

Submission
No 116

INQUIRY INTO TEACHER SHORTAGES IN NEW SOUTH WALES

Organisation: Northern Sydney and Central Coast District Councils of P&C
Associations

Date Received: 31 July 2022



The Northern Sydney and Central Coast District Councils of Parents & Citizens Associations

Presidents: David Hope and Sharryn Brownlee

Joint Submission

Inquiry into teacher shortages in New South Wales

NSW Legislative Council Portfolio Committee No.3

This is a joint submission by our two District Councils of P&C Associations.
We advocate for improve public education from the perspective of the students and the parents.
We are all volunteers.
We do not profess expertise in the technical side of the delivery of school education.

1. Introductory Remarks

Our submission has a focus on the public education system and its two main service providers, the NSW Department of Education and NESAs.

We understand that operating a large, \$16billion plus business is no easy task, and we aim to be constructive in our critique and suggestions.

The shortage of teachers may not be large in percentage terms (said to be less than 4%), but it can have serious outcomes for the students who are affected. This is unacceptable and improved strategies and processes need to be implemented.

We have observed many real life examples of poor student outcomes – some examples:

- Students in year 9 who have never had a full time specialist maths teacher in their time in high school.
- Lack of specialist teachers in many high schools leaves students with a reduced curriculum
- Students in years 7 & 8 without a qualified language, music or CAPA teacher, so will never choose their “natural” subject in later years.

Students at traditionally “hard to staff” schools can have recurring instances, and bear the brunt of the problem. However, staffing shortages seem to be increasing in Sydney where, in many areas, there is a shortage of affordable rental accommodation and/or unaffordable prices to purchase properties. Post COVID, the accommodation affordability issue is reported to be affecting country areas also.

We believe that the shortage of teachers will increase in the future, unless there are improvements made to recruiting and retention. There are particular challenges in rural and remote areas, in some metropolitan areas where affordable accommodation is scarce, and in some subjects, particularly the STEM subjects.

There is a need for the Department of Education as an employer of teachers, along with NESAs as a regulator and provider of some services, to embark on a program to improve all the strategies and processes that input into the complex business of delivering education to our school and pre-school children. The teacher and Principal representative organisations and other stakeholders, such as students and parents, need to be engaged in such a program in a positive way.



The Northern Sydney and Central Coast District Councils of Parents & Citizens Associations

From the perspective of students and parents, and not part of this brief, is the ongoing related issue of the wide gap in student outcomes in like schools and in all schools.

2. Easing current teacher shortages in NSW Schools

There are many young teachers who haven't been able to score a permanent role and some of these have simply moved on to other work places, lost to the schools.

The basic problem is that young teachers are not encouraged to stay when the outlook is several years of part-time work.

Many of these teachers are on casual day-to-day arrangements with gaps in their work opportunities. This group includes young teachers yet to get a permanent position, returning teachers who have taken a break to have families etc, and retirees.

The other areas of concern are uncompetitive salaries and the so-called "red-tape" – an expression which trivialises the problem of underlying dysfunctional processes and procedures. These issues will be dealt with below.

Recommendation: That a Flying Corps of teachers above "establishment" be created from the pool of casuals and other eligible people. Each person in the Corps could be offered a permanent position or a contract, with special conditions covering the area in which they are required to work, and other work conditions and allowances. Some members of the Corps could be available for Fly In/Fly Out work in country areas, or fixed terms in all areas.

The size of the Corps could be in the order of 3%-5% of the total workforce, with the potential to cover a high percentage of the current gaps.

3. Future Teacher Supply and Demand

3.1 Demand

The demand for school teachers is increasing as the population increases and as the number of places in pre-school settings increases. The Department of Education and other employers of teachers should be the best source of information on the current situation and of future projections.

Pre-school demand already outstrips supply and governments are providing more support in response – for example:

<https://education.nsw.gov.au/early-childhood-education/whats-happening-in-the-early-childhood-education-sector/news/nsw-preschool-reform-agreement>

The increasing demand for pre-school educators is likely to take away from some of the pool of people who might wish to become school teachers.

