

# NZEI TE RIU ROA

## SUPPORTING DIVERSE LEARNERS

### SURVEY OF SPECIAL EDUCATION NEEDS CO-ORDINATORS (SENCO) 2018

#### FOREWORD

Special Education Needs Co-ordinators (SENCOs) work hard to ensure that every child is supported to achieve their full potential at school. SENCOs work alongside children with additional learning needs and their whānau to achieve the best possible outcomes for children, undertaking a range of duties including: liaising with teachers, teacher aides and specialist providers, testing students and analysing results, and completing a variety of administrative tasks.

Unfortunately, despite the complexities of the responsibilities they undertake, the SENCO role is not formally recognised or adequately resourced. This survey adds to a growing body of evidence that there is a large unmet need for support to make our education system truly inclusive of all our learners and give every child the opportunity to succeed.

A SENCO in every school is an integral part of a truly inclusive education system. All children and young people, and all educators, would benefit from an investment in the professional infrastructure to support inclusive practice. Tens of thousands of children need specialist support and schools are struggling without the resources to provide it. This survey demonstrates that this need is very real.

It's time for this inequity to be addressed.



*Lynda Stuart*  
*NZEI Te Riu Roa President*

## ABOUT THIS SURVEY

In February 2018 NZEI Te Riu Roa sent out a survey to find out more about the role that SENCOs play in schools. This survey is a follow-up to the original SENCO survey carried out in 2016 (NZEI Te Riu Roa, 2016). Based on the results of that survey and feedback received since, the authors have added new questions to this iteration. Currently, there is no requirement for a school to have a SENCO position and this position does not generate any additional staffing, management units or release time.

This year's survey was sent to 994 SENCOs who had been identified predominantly through site visits by NZEI Te Riu Roa Field Officers. The survey was also sent to 862 principals of schools where SENCOs had not been identified. A total of 572 SENCOs completed the survey. This is an increase from 2016, when 352 SENCOs responded. NZEI Te Riu Roa was contacted by 12 schools, including six special schools, who noted that they did not have a SENCO role. Special schools have a unique role in New Zealand's education system and further work is underway to ascertain their particular challenges in supporting children with additional learning needs and in supporting mainstream schools.

## KEY FINDINGS

On average, 15% of each school's students are listed on the school's special needs register. It is important to remember that many students will need additional support at points in their schooling – sometimes for only a short time. This means the number specified on a special needs register provides a snapshot in time, and this data was collected at the beginning of 2018. It is likely that the number of students on a register will increase during the year as teachers get to know new students who joined the school at the beginning of the year.

Sixty nine percent of respondents either disagree or strongly disagree that their school has the resources needed to ensure that all students can participate fully in school. Participating fully in school includes, but is not limited to, students attending full days and full participation in education outside the classroom activities.

Principals in small schools are taking on the SENCO role at times because they have no other staff to fill this role. Principals are among the 30% of those who receive no financial compensation for undertaking this role.

## QUESTIONS

### How many students are in your school?

There were 564 responses to this question, representing approximately 160,141 students. (Where a range was given as a response to this question, the lowest number in the range was taken). The median number of students in respondent schools is 231 (compared with 290 in the 2016 survey); the smallest roll was 3 (10 in 2016) and the largest was 2203 (1400 in 2016). This is indicative of the diversity in the size of New Zealand schools.

## Does your school have a special needs register?

Of those who responded to this question (562 participants) 92% indicated that their school has a special needs register, compared with 95% in 2016.

## If your school doesn't have a special needs register, why do you think this is?

The reasons given for not having a special needs register include; it isn't needed due to the small size of the school (those students with additional needs are known to all staff), no children with additional needs are at the school, a register was in the process of being put together and there are also different ways of recording those students who are receiving additional support.

