



Mentoring school governance and management

School
governance and
management

An evaluation of support to schools' boards of trustees

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Abstract *The aim of the research project reported here was to evaluate the process and outcomes of the in-depth training programme provided to primary and secondary schools' boards of trustees by the Far North Rural Education Assistance Programme (REAP) in New Zealand. Practical research questions were developed from an analysis of the policy context and programme contracts. The international research literature on mentoring and effective support programmes was then examined. Data were collected using four methods: documentary analysis; case studies of eight selected school communities; a survey of all members of 24 participating boards' of trustees; and a focus group interview of programme consultants. Construct validity, multiple data types and sources, reasonable survey response rates, bias control strategies and triangulation permitted tentative conclusions and provisional recommendations to be drawn. It was found that the REAP scheme was valued for three main reasons; it built governance capacity in school communities; delivered "free", appropriately-scaled, culturally sensitive and customized support on-site; and it improved the ability of schools to self-manage improvements. It was also found that the Far North REAP Office played a key role in conceptualizing, developing, brokering and managing these board mentoring services, and developed a model of brokerage that might be usefully replicated through the Ministry of Education's contracting processes.*

Introduction

This section describes the initiation and development of the Far North REAP mentoring scheme, its national policy context, the regional content and the nature of its institutional host. It also clarifies the changing primary purposes of the scheme, the services intended, the delivery system favoured, and the criteria used to evaluate the scheme and select its consultants.

The Far North REAP entered into a series of contracts with the Ministry of Education (MoE) to provide an education and mentoring service to a number of schools' boards of trustees in the Northland region of New Zealand. Three contracts were entered into over the period from May 1997 to September 2001. The criteria for the selection of boards for inclusion in the programme were originally to be the same as those established by the MoE's schools support

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project. The third contract, however, specified that support was to be provided for up to 29 boards per contracting year, with 14 to have “high needs” and the balance having “medium needs.” The process for defining and selecting boards with “high needs” was to involve the project manager of Te Putahitanga Matauranga (TPM) (the Far North Education Improvement Initiative), with the balance to be identified by the TPM or the Auckland office of the MoE. In practice, however, REAP documentation showed that, of the 29 participating boards, about one third initially responded to a letter of invitation sent by REAP, one third were referred by TPM and/or the MoE, and one third were self-referred.

The national policy context helped shape the scheme. Among the many changes in education announced in 1989 in the *Tomorrow's Schools* policy, boards of trustees were given statutory responsibility to govern their schools. Schools' boards of trustees comprised elected parent representatives, principals *ex-officio*, elected teaching staff representatives, as well as co-opted members as required. These trustees were entitled to a small allowance for their contribution to school governance.

REAP support was offered at no financial cost to boards. The first contract indicated that it was to provide support and development to trustees wishing to take up their responsibilities specified by the National Administration Guidelines (NAGs) and the National Education Guidelines (NEGs), and to self-manage school self-review and principal appraisal. The requirements concerning NAGs were summarised by the MoE in six areas: curriculum; reporting and review; personnel; finance and property; health and safety; and general legislation. All contracts record that boards were paid a grant of \$100, as a contribution towards their costs, upon signing of an agreement that recorded their needs and how these would be met.

It is also important to acknowledge the unique regional context of the scheme. Education is widely regarded as intrinsic to the sustainable social, cultural and economic development of Northland (APR Consultants, 2001). There is equally wide concern, however, that many young people leave the region for educational and employment opportunities, and that many small communities lack the capacity to manage sustainable development.

Northland has nearly 150,000 people, half living in some 30 townships with populations of more than 500 people. Since the population is concentrated along the region's east coast, there are many small communities in most other parts of Northland. The population is growing comparatively quickly, particularly along the east coast, largely due to the return of many Maori to ancestral lands, retirement into coastal areas, and the growth in tourism. It is growing fast from a base of about 3 per cent of New Zealand's population. On the other hand, it only has about 12 per cent of the population of its largely urbanised regional neighbour, Auckland (Statistics New Zealand, 1998). It has a comparatively high proportion of people who are of Maori descent, that is, about one third, although the proportion of Maori as part of the total population varies considerably throughout the region.

Northland's economy is based on farming with significant forestry, marine farming, tourism, horticulture and manufacturing enterprises emerging. It has unique and considerable social, economic and environmental resources and will experience substantial and sustained population growth over the next two decades. On the other hand, Northland has many small and relatively isolated communities and a relatively young age structure. There is a high proportion of people less than 14 years of age, and relatively small proportions of people in the 15-29 and over 65 age groups.

Many communities, therefore, share two concerns: how to develop the capacity to sustain development, and how to provide appropriate educational and employment opportunities that will help retain young people. This context helps explain why the Far North REAP was established in 1978 in Kaitaia, and later, in the mid-1990s, why it developed a bid to become a broker of mentoring support to schools' boards of trustees as part of its community capacity building mandate.

Thirteen REAP programmes were established in the more isolated and educationally under serviced areas of New Zealand in the 1970s, largely as an expression of collective and public commitment to equity and life-long learning. By the 1990s, four themes stood out in their operational philosophies and priorities (Shepherd, 1998):

- (1) a founding value given to life-long education;
- (2) a strong commitment to self-directed educational development;
- (3) the felt need in regions to ameliorate the impact of social and economic events, such as wars, recessions, and changes to economic policies and political philosophies;
- (4) interaction between governments and committed activists had raised REAPs to the status of *taonga* (treasure) in regional development politics.

REAPs' holistic and "grass roots" approach to providing life-long learning located them in the political mainstream of regional politics, strongly associated them with central government's policies on life-long learning, and established them as the main agency for their delivery in isolated areas. It was, therefore, consistent with its history and commitments that the Far North REAP decided to bid for a brokerage role in the provision of mentoring services when schools boards of trustees were established after *Tomorrows' Schools*.

The purposes of the Far North REAP's support to school boards of trustees changed over time. The intended outcomes for the first contract (1997-1998) stressed clarity over role obligations, self-reviews, development plans, the difference between governance and management, management skills, networking, and the professional development of trustees. The second contract (1998-1999) had the same aims as the first. The aims of the third contract (1999-2001) were to provide intensive support to boards experiencing difficulties with governance, strengthen governance structures in partnership with Maori,

deliver strong, enduring education outcomes, and to improve the outcomes of the triennial elections of trustees.

