

**Submission  
No 110**

## **INQUIRY INTO TEACHER SHORTAGES IN NEW SOUTH WALES**

**Organisation:** Federation of Parents and Citizens Associations of NSW

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## **Inquiry into teacher shortages in New South Wales July 2022**

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# Introduction

The Federation of Parents and Citizens Associations of New South Wales (P&C Federation) is thankful for this opportunity to contribute to the Inquiry into teacher shortages in New South Wales. P&C Federation supports the position of individual educational and developmental needs met by a range of differential services expressed through appropriate and well-planned curricula, programs and environments conducted by sensitive and well-trained personnel in conjunction with parents<sup>1</sup> and families.

The core belief of P&C Federation is that the education of our children and youth is the most fundamental means of ensuring individual success and success as a nation. Government's primary responsibility is to ensure education is equitable, well resourced and fully funded.

P&C Federation is a representative voice for parents and students in public education in NSW. With over 1800 member associations, 5000 association executive members, and 820,000 public school children and their parents, our understanding of the issues within education is broad and carries with it the voice of a substantial body of parents and carers.

## Preamble

P&C Federation would like to point out that the issue of teacher shortages is not new. For decades, shortages have been prevalent in regional and remote NSW. Incentives to attract teachers to regional and remote schools have been around for many years with questionable results and no real progress. It is only in the last 3-4 years that the shortages experienced for many years by regional and remote areas are being felt in metropolitan areas. This is the result of several more recent factors::

- There is a significant drop in the number of students enrolling in and completing an education degree. This is likely a result of a shift in students' perceptions of teaching as an unattractive profession or students deciding the teaching profession is not for them while undertaking a course.
- There are fewer graduates remaining in teaching beyond five years of commencement. This is, again likely to be a result of seeing teaching as a less attractive option compared to other professions, combined with the lack of permanent teaching positions.
- A lack of incentive for mid-career transitions to teaching.
- A high workload, stress and lack of autonomy resulting from an ever-increasing administrative burden.
- The lack of a stable education environment with constantly shifting initiatives and programs
- The lack of competitive salaries resulting in teachers in the public system seeking higher-paying roles in the independent sector.
- Experienced teachers leaving for greater opportunities in another profession, including better salaries, less stress and greater autonomy.
- The impact of COVID-19 and flu on staff attendance causing stress, fatigue, demoralisation and burnout
- A rapid increase in the number of administrative and corporate staff resulting in less funding for direct teaching and learning and a further increase in administrative burden.

As of the beginning of 2021, there were 823,000 students in the public system. With a predicted growth rate of 1% per year, this means an extra 8,230 students entering the public system each year or the

equivalent of 330 new classes (based on an average class size of 25). This requires finding 330 new teachers every year just to keep up with demand. Although the total number of students taking up and completing a ITE course is well above this, it is evident that the type of training being undertaken does not meet the current demand in specific subject areas..

Current data shows a decline in Initial Teacher Education (ITE) enrolments of around 30% since 2014, meaning there are 3,000 fewer students entering ITE courses every year. It should be noted that this does not include the rate of dropout prior to graduation. It is obvious that with these numbers, there is no current capacity to keep up with demand. In fact, the situation is so serious that if new teachers cannot be found, the stress on the system will be significant, resulting in larger class sizes and a greater dependency on existing teachers remaining in the system.

While the number of primary teachers employed has increased, there has been a significant fall in the number of secondary teachers (just over 8% since 2003). This is in contrast to the significant increase in the number of non-teaching staff in the same period. Corporate staffing has grown 66% since 2003. Clerical and administrative staffing has grown by around 30% since 2015 whereas executive staff has increased by 300% in the same period. The growth in non-teaching staff comes at the cost of not directly supporting actual teaching and learning and further demoralises teachers.

## Terms of Reference

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

P&C Federation has received feedback from numerous school communities across NSW that teacher shortages are having a significant impact on the education of their children. This is a problem that has been on the horizon for some time, with COVID-19 only exacerbating the issue. In the two years leading up to COVID-19, education leadership was already registering shortages in specific subject areas, specifically in the areas of Maths and Science.

