Submission No 245

INQUIRY INTO TEACHER SHORTAGES IN NEW SOUTH WALES

Name: Name suppressed

Date Received: 31 July 2022

Context of this submission

I have been employed in NSW public schools for nine years. I have spent approximately half my career as a secondary English and HSIE teacher and the latter half as a head teacher. I began my career at a large metropolitan high school in south-western Sydney. I currently hold a permanent head teacher position in an inner regional high school. I will soon take up another permanent head teacher position in a school closer to home on the South Coast. This range of experience has afforded me wide knowledge of what is happening across different areas of NSW in terms of teacher supply and school conditions.

I make this submission in earnest. Put simply, my colleagues and I find ourselves in an ever-deepening workplace crisis. We are relying on inquiries such as this one to implement rapid, effective and sustainable solutions. I have grave concerns for the future of our fine public education system and the profession I love.

Responses to the inquiry's terms of reference

a) Current teacher shortages in NSW

Current shortages can be traced back to historical shortages

While the above focuses on current teacher shortages in NSW, it is important to note that it has been established for some time that teacher shortages have existed in particular Key Learning Areas (KLAs) and in some geographic locations. Historical teacher shortages of this nature are the reason I am a teacher today.

In 2008 as an eighteen-year-old completing my HSC, I applied for and received a Teacher Education Scholarship from the then NSW Department of Education and Training. When I applied for my scholarship, KLAs offered included secondary English with another subject, mathematics, sciences including chemistry and physics, and some Technical and Applied Sciences (TAS) subjects. Applicants had to undertake to work in a permanent position as appointed by the DET in either south-western Sydney or rural NSW, both deemed areas "hard to staff" and subsequently the scholarship program was an effort to ease teacher shortages in these areas.

Fourteen years later, the situation has not improved. Teacher shortages have become even more severe and pronounced. Scholarships continue to be offered to students and mid-career professionals to train in these subject areas and to teach in these areas because the shortages the scholarship program I was part of aimed to fix still exist. NSW state governments have known about this problem for at least twenty years– this is not a new phenomenon and to characterise it as such is to ignore the weight of evidence demonstrating that shortages have existed for a long time without meaningful action to remedy them.

The nature of current teacher shortages – casual and temporary staff

The current crisis encompasses more than just specific subject areas or geographic locations – the shortage is spreading to areas that have traditionally not been "hard to staff" and to subject areas that have traditionally had ample supply of suitably qualified candidates. This has impacts on the success and stability of day-to-day operations of schools. In terms of staffing schools on a

daily basis, the current teacher shortage is most keenly felt in our inability to find casual and temporary staff to backfill absent teachers or to fill vacated roles.

The shortage of casual staff for day-to-day relief has led to specialist programs running inconsistently or not at all. In 2021 and 2022, the pool of casual staff available to the school I teach at has shrunk considerably owing to the department's implementation of the COVID Intensive Learning Support Program (CILSP). While this program has good intentions, it has decimated the casual workforce in many schools. Casual staff have taken up contracts to provide small group literacy and numeracy intervention as part of this program, and in a somewhat ironic turn of events, CILSP tutors have ended up having their tuition groups cancelled to instead cover absent teachers' regular classes. At this point, I am genuinely questioning whether or not the department planned for the CILSP to run as intended or for it to become a de-facto method of contracting casual relief for a year. Furthermore, there are schools who have been unable to attract temporary staff to work as part of the program – the school I work at included, where we have been unable to fully expend the pool of funds allocated to us because we have not been able to find numeracy tutors in particular. Specialist programs that are designed to support students who need additional help simply cannot run while such teacher shortages persist.

Longer-term temporary vacancies are also becoming more difficult to fill. In less than twelve months, the school I am employed at has advertised long-term contracts for: an English teacher, a HSIE teacher, two maths teachers, a science teacher and a TAS teacher. None of these advertisements attracted any applications. The HSIE vacancy is now being filled by a graduate drama teacher with no training or experience in teaching HSIE. The English vacancy is being partially filled by a teacher trained in Japanese. Our inability to find teachers to backfill temporary vacancies for staff taking parental leave or transitioning to retirement necessitated the entire re-timetabling of the school partway through the year, which is obviously disruptive to the continuity of student learning. Small classes designed to support Year 7 and 8 students with low levels of literacy and numeracy, many of whom had been placed in support unit classes during their time at primary school, had to be permanently merged as we simply could not staff them.

Schools are constantly re-advertising temporary contracts via the two official avenues made available via the department; one internal site for temporary vacancies (Staff Noticeboard) and one external site for permanent and temporary vacancies (JobFeed). In addition to this, social media has become a recruitment tool for staff in schools. The Facebook group NSW Casual Teachers is flooded every day with opportunities for casual and temporary work. Many individuals here are constantly posting offers of casual and temporary work because the vacancies at their schools continually go unfilled, meaning students' classes are being merged or minimally supervised.