Far North REAP saw its potential clients, and how best to assist them, in changing terms. Their early analysis, noted in the proposal for the first contract (1997-1998), anticipated uneven skills and experience in modern educational administration, degrees of resistance, the need for needs analysis, tailored content and process, flexible delivery, active learning methods, skilled facilitation, trust and ownership, as well as the need to abandon engagement in negative circumstances. The third contract detailed the delivery system as a sequence of processes:

- (1) (First) visit to board of trustees to give overview of support to be provided and process to be used and to gain commitment.
- (2) Identification of areas of existing competencies and strengths, as well as weaknesses and problems to address (needs identification).
- (3) Formal agreement with each board defining priorities, intended outcomes, monitoring requirements, timeframes, protocols, contractor (REAP) and board responsibilities.
- (4) Support for each board to develop a governance plan based on the identified needs, using a case management approach.
- (5) Intensive on-site support and training to boards.
- (6) Ongoing mentoring (on and off site) to individuals and boards as required.
- (7) Final report and discussion session to reflect on achievements, identify ongoing issues and ways to progress in future.

The contracts indicate that programme quality was to be monitored and evaluated against purposes using a number of processes. Evidence was to be provided in regular reports to the MoE at agreed milestones throughout each contract. Each milestone had a number of detailed professional tasks to be achieved by Far North REAP. The team of facilitators engaged by REAP were initially chosen for their experience and expertise, ability to relate with trustees on site, commitment to the *Tomorrows' Schools* governance model and to Far North REAP's credibility as an education provider, and proven group facilitation and group learning skills.

In sum, 16 research questions were identified by the review of the contracts and their practical context:

- (1) Did boards develop a clear understanding of their obligations?
- (2) Did boards use school self-reviews to prepare development plans?
- (3) Did boards conduct a situational analysis?
- (4) Did boards differentiate governance from management in practice?

- (5) Did boards develop knowledge, skills and strategies appropriate to their role?
- (6) Did boards strengthen their peer and outside networks?
- (7) Did boards engage in professional development?
- (8) Were boards provided with direct and intensive support when experiencing governance difficulties?
- (9) Did the support for governance help deliver strong and enduring outcomes in partnership with Maori?
- (10) Did boards achieve their development plan objectives?
- (11) Did the boards understand NEGs and NAGs?
- (12) Did each board allocate responsibilities to members?
- (13) Were board members trained individually to take up their responsibilities?
- (14) How effective were the consultants who mentored the boards?
- (15) How effective was each process in the delivery system?
- (16) How effective was the delivery system as a whole?

The international research context

Far North REAP constructed a delivery system initially comprising generic training, later replaced by case managing the mentoring of boards of trustees. This latter approach is consistent with a general definition of mentoring: the act of providing guidance, wisdom, knowledge, skills and support in a manner in which a protégé gains benefit (Slater, 1998).

In the absence of a specific research literature that deals with the mentoring of voluntary trustees of schools, it was decided to consider research into the mentoring of peers and employees in educational and industrial contexts. One problem here, as Shepherd (2001), one of the founders of the Far North REAP programme, pointed out:

... the international research of mentoring is based on studies of employment-related mentoring ... in this case we had some professional mentors who were often dealing with mentees who had little appreciation of their role and who were volunteers; hence the mentoring was often of a very different nature to that implied in the international literature. Having to mentor novice volunteers is as much a matter of process as it is of supplying facts and information. It is as much a matter of establishing trust and validity as it is of helping people keep the ship afloat for another month. It is as much a matter of brokering deals with other agencies on behalf of the mentees as it is helping them to help themselves. It has some remarkable similarities to parenting.

With these cautions in mind, a number of key themes were identified in the literature – mentoring as a process, the benefits to both parties, and the qualities, skills and obligations of mentors. A recent review of mentoring (Grant *et al.*, 2001) was used to identify appropriate evaluative criteria concerned with the nature of effective mentoring relationships, and the

strategic and operational processes of planning and developing effective support programmes. Some believe that mentoring should be “an easy, informal and personal activity between two individuals with good intentions” while others believe that it should be “designed, structured and institutionalised” (Wunsch, 1994a, p. 33).

The reciprocity of benefits for the parties has been noted in mentoring relationships (O’Leary and Mitchell, 1990b) and, further, that “evaluations consistently show that mentors gain more from the relationship than mentees” (Fullerton, 1999, p. 37). Advice developed systematically, and then shared with care, apparently impacts more profoundly on the mentor than on the mentee. Another potential benefit follows from systemic and public recognition for participation (Marshall *et al.*, 1998; Wunsch, 1994b), in addition to the intrinsic rewards that can flow from the mentoring relationship. Mentors also report the satisfaction of “making a difference”, and “having someone you too can learn from” (Clarke, 1996; Clifford, 1996; Slater, 1998). According to Marshall *et al.* (1998), mentors tend to be senior to, or a peer of, the mentee and to be leading figures that exhibit mastery in their professional field, have long-term experience and have a reputation for high level achievement. Sands *et al.* (in Harnish and Wild, 1994a, b) reported that they typically enact four mentoring roles: as friends, career guides, information sources and intellectual guides. Research (Graav, 1999; Jackson and Simpson, 1994; Wunsch, 1994a, b) concludes that the mentor’s obligations include maintaining the relationship and that orientation and training is needed by both mentor and mentee to make the most effective use of mentoring processes (Wunsch, 1994a, b). Indeed, whether a mentor is positive or negative in effect depends in large part upon how well informed and skilled the mentor is and upon the mentor’s commitment and availability (Mikhelson, 1997). Since a detailed analysis of the research is available elsewhere (Macpherson and McKillop, 2001), and in the interests of brevity here, 13 research questions were identified by this review:

- (1) How has the programme’s organisation created trustful relationships between those unequal in wisdom, expertise and disposition?
- (2) How has the programme’s organisation enabled effective learning through educative forms of leadership?
- (3) What have been the operating definitions of mentoring used in this programme?
- (4) How were the goals of the mentoring programme developed and clarified?
- (5) How were the potential benefits of participation explained to boards and consultants?
- (6) How were the potential risks of being involved in a mentoring programme clarified to boards and consultants?
- (7) How were the terms of participation in the programme determined?

- (8) What were the characteristics of the boards and consultants involved, and how were they selected and deselected for participation?
- (9) How were the relationships between boards and consultants constructed and reconstructed as the programme unfolded?
- (10) How were the obligations of the boards and consultants negotiated, monitored and reviewed as the programme proceeded?
- (11) How were the consultants and boards prepared for their roles?
- (12) How were the mentoring relationships sustained and changed in the course of the programme, and to what extent were they effective?
- (13) How effective were the safeguards, resource management, evaluation and termination processes planned for the programme?