## If your school does have a special needs register, how many students are on it?

There were 471 responses with numerical data. Overall, there are 20,424 students on registers, giving an average of 43 students per school. Using information from the previous question about the number of students in school, there is an average of 15% of students on special needs registers. This is similar to the 2016 survey which found that there were 16% of students on special needs registers.

This question asked about the number of students who receive support from different funding streams (see table).

## Funding by source

|   | Number of recipient students | Proportion reporting this source |
|---|------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Special Education Grant (SEG)           | 10,018                       | 63%                              |
| RTLB Funding                            | 2,114                        | 75%                              |
| Ongoing Resourcing Scheme (ORS)         | 1,289                        | 74%                              |
| Parents                                 | 241                          | 22%                              |
| Accident Compensation Corporation (ACC) | 111                          | 18%                              |

**TOTAL RESPONDENTS: 541**

Schools access a range of funding sources to support students with additional learning needs. Most students are supported by the Special Education Grant (SEG).

## Other sources of funding

It is clear from the responses to this question that there is a wide range of revenue streams and agencies that SENCOs access to support students with additional learning needs. There were 365 respondents who identified at least one additional revenue/support stream. The most commonly identified additional support source, noted by 26% of people who responded, is School High Health Needs Fund (SHHNF). Support for communication needs (including speech language therapists, communication support workers and language and learning intervention) was identified by 24% of respondents. Twenty four percent of those who responded to this question also noted that in-class support was another avenue of resourcing.

Additional sources of support were sorted into 21 main categories as per the table below.

| Area of support   | Number of responses | % responses |
|---|---------------------|-------------|
| School High Health Needs Fund (MOE)   | 96                  | 26%         |
| In-Class Support (MOE)  | 86                  | 24%         |
| Speech Language Therapists/Support Workers/<br>Early Intervention specialists (MOE) | 87                  | 24%         |
| English as a Second Language funding (ESOL/ELL)                                     | 61                  | 17%         |
| MOE Behaviour funding   | 63                  | 17%         |
| Board of Trustees/Operations Grant  | 57                  | 16%         |
| Interim Response Fund (MOE)   | 48                  | 13%         |
| Oranga Tamariki/Ministry for Children   | 42                  | 12%         |
| Learning and Support Fund (MOE)   | 30                  | 8%          |
| Intensive Wraparound Service (MOE)  | 21                  | 6%          |
| Charities/Grants/Trusts/Private providers/fundraising                               | 23                  | 6%          |
| Resource Teacher - Literacy   | 16                  | 4%          |
| High and Complex Needs funding (MOE)  | 11                  | 3%          |
| Reading Recovery  | 8                   | 2%          |
| Other   | 6                   | 2%          |
| Targeted At-Risk Funding (MOE)  | 5                   | 1%          |
| Blind and Low Vision Education Network NZ (BLENNZ)                                  | 4                   | 1%          |
| Hearing-related funding   | 4                   | 1%          |
| Social Workers in Schools (MSD)   | 5                   | 1%          |
| Iwi agency  | 4                   | 1%          |
| Health agencies   | 4                   | 1%          |
| <b>TOTAL RESPONSES</b>  | <b>681</b>          |             |

## How many students at your school receive ORS funding?

Five hundred and thirty two people responded to this question. Overall, 1307 students in respondent schools receive ORS funding. The median number of student receiving ORS funding per respondent school was one.

## How many ORS applications has your school submitted in 2017?

On average fewer than one (0.88) ORS application was submitted by each school in 2017. The highest number of ORS applications for one school was 24.

## How many of those applications were successful?

On average, approximately half of all ORS applications submitted by respondents were successful.

## My school has the resources needed to ensure that all students can participate fully in school

This includes full days at school and participating in education outside the classroom. A total of 558 people responded to this question. Sixty nine percent of those who responded either disagreed (46%) or strongly disagreed (23%) with this statement.

