

Submission
No 89

INQUIRY INTO TEACHER SHORTAGES IN NEW SOUTH WALES

Organisation: Association of Heads of Independent Schools of Australia

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31 July 2022

The Hon Mark Latham MLC
Chair
Portfolio Committee No 3
NSW Legislative Council
Parliament House
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Dear Mr Latham

Inquiry into Teacher Shortages in NSW

AHISA is a national professional association for Heads of independent schools, with six state/territory branches. There are currently 136 members in the AHISA NSW/ACT Branch.

Nationally, AHISA's 460 members' schools account for over 450,000 students, representing 70 per cent of independent sector enrolments and over 11 per cent of total Australian school enrolments. Some 20 per cent of Australia's total Year 12 students are educated in AHISA members' schools.

Nationally, AHISA members' schools employ over 45,000 teaching staff and some 28,700 support staff.

Teaching and support staff are schools' greatest assets. As we face a critical teacher shortage, exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic and the prevalence of winter influenza, all Australians cannot fail to be aware that those who enable our schools to remain open and to function as vibrant learning communities are also one of our most important national assets. We therefore welcome the Legislative Council's inquiry into factors affecting the staffing of NSW schools.

1. STAFF TURNOVER IN AHISA MEMBERS' SCHOOLS

In 2020, in recognition that Australia would soon find itself engaged in an international 'talent war' for teaching staff, AHISA conducted the first of an intended biennial survey covering staff recruitment, retention and turnover in members' schools. It was intended that the data would create benchmarking data for members and also inform AHISA's ongoing advocacy to the Australian Government on issues relating to temporary skilled visa arrangements to assist schools fill specialist staff vacancies, particularly in regional and remote areas.

The data collected in the 2020 survey related to 2019 (that is, pre-COVID). This year, to collect data relating to 2021, an expanded survey was conducted in collaboration with education consultancy



MMG Education, with the aim of capturing some of the effects of the pandemic on staffing arrangements in independent schools.

In this submission we present data from both surveys relevant to the Portfolio Committee's inquiry. In assessing these data it is important to note that the survey responses demonstrate that staffing issues in schools are not necessarily uniformly experienced: they can be heavily dependent on the school's location, its size, range of year-level offerings, any curriculum specialisms and the demographic profile of its workforce. There are, however, common and persistent issues – the most prevalent being the difficulty of recruiting qualified and/or experienced secondary teachers for subject areas such as Mathematics, Physics and Chemistry.

Around one-third of AHISA NSW/ACT Branch members participated in each survey and, in turn, represented around one-third of all respondents in both surveys. Most AHISA NSW/ACT members participating in the surveys were leaders of K-12 schools or secondary schools with some primary years provision and located in metropolitan or inner regional areas. Almost three-quarters of NSW/ACT members responding to the surveys were leaders of schools with enrolments between 750 and 1500 students.

1.1 Teaching staff turnover rates

The following table offers a comparison of turnover rates for all teaching/academic staff in AHISA members' schools as reported for 2019 and 2021.

In the 2022 survey (collecting 2021 data), the AHISA Queensland, Tasmanian and Victorian Branches all reported higher turnover rates of primary teaching staff than AHISA NSW/ACT. The only Branch reporting a higher secondary teaching staff turnover than AHISA NSW/ACT in the 2022 survey was AHISA WA.

Table 1. Median teaching staff turnover rates 2019 and 2021

	PRIMARY		SECONDARY	
	AHISA NSW/ACT	AHISA National	AHISA NSW/ACT	AHISA National
2019	Range 4-5%	Range 4-5%	Range 4-5%	Range 4-5%
2021	7.41%	8.33%	13.01%	11.51%

