

Submission
No 225

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

Name: Name suppressed

Date Received: 31 July 2022

Partially
Confidential

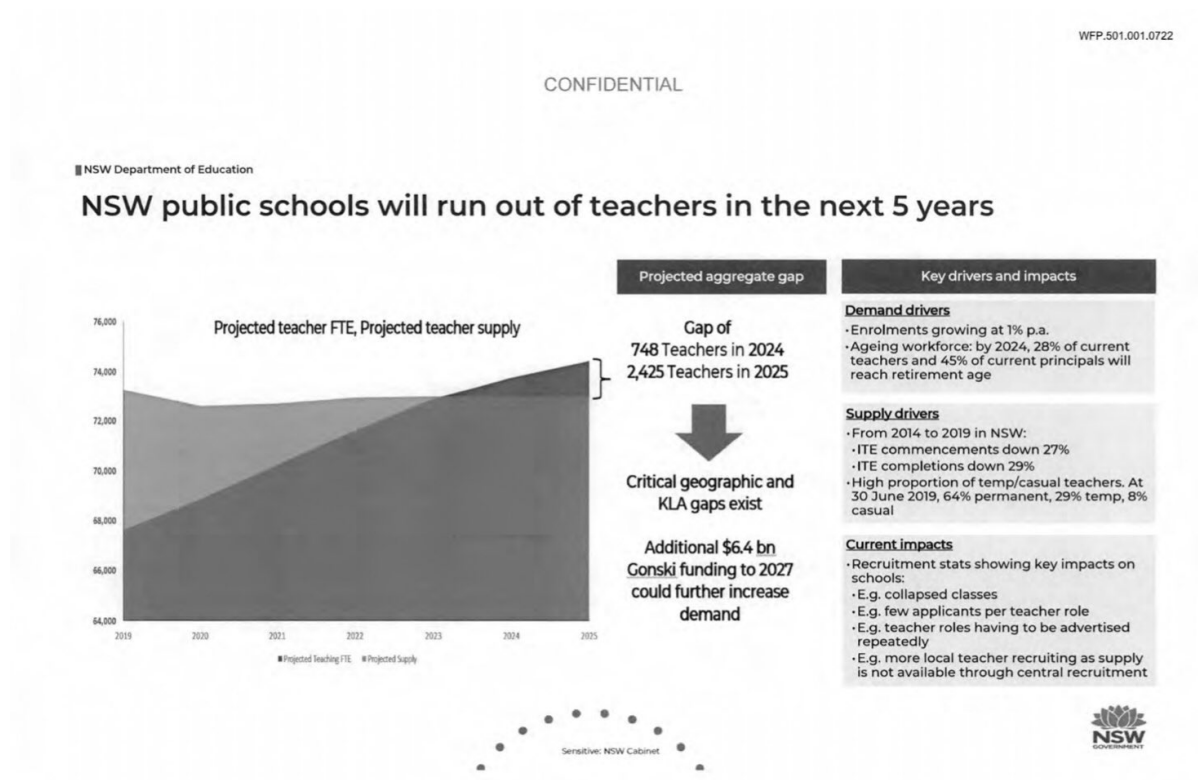
I am primary school teacher who has been teaching since 2012, oscillating between exploitive temporary contracts and casual teaching. In my experience, the teacher shortage emerged as a problem in 2016 and has seen an accelerated deterioration year-on-year since then. There are two distinct shortages occurring:

- A shortage of temporary contract and permanent classroom teachers.
- A shortage of casual teachers. Effective operations depend on casual teachers and without them learning programs continue to collapse and learning continues to be severely disrupted. Casual teachers are the difference between learning remaining continuous or collapsing, and yet the Department persists in treating its casual teachers with abject contempt.

I currently work as a casual teacher in Sydney. I chose precarity over the slightly more stable full-time temporary contracts out there because those contracts are exploitive. As a full-time teacher, I was getting paid for thirty-seven hours of work a week but doing at least sixty, often more. Overnight school camps are unpaid, even though I'm effectively on duty 24/7 for 4 nights and 5 days. In the school holidays, my hours wouldn't change as they were spent planning but mostly double- and triple-entering the same arbitrary data across different clunky interfaces the Department is forever throwing up from its bottomless pit of impractical ideas it pays the private sector millions of taxpayer dollars to invent. That, and buying resources for my class on advice from a twelve-week, Department-sanctioned 'professional development' course telling us to look out for good deals on desks at Ikea during the holidays and then spend our wages on said desks. Bonus points if you can get a whiteboard desk. Same with rich texts, such as novels and picture books. This taught me that the public education system is built on unpaid overtime as well as the emotional blackmail of teachers who have their goodwill mined and exploited.

