

Submission
No 214

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

Name: Name suppressed

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Partially
Confidential

To: The NSW Parliamentary Enquiry into Teacher Shortages, June 2022.

Saturday 30th July, 2022

Chair: Latham, Mark (PHON, LC Member)

Deputy Fang, Wes (NAT, LC Member)

Chair:

Members: Boyd, Abigail (GRNS, LC Member)

Cusack, Catherine (LIB, LC Member)

D'Adam, Anthony (ALP, LC Member)

Farlow, Scott (LIB, LC Member)

Houssos, Courtney (ALP, LC Member)

Dear Honourable Committee members,

I write, on a Saturday afternoon, despite a long ‘must-do’ list of teaching-related tasks that must be completed to ensure my faculty and students receive the leadership, support and quality education they deserve in the upcoming week. The issue being investigated has become critical, although it has been predicted loudly for at least a decade. The recent vocal minority blaming the current crisis on the vaccine mandate is [misleading](#), and distorting the true, long-standing nature of the problem, the objectors represent a tiny fraction of the teacher workforce. The Education system in NSW, in each of the Public, Catholic and Independent sectors is fundamentally broken. The other distraction promulgated by the mainstream media, which pits the sectors against each other, is counter-productive and highly damaging to the future of education in this state. All sectors perform critical functions to meet the education needs of young Australians. All need review, and support, to address the foundational needs that underpin a quality education.

I was recently appointed as a Head of Department at an Independent school in Sydney. I hold a PhD in Science, with a decade of research and university teaching experience, and retrained in 2011 to obtain a Graduate Diploma of Education when a lack of research funding and job security reached its own crisis point. Rather than waste my experience and training, a more “family friendly” career in teaching with reasonable prospects for job security to obtain a mortgage seemed a sound option. The changes I have witnessed and lived in a decade of classroom teaching have driven me to write this submission.

In my current position, I have had to recruit three full-time teachers, one each in Physics, Chemistry and Biology since the end of 2021. I have also had to find cover for an experienced Senior teachers on extended sick leave, and a Maternity Leave position. Despite working in a desirable school, in a desirable location, I have been forced to appoint teachers who have come from interstate and internationally (on a temporary bridging visa for the last 7 months), and a beginning teacher with a background in banking and finance. I have also hauled an Initial Teacher Education lecturer and experienced Science teacher out of retirement to meet a dire need for a Science-trained casual to cover COVID-related absences in the lead up to Trial HSC Examinations. The number of applicants for my own current role were limited to substantially less than a handful, despite attracting a middle leadership salary well above the top band of classroom teacher, such is the critical shortage of people willing to take on the task.

Finding any casual teachers to cover staff illness, professional development etc has become a daily, stressful juggling act. Student learning and wellbeing is being impacted significantly due to lack of a consistent approach, teaching by multiple teachers, ongoing disruptions, classes being minimally supervised, left with less engaging work that can be managed by a non-science teacher, being taught by someone not qualified in the subject, etc. Excursions and Professional Development are harder to arrange and justify because suitable cover can't be obtained. When PD is a requirement of ongoing Teacher Registration requirements, this problem pushes this training into additional outside of school hours times, adding to teacher workload. Students who need assistance with learning support are floundering because of a shortage of qualified special education teachers. The best and brightest students who deserve extension support are also missing out, resulting in a permanent and cumulative loss to society.

The causes of the teacher shortage are complex and intertwined. Most teachers would agree it is not a simple issue of teacher salary, although teacher remuneration when considered alongside workload makes the profession absolutely unappealing in the face of many alternatives.

What follows are a series of short points that I cannot afford the time to discuss extensively - in addition to my after hours teaching administration workload, I am a parent of a Year 12 student at a NSW state public school, and have responsibilities to the running of my household. Some genuine leisure time would be nice too, but I satisfy myself with this submission on that point for the moment.

- [Work intensification](#) on multiple levels. Colleagues lament that there is always something new being added to the workload and expectations, yet nothing is removed. Up to a certain point it is possible, but this point is long surpassed. This intensification is multifaceted and includes the increased complexity of teaching using new technologies with minimal training time. My favourite was learning how to use Microsoft Teams in an afternoon session, before needing to hit the ground running the following day with a seamless transition to remote learning. Pivot, they said. We did. Demands on teachers by society to fill every gap, and become surrogate parents, but without the resources, support and respect to achieve this are demoralising. Consent education, being ‘accidental counsellors’, monitoring disordered eating, extreme behavioural management, teaching executive function skills, manners, social media education, addressing social issues such as vaping etc, etc. New syllabuses are introduced ad hoc, with scant regard for their impact on the stages above or below them. The current 2017 Syllabuses for Physics and Chemistry are a case in point – the mathematics required to access them hasn’t been taught in more than a decade, and many younger teachers never studied it in sufficient depth themselves. Realistically, mathematicians, chemists and physicists with the appropriate skills are highly employable in so many other careers they aren’t lining up to have chairs thrown at them.
- [Teacher remuneration](#) - Salary starts out fine, at a little above the average graduate starting salary but plateaus rapidly, and there are limited numbers of leadership roles that attract higher rates. This results in experienced teachers losing ground to peers in other tertiary qualified professions, with nowhere to go. This is not seen in other tertiary educated careers where salary continues to increase with increasing experience. Additionally, when the hours required to get even some of the required work done are considered, the salary begins to approach menial, unskilled labour rates. Packing shelves at Woolies would definitely earn me more on an hourly basis.
- Discipline: a system that works to rehabilitate particularly problematic students and enable them to be removed from the general school population is urgently required. How many careers involve being assaulted, bitten, verbally abused and subjected to [relentless harassment](#) etc on a daily basis? Paramedics and Health Care workers also suffer from this problem, but raising these concerns as a counter argument is facile and dismissive – everyone deserves the right to a safe working environment, it’s not a competition about who has it worse.