P&C Federation have heard from many schools of classes being merged or cancelled, or of students having minimal supervision. Of particular concern have been the senior secondary classes that have not been able to be taught, placing the future of HSC students at risk. In several cases we have heard of students leaving school and taking up vocational education or paid work rather than risk a poor ATAR. This is a direct result of the issues around staff shortages and remote learning over the last two years.

The most detailed information we have received is from Mudgee High School, who have provided regular updates throughout 2022 on the impacts of teacher shortages at the school. On 29 June 2022, P&C Federation received the following numbers from this school:

- 140 roll-calls, merged with other roll-calls
- 209 senior periods on minimal supervision
- 24 senior periods merged with other classes
- 92 senior periods not covered
- 765 junior periods on minimal supervision
- 14 junior periods merged
- 8 junior periods not covered
- 39 support classes unable to run as normal
- 1 distance education course
- 81 supervision duties not covered

Some of these issues can be ascribed to COVID-19, or more recently influenza. Many teachers have been unable to attend work, placing additional stress on those still able to work and compounding the staff shortages that existed pre-pandemic. Many schools have had to reorganise timetables, merge

classes or skip classes altogether in order to cope with staff shortages. Unfortunately, this has impacted negatively on educational outcomes and will continue to do so for some time.

However, this is not the only or even the primary cause of the problem. Although COVID-19 and the flu have had a significant short-term impact, P&C Federation sees the largest factor as the steady decline in ITE course enrolments over the last decade and the lack of permanent teaching positions. Simply put, there are fewer teachers graduating, and fewer permanent positions providing certainty to those graduates. Complicating this is the increasing number of experienced teachers choosing to leave the system. Although there are several reasons for this, the loss of these experienced teachers losing teaching capacity and mentoring capacity.

### **(b) future teacher supply and demand**

There have been ongoing forecasts of looming teacher shortages for some time. The most recent NSW internal modelling (not released publicly) suggesting NSW will be understaffed by 1,700 teachers within three years, with STEM subjects projected to suffer the most shortages.<sup>2</sup> The NSW Teachers Federation will be quick to point out that there are already over 1,000 vacancies within the system and our own experience has shown that certain subject areas have virtually no applicants.

Although there are a number of initiatives underway to try to attract more teachers by the Department of Education, the key issue of lack of enrolments into ITE courses is a national issue and requires a combined and determined approach by all states and territories with support from the Federal Government.

A possibility P&C Federation has raised in the past is to allow for more dual professionals to become teachers. The common trajectory of a teacher's career is to graduate from high school, enter university to undertake an education degree, and then immediately become a school teacher. Such school-university-school transitions allow for few opportunities for teachers to gain knowledge or experience from settings other than classrooms, even though knowledge and experience gained outside classrooms could be valuable for students. As well as potentially addressing some potential future teacher shortages, this could allow for a more diverse breadth of knowledge and experience among teachers.

One relatively recent approach to address this has been to attract more overseas teachers to NSW government schools, for example by proposing their pathway to Australian citizenship be expedited.<sup>3</sup> P&C Federation has concerns about how practical and realistic this approach is, as there is potential for people to use this profession as a means to attain Australian citizenship, without necessarily intending to remain in the teaching profession beyond this.

#### *Recommendation*

- undertake an urgent national strategy to promote teaching as a profession including
  - o incentive packages to entice ITE enrolments for school leavers
  - o incentivise mid-career retraining to attract other professions into teaching
- Significantly reduce the administrative burden of teachers, allowing them to spend more time teaching and reducing stress levels.

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

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<sup>2</sup> *The Guardian*. 'A perfect storm': government forecasts shortfall of 1,700 teachers in NSW. 16 March 2022.

<sup>3</sup> Fast-tracked citizenship could lure overseas teachers to Australian classrooms. *Daily Telegraph*. 17 July 2022.

Out-of-area teaching has been a problem in NSW government schools for many years. P&C Federation has raised this issue with the Department of Education and NESA many times, and while they are more than aware of the issue no solution has been forthcoming. In P&C Federation's view, all students deserve to be taught by educators with a thorough understanding of their subjects. The use of out-of-area teaching, to the extent it must be used at all, should be as a very last resort.