Methodology

The two lists of research questions above were amalgamated and 11 key constructs were identified for data collection purposes; the basis of each board's participation, how boards were introduced to training and mentoring, the analysis of each board's needs, training agreements/development plans, boards' learning processes, trustees' learning processes, qualities of consultants, facilitation of teaching and learning, learning outcomes concerning boards' processes, learning outcomes concerning policies, plans, actions, and, the overall quality of the scheme.

Four main data collection methods were used to provide rich, contextualised, and descriptive information about how the scheme had been implemented, and how it had functioned:

- (1) Documentary search of the archives held by the contractor, Far North REAP, the facilitators and participating schools.
- (2) Case studies of eight participating schools.
- (3) A survey of the trustees in the 24 active schools of the 29 schools enrolled in the programme.
- (4) Focus group interview of the consultants and the project manager.

The eight schools selected as cases were representative in terms of school size, those which had experienced conflict in the governing process, and schools which had received unfavourable Education Review Office (ERO) reports. Open questions were formulated from the 11 constructs above to guide the discussion:

- What factors facilitated the implementation of the programme?
- What appear to be the strongest and weakest aspects of the programme?
- Were there any barriers to the implementation of the programme?
- To what extent does the programme meet its intended outcomes?
- What effects did the programme have?

A summary of the interviews with trustees at each case study school was returned in confidence for discussion, correction and validation. These reports were edited to ensure the anonymity of persons and schools, including giving all consultants a generic male gender.

The trustees in the 24 schools of the 29 schools enrolled in the programme were surveyed. The other five schools were considered to be too early in the training process to be able to contribute meaningfully. The 11 constructs were elaborated using the outcomes of the case study interviews to develop a 75-item survey instrument. This was posted to the 24 schools and they distributed 162 survey forms to those people who had been members of their Board of Trustees at the time of training. Forty-four useable responses were returned (27 per cent). An analysis of non-response found that the recent election of trustees had, in many cases, resulted in a substantial change of personnel. Further, a number of original members had moved from their districts and were not able to be contacted. Every avenue to contact potential respondents was exhausted. While the response rate to the survey of 27 per cent was barely adequate, a higher level of provisional trust can be given where the findings cohere with those gathered using other methods. The data collected in the survey were also valuable in that the constructs themselves were further elaborated and validated.

Respondents were also invited to comment freely on the issues raised. They were assured that the researchers would summarise their responses, render all data untraceable, and then store the response sheets in confidence.

A focus group interview was conducted with the consultants and the project manager at one of their regular training workshops. Information sheets and consent forms were distributed, the process explained and consent obtained prior to the interview. The group clarified the philosophy, genesis, development, achievements and the limitations of REAP's training and mentoring scheme. Both researchers took notes. The summary was then returned for corrections of fact and validation.

This approach had three major potential benefits; it heightened construct validity, used multiple data sources and types, and provided for triangulation. On the other hand, there were potential and actual sources of bias that need to be recognized and accepted as limits to interpretation.

Far North REAP's archives were opened to the researchers but vital data could have been overlooked in the documentary analysis. Further, aspects of the scheme were not within the scope of the research. The financial management of the project was one example. Another is that some of the primary documents from consultants used to assemble progress reports were absent.

The case studies of selected schools posed particular challenges, despite the vital qualitative, quantitative and contextualised data they provided. Most of these schools were small schools in isolated communities. They tended to have relatively inexperienced leadership, high trustee turnover and limited community capacity. Interviews of trustees proved difficult to arrange and

often had to be changed at short notice. Inevitable sampling bias was partially mitigated by informants and boards amending accounts before validation.

The design of the study permits tentative generalisation to the schools in the REAP scheme and allows provisional conclusions to be drawn. The final caution is that the extent to which the findings that follow might be used to inform the development of other regional board mentoring schemes requires a detailed knowledge of contexts and trends.

Research findings

Case studies

The objectives of the case study interviews were to collect data concerning the experience of being mentored and to identify constructs to be explored through the survey. Informed and written consent was obtained prior to all interviews. A total of 24 trustees were interviewed, in schools whose rolls ranged from 34 to 350, with 2.5 to 14 teachers, with two to 12 support staff, and whose ethnicity profiles ranged from 30 to 100 per cent Maori.

Many trustees confirmed that assistance was sought from the Far North REAP to build skills, and to respond to a negative ERO Report. Other major problems were traced to sudden and significant staff turnover that led to a major loss of confidence by children and community, with marked disruption to teaching and learning processes. One parent remembered how “the kids just went ape.”

These case studies reiterated the systematic use of the process noted in steps 1-7 (p. 326). The trustees recalled the workshops as having particularly valuable outcomes, taking trustees out of their “comfort zone.” Co-opted trustees reportedly “came up to speed” quickly on their responsibilities. Clarifying trustees’ responsibilities quickly raised their confidence. The presence of an expert facilitator who knew the context, but who lacked any “baggage,” helped trustees leave their own “baggage” behind. The board also experienced the benefits of free speech, of being able to ask “idiotic” questions in safety, and the “pleasure” of full inclusion. They reported many improvements successfully planned and completed.

Most interviewees would agree with the claim that “We all benefited from the training.” Each person “picked up a portfolio, and got practical advice and models from other schools.” Consultants then reinforced trustees’ confidence in their ability to manage their portfolios. They reportedly “brushed off complaints” about communications and consultations, and used a problem solving approach to “work on an issue-by-issue basis.” They gave trustees “one thing to do after another.” These “action plans were effective and helped everyone solve problems.” There was agreement that the school community was now “heading in the right direction” and that the consultant “helped start it all.”

The trustees in one school recalled that their consultant did not get involved in the local politics. He was “very impartial. An excellent arbitrator”. He “taught

through questions.” He evaluated every session, and negotiated the next session before leaving. He was, typically as it turned out:

...very patient. We all felt safe. He helped us clarify the role of the principal, how it related to the role of the board, so we all felt part of the board. The sessions were very interactive and the principal and the deputy said the least. The new parents were very positive. We really enjoyed the outcomes of every session. The board worked more harmoniously than ever before. It wants our school to be successful and the staff to be happy.

