



Peter Spratt

Former NZASE President and Chairperson of the Earth and Space Science Educators, Jenny Pollock, CSRNZ, gave a slightly amended version of this talk to a special celebration of Peter Spratt at CONSTANZ in October 2019. It was held in the evening to an audience of current and former office holders of the Science Technicians Association of NZ. Peter was a long-term Executive Officer of NZASE, and involved in the 2005 formation of STANZ.

Exceptional science teacher

Writing this speech has been a sad trip down memory lane, not only for me but also for the people I asked to contribute anecdotes. To write this I have drawn heavily on [the obituary in the Dominion](#), written by Diana Dekker, plus comments from Rose Hipkins and Jessie McKenzie, who both worked very closely with Peter. Many thanks to those people.

Peter Spratt, MSc Hons in Geology and Diploma in Education, was an exceptional science teacher, with special interests in the land and geology. He was also an examiner and curriculum developer in the field of Agriculture. He left the classroom to inspire the communication of science by teaching teachers. In 1991 he joined Teacher Support Services in Wellington as a school science adviser, working with teachers to implement the science curriculum.

In 1994, he joined the Royal Society Te Apārangi, expanding the role and influence of the education section. While he was there he established and enhanced many initiatives, most of which survive today.

Peter's initiatives

NZASE

Peter boosted the importance of NZASE and was its Executive Officer until his death. He was the rudder that steered the ship. He died just as I was about to become President. Beverley Cooper, the President at the time, and the rest of the NZASE Executive and Council were fully aware of what that huge loss meant to NZASE.

Formation of STANZ

The concept of a national body to represent school science technicians was proposed and accepted at the 2004 NZASE AGM, and a Special Interest Group for technicians was established, to be called STANZ. In 2005 the first committee was formed, aiming to focus on professional and practical matters. STANZ became and has remained very involved with improvements in school laboratory safety through the Code of Practice and its successor, even though this has been the bane of most technicians' lives for a long time. It has become a very successful committee, being a wonderful advocate and source of help for school science technicians.

Teacher Fellowship Scheme

Peter strengthened the Royal Society Te Apārangi's teacher fellowship scheme, which grew from a few teachers to about 40 annually. The scheme allowed science, maths and technology teachers to take a year away from the classroom to study something of interest. Funding priorities changed and in 2008 I was one of the last recipients of the annual award in that form. My fellowship was on Oceanography and what I learnt that year heavily influenced the teaching of Planet Earth and Beyond and the development of Earth and Space Science as a subject. The fellowship scheme still survives today, changing emphasis so that there is now a direct relationship between the teacher and the classroom, something that Peter would have welcomed.



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National Science & Technology Fair

Peter also helped start, co-ordinate and boost the profile of the National Science and Technology Fair. The fair aimed to get students thinking about science careers, especially seeing that an aging work force meant that many scientists and skilled technicians were retiring. He also started a database of interested students from year 13 to tertiary age, and sent those students regular newsletters.

Education contracts

Peter made sure that he knew about the educational contracts from NZQA, MoE and MORST (now part of MBIE). Through his network of teachers he was able to advertise these and get good people to run them.

Travel award

Peter set up the Talented School Student Travel award for students selected to attend international science and technology events.

Code on the ethical use of animals

The Royal Society was commissioned to prepare a Code of Ethical Conduct for the use of animals in research and teaching in schools and early childhood centres, and establish an Approvals Committee. Peter guided this process. The Code is held by NZASE, which was contracted to prepare guidelines and examples for use by teachers and students. Human guidelines were also set out.

Alcohol production

[This item caused a lot of amusement at CONSTANZ19.]

Back in the day, many schools engaged in small scale brewing, wine-making or distilling activities as part of their science or chemistry programmes. According to Customs and Excise regulations at that time, schools were



required to be licensed for such activity and pay duty on the alcohol produced. NZASE was asked by the Ministry of Education to prepare guidelines for schools. The basis of the draft was that schools should be exempt, providing they followed the draft guidelines and the amount of alcohol involved was below a suggested threshold. However, it appears that Customs would not grant any exemption for schools, so NZASE could not endorse the published guidelines.

Science teacher newsletter

Peter sent out a printed newsletter four times a year, which at that time was how science teachers and regional science teacher committees gained their news. It was a unifying and well-read publication, eventually superceded by other updates.

NZ Science Teacher magazine

Peter encouraged and enhanced NZASE's publication of the *NZ Science Teacher* magazine. Unfortunately, the magazine always cost more than NZASE could afford. It became an annual magazine until 2018, and was then replaced by a monthly email newsletter.

NZASE Certificate in Science

Peter also cared about students who couldn't understand many aspects of science. He formed an NZASE Certificate in Science which was an alternative qualification for 'less able' students. It was used for many years but was eventually replaced by NCEA standards.

Primary science conference

Under Peter's guidance the Primary Science conference format was updated and made more available to teachers in different parts of the country. He helped to establish a biennial, rolling, three-day conference, with



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key presenters travelling between cities, supported by workshops and presentations by local teachers and scientists. This conference format ran for many years.

Impact of his loss

At the time of Peter's sudden death in 2007 he was the president-elect of the International Association of Science Educators. Peter was survived by his wife Berys and three daughters.

Peter's sudden death was a real shock, and because he had held such a pivotal role for so long, he was irreplaceable. NZASE, and the standing committees of SciPEB (now ESSE), ChemEd, Physics, BEANZ, Primary Science and STANZ, were badly affected. Peter had done much of the day-to-day running of NZASE, for example, liaising with and assisting administrator Beverley Booker. He also networked with key people nationally and internationally.

His role, of course, was very helpful and enabled NZASE to obtain contracts such as for animal ethics, and keep in touch with and participate in science and educational issues. The relationship between the Royal Society Te Apārangi and NZASE was close. Royal Society Te Apārangi supported the NZASE Certificate in Science and the preparation of the *NZ Science Teacher* by allowing RSNZ staff to work on these activities without charging full rates for the time involved.

After Peter died, Richard Meylon, previously at MORST, became the new Royal Society Te Apārangi Educational Officer and the society started to shed the NZASE admin jobs that it had been doing. The new CEO, Dr Di McCarthy, had a different vision for the organisation, which didn't include, unsurprisingly, administration for NZASE.

For a while the society maintained the database, banked money received and forwarded mail, but eventually even that help ended. Much of the huge collection of resources and records that Peter had accumulated was thrown away, and remaining resources were moved from the

RSNZ to Te Kura, then to a garage in Nelson and then into my office at school. It was always sad when I threw out old accounts and other records Peter had kept.

Peter Spratt Medal

NZASE honours Peter by awarding the biennial Peter Spratt medal at SciCon. This goes to a person who has made a significant, long-term contribution to science education in NZ at the grassroots level. This can include office holders of regional science teacher committees or NZASE; membership of organising bodies for conferences or science fairs; membership and contribution to examination and curriculum panels; advisory boards or NZASE contracts such as animal ethics; HSNO; NZASE Certificates; or any other activities that have significantly assisted science teachers nationally.

Peter Spratt was a much-respected figure who left behind a huge legacy. His effect on science education was profound and his influence is still felt in many ways.



Jenny Pollock wearing her Peter Spratt medal in 2014.