A study conducted by the Global Labor Organisation in 2020 based on PISA results for Year 10 students showed that many students were being taught subjects by teachers who were not qualified in that subject.<sup>4</sup> The study found that 1 in 5 mathematics and English classes were being taught out-of-field. This climbs to 2 out of 3 classes for ancient languages. This data has its limitations as it does not differentiate within the sciences. For example, a trained physics teacher teaching biology is not considered teaching out-of-field in this study. Of greater concern to P&C Federation is that the majority of out-of-field teachers reside in the public system. There is a significant discrepancy between the proportion of out-of-field teachers government schools compared to non-government schools. This is essentially because independent schools have a competitive advantage - having more flexible budgets allows them to offer higher salaries and therefore attract more in-field teachers.

The out-of-field teaching issue is especially pronounced in regional and remote settings where attracting qualified teachers in a particular subject is highly difficult. This often means that schools in these areas are not able to offer any more than the most basic courses to students, thereby substantially limiting opportunities for students. This leads to many parents in regional areas placing their children in non-government schools, or to seek other options such as distance learning.

#### *Recommendation*

- Ensure that all schools have the necessary funding to ensure they can employ appropriate numbers of staff.
- Offer incentives to teachers willing to qualify in a new subject area, including subsidised courses and a higher pay level on completion
- If there is a need for out-of-area teachers, they should be required to undergo a degree of training in the subject area they are being asked to teach before they begin teaching students.

#### **(d) the NSW Teacher Supply Strategy**

The strategy is a positive step by the Department to address the looming teacher shortage. While not enough time has passed to evaluate its effectiveness, we would note it is important that each program of the strategy is regularly evaluated reports to ensure it is meeting its targets. Currently, the strategy states its programs have "built-in evaluation", however it does not elaborate on this. There is nothing indicating there will be regular publicly available reports, and P&C Federation would consider such reports important in building confidence that the strategy is being effectively implemented. At the very least P&C Federation would argue that the Teacher Supply Strategy should be monitored

#### *Recommendation*

- That the Department of Education regularly evaluate each program of this strategy via publicly available reports.

#### **(e) teaching workforce conditions**

A long-standing complaint from people in the teaching profession is the increasingly excessive time taken up by administrative and compliance tasks. This adds considerably to the out of hours and at-home work. In P&C Federation's view, teachers should not be doing administrative tasks beyond that

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<sup>4</sup> Chandra et al. 2020. *Teaching 'out of field' in STEM subjects in Australia: Evidence from PISA 2015*. GLO Discussion Paper no. 511

which is meaningful and directly beneficial to the teaching and learning of their students. If a direct benefit to the teaching and learning of their students cannot be demonstrated, we would question why such work should exist.

Meaningful reporting is a key part of teaching, as it ensures that students and their parents are continuously aware of whether they are adequately meeting the desired proficiency levels, and whether the teacher needs to adjust their teaching. However, it is generally accepted that teachers' administrative work has increased over the years, and a large portion of this work is enormous amounts of data entry that is arguably not meaningful to student learning and teaching.

#### *Recommendation*

- All work done by teachers should have a direct and demonstrable benefit to their students' education.

#### **(f) Initial Teacher Education**

In past inquiries, P&C Federation has noted concern that teachers were not required to meet high proficiency levels. While there have been some improvements in this area, we would still consider there to be room for further improvements. For example, there appears to be significant variation across universities as to the length and format of practicums. In our view, practical experience is important as it gives aspiring teachers a clearer idea of the work and whether they are suited to it.

We have also noted what appears to be a lack of consistency across those that mentor new graduates or oversee practicums. In this crucial stage, graduates or practicum students need to be positively supported, given constructive feedback and have their confidence enhanced. There are many mentors within systems capable of doing so but equally many mentors that are abrupt, unsupportive, and overly critical or simply overloaded with work with little time for new graduates or practicums. Depending on the school situation, the mentor may well be a teacher with only a few years' experience or a long-term teacher unwilling to embrace new methods. Training, support and validation of appropriate mentors is essential to support long-term quality of new teachers.

#### *Recommendations*

- Each teaching course should include practicums for at least a term each year, starting in the first year of teaching courses, so that poor performers can be identified early.
- Practicums should make up at least 20% of the ITE course.
- Investigate the training and support of appropriate mentors for initial teachers.