- The discipline issue feeds into a dismissive lack of respect. [Teacher bashing](#) is commonplace. Every newspaper article comment section and social media post is peppered with frankly offensive contributions from highly vocal teacher bashers who loudly and frequently maintain that teachers waltz into a classroom at 9 and leave at 3, and spend 12 weeks a year sipping cocktails by the pool, and various permutations of the same. I've been told I only work 5 'customer facing' hours per day, as if fully prepared and resourced lessons just materialise as I enter a classroom, and admin and marking do themselves. My family would tell you otherwise. My average work week is always in excess of 50hrs. This week, with additional administrative duties including parent teacher conferences, I was physically at school for 51hrs between Monday and Friday, along with several more hours in the evenings, and I'll easily hit a 60hr work week by the end of the 'weekend'. The Government response to the COVID-19 pandemic is another example of a lack of respect. Despite requests for teacher vaccination to be made a priority, from unions and teachers themselves, and our role as 'essential workers' there was no access before the [6th September 2021](#), to try and meet the demand for return to onsite teaching and to run the HSC examinations.
- Increasing administrative burden – such as the NCCD – teachers typically enjoy the challenge of incorporating modifications to meet the needs of all students in their classes and do this as a matter of course. The burdensome aspect is the time required to document these interventions in several places in an ongoing manner. This takes away time that would be better invested in developing differentiated teaching practice. Documentation of emails, parent phone calls, making records of conversations, following up with stakeholders including parents, counsellors, year advisers and principals. With increasing numbers of students suffering from mental health concerns, behavioural problems, learning difficulties – this work accounts for a substantial workload that must be done outside face to face teaching hours, so results in intensification of the work day – break times from teaching are filled with urgent and important admin. You feel like you never stop, often don't get time to eat, and can go all day without a toilet break.
- NESAs Teacher Accreditation requirements – A substantial burden in the workload under the current conditions is finding and completing sufficient NESAs accredited Professional Development hours on the rolling 5yr basis. The [bulk cancellation](#) of almost all NESAs Accredited courses in 2020 has made a difficult job even more challenging. While some courses undoubtedly didn't meet quality standards, this is a 'baby with the bathwater' tale of epic proportions and included highly regarded providers for mandatory First Aid

Training amongst many others. The Highly Accomplished and Lead Teacher process is ridiculously burdensome. The prospect of paying for an application, putting together a substantial portfolio of evidence, to be potentially awarded a small pay increase along with even more additional responsibilities has clearly met with a [lacklustre response](#), given the lack of teachers who have taken it up. Every minute spent on this process is stolen from the time required to be a quality classroom teacher, so the students suffer again.

- Why does NESA issue an Australian Curriculum which then requires programming and resourcing to be replicated individually by every school in the country? This kind of wasted effort would never be tolerated in private industry, and people from management positions in other fields cannot fathom why it occurs. A more consistent, higher quality delivery of curriculum could be achieved by having NESA produce a substantial scaffold of programs at three levels, with quality resources:
 - Standard
 - Extension
 - Support

Schools and teachers could select and further refine the most appropriate level of program for any class group, without the endless reinvention of the wheel in every staffroom in the country.

What to do?

- Professional autonomy – give teachers the tools to teach (see NESA Programming suggestion above), and trust them to do this without micromanagement and the administrative burden of constant re-justification.
- Salary increase to acknowledge the professionalism and standard of education held by teachers.
- Offer retention bonuses
- Restructure the long term leave system to reallocate permanent positions to long term temporary experienced teachers
- Reduce full-time teaching load to 4 classes maximum, to allow sufficient time to prepare, mark and conduct administrative tasks in normal working hours
- Address the perception of the profession by demonstrating how it is valued by the DET. Provide sufficient budget to allocate support staff and teacher allocations above the bare minimum dictated by student numbers to reduce workload and burnout.

I could go on, and on. There is no simple fix, the system needs a complete rebuild. Our goodwill and determination to do the best for our students has now been overstretched to the point of disintegration. The predicted crisis has upon us. There are numerous submissions from professional bodies, use them!