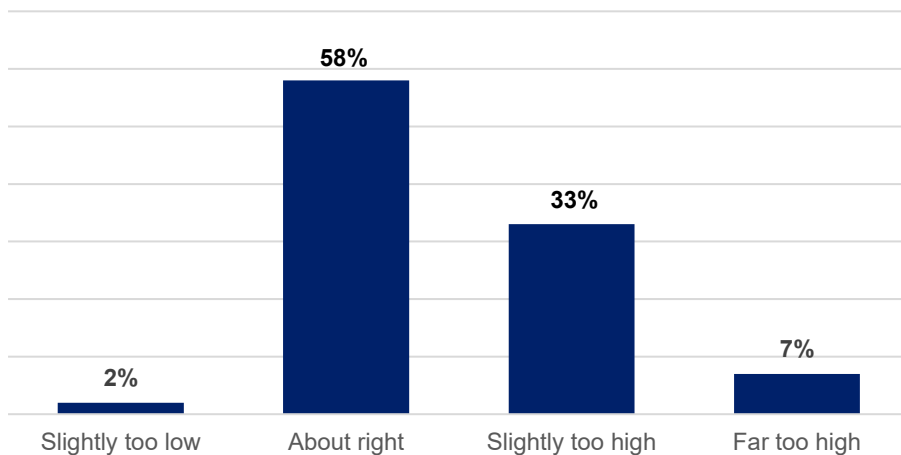
As might be expected from media reporting on teaching staff issues across all school sectors, median turnover rates for teaching/academic staff in AHISA members' schools were significantly higher in 2021 than in 2019. It should not immediately be assumed that this was a negative result. As mentioned above, school context is a key determinant of staffing issues, including staff turnover rates, and responses to two new questions included in the 2022 survey are of interest in evaluating the 2021 turnover rates: (1) 'If any, what is your school's ideal level of yearly turnover of staff?'; and (2) 'What is your view of the current turnover level in your school?'

Nationally, a majority of respondents (68%) reported they had no ideal level of turnover. There was considerable variance in the ideal turnover rate reported by those respondents whose schools did have an 'ideal' turnover rate. While a majority of these respondents stated a level of less than 10% was ideal, and 33% reported a turnover rate of 10% was considered ideal, some 9% of respondents reported a rate over 10% was ideal.



Members' responses to the question about their view of the current turnover level in their school also helps to provide context to the issue of turnover rates. When asked their view of the current turnover level in their school, 58% of AHISA NSW/ACT respondents reported it as 'about right' and 33% reported it as 'slightly too high'. Only 7% of AHISA NSW/ACT members reported their school's current turnover level as 'far too high'.

Chart 1. AHISA NSW/ACT members' views on teaching staff turnover rates in their school in 2021



Size of school may have a stabilising effect on turnover rates. Taking into account responses of members from all Branches, schools of 1500 students and over were most likely to report their turnover rate as being 'about right'.

1.2 Reasons for departure of teaching staff

Data from AHISA's 2020 and 2022 surveys – set out in the table below – indicate that, while attrition from the profession is not a key factor in turnover of teaching staff in AHISA members' schools, uncertainty created by the COVID-19 pandemic may have acted as a brake on attrition of teachers from the profession: the proportion of respondents selecting 'career change' as a contributor to turnover of teaching/academic staff in AHISA members' schools dropped from 8% in 2019 to 4% in 2021. Of interest is that, in 2021, teacher mobility *within* the profession appears to have significantly increased over 2019.

Table 2. Reasons for departure of teaching/academic staff 2019 and 2021 (AHISA national), in order of proportion of respondents selecting the option