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

For most of the COVID-19 pandemic, Australian states and territories adopted essentially a zero tolerance approach to circulation of the virus in the community. The governments stated this was only intended as a temporary approach that would end as soon as certain vaccination levels were reached, after which circulation of the virus would be more accepted and tolerated.

It was clear that as soon as the 'zero tolerance' approach ended, there would inevitably be an increase in COVID-19 infections. Despite this, when the rapid increase in infections occurred in early 2022, the Department of Education appeared blindsided and ill-prepared, and its approach to address appeared highly ad hoc. To address the teacher shortfall in this period, the Department recruited retired teachers to fill the gaps, which led to much of the frequent merged classes and minimal supervision that characterised much of Terms 1 and 2 of 2022.

Some of this unpreparedness may be attributed to the spread of the Omicron variant of COVID-19, which medical experts noted was both more transmissible and more prone to evade prior immunity.

However, in our view, the NSW Government should have had contingency plans for an eventuality like this occurring.

#### *Recommendation*

- That the NSW Department of Education develop a long-term strategy to ensure the educational needs of students are readily met in situations where there are high rates of COVID-19 transmission.

#### **(h) the impact of workplace mandates**

Until recently, there was a requirement for all school workers to be fully vaccinated against COVID-19, however to the best of our knowledge the effect of these mandates does not appear to have been large. According to the most recent information we know of, only 233 active teaching staff members in NSW are confirmed as unvaccinated without a medical exemption.<sup>5</sup> There were a further 2,937 active teaching staff whose vaccine status was listed as “not attested” and 448 who had their confirmation rejected. However, it is not clear how many of those individuals are unvaccinated and how many have not confirmed their vaccination for another reason.

#### **(i) the status of the teaching profession,**

In our view, considering the large role teachers play in developing young people to be contributing members of society, teaching should be considered as important to society as the medical or legal professions. However, for a variety of reasons, teaching is not considered to be as prestigious as these professions. Increasing the prestige of teaching as a profession could well attract more people to fill the projected shortfall in teachers.

Although teachers’ pay is often cited as a reason for the perceived lack of status, raising the status of teaching must go beyond the issue of pay. Indeed, Australian teacher salaries are well above the OECD average,<sup>6</sup> yet there is little evidence that this has increased the attractiveness of teaching in Australia. It should involve ensuring that teaching is highly respected as a profession. Part of this must involve ensuring teaching courses are of high quality, so as to build a level of confidence among parents that their children’s teachers have been through a process that ensures they are qualified and capable.

It could also involve increasing the independence of teachers. It is difficult to elevate the teaching profession’s status when the system itself does not show confidence in the ability of its teachers. Currently, Australian curricula and syllabuses are highly prescriptive and teachers are subject to detailed requirements of what they can teach, and there is thus little flexibility for teachers. It would be preferable if, instead of requiring teachers to stick rigidly to syllabuses, they were given the flexibility to make decisions around student learning, and encouraged to take risks in teaching and learning, supported with resources to enable students to be engaged in the learning continuum.

#### *Recommendations*

- improve the quality and reputation of teaching, and ensure parents are aware of the processes in place for registration and further accreditation.
- Allow for more teacher autonomy in classrooms.

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<sup>5</sup> Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation. *CESE review of the department’s mandatory vaccination requirements and school-based staff numbers*. 9 May 2022.

<sup>6</sup> OECD. *Education at a Glance 2021*. Figure D3.2.



**(j) the impacts of the Staffing Agreement on the ability of principals to effectively staff schools and manage performance**

Although P&C Federation has not been involved in consultation around staffing formulas or agreements, we do monitor changes and have noted the impacts on teaching and learning. In particular, staffing numbers are quantised based upon a complex formula related to the number of students at the school, weighted against student staff ratios for each year. This means that the school is not entitled to an additional teacher until the next quantisation level is reached, typically a full class. This means that children need to be spread across existing classes or a casual teacher employed until the entitlement threshold is reached.

In terms of performance management, P&C Federation was made aware of the Teacher Performance Management & Improvement (TPMI) program back in 2018 which was originally established under EPAC. The program involved a number of trained field advisors under a principal coordinator. The team's job was to support Principals managing teacher performance issues.