The issue-by-issue approach consultants reportedly used “took us away from the squabbles. Back to the charter, then to the NAG portfolios. It was very evident that the trustees wanted to know. [He] had a wonderful way of motivating enthusiasm. And he rewarded us with mint chocolate biscuits.” It was explained that he was willing to be contacted on a one-to-one basis, and that he remained “completely unbiased” and always confidential. “Nothing ever came back. Total integrity.”

Consultants were also remembered for their approachable and comprehensive styles. Agendas were flexible but no issue ever “got lost.” They were also available by phone and always made trustees “feel comfortable.” Trustees were deeply impressed by their serious approach, quiet expertise, and their knowledge of the NEGs and NAGs. They brought examples of policies from other schools, but helped trustees “develop policies for ourselves.” Another recalled that their consultant was “very aware of the dynamics of small rural schools.” They knew how to “draw in people”, “diffuse the heat”, and “everyone responded”. They were “keen to fix the ERO issues, and to cut the fighting and bickering”. It made “the board’s work achievable.”

Many of the positive processes reported were attributed to the skills of consultants, especially their ability to draw people out and boost their confidence with judicious praise, mix management advice with expert group facilitation, follow up sessions with targeted resources, additional expertise, and relevant research findings, and plan sessions so that handouts, scenarios and group tasks drew trustees into learning.

Facilitating this sharing, many pointed out, was consistent with the responsive approach that Far North REAP had taken since establishment. REAP had become a “major repository and clearing house of information of immediate value to principals and teachers.” It was similarly described as “the home for professional development in the Far North,” as well as “the home of the literacy programme that was highly valued in the community.”

Uncomfortable moments recalled were when trustees “had to come to understand the occasional need for confidentiality in the work of the board.” On the other hand, participants “soon came to appreciate why training sessions were conducted in confidence.” Finally, it was felt that the recent turnover of trustees was a reason for developing additional training, especially in meeting procedures.

Five benefits recalled were regarded as both immediate and enduring; meetings were much better organized, trustees enjoyed meetings far more, reports by principals and other trustees “started coming out two or three days

before meetings, which allowed the board to focus on the most important issues,” and meetings became much more productive, especially as policies and handbooks took shape. All boards reported developing a mission, strategic plans, development plans, portfolios for individual trustees, and maintaining “a strong overview of all school developments”.

Small schools in remote settings were particularly grateful. They stressed how essential it was for small boards with high turnover to have access to the same expert over time. Confidence, they explained, rises slowly, and the consultant has to be able to help people learn through taking many small steps together.

Limits to the REAP process had become more evident in time. The first was that the “fine line between governance and management needs to be explained and explored and debated far more during initial training.” Second, performance management “needs to have a higher profile” during board training. The REAP scheme was also considered to be limited in its effectiveness by three major factors: the isolation of these school communities usually means that “some things do take time,” diaries have to be synchronised to “make sure we get together,” and, “births, death and marriages can disrupt everything in a village where trustees must wear many hats in the Kohanga Reo (pre-schools), on the *marae* (meeting place), etc”. Fourth, there was no informed relief immediately available at short notice when a consultant was taken ill. Fifth, in one school, developmental priorities and processes agreed had to wait until some industrial matters were resolved. REAP’s mentoring scheme is prohibited by its MoE contract from engaging in industrial matters, and while it is not a pre-condition for success, appears to work better in a cooperative industrial context.

Four major strengths of the REAP scheme were noted by those interviewed. First, they knew that support was constantly available and only a phone call away. Second was the outstanding quality of the consultants provided. Third was depth, in that behind each consultant were other excellent REAP personnel and support services. Finally, the REAP itself was “modelled on an extended *whanau* (family) structure that is very familiar in the Far North.”

In some settings, where governance and management processes had collapsed, the board of trustees had been suspended and replaced by a Ministry-appointed commissioner. In these cases, capacity building through participation actually helped such communities regain the governance of their school. The chair of one board explained:

We wanted our school back. That’s why we got such a good turnout when [the Consultant] came to the school. The issues were *whakama* [shaming] to us. We are all *whanaunga* [relatives] up here, all Maori. We didn’t want to tell the story of the Commissioner again and again.

So we split up the NAGs. It was all at our level. Some trustees were as green as. Others have been there for nine years and can get very over bearing. But the session on strategic planning was nice and simple, and [the Consultant] covered mission, goals, strategies and outcomes. We still have to do our strategic plan and revise the charter. A few more meetings to go and we will have all of ours together.

One parent described the early outcomes:

The training helped us parents understand the resources of the school and how teachers work. The [new] open-door policy encouraged home-school partnerships and gave us practical skills for everyday life. The community got much much more involved.

In sum, the informants described how they engaged in the REAP scheme, how its processes impacted on their school community and what they regarded as the significant outcomes. These case studies usefully indicated the complex challenges of mounting an appropriate support programme for trustees.

Survey of trustees

The two major reasons given by trustees surveyed for deciding to participate were to “top up” skills and to respond to an ERO Report, with some noting that it was to help cope with a major challenge. It was widely agreed that principals had played a major role in board decisions to participate, and strongly confirmed that the consultants introduced the training and mentoring processes by giving “a good overview” by “explaining the processes carefully”. Similarly, a large majority confirmed that boards were “fully committed to the training” and that all phases were “effectively evaluated”.

Respondents were then asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed with two propositions: our consultant helped us identify our competencies and strengths, and our consultant helped us identify our learning needs and problems to be addressed. Over 95 per cent of respondents agreed with both propositions. The percentage of agreement was calculated as those who strongly agreed + agreed/neutral + disagreed + strongly disagreed \times 100, with “no response” and “not applicable” responses set aside. Similar levels of agreement indicated that formal agreements were reached on each site concerning training needs and programmes, and later, that evaluations were conducted against this framework.

Four propositions were responded to concerning “My board’s learning.” High levels of agreement were recorded. “My board fully achieved the objectives agreed with our consultant at the beginning of the training” (84 per cent), “My board was better equipped to take up its governance role” (91 per cent), “My board implemented appropriate governance structures” (90 per cent), and “My board developed a practical action plan to improve our effectiveness” (82.5 per cent).

Respondents were then asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed with ten propositions concerned with “My own learning”. Again, high levels of agreement were found, as shown in Table I.

Since all participating boards distributed responsibility for each NAG to a different trustee, these data suggest that most trustees built up a “good understanding” of all NAGs, and that trustees going into a second term of service could probably mentor newcomers into a portfolio while taking up another relatively easily.

Twelve propositions were offered to respondents concerning the services of consultants that mentored boards. Strong agreement was found, as shown in Table II.