The Greater Cities Commission's North District Plan, includes the Northern Sydney District Council of P&Cs area, and covers the area north of the Parramatta River out to the City of Ryde and some parts of the lower Hills.

It forecasts an increase of about 30,000 school age children in the 20 years from 2016, and an increase of 92,000 dwellings in the same period.



The Northern Sydney and Central Coast District Councils of Parents & Citizens Associations

www.greatercities.au/north-district-plan/future-of-north-district/metropolitan-context-of-north-district

For Greater Sydney, it is estimated that the population will increase from 4.5million in 2016 to 6.1million over 20 years, about 35%.

<https://www.greatercities.au/metropolis-of-three-cities/introduction>

The NSW Government is responding to the demand for classroom space by spending \$8billion on a capital program over about 5 years, most of which is new capacity and some renewal of existing assets. Much more capital spending on new capacity will be required in future if the current population projects are anywhere in the ball park.

The Department's work force plan should provide information on how the difficult problem of increasing demand will be managed, now and into the future.

3.2 Supply

Going back about 50 years, the Department of Education provided scholarships to universities and bespoke teachers colleges, which covered fees and a living allowance. In return, teachers were bonded for a number of years to work for the Department. Part of the deal was that graduates had to go to any school within a defined broad area, often the hard-to-staff schools in both city and country areas.

This system tended to produce life-time teachers. There are no bespoke teachers colleges any more, and so the Department has lost that reliable recruitment path.

These days, there is not such an incentive to choose teaching as a career. Young teachers find it hard to get a permanent appointment, they face more demands in the job than in the past, they have more career choices in other industries and the salaries for classroom teachers are somewhat uncompetitive. Some younger teachers complain that older senior teachers and school executives in their school are not interested in moving with the times, and this is a factor in the drop-out rate.

Many young teachers spend a long time in temporary roles filling vacancies. Sometimes the reason for this is that Principals prefer a young, enthusiastic teacher to the person that they may receive under the transfer system.

3.3 Improving Teacher Supply

The Federal Government's Quality Initial Teacher Education Review, conducted in 2021 by an Expert Panel chaired by Ms Lisa Paul also covers the encouragement of people to train to be teachers, and to remain in the profession. We are sure that this document will be under the consideration of the NSW Legislative Council Portfolio Committee No.3.

<https://www.dese.gov.au/quality-initial-teacher-education-review/resources/next-steps-report-quality-initial-teacher-education-review>

The Report covers many of the points in the Terms of Reference.

The challenge will be in implementing the Report's recommendations.

Below are some further suggested options for improving teacher supply. These include recruiting more teachers, and making for a more satisfying work environment by reducing their workload on "non-teaching" activities by helping teachers be more productive.



The Northern Sydney and Central Coast District Councils of Parents & Citizens Associations

The Department will also have to meet the market on salaries as the ideas of young people change. Build a corps of teachers in permanent or contracted roles – as described above.

3.3.1 Reorganise schools

The NSW Department of Education says on its website: “Our goal is to ensure every student is engaged and challenged to continue to learn, and every student, every teacher, every leader and every school improves every year”.... and further
“Children, young people and adult learners are at the centre of all our decision-making”.

Unfortunately, the second point “students at the centre” has some way to go. Our school education system is still closer along the spectrum to “one-size-fits-all” than it is to meeting the student at their level of attainment and interest and to providing the best outcome for every student. The rules around the curriculum, which prioritises progression by age rather than by individual level of capability, is also an issue.

In the current situation, with each teacher responsible for 20-30 students, and loaded up with an ever-increasing range of non-teaching activities, putting every student first is near impossible.

We advocate the use of team teaching, which allows different groups within a larger “class” to work at their own levels. Typically, there could be two or four teaching staff in a “class”. This could allow the use of sub-professionals in the teaching team who have diploma or Certificate 2, 3 or 4 qualifications. These people would mostly not be coming from the normal pool of teaching graduates and would therefore add to the number of “teaching staff” available.

Sub-professionals are used in early childhood settings and in some schools overseas. The sub-professionals can ably do routine functions with the students or in preparation or administrative functions.

The pay rate is lower and it would therefore allow fully qualified teachers to be paid more from the same pool of funds.