At the time, figures presented showed that there were only around 50 performance management cases per year, representing 0.1% of the workforce under management. This is substantially lower than would be expected in any normal workforce population. At the time, only 12 teachers per year were being dismissed on average for underperformance. The Department indicated at the time that they believed the figure is more likely to be around 3% or around 30 times more than the previous rate. As parents of children within the system, our members would likely see this figure as higher again.

Of concern is the reluctance of Principals and the Department to address underperforming teachers. Anecdotally, we are aware that teachers under performance review will often take stress leave or cite mental health issues, burdening a Principal and the Department who then have to navigate the complexities of workplace law including unfair dismissal or allegations of intimidation or bullying. Other than a few meetings in 2018 and 2019, P&C Federation is not aware of whether this program was expanded or has ended.

**(k) the administrative burden for principals associated with recruiting for and appointing teachers**

P&C Federation and our member P&C Associations are often involved in the merit selection process for teaching and executive staff. From first-hand experience, recruitment for a single position on merit would take at least five to six hours minimum on the part of the panel convenor (usually the Principal in smaller schools) or around the best part of a working day. In previous years when there were substantially more applicants, a merit panel could consume upwards of two days for a single position, not including time to read applications. Anecdotally, merit panels have experienced a noticeable drop in the number of applicants over the last five years. P&C Federation have also noticed an increase in the number of merit selection processes where there were no suitable applicants resulting in the panel being rerun. Common problems include difficulty in navigating the Department's HR section, a cumbersome eRecruitment system and a relatively inflexible system for tracking the merit process (TOLEO)

Many years of experience with the merit selection process anecdotally suggest that Principals are likely to spend up to 20% of their time dealing with recruitment matters. This does not include other staffing matters such as managing casuals, staff appraisals, dealing with staff conflict or performance management. The low numbers of staff applying for roles at present have only increased the burden on Principals.

**(l) the impact of central appointments prioritisation for teaching and principal roles**

Other than RAM allocations for staffing based on needs loadings, there is typically no additional support from the Department of Education to staff above the base allocation. This forces Principals to become creative in how they allocate their budgets. In some cases, a Principal will come to the school P&C

Association asking for funds to partly or wholly support the employment of additional teaching staff. Although this is outside of the constitutional remit of a P&C Association and something P&C Federation advises our members against, the pressure of providing additional staff can override this. While it is up to individual school communities to decide how best to support their school, a P&C Association should not be in a position to have to support staffing.

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

Numerous detrimental issues arise from the widespread casualisation and temporary contracts. , Broadly, there are two key areas of concern:

- the impact on the morale, professional learning and opportunities for casual and temporary teachers; and
- the impact on teaching and learning for students

Regarding the first issue, casual teachers generally have less access to professional learning and mentoring. The piecemeal nature of their roles does not provide the level of experience gained by permanent teaching staff nor afford them the opportunity to settle into a more stable and consistent role where they can feel part of a school and establish a relationship with the class.

Since 2001 when the Department of Education introduced temporary positions, one in five teachers now have temporary status. In around 100 public schools there are more temporary and casual teachers than permanent staff. While there are many factors that can affect this, P&C Federation believes that there is an over-reliance on the use of temporary and casual teachers. Data shows that only one in four new graduates gain a rare permanent position. This leaves 75% of graduates having to work on a temporary or casual basis, which is likely to be demoralising and in some cases untenable in terms of stable income. With the cost of living increasing dramatically over the last decade, P&C Federation believes this may well be a contributing factor to teachers leaving for other professions that offer permanency and higher salaries.

Regarding the second point around the impact of teaching and learning, parents often comment negatively about the use of temporary or casual teachers. Nearly all parents can tell you of examples of casual teachers simply acting as a child minding service. Temporary teachers can be hit or miss in terms of outcomes for students as factors such as the length of the temporary engagement, the teachers professional experience, professional learning, past mentoring and sense of belonging can impact the quality of the teaching.

*Recommendation*

- Consider implementing a program of permanency for a large number of temporary teachers, including a cap on the time a teacher can remain temporary, after which they are made permanent.
- Consider implementing a maximum proportion of teachers whom school principals can employ as a temporary teacher.