## If no, what percentage of students at your school do not receive adequate support/funding?

Despite 382 people noting they either disagreed or strongly disagreed with the previous statement, more people – 456 – chose to answer this question. Over half the respondents to this question (55%) believe that between 1-20% of students are not receiving adequate support and/or funding. A further 27% of respondents believe that between 21-40% of students are not receiving adequate support and 9% believe that between 41-60% of students are not getting adequate support.

## Although the name “Special Education Needs Coordinator” (SENCO) describes the work you do and the needs of the children you support, do you think this is the best name for the role?

Of those who responded to this question, 35% think that SENCO is the best name for this role, 27% do not think that SENCO is the best name for this role and a further 38% are not sure.

## What do you think would be a better name for this role?

A number of respondents (75) suggested Learning Support Coordinator would be a better name for this role. However, the comment was made that this role is more encompassing than supporting students with their learning; it is about “hauora”- supporting the learner wherever they need support. This is reflected in the suggested name of Wellbeing, Learning and Behaviour Coordinator. Inclusive Education Coordinator was suggested by 11 respondents and Education Needs Coordinator was suggested by five respondents.

The suggestion of Student Support was made by seven respondents. There were no other clear themes coming from the remaining responses. It is clear that further work needs to be done in this area so that the name of this role is reflective of the work and is respectful to learners and their whānau.

### I find it easy to obtain access to external support for children within a reasonable timeframe

There were a total of 558 respondents to this question, with 49% disagreeing and a further 23% strongly disagreeing with this statement. This means that only 28% of respondents find it easy to access external support for children within a reasonable timeframe.

### Employment type (excluding the SENCO role)

SENCOs are likely to be employed permanently at their school on a full time basis (82%), with a further 12% employed on a permanent, part time basis.

### How long have you been in the SENCO role?

| How long have you been in the SENCO role? | 2016       |     | 2018       |     |
|---|------------|-----|------------|-----|
|   | Count      | %   | Count      | %   |
| Up to 1 year                              | 39         | 11% | 68         | 13% |
| 1-2 years                                 | 48         | 14% | 75         | 14% |
| 2-5 years                                 | 96         | 28% | 174        | 32% |
| More than 5 years                         | 165        | 48% | 225        | 42% |
| <b>TOTAL</b>                              | <b>348</b> |     | <b>542</b> |     |

There has been a change in the percentage of respondents who have been in the SENCO role for more than five years. In the 2016 survey, 48% of respondents fitted into this category, now only 42% have been in the role this long. There has been an increase in the number of SENCOs who have been in the role between two and five years, from 27% in 2016 to 32% in 2018. It appears that proportionally, the most experienced SENCOs are leaving the role.