Propositions concerning "my own learning"	Per cent agreement
"I developed a good understanding of NEG's"	89.7
"I developed a good understanding of NAG 1 – Curriculum"	85.7
"I developed a good understanding of NAG 2 – Reporting and Review"	81.5
"I developed a good understanding of NAG 3 – Personnel"	80.0
"I developed a good understanding of NAG 4 – Finance and Property"	89.5
"I developed a good understanding of NAG 5 – Health and Safety"	83.3
"I developed a good understanding of NAG 6 – General Legislation"	64.8
"The training prepared me for my role and responsibilities on my board"	89.7
"The training developed my skills for handling issues relevant to my board and school"	90.0
"The training strengthened my networks"	72.5

Table I.
My board's learning

Propositions concerning "our consultant ..."	Per cent agreement
"Made us feel comfortable about asking anything we wanted to"	97.6
"Helped create open and frank settlements"	94.8
"Used a problem solving approach, working issue by issue"	97.6
"Was always approachable and patient"	97.6
"Gave us expert advice"	92.5
"Was aware of the dynamics of small rural schools"	97.6
"Was good at explaining detail on key issues at the correct level"	97.6
"Mostly guided processes to help us achieve our own purposes"	95.0
"Was flexible regarding times and places of meetings"	100
"Kept sensitive information confidential"	94.9
"Responded to local needs and understandings"	100
"Helped us communicate with the education system"	84.2

Table II.
Qualities of our
consultant

Comments made in response to an open-ended question on the qualities of consultants referred to their expertise (11), standing (ten) and ability to create a positive learning environment (ten).

The level of respondents' agreement with ten propositions about the teaching and learning processes encountered is presented in Table III.

Fifteen comments to an open-ended item regarding the teaching and learning provided stressed the excellence of methods used, one affirming the need for consultants to "put themselves on the parents' level".

There were nine propositions offered about what learning outcomes were actually achieved related to board processes. Levels of agreement were broadly positive with some unevenness as indicated in Table IV.

The 11 comments made in response to an open-ended item regarding achievement of learning outcomes indicated that attendance by some trustees had been uneven, some were "too emotional" and a few had "shied away responsibilities".

Table III.
Teaching learning
processes

Propositions concerning the teaching learning experience	Percent agreement
"Our consultant was an expert facilitator of group processes"	95.2
"Our consultant provided team building for the board"	94.9
"Our consultant reinforced trustees' confidence by affirming all the good things going on"	97.6
"Our consultant provided excellent scenarios, handouts, templates and overheads"	90.2
"Our consultant provided a highly interactive and supportive learning environment"	81.4
"Our consultant booked sessions well in advance to maximise attendance"	92.5
"All sessions with our consultant were evaluated"	70.0
"Our consultant's teaching was well paced"	92.9
"Our consultant made our learning fun"	80.9
"Our consultant built a relationship with us that sustained learning"	95.1

Table IV.
Learning outcomes

Propositions concerning learning outcomes	Percent agreement
"We enjoyed the board meetings far more"	76.2
"We solved problems"	87.8
"Relationships on the board improved"	74.3
"Each trustee took up a NAG portfolio"	90.2
"We became enthusiastic about our roles"	61.5
"With trustees taking up portfolios, the pressure came off the principal and the chair"	66.7
"The board took up a strong overview of all school developments"	80.0
"The training brought new trustees up to speed"	94.6
"The training helped the shy ones come out"	64.3

Another 11 statements measured the extent to which there was agreement on learning outcomes related to policies, plans and actions taken. The levels of agreement are presented in Table V.

The open-ended comments related to this section of the survey supported the overall impression that each board had successfully engaged in site-specific development of policies, plans and actions.

The overall qualities of the REAP training programme, as seen by the respondent trustees, were summarised in eight histograms (Figures 1-8).

The invitation to provide any other comments and suggestions was taken up by 24 respondents. Their suggestions clarified and reinforced the data presented above.

Focus group interview of the consultants and the project manager

The group interview was semi-structured by the original objectives of the scheme drawn from the three contracts, the criteria for effective mentoring and

Propositions concerning policies, plans, actions	Percent agreement
"We developed or revised our school mission"	65.8
"We developed or revised our school charter"	69.4
"We developed or revised our school strategic plan"	79.5
"We developed policies and handbooks"	75.7
"We improved our reporting procedures"	80.6
"We sorted out meeting procedures"	72.2
"Our meetings were better organized"	76.3
"We stopped the decline in the school roll"	30.0
"The school community is now heading in the right direction"	78.9
"Improved compliance on ERO criteria was achieved"	70.3
"The performance appraisal of our principal was managed by our consultant"	60.7

