need to encourage greater awareness of appropriate dress standards for the environment you are in*
- *The code needs to enable conversations about two-way expectations (parents, whanau, learners), not just creating more expectations of teachers*
- *There were also quite diverse opinions about the need to clarify professional expectations at all ("This should be taken for granted." "Don't teach us to suck eggs" vs "This is essential. Some…are completely unaware of what [being professional] looks and sounds like" and "Being a teacher means being responsible and professional")*
- *A number of others again felt the Code of Ethics already addresses these needs adequately*

For <u>Teachers</u> it was seen as inspiring and reminding teachers what it means to belong to the teaching profession – serving as a tool to monitor and reflect on practice and guide ethical decision making.

Again, this statement was very strongly supported with just over 90% of participants indicating their agreement with these thoughts. Of those who added further comment, the key themes included:

- *The current code is aspirational, but it is too wordy*
- *The need for greater acknowledgement of the great work teachers do and the long personal hours they give up for their students*
- *The need for greater links between the code and all the documents that talk about values and teacher practice (Tataiako, Ka Hikatia, Teaching As Inquiry, registration guidelines, Registered Teacher Criteria etc)*
- *Concern that the code needs to apply equally to all in the education setting (Principals, leaders, managers etc, not just teachers)*
- *A desire to keep the word ethics in the title*
- *Concern that it is used to help re-align teachers who aren't meeting the standards rather than placing further requirements on teachers who are performing well to collect even more evidence to prove their performance*
- *Amongst acknowledgements of values and social responsibility, concern that we do not lose focus on the core job to "scaffold students' learning"*
- *The need to safeguard the right of teachers to speak out on educational matters*
- *Others viewed it as a "vitally important tool" but that it would be good to have "more concrete guidelines" for addressing potential concerns and examples of "appropriate practice" and the "use of judgement"*
- *Concern that the code also addresses things like institutional bullying, not just the behaviour of the individual classroom teacher*
- *In addition to encouraging teachers to aspired to high professional standards, the code also needs to prompt others to treat teachers with the respect and professionalism they deserve*
- *The language of the code needs to acknowledge the "wonderful, hardworking teachers" that make up the vast majority of the profession – words like "evidence" don't belong here; they are more associated with courtroom proceedings when someone is on trial.*
- *There were some questions about whether a Code can be inspirational or whether it should just focus on providing clear behavioural guidelines and standards*

For <u>Learners, families/whanau and the public</u> it was seen as providing guidance on assessing the behaviours they can expect from teachers and providing reassurance of the high standards that underpin the profession.

84% of participants agreed with these statements, with 16% disagreeing. While still overwhelmingly supportive, this was the highest level of disagreement so far and appears to mainly stem from the use of the word "assessing" (as one participant added, *"Removal of the word assessing would see me tick the 'yes' box instead of the no box"*).

There was concern that learners, families and the public should not be 'assessing' the behaviour or performance of teachers, however there was strong commitment to the idea of providing clear expectations for all parties: *"How many teachers go to the parents' workplace and start pulling THEIR jobs to pieces".*

Another participant suggested the statement should be reworded as: *"For those outside the profession - such as the learners, their families/whānau and the public - the Code would provide guidance for what might be expected of all certified teachers in their professional roles."*

Other key themes included:
- *The code of ethics address these concerns but need to be in language that is more accessible to parents/caregivers, family and whanau. It needs "to be reader friendly and easy to understand" and without all the "teacher talk"*
- *The code could also be a useful tool to raise the positive profile of the profession in the eyes of the public – especially as "the media only reports on the small number of people who offend." It was seen as "important for the public to have awareness that teachers do have professional expectations and that the vast majority adhere to these"*
- *The suggestion that we need "a similar code for students and parents to highlight their responsibilities"*

For <u>Boards of Trustees, Centre Managers, and Employers</u> it was seen as helping inspire and motivate their employees, stimulate conversations about ethical decision-making and providing a standard to assess conduct in the event of complaints or concerns being raised.

89% of participants agreed with these statements, with 11% disagreeing. As with other areas the feedback highlighted the need that the code equally govern the practice and behaviour of Boards and employers, not just the individual teacher. The need for 'equity' in the application of the code was the key theme in response to this statement: *"It should also guide the behaviour teachers can expect from a school's management"*.

Other key themes included:
- *The need for clear complaints processes and responsibilities that are applied consistently for all parties*
- *The code should begin with the assumption that our teachers are among the best there are*
- *A desire for the government and other authorities to send clearer, unreserved messages about how effective New Zealand teachers are as professionals, providing better balance against the media coverage of the small minority that do not live up to the standards of the profession*
- *The suggestion that we "should be employing people who are inspired and motivated; a code is unlikely to [achieve that]." Other participants added "Codes do not inspire, they guide behaviour."*
- *Still another participant felt "inspire and motivate are the key words but I'm not sure using as a standard [fits] with this," and that "It is very difficult to have a statement which is both inspirational/aspirational and also used for bottom line accountability."*
- *The code needs to recognise teachers are humans and we do not own them 24 hours a day, they need the space and freedom to "have a life" as well*

Finally for <u>Regulatory Bodies (Education Council, Complaints Assessment Committee etc),</u> it was seen as providing a standard to assess professional conduct.

There was strong support for this statement with 89% of participants indicating they agree. Of those who added further comment, the key themes and quote included:

- *"Great that you are looking at this - while some schools have very clear codes of conduct, others do not and the profession needs consistency in this regard. Having a single code across all settings would be a great start."*
- *There are challenges in the code serving a broad audience – we need to avoid the "risk that it will become a thesis rather than a series of short, declaratory statements". The code must be "expressed in clear, plain language so the standards and expectations can be easily understood and are not open to interpretation"*
- *The need for professional development and guidelines to support implementation of the code and its use in self-review and appraisal*
- *The code needs to acknowledge and support the health and wellbeing of teachers, not just putting their practice "under the microscope"*
- *Suggestions that the current Code of Ethics does this well – initial teacher education conversations could be supported by referring to the commitments to children and to parents and others as outlined in the existing code*
- *An observation that there is a tension between aspirations and behavioural standards: "Aspirations aren't things you can judge competence on."*
- *"It is my hope that this will not be another set of standards that are used to measure rather than inspire and build that professional culture we would all like to work within."*

NEXT STEPS

The intention has always been to run an ongoing series of surveys throughout the engagement process – using this survey to start the conversation together. In addition to the survey, we have recently conducted our initial set of focus groups, covering a mix of education providers covering secondary, early childhood, and area schools.

We've developed our next set of questions, building on the dialogue from the focus groups and the opening survey feedback summarised here. You can provide feedback to the next set of questions here.

> **Comment [CP1]:** We will add this link next week.

We will continue to invite feedback, share responses and evolve the conversation in an iterative style with you. We hope you will continue to share your thoughts with us and if there are other ways we can make it easier to participate or enable the dialogue more effectively, please let us know.