

Submission  
No 88

## INQUIRY INTO TEACHER SHORTAGES IN NEW SOUTH WALES

**Organisation:** Independent Education Union of Australia NSW ACT Branch

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### **Independent Education Union of Australia NSW/ACT Branch Submission**

The IEU in NSW represents more than the 32,000 principals, teachers, and support staff members in schools, early childhood centres, and English language services (ELICOS) across the state.

The IEU has been warning about impending staff shortages for many years due to a range of factors including an aging teacher workforce, mid-career teacher attrition rates, and decreasing enrolments into initial teacher education courses.

In early 2021, the IEU conducted a survey of all Catholic systemic schools. This survey revealed the widespread presence of unfilled temporary and permanent teaching positions across all stages in primary schools and all key learning areas (KLAs) in secondary schools. These shortages were reported in all 11 dioceses, both metropolitan and regional. The IEU will be conducting a similar follow up survey across the entire non-government sector throughout Term 3 2022.

It is undisputed that teachers' work has increased in complexity in recent decades. In a case brought by the IEU in the Fair Work Commission in relation to the federal modern award applying to school teachers and early childhood teachers nationally, the Full Bench concluded that there had been "*substantial changes in the nature of the work of teachers and the level of their skills and responsibility since 1996*". See decision 19 April 2021 [https://www.fwc.gov.au/documents/decisionssigned/html/2021fwcfb2051.htm#P5511\\_785695](https://www.fwc.gov.au/documents/decisionssigned/html/2021fwcfb2051.htm#P5511_785695) including for an enumeration of the types of changes at paragraphs 588-645. This increased complexity is a prism through which the issues raised by the current enquiry must be considered.

When attempting to address teacher shortages, the IEU asks for a respectful level of engagement with the profession by decision makers, which will allow us to provide meaningful input in a timely manner and, where necessary, provide us with an opportunity to explore and suggest more suitable alternatives. We view this inquiry as a first step in this process.

Below you will find our responses to the Committee's Terms of Reference. We would be happy to speak further to any of these comments if required.

### **IEU RESPONSES**

#### **(a) current teacher shortages in NSW schools**

- i. Despite mainstream media efforts attempting to declare the current teacher shortage crisis a 'union beat up', we can attest that the IEU receives, almost daily, reports from members advising teachers are:

- standing between classrooms while supervising two classes at once
- splitting primary classes to create larger classes for supervisory purposes

- aggregating multiple classes in a school hall or in the playground for supervisory purposes
  - conducting their senior classes while simultaneously supervising a junior class in the same room
  - rostering year groups to work from home one day or more per week on a rotational basis
  - creating lessons designed to be delivered to large groups of students, out of necessity and at the school's instruction. Such lessons make individual assistance to students nearly impossible. Similarly, collaborative activities, and tasks involving concrete materials or technical equipment, are not feasible when teaching such large groups, thus having an immediate detrimental impact on learning outcomes.
- ii. As stated above, the IEU conducted a survey of all Catholic systemic schools in March 2021. At that time 23% of Catholic systemic primary schools and 44% of systemic secondary schools reported unfilled temporary or permanent vacancies.
  - iii. 77% of schools the IEU surveyed reported not being able to fill one or more casual teacher vacancies in the two weeks covering the survey report period.
  - iv. These shortages were not geographically restricted. They were occurring on the north shore of Sydney, in regional and remote NSW, and everywhere in between. These shortages are symptomatic of a profession in crisis.
  - v. Throughout 2022, members have consistently reported this situation has deteriorated, not improved. Our follow up survey in the coming weeks will, in all likelihood, confirm this.

(b) future teacher supply and demand

- i. It is concerning that there is no comprehensive data regarding teacher workforce supply and demand. The current AITSL Australian Teacher Workforce Data (ATWD) information has only been running in a limited capacity since 2018 and largely relies on voluntary participation from teachers and preservice teachers.
- ii. Around 17,700 registered teachers from across Australia responded to the 2021 ATWD survey, which was the basis of the *Australian Teacher Workforce Data National Teacher Workforce Characteristics Report* (AITSL ATWD).
- iii. In NSW, only 7137 registered teachers working in schools and early childhood services responded to the 2021 ATWD survey (*ATWD NSW*, p8). According to ABS statistics there were 104,124 registered teachers in NSW in 2021.
- iv. Given the critical role education plays in the life of our nation, it is concerning that more effort is not being made to obtain a clearer picture as to the full extent of the workforce situation in the sector.
- v. The snapshot this limited data does provide, however, gives pause for thought.

