

Submission
No 189

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

Name: Name suppressed

Date Received: 25 July 2022

Partially
Confidential

I'm writing to you as a dedicated and passionate teacher who has worked in the NSW public system, Catholic education system, and the UK's education system for 19 years (excluding periods of time for growing our family). My experience is in primary schools and whilst certain aspects of this submission may be relevant to Secondary, it is purely focussed on the Primary system in which I am familiar.

The following context is important for my submission and some of the problems facing the system. I am currently a fulltime temporary teacher at one school who has just finished a 2-term contract (1 contract was for 1-day and another for 4 days over 6 months) and a week before that contract was due to cease, I was lucky enough to secure a contract for another 1 term for 5 days. I am unsure what happens in term 4 other than my need for full-time employment.

My submission on the factors contributing to teacher shortages and ways the Government can address these issues is below. This is not intended as an exhaustive submission for all issues, and may at times feel personalised, but it is intended as a genuine attempt to explain my personal experiences with a view to offering pragmatic solutions.

I wish to remain a teacher in the NSW public system, however, I am closer and closer to becoming a valued employee for another and potentially not teaching organisation.

I often hear that teachers choose to be casual or temporary as it suits their lifestyle or circumstances - this is incorrect. Teachers are forced to work temporary and casual as there is a real lack of opportunities that are advertised transparently in many regions.

As described above, often the temporary contracts are a mix of positions and only for one term or two, or a mix of casual and temporary employment to create the fulltime load required. Teachers have mortgages, children and other life needs and require certainty. An ever-changing mix of contracts and casual appointments will lead to a teacher leaving the profession and finding more stable employment.

Further, often these positions are held open for people who are exploring other careers, lifestyle changes, transitioning to retirement, or pursuing side-gigs/running businesses whilst using paid and unpaid leave. I don't believe this is the intent of the leave provisions. These scenarios are real and we see it regularly – it is not right.

A permanent has overblown job security and certainty (even when you don't really want to teach) and job security is tenuous and a highly uncertain term-to-term experience for a casual/temp even if you are passionate and dedicated to a lifelong career in teaching. If you can't cater for those that want to teach as permanent, you lose them whilst catering for those that have permanency but don't really want to teach. This is not about all permanent teachers, but, if I was to extrapolate what I see in a small sample, it is significant enough across the whole system to raise.

And finally, before the solution component of my submission. The reason I have asked for this to be published with name withheld is that it is embarrassing that a teacher of my experience, passion and capability, who has great respect from leaders, colleagues, parents, student-teachers and students, is unable to secure a permanent position. In the past few months, I have not seen one advertised within a 45-minute drive range of my home.

I don't wish to dwell on the negative and wish to focus on potential solutions. Some potential solutions are offered below:

- **Review the myriad of circumstances that allow teachers to hold on to positions** for what seems a lifetime (and often for spurious reasons). Clearly, we need flexibility as per s65 of the Fair Work Act and there are benefits to supporting a teacher on a sabbatical etc. However, the current system is being abused to the detriment of those wishing to teach. This ultimately results in temporary and casual teachers leaving the profession for permanency elsewhere.
- **Consider resourcing and recruitment at a higher level than school level** e.g. district level (or sub-district level) – there may be opportunities to provide some casual teachers and temporary teachers with a sub-district position allowing that teacher to fill vacancies across a number of schools (as a permanent full-time employee). There would be a natural rate of absenteeism that these teachers could naturally fill in familiar schools.
- **Reduce the potential for ‘jobs for the boys/girls’ by undertaking recruitment above a school level.** Recruitment is clearly an emotive topic, however, it does not take long to hear stories of cronyism and nepotism in the system. Review policies for recruitment and improve transparency of temporary and casual conversion processes. The use of priority dates (or not) should also be cleared up as even Ed-Connect is unable to give any consistent advice to teachers who await ‘the call’ that many others talk about – mine is 1985 (it’s approaching my birth year).
- **Recognise and Reward teachers who have consistently worked as a casual and temporary and now desire permanency.** More and more so, I am confronted by non-teaching graduates, and ‘yet to graduate’ teachers being employed permanently who come to me for mentoring, leadership and support which I provide unrewarded. I do not begrudge these people employment as I think young, dynamic teachers and hard-working teachers are the future. I am humbled to provide this support and it is often the only reward I get. However, I am now 40 and after funding my own maternity and child-rearing years due to casualisation, remain a highly experienced and valued teacher looking for permanency in a district that has not seen a recent vacancy. I am not past my use by date and have lots to provide children and the system more generally. However, when you see some of the practices providing permanency, whilst as a casual/temp you fight for the days you need, or even have a contract terminated to make way for a new permanent, why would you stay to be treated like a second-rate employee?
- **Pay is not the solution to retention or attraction.** Despite the placards you often see, pay is not the answer to attraction and retention. Obviously being remunerated appropriately helps however the pressures on a fulltime classroom teacher is immense these days with growing expectations. Is there an opportunity to increase support personnel support staff to supervise children in breaks, run sport or other non-core activities so that teachers are able to focus their expertise on the fundamentals. Education is one of the most important factors in a highly innovative and productive economy and allowing teachers to focus on what matters most will support this notion and reduce teacher burn-out.

I am no expert in the administration of an education system, however, I am an expert teacher and I am also well placed to describe the factors which will force me away from teaching. I am not leaving yet, however, with a burgeoning job market and the capabilities and experience as a teacher, without permanency, I’m not far away given rising living costs and uncertainty.

Thank you for considering my submission.