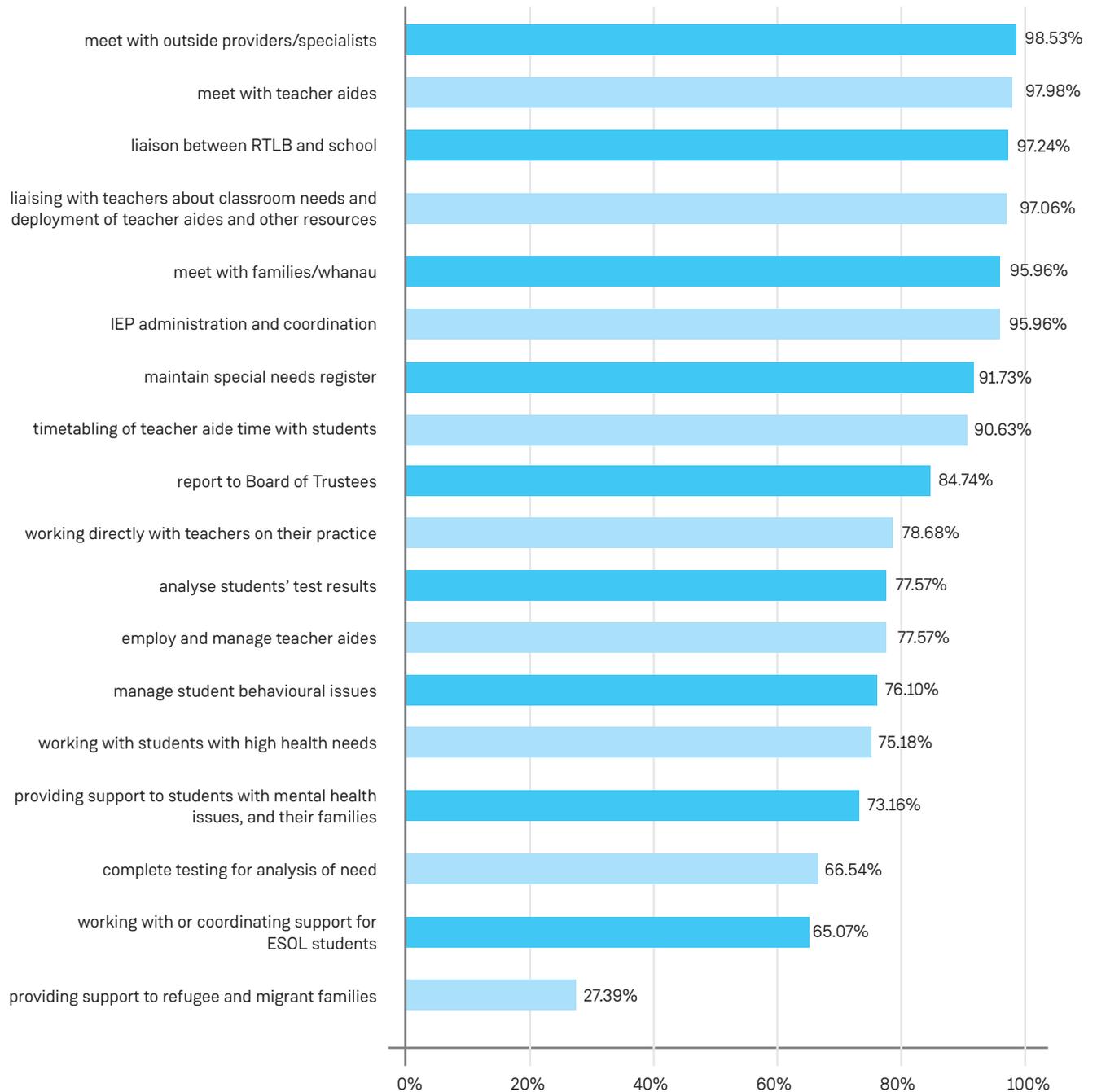
### Activities undertaken as part of the SENCO role

As a result of the 2016 survey, we identified additional activities that might be undertaken as part of the SENCO role. These were included in the 2018 questionnaire.

The activities that SENCOs are most likely to undertake are; meeting with outside providers/specialists (99%), meeting with teacher aides (98%) and liaising between RTLB and school (97%). The role of the SENCO is varied and complex and it appears that SENCOs are doing more, with 97% liaising with teachers about classroom needs and deployment of teacher aides and other resources, and 96% meeting with families/whanau and undertaking Individual Education Plans, administration and coordination.

Eight percent of respondents who commented on this question indicated that they are also the principal of the school.