Table V.
Learning outcomes
related to policies,
plans and actions
taken

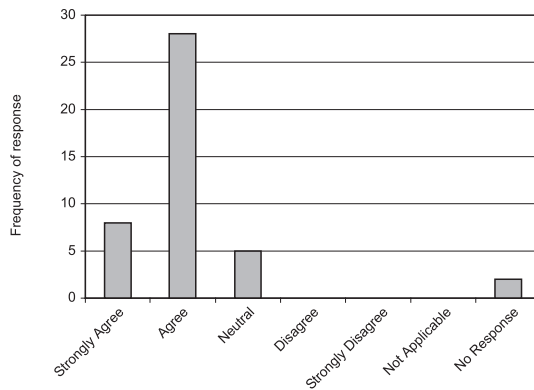


Figure 1.
REAP programme made
board's work achievable

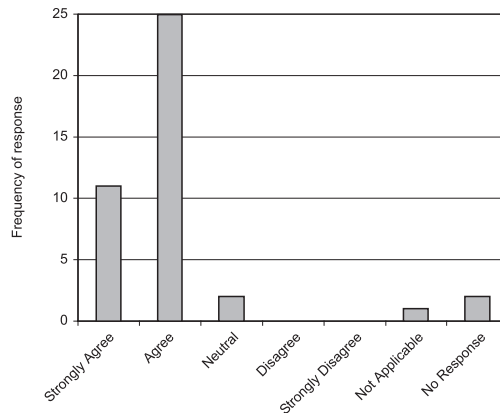


Figure 2.
REAP support helped to
create change

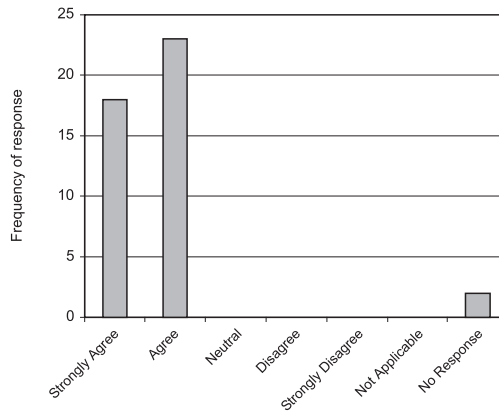


Figure 3.
REAP support readily
accessible

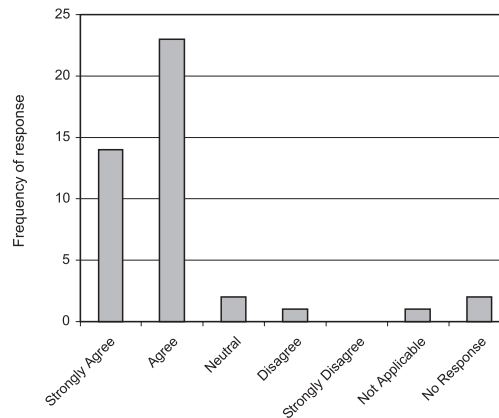


Figure 4.
Programme
appropriately extensive

developing mentoring programmes drawn from research, and questions that probed the consultants' assumptive base regarding their actions.

When asked what had initiated their involvement, and why they had invested so heavily in the development of the scheme, the consultants indicated a profound and long-standing personal commitment to Northland schools and education. They had each developed and deeply valued the relationships they enjoyed with principals and chairs of boards of trustees in many schools over the years. The two metavalues of their involvement appeared to be life-long community education and altruistic professionalism.

Most of the group were ex-principals who had anticipated the need for special support services in Northland school communities when boards of trustees were established. When the requests for on-site assistance from boards, principals, the Schools Trustees Association and the MoE accelerated,

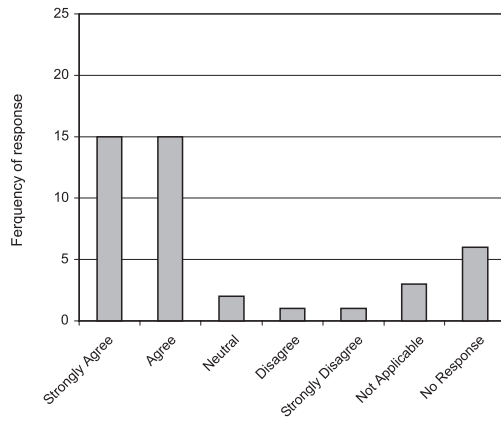


Figure 5.
Free programme to
poor school

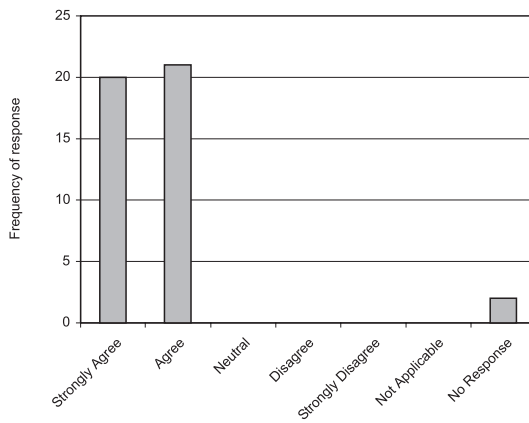


Figure 6.
REAP programme
supportive

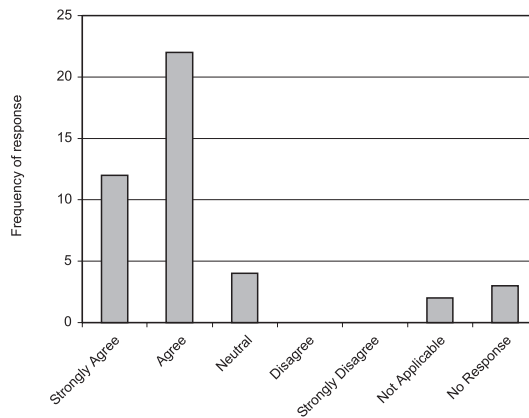
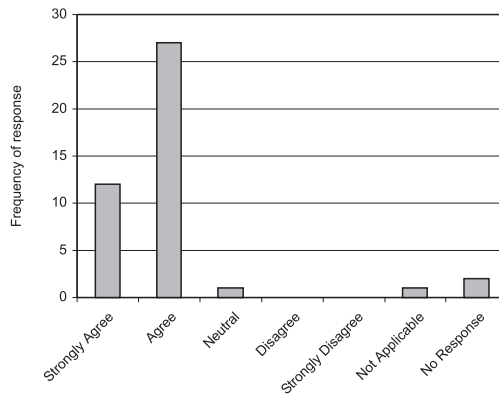


Figure 7.
Local solutions to
local problems

Figure 8.
Improved ability to
self-govern and
self-manage



they had joined with REAP to develop, trial and further develop a support scheme. The series of contracts administered by REAP for the MoE had formalised what had once been a loose network of private consultants.

The support system had evolved over time as the composition of the network changed and experience of the group accumulated. The model of intervention eventually used, and known by REAP as the “project system”, was tentatively agreed prior to the first contract bid to the MoE. It had been converted into a series of basic templates and flow charts for personalised application by participating consultants, and subsequently modified through regular meetings of the group. While it was understood that each consultant would need to apply the system in a way that matched their own personalities and the current needs of the school community they encountered, they had also agreed to adhere to a sequence of strategies:

- systematic needs analysis;
- confirmation and affirmation of the existing board’s expertise;
- formal agreements on tasks and roles for the board and the consultant;
- the revision or creation of the school’s mission and charter;
- translation of NEGs and NAGs into portfolios for trustees;
- deliberate creation of the consultant’s credibility through professional expertise, a caring manner, guaranteed follow-ups, effective networking, telephone call-backs, and confidentiality;
- consultants meet four times yearly to update and further develop their “rules for success” – all present papers, e-mail ideas to the network, consult bilaterally and dialogue with key invited guests, e.g. ERO; and
- manager of REAP serves in three roles – as a consultant, as the group’s coordinator, and as the conduit for external liaison and contract matters.

All consultants believed that the distinction between governance and management and role clarity were crucial. Confusion over the boundaries of

responsibilities for principals and boards was often the basis for referral. They also reported that most of the schools referred for assistance over the years have had novice or acting principals, and/or had suffered from a disproportionately high turnover of their principals.