An education system built on unpaid overtime, low-value administration tasks, and emotional blackmail has procured the current teacher shortage.

The Department doesn't even know how hard we work. 'We do not have specific data on the hours per week worked by a teacher at this time,' said Secretary Georgina Harrison in response to a request made by NSW Teachers Federation on 27 August 2021. According to the Department's [own internal reporting](#), NSW is on track to 'run out of teachers in the next five years.' (Appendix A)



Despite there being almost 2000 vacant permanent positions going across the state, next to nobody wants the job. Compounding this is the tens of thousands of temporary contracts barely retaining a rapidly shrinking workforce. If you're a primary school teacher, you have more chance of getting covid than permanency. It doesn't take a million dollars paid to Deloitte interns to work out that people don't want to go through the rigour of an education degree to find there is no work/life balance on the other side. The large and growing teacher shortage driven by exploitive working conditions is compounded by a perfect storm of increasing student enrolments, an aging workforce and 30 per cent decrease in enrolments for teacher degrees. The Department reported before Covid that a 'high proportion of temp/casual teachers' was negatively impacting retention.

Given [most of the Department's teaching workforce](#) are stuck in an unending cycle of insecure contracts and casual gigs, it is extraordinary that the Department's Deputy Secretary Yvette Cachia would email the whole workforce at the start of the state's 2021 Covid lockdown to encourage her casual teacher employees to go on welfare payments from Centrelink. A slowly worsening casual shortage existed long before Covid and it beggars belief that, despite all the million-dollar consultancy advice, the Department wilfully decided to accelerate it by locking casual teachers out of wages for four months. And where is the money that the Department saved on rorting casuals during Term 3, 2021?

As the old adage goes, you reap what you sow. In 2011, the NSW Coalition government sowed a year-on-year wage cut for public school teachers in the form of a 2.5% wage cap. Teacher wages haven't matched inflation since the twentieth century, but a number of factors have accelerated the decline in recent times. These include a Coalition wage freeze in 2020, and the failure of the NSW Coalition government to retain casual teachers—the backbone of its teaching workforce remaining fully operational at any given time.

There is no clearer sign than a chronically useless government and education department than one that commissions a casual teacher shortage during a casual teacher shortage. The data below, obtained from an FOI request and provided by the NSW Department of Education (Appendix B), illustrates the decline in casual teacher engagements between 2019 and 2020 in Term 3 and then a \$56 million+ decline in Term 3, 2021 when the Department told its entire casual teacher workforce to go on Centrelink during lockdown (Appendix C). And now the Department has the audacity to scratch its head and wonder: where did all the casual teachers go?

Total spend on casual teacher wages in term 3 of each year 2019-21 by Operational Directorate

Operational Directorate	Total Gross Amount Term 3, 2019 (PPE's 25 Jul 2019 to 3 Oct 2019)	Total Gross Amount Term 3, 2020 (PPE's 23 Jul 2020 to 1 Oct 2020)	Total Gross Amount Term 3, 2021 Total Gross Amount (PPE's 22 Jul 2021 to 30 Sep 2021)
Connected Communities	\$315,507	\$258,609	\$138,328
Metropolitan North	\$20,973,403	\$17,798,281	\$9,924,896
Metropolitan South	\$20,772,944	\$17,675,207	\$9,823,071
Metropolitan South & West	\$18,333,819	\$15,388,517	\$8,959,598
Regional North	\$18,696,962	\$15,698,447	\$10,069,965
Regional North & West	\$10,979,943	\$9,820,688	\$7,810,664
Regional South	\$14,829,049	\$12,681,776	\$8,888,507
Rural North	\$10,295,145	\$8,738,571	\$6,530,938
Rural South & West	\$8,637,651	\$7,272,114	\$5,736,633
Other	\$1,688,892	\$1,314,223	\$1,334,560
Total	\$125,523,315	\$106,646,433	\$69,217,160

*Other includes casual positions that are flagged to a corporate-based unit but utilised across various locations. Examples include Saturday schools and Swimming programmes

This data also puts a dollar figure on the short-term savings the Department collected from the wages of the casual teachers it booted out during the 2021 Covid lockdown. The Department continues to treat its casual teachers as an economic inconvenience and the continuation of this contempt will only see that there are even less casual teachers as the terms roll on.

Casual teachers lost between \$38-\$56 million in wages that the Department would have spent anyway if they hadn't chosen to dispose of them during lockdown. Crucially, this also means that the Department saved \$56 million from the unpaid labour of temporary and permanent staff, who had to take on the extra labour in the absence of casual teachers.