### Please tick all the activities you undertake as part of your SENCO role

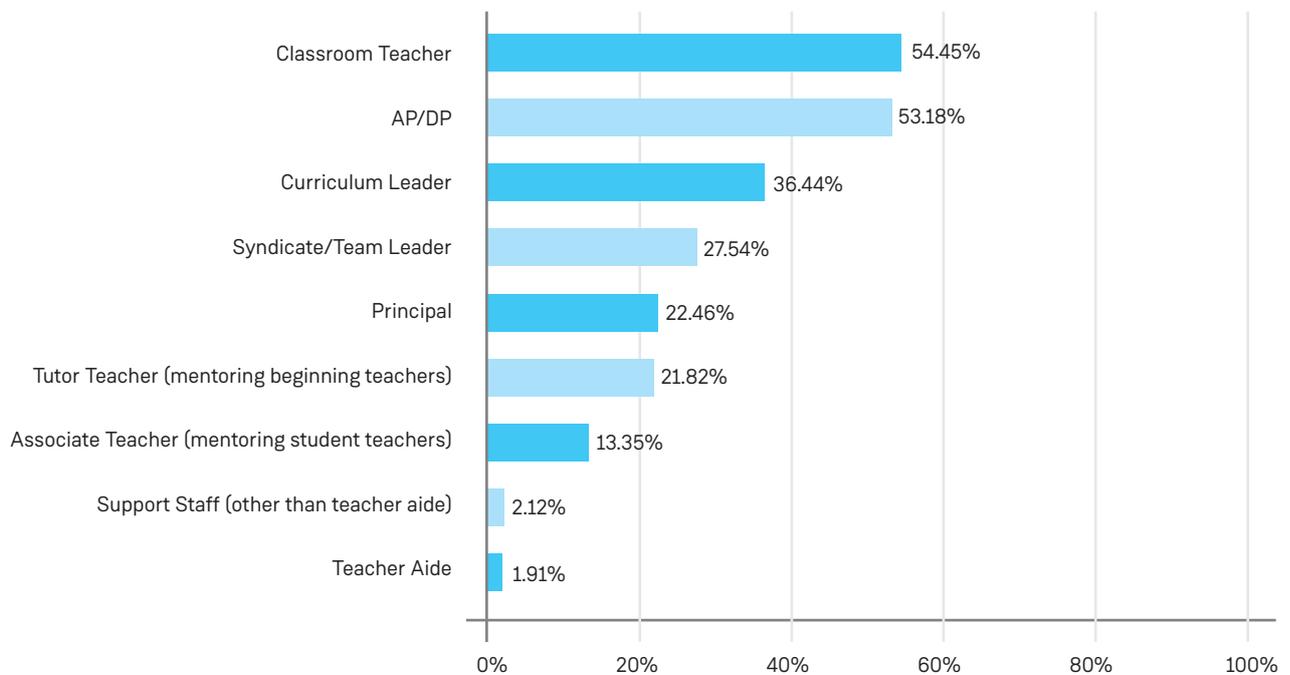


## Do you receive any financial compensation for this role?

There is an increase in the percentage of SENCOs who are not receiving any financial compensation for this role from 26% in 2016 to 30% in 2018. Forty three percent receive one management unit on top of their base salary for this role, which is less than the 66% who were receiving a unit in 2016. There are now a number of SENCOs who are receiving more than one management unit, (13%). However, out of those who chose to comment on this question (76), there were 45 who noted that SENCO was part of other responsibilities (either AP/DP or principal). Eight of those who commented received less than one unit and a further two noted that they had a fixed term unit, which was not guaranteed from year to year.

## What other roles do you fulfil at your school, besides SENCO?

It is clear that those in SENCO roles are also likely to fulfil other roles in the school environment, as per the table below.



## Is your SENCO role permanent or fixed term?

There has been an increase in the percentage of those who have permanent SENCO positions, from 63% in 2016 to 73% in 2018. While there has been a decrease, there are still a number of SENCOs who are unsure if their role is permanent (11% in 2016 to 8% in 2018).