Their descriptions of their engagement in the REAP project highlighted other commonalities. They were primarily self-selected and motivated by intrinsic rewards. They were strongly committed to the Far North REAP itself. They were committed to needs-driven capacity building in communities, “valley by valley”. As one consultant explained:

There are 29 schools in this scheme out of 78 schools in the REAP area. We work deliberately bottom up, accepting referrals first from the TPM and ERO, then self-referrals from those running into trouble, and then the self-managing schools wanting top ups. We offer and wait. Twenty boards approached have yet to take up the offer. Some boards have been captured by their principals. We offer and wait.

Other limits of the in-depth training and mentoring support were identified during this interview; they tend to focus on contracted tasks and give selective inattention to other problems encountered, be impeded by isolation factors, and tend to respond to problems post-change – rather than anticipate with capacity building. Some strengths were identified: the tailoring of development to each school community; flexibility; intimacy; trust; and high success and satisfaction rates.

Discussion

This section has three objectives, namely to evaluate the programme against its objectives as specified in the contracts, address the 16 research questions drawn from the practical context, and answer the 13 questions drawn from the international research literature. It is also concerned with two distinct issues: the strategies and operational processes of planning and developing an effective mentoring programme; and creating and sustaining effective mentoring relationships.

Did the REAP scheme deliver on its contracts? The first contract (1997-1998) and the second contract (1998-1999) required eight outcomes. The first outcome expected the scheme to generate clear understandings of NEGs’ and NAGs’ obligations. There is triangulated evidence from the case studies, the survey and the focus group interview that all parties saw such clarity as an outcome. Similarly, the data from all sources indicate that the second outcome was also achieved. Participating boards conducted self-reviews and built development plans.

All data sources indicate that participating boards were significantly more aware of their context, ideals, actual practice, roles, responsibilities and relationships as a consequence of participating in the REAP scheme – the third expected outcome. The evidence, particularly from the case studies, indicated that boards were striving to achieve the fourth outcome – a clear view of the differences between governance and management. On the other hand, there

were also constant indications that their operational policies were advancing their understandings.

The survey data were particularly compelling about the extent to which participating boards had gained additional skills, strategies and knowledge needed to manage their affairs in key areas (the fifth expected outcome) and to handle issues peculiar to their school community (the sixth outcome). There was strong evidence from all sources that participating boards had strengthened their networks (the seventh outcome) and developed strategies to meet future professional needs (the eighth outcome).

The third contract (1999-2001) required, in addition to the eight outcomes noted above:

- intensive support to boards experiencing difficulties with governance; and
- strengthened governance in partnership with Maori to deliver strong and enduring education outcomes.

There is evidence from all sources that the first of these additional objectives was achieved. The case study data also make it clear that effective partnerships with Maori were a feature of the scheme.

This research, however, was not designed to measure the extent to which the improvement of governance structures actually resulted in “strong, enduring educational outcomes.” On the other hand, many participating boards attributed markedly improved ERO reports to the support they had received from the REAP scheme. Responding to a negative ERO report was the second most frequent reason cited for participating in the training. No evidence was encountered that would suggest that educational outcomes were impaired by boards’ participation.

The 16 research questions that traversed the issues raised by the contracts and their practical context were listed above. The discussion above has addressed questions 1-9. Questions 10-16 were answered by respondents to the survey, and by those interviewed in the case study schools. The consultants were described consistently as excellent teachers and facilitators, highly credible and expert, and instrumental in empowering boards to plan and achieve their governance responsibilities and roles. Each of the first six processes detailed in the flow diagram above was shown by many data to be effective. According to all data sources, the overall delivery system is regarded as highly effective, with some limitations acknowledged.

The 13 research questions from the research literature listed above relate to strategies and processes of delivering effective mentoring programmes and to building appropriate relationships. The first concerned how the programme’s organisation created trustful relationships between those unequal in wisdom, expertise and disposition. The evidence is that REAP acted as a broker to set the philosophical, strategic and operational contexts of the scheme, assembled and trained consultants, and organised the relationships between the principals, the boards and consultants. This brokerage was crucial to the

building of delicate relationships in circumstances where clients were often stressed, shamed by ERO reports or struggling in their roles. Second, there is clear evidence that the project system systematically enabled the growth of trust, respected positional authority and leveraged on the interdependence of roles.

How did the programme's organisation enable effective learning through educative forms of leadership? Effective learning was generated through adherence to the principles of adult learning which acknowledged the capabilities of board members while developing knowledge, skills and dispositions. The selection and preparation of consultants was vital in this regard. Selecting expert ex-principals to advise inexperienced principals and boards both respected professional norms and enabled team building. The organization of the scheme also provided educative forms of leadership by enabling boards to become familiar with all facets of strategic management – visioning, internal analysis, external analysis, identifying opportunities, setting goals, reviewing activities, allocating resources and evaluation.

What were the operating definitions of mentoring used in this programme? There was no evidence that a formal definition of training or mentoring was developed at the outset. However, definitions of these activities gradually emerged from the discussions held at the “update meetings.” The terms “training” and “mentoring” appear to have been used interchangeably until it became clear that site-based mentoring was singularly more successful than training individuals outside of their governance setting.

How were the goals of the mentoring programme developed and clarified? There were explicit goals developed at two levels. The overall programme goals were articulated in the contracts. The development goals for each school were negotiated between the board and their consultant. On the other hand, the goals, strategies and operational aspects of mentoring and being mentored were left largely implicit. This helps explain why the three terms “training”, “case management” and “mentoring” continued to be used by REAP in largely undefined ways.

How were the potential benefits of participation explained to boards and consultants? The project manager and a consultant explained the potential benefits to each board during the contracting process. The standard letter to schools offering participation detailed potential benefits as opportunities to “review ... operations”, “clarify roles”, “identify training needs”, “streamline systems”, meet the requirements of NEGs and “reduce workloads”. It can be assumed that the benefits to consultants were discussed as part of REAP's contracting process. Conversely, no explicit evidence was encountered of risk analysis with regard to any party.

How were the terms of participation in the programme determined? A formal offer was made by REAP to each school. On acceptance of this offer, a contract was agreed between the parties. The specific terms were clarified at the first meeting the board had with the consultant. The schools tended to be small to medium-sized primary schools of low decile ranking with a high proportion of

Maori enrolments. The consultants tended to be ex-school principals, deeply committed to life-long community education and motivated by altruistic professionalism.