3.3.2 Provide part-time tutors

Tutors could be used to cover gaps where a specialist teacher is not available. University students would be useful particularly in STEM subjects. Retired teachers could cover many subjects. Retired or practicing professionals such as lawyers, engineers and accountants could do likewise.

3.3.3 Technology

The Department has a number of initiatives for remote learning. It would be possible to extend the Aurora College system, which presently only services students in remote areas who have qualified for selective high schooling.

<https://education.nsw.gov.au/teaching-and-learning/curriculum/rural-and-distance-education/aurora-college>



The Northern Sydney and Central Coast District Councils of Parents & Citizens Associations

3.3.4 Remove Year 12 for some students

There are opportunities to reduce the demand for teachers in a number of ways.

There are cohorts of students:

- who have high academic skills who could easily be accelerated to do the HSC in Year 11, and then go on to higher education, or whatever.
- who would benefit by entering a trade, and although this still happens, it could be cost effective, and advantageous to students and the economy, if encouraged more.
- who have interest in IT/Artificial Intelligence/Robotics. These students could go into a P-Tech course perhaps in a hybrid mode with an employer. P-Tech is only available in 16 settings across Australia at the moment, but this system should be extended to benefit students and the economy. <https://www.ptech.org/p-tech-network/our-schools/aus/>

4. Implementing Improvement Programs

4.1 Teacher shortages

The Terms of Reference predominately cover the NSW Department of Education's HR strategies, policies, processes and procedures.

Our view is that it is time to implement wide ranging changes to the system to meet the challenges of today and the future – not only for the benefits of the Senior Executives, Principals and teachers, but also the customers of public schools being the students and their parents, and the economy more widely.

The Federal Government's Quality Initial Teacher Education Review mentioned above is a good starting point.

Implementing major improvements is best achieved by setting up a program which operates under project management principles. Trying to implement such a program can rarely be done as a side project by the operators of the business in question – in this case Human Resources and School Operations.

The program should have its own bespoke full-time manager, and be overseen by a steering committee. In this case the steering committee should consist of the CEO's of the Department of Education and NESAs, an independent education expert, a highly experienced person in change management and maybe one or two others. There should be a consultative committee which consists of teacher, parent and student representatives whose role it would be to provide input from their constituencies.

4.2 NSW Public Schools

One of the difficulties for Principals, teachers and other staff in School Operations is that there are various internal policy and service providers who each have their own responsibilities, which are transferred to the operators. There is little co-ordination of these various demands.

What happens in real life is that the obligations placed on the operators grow over time, without a lot of regard for the load imposed by the sum of these various obligations on the recipients. Sometimes



The Northern Sydney and Central Coast District Councils of Parents & Citizens Associations

these obligations become part of the culture and persist long after they are needed. Occasionally the recipients jack up, and there is an attempt to cut “red tape”. Unfortunately the term “red tape” tends to trivialise the insidious impact of this build up.

Technology does come to rescue on occasions, but sometimes it is part of the problem. The Department’s implementation of the SAP-based LMBR project, which was supposed to make activities across a broad range of the organisation more efficient, suffered from deficiencies which meant that some objectives were not achieved.

There are very many strategies, policies, processes and procedures which come together to make the NSW school education system work. Chief players are the Department as service provider, and NESAs as a regulator and service provider. There is also a number of other government organisations who impact the delivery of the services, along with the main stakeholders - students, parents and teachers.

There needs to be a gateway that prevents additional demands being made on the operators unless appropriate hurdles are jumped and it can be demonstrated that any additional loads are necessary for compliance or the meeting of an organizational object, and that the changes are the most efficient.

It is time that a Program was put in place to determine a prioritised improvement plan for the whole life cycle of the worthy endeavour of educating our young people. This starts with

- a high level mapping of the major processes,
- an assessment/gap analysis of each process against best appropriate practice for the business,
- a program of initial prioritized improvement projects

There will be some things that can be done simply and quickly, often referred to as “low hanging fruit”, but many others that will take considerable time and effort. The improvement projects can be prioritized and implemented at a pace that the organization can manage.