## How many hours release per week do you get for SENCO responsibilities?

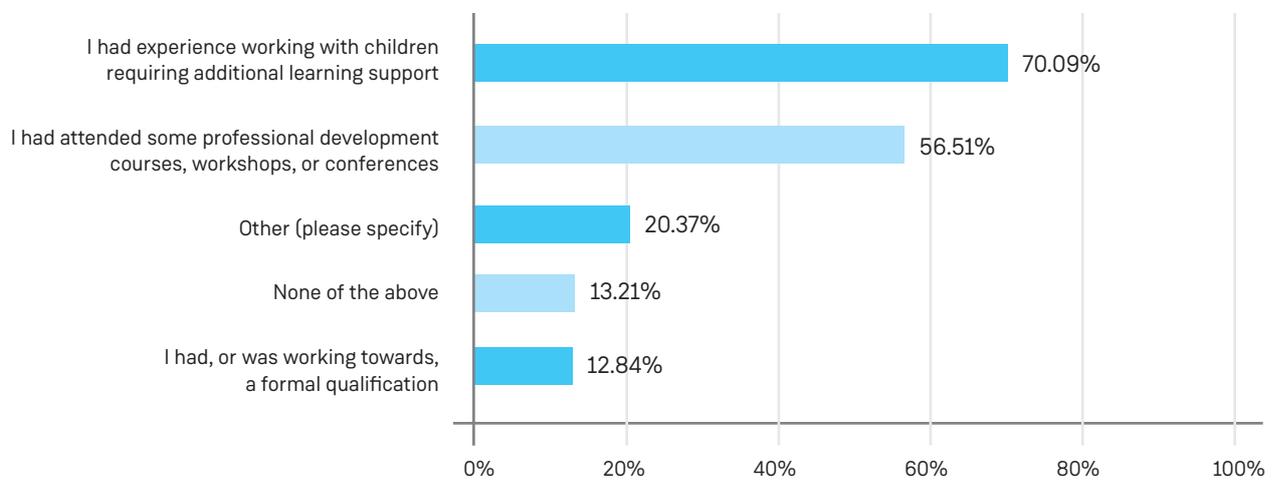
Forty eight percent of respondents do not get any release specifically for SENCO responsibilities. This is a significant increase from 2016, when 19% of respondents did not get any release specifically for SENCO responsibilities. A further 20% get between 1-4 hours per week to enable them to undertake SENCO responsibilities. As in 2016, 10% of respondents are full time SENCOs.

## Do you think you get enough release time to enable you to fulfil the SENCO role?

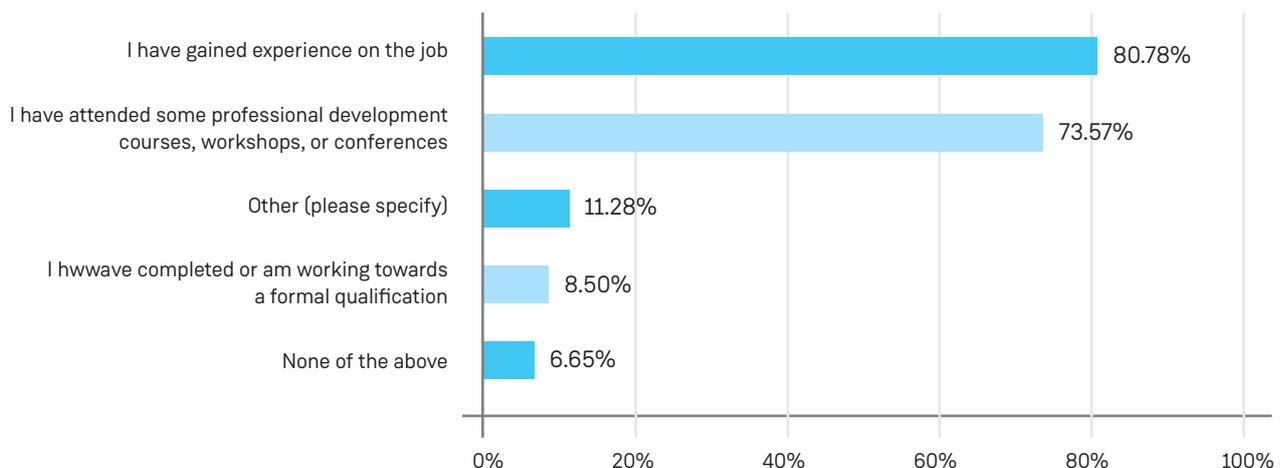
The results for this question were similar to the results in 2016. A greater percentage of people this year noted that they needed some more (41%) or a lot more (29%) time to fulfil the role. This is a total of 70%, up from 66% in 2016.