In a survey I ran in September 2021 across various private Facebook groups for casual teachers in NSW, 84 per cent of the more than 200 respondents reported receiving no work or significantly less work than was usual for Term 3, 2021. Despite Department directives encouraging schools to continue spending their casual budgets as per normal, this did not happen. And despite it being in the best interests of the Department and students to support the financial wellbeing of casual teachers across NSW during Covid restrictions in order to prevent the shortage from deteriorating further, the Department chose to kick them onto welfare instead. It is no wonder schools are struggling to find casual staff a year on. This contemptuous

disposal of casual teachers during the pandemic is a slur against the whole workforce and against every public school student.

As a casual teacher, I haven't taken a booking 'the morning of' since June 2019. I'm booked every day of the school week well in advance. If a teacher calls in sick at the last minute, or comes down with Covid, there are simply next to no casual teachers available to cover anymore. There was a shortage of casual teachers before the 2021 Covid lockdown in NSW. However, the predicted peak of the shortage was arguably brought forward by years thanks to the NSW Department of Education's unceremonious emailing of its entire casual teacher workforce at the start of lockdown encouraging us to seek income from Centrelink instead. The Department wilfully forgot about its casual teachers for a whole term, and then when lockdown lifted and with schools now fully operational again in 2022, the NSW Government and Department of Education fails to acknowledge how their actions in Term 3, 2021 worsened the pre-existing casual teacher shortage.

Compounding this impact is the fact that the government has decreased the sick leave loading for casual teachers year-on-year throughout the pandemic. The 5% sick leave loading component of a casual teacher's daily pay rate has remained unchanged since 2016 and has not been updated to accommodate the circumstances of the pandemic. The pay change for teachers in January 2022 of 2.04% was even smaller for casual teachers, since our wages and sick leave loading were combined before the 2.04% was calculated. In real terms, this means that casual teachers are earning less in 2022 than they did in 2016.

None of this is surprising from a government and education department whose advice to casual teachers (via its recruitment contractor ClassCover) is to '[sell your things](#)' and drive for Uber during unpaid school holiday periods (Appendix D).

The staffing crisis comes only as a surprise to the non-teacher bureaucrats running the show on half a million taxpayer dollars a year. Ultimately, it will be the students who lose out when the vapid schemes and wasted advertising about the 'joy' of teaching fail to plug the gaping holes in the workforce. Marketing won't pry teacher wages from the bog of stagnation, nor will it reduce workloads and provide job security to the majority of teachers. As outlined in the roadmap in the [Gallop Inquiry](#), there isn't a shortage of teachers because there is a shortage of supply strategies and schemes. There is a teacher shortage because the profession has been driven into the ground by poor governance resulting in the long-term stagnation of wages, exploitive temp contracts, over-casualisation, and an overblown workload pockmarked by a litany of low-value tasks that have decimated the work/life balance of all teachers.

To get accredited, teachers have to complete and log at least 100 hours of professional development courses; pay NESA (NSW Education Standards Authority) \$100 every calendar year (When I spoke to NESA on the phone about the fee's purpose, they referred me to their website for an opaque breakdown of what activities are funded by it. These activities included "accreditation support" and "quality professional development."); annotate evidence to "prove proficiency"; keep diaries, be mentored by instructional leaders; request and collate reports written by supervisors; painstakingly assemble all reports and evidence into a single document, and more. All of which is a requirement outside of the already overburdened and under-resourced job of actually teaching.

When I was employed on successive temporary contracts that went nowhere, I had to fight tooth-and-nail to get five minutes of accreditation support and even then the school was reluctant to provide anything until the union intervened. Eventually I gave up and went back to casual teaching.

In NSW, there are not enough casual teachers, leaving schools to split up classes and collapse learning programs every single day. In my experience as a casual

teacher working across tens of Sydney schools, I cannot recall a single day this year in which no classes were collapsed or split. The shortage isn't spearheaded by an increase in illness – the shortage is driven by the complete decimation of every teacher's work/life balance. Increased illness has only exacerbated this central driving factor.

In my ten years of experience as a primary school teacher, I have also found that schools and classrooms are significantly under-resourced. Writing materials are scarce, equipment to support learning is next to non-existent or broken, and technology frequently does not work. In my ten years of teaching, I am yet to have a class that has access to a class of fully working devices at any given time as the curriculum demands. It is extraordinary that the Secretary of the NSW Department of Education is being paid \$600,000 a year of taxpayer money and yet my students aren't even provided with a pencil to write with, let alone a working computer. Classrooms are resourced by teachers spending their own wages on resources.