The implications of teacher shortages for school leadership

A less-publicised and somewhat overlooked area of the teacher shortage is the impact this has on school leadership. The department developed the School Leadership Identification Framework (SLIF) through its School Leadership Institute (SLI) and implemented it as a pilot program in schools last year. I had the opportunity to participate in the program as a mentor to a classroom teacher aspiring to become a head teacher. In a meeting I attended with colleagues

and SLI staff, it was made clear that a key driver of the program was the significant decline in applications for head teacher and assistant principal roles measured over the last decade.

The teacher shortage has serious implications for attracting and retaining leaders in school settings, who both nurture high quality classroom practice in teachers and manage some of the more complex aspects of community engagement and school operations. As long as teacher shortages persist, the pool of candidates to become school leaders is smaller and less competitive, potentially diluting the quality of school leadership. I have serious concerns about the much-touted FASTstream program and its intention to take candidates from graduate to principal in just ten years and appoint them to some of our most challenging and isolated schools. The corporate knowledge, curriculum expertise, interpersonal skills and 'nous', for want of a better word, that are developed through a sustained school leadership journey cannot be substituted with professional learning courses and targeted placements alone. There is evidence to indicate that the teacher shortage is also a school leadership shortage, and this situation is equally critical.

b) Future teacher supply and demand

What is known about future supply and demand

This is an area where substantial information is available to indicate that the current shortages will continue to grow and that the department is entirely aware of what is occurring. Late last year, *The Sydney Morning Herald* published information obtained from confidential department documents developed between 2019 and 2021. In late 2019, the internal documents predicted a supply gap would occur in 2022. Federal Government modelling and documents obtained by *The Guardian* have also demonstrated that future demand will outstrip supply in NSW, echoing the department's own findings.

In other words, the department have known for years the precise situation we would be in right now, and they failed to take swift and meaningful action to fix it. They have committed money to various programs over the next four years, but their own documentation projections illustrate that they are already not keeping pace with the needs of the system. Four years is an awfully long time to see whether their plan, which consists of the same as they have previously offered – scholarships, incentives and marketing campaigns about the joy of the job – will actually work.

The department has acknowledged, along with the aforementioned sources, that enrolments in initial teacher education courses are declining. The *NSW Teacher Supply Strategy* states that from 2014-2019, enrolments in teacher training have dropped twenty nine percent. That reduction is precisely why we are experiencing a shortage of casual and temporary teachers in particular – because these are the kind of roles graduates tend to take up in order to begin their careers and develop the skills and experience they need to progress into long-term employment. Without a steady supply of graduates, there is not a pool of people to draw on for these roles, and so casual and temporary shortages will continue to be difficult to fill without devising an effective plan to "grow our own" teachers as the department puts it in the abovementioned strategy.

What supply and demand mismatch looks like in a school

In my position, I have experienced first-hand what reduced graduate supply looks like. Part of my role is to coordinate professional experience placements for pre-service teachers. The

number of requests I am receiving for placements has dropped continuously since I took up the position in 2019. Almost three quarters of the way through the school year, I have only had six placement requests. In 2019, that was approximately the number of placements we had already completed with more students to come through the second half of the year. This has a direct connection to what my school can anticipate for future teacher supply, as a key employment pathway for pre-service teachers is through relationships built at schools that provided their placements. As universities tend to be located in Sydney or large regional cities, schools in smaller towns can expect to provide less pre-service teacher placements and subsequently will not be able to access this method of recruiting staff.

I am concerned this is indicative of where the supply and demand crunch will hurt the most – regional and rural locations, as well as disadvantaged schools in metropolitan areas. The gap between future supply and demand will further compound the difficulty such schools already have in recruiting and attaining staff, and the flow-on effects of that for students are obvious and well-documented.

c) Out-of-area teaching, merged classes and minimal supervision in NSW schools

Out-of-area teaching

I have experience myself as an out-of-area teacher in a teaching area less discussed than STEM. I have delivered geography to Years 7-10 with no university training. The anecdotal figure often discussed is that 70 percent of geography teachers in NSW are not trained to deliver it. It is such a common practice that the department has specifically designed a resource called *Geography for those new to teaching the subject* to provide unqualified teachers basic guidance in delivering the subject. Out-of-area teaching is not impossible, but it certainly does place additional demands on to teachers who do not have resources or knowledge from past studies to draw on in order to inform their practice.