## Please identify the type of qualifications, experience and/or professional development that you had before your started your SENCO role

It is worth noting that of those who commented on this question (111 respondents), 18 (16%) had RTLB training before taking up the role of SENCO.



## Qualifications, experience and/or professional development before starting the SENCO role



## Who has paid for the professional learning and development you have received?

Fifty five percent of those who responded to this question noted that their employer paid the full costs for PLD. A further 24% noted that their employer had paid for part of the PLD. A significant number of respondents (38%) said that the PLD they had received was free. There are some SENCOS (16%) who either have paid for or taken out a loan to cover their PLD.

## Do you feel confident in your ability to carry out the SENCO role?

Nineteen percent of SENCOS feel completely confident in their ability to carry out the role. However, there are still a significant number of SENCOS (36%) who are either not at all confident (1%) or only confident to a certain extent (35%) in their ability to carry out this role. Despite mention by individuals of good networks and supports, further need to support SENCOS in their role is indicated.

## Would you be interested in obtaining a SENCO specific formal qualification?

Sixty one percent of respondents would be interested in obtaining a specific formal qualification if it was fully funded, with some release time. A further 3% would be interested, even if they had to pay for it themselves. Some SENCOS (5%) indicated that they already have a relevant qualification. Only 8% of those who responded would not be interested in obtaining a formal qualification.

## Do you have the opportunity to collaborate with other SENCOS?

Opportunities for SENCOS to collaborate have not changed considerably since 2016. There is still a significant percent, (46%) who are not able to collaborate with other SENCOS because of lack of opportunity or time. This means that there is likely to be a sense of professional isolation in this role, with SENCOS having to negotiate systems and processes independently.

| Opportunities to collaborate with other SENCOS |            |     |            |     |  |
|--|------------|-----|------------|-----|--|
|  | 2016       |     | 2018       |     |  |
| Yes  | 182        | 53% | 290        | 54% |  |
| Yes, but not at times that suit                | 82         | 24% | 125        | 23% |  |
| No   | 80         | 23% | 125        | 23% |  |
| <b>TOTAL</b>                                   | <b>344</b> |     | <b>540</b> |     |  |

## Is collaboration between SENCOs based on formal or informal networks?

Forty one percent of those who responded noted that collaboration is based on both formal and informal networks. Twenty two percent of respondents only collaborate through formal networks and 21% only through informal networks.

## CONCLUSION

The SENCO role is complex and demanding. It requires knowledge, skills and perseverance to be able to negotiate the current system. This is particularly challenging when the Ministry of Education funding is often contestable. This is despite the number of students with additional learning needs increasing over the years (Statistics New Zealand, 2014, p. 3). SENCOs are creative – gaining funding for students from a variety of sources. However, applying for applications takes time away from working with teachers and/or students who need support.

There are a number of SENCOs who receive no financial support for the role that they do. Many receive no release time to enable them to fulfil their role and therefore the SENCO work is done after hours, on top of the many other roles that they hold. Fifty eight percent of SENCOs have been in the role less than five years. This indicates a high turnover of staff in this role. Given the lack of compensation and lack of release time, this is not surprising.

SENCOs are keen to learn more and many would undertake a formal qualification if it was provided fully funded with some release time. More needs to be done to support SENCOs in this vital role.

## REFERENCES

NZEI Te Riu Roa. (2016). *Survey of special education needs co-ordinators (SENCo) 2016*. Wellington, New Zealand: NZEI Te Riu Roa.

Statistics New Zealand. (2014). *Disability survey: 2013*. Wellington, New Zealand: Statistics New Zealand.