According to the AITSL data:

- 12% of NSW teachers are over 60 years of age with a total of 37% being over 50 years (*ATWD NSW*, Figure NSW-6, p11)
  - 32% of teachers indicated they intended to leave the profession before retirement, a figure higher than for teachers in all jurisdictions surveyed (*ATWD NSW*, Figure NSW-50, p47)
  - Most significantly, 28% of teachers indicated they would leave the profession within 1-4 years (*ATWD NSW*, Figure NSW-51, p47).
- vi. With a significant decline in enrolments to initial teacher education courses, it is unclear if the current government settings around ITE entry requirements and the salaries and conditions of the teaching profession are capable of addressing this crisis situation.
- vii. Efforts to source teachers from interstate will face the same limiting factors currently found in NSW, namely a shortage of current teachers, a decline in students entering teacher training, and a profession which has become increasingly less appealing in which to work.
- viii. Efforts to source international teachers to fill the gaps will face the current accreditation barriers which currently exist. The IEU also has philosophical concerns about one of the world's wealthiest nations outsourcing its teacher staffing shortfalls to other countries, some of which will be severely impacted by losing even small numbers of their locally trained professional workforce. It is also the case that teachers trained overseas in a different education system and culture may struggle to adapt to the expectations of teaching in NSW.
- ix. The IEU contends that the current staffing situation being experienced by the profession is a result of retention issues, largely exacerbated by an unmanageable workload and poor salary outcomes over extended periods.

(c) out-of-area teaching, merged classes, and minimal supervision in NSW schools

- i. As discussed above, respondents to the IEU survey indicated teachers were:
- Covering classes in addition to their own timetabled classes
  - Being asked to change their regular non-work days or being asked to work additional days if employed on a part-time basis
  - Forgoing their scheduled release from face-to-face (RFF) preparation time
  - Specialist teachers being required to take regular timetabled classes and supervisory duties taking them away from their vital role supporting students with special learning needs, First Nations students, and students with wellbeing issues
  - If in a leadership role, taking on additional classroom teaching duties, thus not being able to appropriately attend to their leadership duties.

- ii. Data in the 2021 AITSL ATWD (p88) indicates around 20% of teachers surveyed in all jurisdictions are teaching out of field with up to 46% in some subjects. NSW data indicates 23% of English teachers in NSW have not completed tertiary study in English and for NSW teachers of LOTE, Design and Technology, Mathematics, PDHPE, and Special Education, the figure is above 30% (*AITSL ATWD NSW*, Figure NSW-49, p46).

(d) the NSW Teacher Supply Strategy

- i. Not applicable to our sector

(e) teaching workforce conditions

- i. For many years teachers have been reporting unmanageable workloads and unreasonably demanding working conditions due to a range of factors including:
  - Increased administrative burdens
  - A significant increase in the number of students with learning difficulties and or challenging behaviours
  - A never-ending churn of education initiatives, often without any or adequate consultation and coming in on top of existing initiatives which have yet to be consolidated
  - The constant churn of state and national curriculums
  - Aggressive parental contact and demands
  - Principals and teachers facing increasing pressure to assist student and family wellbeing as the first, and often only, support as other agencies are swamped.
- ii. On average, full-time primary teachers in NSW report working 61.4 hours per week and secondary teachers work 59.9 hours per week (*AITSL ATWD NSW*, Table NSW-3, p25). This is higher than the average for all surveyed jurisdictions of 57 hours per week for both primary and secondary teachers (*AITSL ATWD*, Table 5-2, p66).
- iii. 53% of teachers in NSW reported working more than 60 hours per week, compared to 42% of teachers across all surveyed jurisdictions working more than 60 hours per week (*AITSL ATWD NSW*, p63).
- iv. Only 47% of early career teachers reported participating in a formal induction at their school (*AITSL ATWD NSW*, p23).

(f) Initial Teacher Education

- i. A comprehensive review of ITE is currently taking place. The IEU asserts that the most significant barriers to addressing the teacher shortages are:
  - Unreasonable and unsustainable workloads
  - Inadequate remuneration, especially by mid-career point

- Consistent negative commentary on the profession by politicians and the media. See section (i) below.

(g) impacts related to COVID-19, including the impact of government responses such as remote teaching and safety restrictions

- i. There was little impact to the capacity to staff schools as a direct result of government responses to COVID-19.
- ii. Of greater concern to IEU members was the issuing of public health orders and other decisions which directly affected the day-to-day running of schools with little or no consultation with the profession. In many instances, teachers were finding out from media releases what might be happening in the coming days at their school. Many of these decisions indicated little or no understanding or appreciation as to how schools operate in a practical sense. The goodwill and professional attitude of teachers and support staff was critical in keeping schools functioning over the last two years.