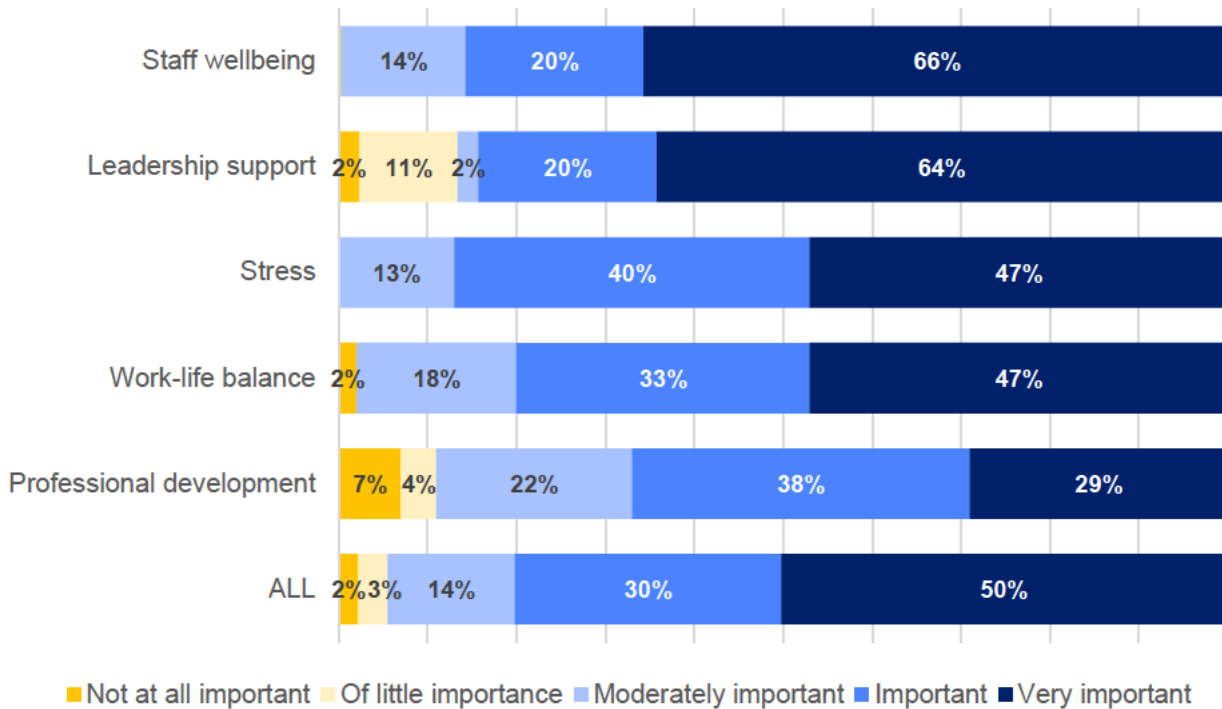
2019		2021	
Job offer in another school	21%	Job offer in another school	48%
Retirement	19%	Retirement	22%
Family relocation	14%	Family relocation	13%
Career change	8%	Family reasons*	6%
Employment termination due to poor performance or poor 'fit'	8%	COVID related issues	5%
Job/role dissatisfaction	7%	Career change	4%

* 'Family reasons' was a new factor introduced in the 2022 survey.

Nationally, most staff departures in AHISA members' schools in 2021 were amongst staff aged 41-50, followed by those aged 31-40, and then those aged over 61 years. While not a consistent result across all states and territories, this pattern held for AHISA NSW/ACT members' schools. Allied to data presented in Table 2 above, age-related data suggest that experienced teachers in independent schools may be most likely to be mobile in seeking positions in other schools. The data presented below suggests those opportunities may relate just as much to personal factors such as wellbeing and work-life balance as to professional factors.

In AHISA's 2022 survey, members were asked to rate the importance of a range of factors affecting staff turnover which schools were addressing in their policies and practices. The chart below presents the responses of AHISA NSW/ACT Branch members only.

Chart 2. AHISA NSW/ACT: School policies & practices affecting teacher/academic staff turnover 2021



2. CHALLENGES IN TEACHER RECRUITMENT

While 2022 survey respondents noted a range of challenges in recruiting teaching/academic staff, nationally the most often reported, in order of number of mentions, were:

1. Shortages of teachers with required specialist/discipline knowledge
2. Shortages of teachers with required experience
3. Shortages of teachers who share values and beliefs of the school.

Responses of AHISA NSW/ACT members matched the national profile.

Nationally the teaching positions most often reported as hardest to fill, in order of the proportion respondents selecting the option, were Mathematics, Physics, Design & Technology and Chemistry. The measure of difficulty in recruiting such positions varied by state and territory. The table below compares national and AHISA NSW/ACT reporting:



Table 3. Hard to staff teaching positions 2021, AHISA National and AHISA/ACT Branch, in order of proportion of respondents selecting the option

SUBJECT AREA	AHISA National	AHISA NSW/ACT
Mathematics	67%	78%
Physics	55%	61%
Design & Technology	42%	57%
Chemistry	34%	43%
Languages other than English	32%	22%
Education support/Special needs	23%	24%
English	21%	26%
Religious education	20%	20%
Engineering	12%	20%
Senior secondary extenders in any subject area	10%	11%

AHISA NSW/ACT Branch would welcome the Portfolio Committee's questions on the data presented in this submission. Staffing their schools and developing staff to achieve the best possible instruction and development of students are two of the chief responsibilities of principals. We look forward to the Committee's final report.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Gareth Leechman

AHISA NSW/ACT Branch Chair
Headmaster, Arndell Anglican College