The relationships between boards and consultants were constructed and reconstructed as the programme unfolded, essentially through negotiation and re-negotiation. There is much evidence that the consultants actively avoided the creation of dependency or becoming personally involved in local school politics. Similarly, many data sources described how negotiated engagements and disengagements respected local culture, norms of interaction and a diverse range of personalities. Further, the obligations of the boards and consultants negotiated, monitored and reviewed as the programme proceeded. The data from the survey and the case studies confirm regular and formative evaluation and renegotiation of roles and responsibilities.

How were the consultants and boards prepared for their roles? The programme planning processes and the “update” meetings provided training and professional development for the consultants. The boards were prepared for their roles through the sessions held with consultants, with content explicitly negotiated.

How were the mentoring relationships sustained and changed in the course of the programme, and to what extent were they effective? Respondents to the survey and the case study data attest to the flexibility of the consultants and the highly effective nature of their relationships. Inexperienced principals, in particular, found these relationships supportive and professionally enhancing. Again it must be noted that the roles of mentors and mentees were not clarified in the schools and relationships focused solely on school development. The “update meetings” of consultants appear to be the only context in which the effectiveness of training and mentoring were discussed.

How effective were the safeguards, resource management, evaluation and termination processes planned for the programme? The consultants were acutely aware of the need to protect all interests as they supported the board as a whole while also supporting individual trustees. This research did not evaluate REAP’s management of the resources available to the scheme. Evaluation occurred at a number of levels: REAP’s programme reporting of milestones, consultants’ reports, session evaluations and final evaluation by the board on completion of the project system.

Tentative conclusions and provisional recommendations

As indicated in the methodology section above, 11 key constructs were identified within the amalgamated list of 29 research questions that were, in turn, derived from the contracts and the practical and theoretical contexts. These constructs are now used as a framework for developing tentative conclusions and provisional recommendations, mindful of the limits to interpretation discussed above. Constructs three and four, five and six, and nine and ten were paired and treated together because they were found to be so closely aligned in practice.

Tentative conclusions were drawn concerning the basis of boards' participation:

- Despite the service levels required by the contracts, REAP's decision to "offer and wait" allowed boards to participate on their own terms, for many different reasons, when they were ready.
- Participation was particularly helpful to boards responding to negative ERO reports.
- Participation was particularly helpful to boards coping with significant internal challenges, such as high turnover of trustees, inexpert skills, an inappropriate skill mix and inexperienced governance and leadership.
- Participation offered access to a comprehensive, customized and effective governance and school development model in a context confused by multiple, partial, fragmented, decontextualised and competing training programmes.

This led to four provisional recommendations:

- (1) The REAP brokerage model might form the basis of a national scheme.
- (2) This scheme might complement ERO summative evaluations.
- (3) This scheme might be made available to all school boards, especially those facing significant challenges or high turnover.
- (4) This scheme might provide for the coordination, the rationalization and the provision of mentoring support to boards.

The second construct was about how boards were introduced to training and mentoring. Two tentative conclusions were drawn:

- (1) The terms "training," "support," "development," "case management" and "mentoring" tended to be used interchangeably by consultants and boards.
- (2) Positive engagement was created by clarity and negotiated agreements regarding purposes, processes and evaluation.

It was provisionally recommended that any national scheme should locate the negotiation of training and case management as part of the process of building mentoring relationships.

The third construct concerned the analysis of the strengths and the learning needs of boards. It was tentatively concluded that such analysis is a crucial component of the model because it evokes a positive orientation, focuses on local priorities and generates a customized plan. It was therefore provisionally recommended that the analyses of strengths and needs remain a key mechanism for promoting relevance, buy-in, customization and formal mentoring contracts.

With regard to the fourth construct, boards' and trustees' learning processes, three tentative conclusions were drawn:

- (1) Participation enabled boards to achieve the objectives of their action plans and implement governance structures.
- (2) Trustees deepened their understanding of NEGs and NAGs and strengthened their skills and networks.
- (3) The learning processes were negotiated as a programme comprising a series of training sessions, while, in reality, learning was supported through a mentoring relationship that also involved training, case management and personal consultations.

It was therefore recommended that the comprehensive facilitation of learning processes by the consultants be reconceptualised as being embedded within a mentoring relationship, rather than merely a series of extraction training sessions alienated from governance relationships.

The quality of consultancy was the fifth construct related to outcomes. It was tentatively concluded that:

- The consultants created environments that sustained highly supportive, effective and problem-solving forms of interaction.
- The expertise, skills and approach of the consultants validated the selection criteria and recruitment processes used by Far North REAP.
- The qualities of the consultants were key determinants of the perceived success of the REAP scheme.

Two provisional recommendations follow:

- (1) Any national scheme adopt the criteria and processes developed by the Far North REAP scheme for the selection of consultants.
- (2) The quality of Far North REAP's consultants be used in any national scheme as benchmarks for evaluating the comparative performance of consultants.

Facilitation was the sixth construct evaluated. It was tentatively concluded that the facilitation of teaching and learning was strongly associated with effective group processes, team and confidence building, appropriate pacing, regular evaluation and feedback, caring relationships and making learning fun. Similarly, four conclusions were drawn with regard to learning outcomes related to boards' processes, policies, plans and actions (the seventh construct):

- (1) A condition of success of the Far North REAP model is that consultants do not engage in industrial negotiations or take a partisan position in micro-politics.
- (2) There may be a potential conflict of interest where a consultant attempts to be both a mentor and an appraiser of a principal.

- (3) Satisfaction with process outcomes was strongly associated with problem solving, positive relationships, task distribution, enthusiasm, school development, and building skills and confidence.
- (4) Satisfaction with policy, plan and action outcomes was strongly associated with positive governance and strategic management, compliance with ERO reports and improved leadership.

Two general conclusions were drawn concerning the eight constructs:

- (1) The Far North REAP scheme is valued for its overall capacity to facilitate governance that creates improvements, deliver “free”, appropriately-scaled and customized support on site, and improve the ability of schools to self-govern and self-manage.
- (2) The Far North REAP Office played a critical role as local brokers of quality mentoring services, provided this brokerage in a culturally and politically sensitive manner, and delivered essential coordination and support to consultants in a highly effective manner.

The final provisional recommendation was that the Ministry of Education use Far North REAP to deliver training and planning workshops for other regional groups interested in brokering mentoring services to boards of trustees in other parts of New Zealand, prior to the award of contracts.

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