(h) the impact of workplace mandates

- i. The IEU asserts the workplace mandates (specifically mandatory vaccinations) over the last two years (2019-2020) have had little or no impact on the capacity to staff schools.
- ii. The issues with respect to the current staffing crisis were present well before the commencement of the 2019 school year.
- iii. Of broader concern to members was the fact that the teaching profession was effectively declared an essential workforce and then struggled to obtain priority access to vaccinations in a timely manner, appropriate access to personal protective equipment (PPE), adequate paid Covid isolation leave, and experienced a concerning lack of consultation as to how to most effectively reopen and keep schools operational as each public health order came into effect.

(i) the status of the teaching profession

- i. As detailed by Dr Nicole Mockler, Associate Professor of Education University Sydney (*The Conversation*, 11 July 2022) the teaching profession faces a constant barrage of criticism and abuse, to a degree which no other profession experiences. Her study of over 65,000 media comments for the past 25 years revealed an increasingly hostile media environment demeaning teachers and questioning their professionalism on a regular basis.
- ii. In particular, Dr Mockler's study revealed:
  - We are fixated on teacher quality with respect to education. When other systems are under stress, for example the health or legal systems, we rarely, if ever, attack the professionalism and 'quality' of those working in the sector. See below.

- The work of teachers is depicted as simple. All they need to do, self-proclaimed experts declare, is to 'get back to basics' and everything will be fixed.
  - Teacher bashing is the norm, with the media articles about teaching found to be disproportionately negative in their representations. Of significant concern, these negative stories included linking the "crises" to "poor quality" teachers.
- (j) the impacts of the Staffing Agreement on the ability of principals to effectively staff schools and manage performance
- i. Not relevant to our sector.
- (k) the administrative burden for principals associated with recruiting for and appointing roles
- i. The burden of recruiting for and appointing roles as part of the administrative burden for principals is not new to the non-government sector.
  - ii. While our principal members would not be looking to divest themselves of this role, they would note that this task is made increasingly difficult by:
    - The increasing demands of teaching, coupled with increasingly complex and demanding working conditions and inadequate remuneration by mid-career point
    - The ongoing public criticism of the teaching profession by politicians and so-called education experts in the media.
- (l) the impact of central appointments prioritisation for teaching and principal roles
- i. Not relevant to our sector.
- (m) support for principals to effectively staff schools above base allocation
- i. The Remote and Rural Areas packages offered by the various Catholic dioceses which detail relocation, accommodation, and other financial incentives for teachers in the non-government sector fall well below those being offered by the Government sector. The IEU is currently in negotiations with the dioceses to improve these conditions, however, the employers have indicated there is little likelihood of change due to current funding constraints.
- (n) the impacts of incentives and the transfer point system on regional shortages
- i. Not relevant to our sector.
- (o) the approval to teach process in New South Wales
- i. See other related matters.

(p) the impact of casualisation, temporary contracts and job insecurity

- i. According to AITSL data, only 44% of early career teachers reported being employed under a permanent or ongoing contract, as compared with 66% of the total teacher workforce being under an ongoing, permanent arrangement (*AITSL ATWD*, p69).
- ii. Members report being caught in a cycle of “not being able to say no” to the many excessive workload demands placed on them in the belief that this might better position them for a permanent role.

(q) the measurement of staff turnover particularly in regard to temporary staff

- i. As stated above, there is little reliable data regarding staffing, either permanent or temporary.
- ii. The IEU asserts that staff retention is the most concerning aspect of the teaching supply crisis.

(r) any other related matter

- i. There is a concerning move to implement a stopgap staffing measure by bringing in third and fourth year Initial Teacher Education (ITE) students to work in schools. The IEU contends this will do little to ameliorate the excessive workload issues teachers are facing.
- ii. Further, by promoting student teachers prematurely into a profession already in crisis, these interim measures have the very real potential of burning out prospective young teachers before they have even had a chance to establish themselves, thus further exacerbating the real issue, which is retention rates.
- iii. This proposal fundamentally fails to appreciate the nature of teaching and the workflow of a teacher. There is very little capacity to “hand off” teacher work to untrained and unsupervised staff which would have a meaningful impact on teacher workload. In fact, this proposal has the potential to increase workloads with teachers being required to supervise, mentor, and instruct these staff.
- iv. Implementing such temporary measures to address structural staffing issues is unhelpful, points to a fundamental lack of understanding as to the complex nature of teaching and reveals a concerning disrespect for the profession.
- v. The IEU strongly recommends that enhanced support measures should be put in place for student teachers who have been rushed into the workforce, and for the supervising and mentor teachers working with them.
- vi. The IEU contends that, by implementing such a program, the NSW Government has a moral obligation to make all reasonable efforts to track the progress of any student teachers brought prematurely into the profession:
  - to ensure appropriate support is provided where required, and
  - to accurately assess the impact this program might have on their future career path within the profession.