The NSW government first commissioned recruitment poverty in its own public education system back in 2011 when it became the first state or territory to impose an austerity measure in the form of a wages cap of 2.5 percent on all public sector employees (including teachers and nurses). This extraordinary act of economic vandalism has overseen a year-on-year decline in teacher wages in relation to inflation and the cost of living. In real terms, teachers have copped a pay cut every year since 2011 as a result. Teachers are presently earning the lowest wages they have since the days of poverty wages before the teacher strikes of the 1980s. In the 1990s, the average teacher's wage could afford a house. In 2022 teachers can barely afford to rent a room in a dilapidated sharehouse.

The Department's decision to allow anti-vaxers and all manner of other covid flat earthers back into schools to teach after they were rightfully locked out of the profession to protect the health of students, staff and the community is a disgrace. Not to mention the hundreds of deaths that are occurring every single day. The

Department, however, appears committed to increasing this death rate by exposing its staff and students to unvaccinated conspiracy theorists who chose to defy public health orders and the advice of experts. Let us be clear: people will die because the Secretary and her Education Department have decided to harm their workforce by engaging unvaccinated staff. On another note, how are these conspiracy theorists and anti-health tinfoil hatters in any intellectual capacity fit to teach our kids? What protocols does the Department have in place to ensure these anti-vaccination extremists, charlatans, and snake oil merchants are not going to push their harmful and fictive rhetoric onto children?

By allowing the wilfully (and selfishly) unvaccinated back into schools, the Department is validating their ridiculous conspiracy theories and further diminishing the status of teachers as professionals in the eyes of the public. You can be a covid conspiracy theorist or you can be a teacher, but you can't be both. It is impossible for someone who has been radicalised by anti-vaccination groups to be an effective teacher. Such people need help, much like anyone who has fallen victim to a cult. I urge the Department to reverse this decision immediately for the safety of students, staff and the community.

According to the Department's own records, it understood long before the pandemic that it was going to run of teachers by 2025 (Appendix A).

In my own experience, the job of a primary school teacher in NSW has become too much for too little, completely untenable. The job of a teacher has, in my experience, splintered into three distinct beyond-fulltime jobs: teacher (which is what we should be doing), professional statistician and data analyst (constantly entering and raking over data, data, and more data), and PR consultant (rewording student data in reports so that it is "parent friendly"). One person cannot sanely do all three and yet teachers are expected to do so, and only get paid for one.

Compounding factors and overlapping crises will see that teacher numbers continue on a sharp downward trajectory, and can be summarised by:

- Poor treatment of casual teachers, especially during the pandemic.
- The convoluted way in which casual teachers are taxed is a joke (Appendix E). Not even the Department can explain it in clear terms. Casual teachers, who can only earn for a maximum of 9 months of the year during term time, are frequently taxed 50% of their pay and told by the Department that they will “get some back” when they do their tax return. Casual teachers pay rent fortnightly, not annually when the government chooses to correct the monumental mistakes they make every single fortnight. Also, it is worth noting that a lack of affordable housing compounded by poor earning conditions has also locked in a drought of casual teachers. The Department needs a daily supply of casual teacher all year round and yet we are not paid for the holidays. Solution: 1. Pay casual teachers during the school holidays; 2. Remove HECS/HELP debts of all teachers; 3. Tax casual teachers in a way that is reasonable and sane and matches the way temporary and permanent teachers are taxed.
- The 5% “sick leave loading” built into the casual teacher’s daily pay rate is redundant and needs to be recalculated and reapplied. The 5% loading hasn't been updated since 2016 and as such it does not match the circumstances of the ongoing covid-19 pandemic. The so-called “sick leave loading” is also flattened into our daily pay rate when pay rate changes occur. Meaning that when teachers got a 2.5% pay "rise" in January 2022, casual teachers' daily rate went up less than that in real terms. With inflation at 6.1% and rocketing toward 8% (and compounded by the wage cap and pandemic) the sick leave loading is rendered redundant. This is another factor contributing to the casual teacher shortage. Nobody is going to sign up for precarity when the pay and conditions are so poor.
- The burden of unpaid labour wrought upon temporary and permanent teachers needs to stop immediately.
- Across the Catholic and Independent schools sector, the government should prohibit the charging of fees if those schools are to retain any public funding. If private schools don't wish to comply, their public funds should be withdrawn.

- With inflation due to hit at least 7.75% by the end of 2022, teacher pay falls well short of the cost of living. Nobody wants to spend 4 years at university to gain a casual gig or temporary contract for a teaching job in which you're doing 50-80 hours a week but only paid for 37 of them.
- The working conditions of teachers are the learning conditions of students, and the NSW Department of Education and its blunderbuss orbit of overpaid non-teacher bureaucrats and politicians remain committed to an ideology that seeks to drive public education into oblivion to justify the public funding of private schools.