Out-of-area teaching is becoming more common as schools aim to fill vacancies to ensure that basic duty of care and student supervision requirements are met. I have previously mentioned that out-of-area teaching is currently occurring owing to unfilled vacancies within the school I work at. Our mathematics faculty is currently so short of staff that teachers are taking classes above their allocation as outlined in the award rather than have a non-mathematics trained teacher take them. Another instance in the school is one personal to me – I am currently sharing a Stage 5 English class with a beginning teacher trained in Japanese. This situation is very challenging because, even though they are a hard-working and competent teacher, they simply don't have the expertise to deliver the subject. I find myself planning all of the lessons, and planning them so that an untrained teacher new to the profession can deliver them without an unrealistic burden placed on them to learn the entirety of a new curriculum that bears very little resemblance to what they are trained in.

Merging classes

Merging classes has long been a strategy used to try and ensure continuity of learning for senior classes in particular. In my previous role as a head teacher of English, I regularly merged senior classes and at times had up to 70 students in a room when we could not find casual staff or could only employ staff who were not suitably trained to deliver Stage 6 English. A temporary vacancy was unfilled for the better part of a term and classes had to be continually collapsed, particularly for Years 11 and 12, to ensure some continuity of learning for students in the final

stage of their schooling. When I left this school in 2019 to take up my current position, an appropriately qualified teacher could not be found to replace me and my Year 12 class was collapsed and divided up among the other classes, meaning all Advanced English classes were over capacity.

The caps outlined in the award exist as much to manage teacher workload as they do to create an environment conducive to learning for students. The continuing need to merge and collapse classes compromises the quality of education that can be delivered as students obviously receive less one-to-one or small group support as class sizes become larger.

Minimal supervision

Minimal supervision is also frequently used at my current school when teachers of senior classes are away. While senior students will generally behave more responsibly, it does not necessarily follow that they will engage in work set by their absent teacher. I have minimally supervised senior classes regularly this year – on average, once a fortnight – and have faced the difficult choice between my class and the classes of colleagues that are delivering different English courses, meaning classes cannot be merged as students are learning different material. More supply of casual teachers would, at the very least, ensure continuous supervision and monitoring of students and their progress.

d) The *NSW Teacher Supply Strategy*

Having my aforementioned experience with the department's historical efforts to attract more teachers and alleviate shortages in particular subjects and regions, I am sceptical about some of the approaches outlined in the document and have serious concerns that this strategy is merely a repackaging of past initiatives that have not had the level of success required to authentically solve the teacher shortage problem.

Recruiting teachers from other jurisdictions

The first goal of the strategy is to "grow the overall supply of teachers" with the first intended measure listed to be recruiting interstate and internationally. The Federal Department of Education's modelling has indicated that teacher shortages are projected to worsen across all of Australia. Knowing this, every other state has the same strategy – poach trained teachers from other states. If everyone is using exactly the same strategy, I'm unsure how NSW will be the state to succeed with it given the cost of living and housing affordability issues that are so very pronounced here.

Teacher shortages are an issue across the developed world with the key nations we would look to for international recruits – the UK, New Zealand, Ireland, the US and Canada – all experiencing teacher shortages equal to if not more drastic than the situation we face in NSW. The stories across these nations closely echo the current situation in NSW– a lack of casual relief and temporary teachers to cover absences, declining numbers of new enrolments in teacher education courses, poor retention rates and shortages in subjects like mathematics. These nations' problems have also been ongoing. Late last year, Canadian schools were experiencing difficult in finding substitute teachers. In June this year, English schools were warning of "acute" teacher shortages and schools in New Zealand were sending students home due to a lack of teaching staff.

The other thing that these nations have in common with NSW is that their purported solutions are exactly the same as the ones proposed in the *NSW Teacher Supply* Strategy – bring Australian teachers working overseas home and attract talent interstate or internationally. The document may as well be called *The Entire Western World's Teacher Supply Strategy Because There's a Shortage Everywhere.* We are competing in a very crowded global market, fighting for a shrinking pool of individuals domestically and internationally. I am concerned that the proposed fast-tracking of visas for teachers, seemingly endorsed by the Albanese government, will do little to solve teacher shortages but do a lot to provide a convenient pathway into Australian for immigrants who would like to work in our more respected and lucrative industries.

Other nations with similar programs have also seen a reduction in the standards required for both domestically and international recruited teachers. Some states in the US are waiving requirements for teachers to have any formal training prior to entering the classroom, such as Florida's program to waive the requirement of qualifications for serving or ex-military personnel and their families, enabling them to enter the classroom without commencing university training. In the UK, standards are currently being relaxed for internationally-trained teachers. Given the amount of rhetoric about the necessity of high-quality training and constant reviews into our own initial teacher education programs, it seems somewhat counterintuitive to be so reliant on people trained in systems outside of our own. The strategy must not see a weakening of our own standards that currently-employed, successful teachers have had to meet in order to be part of this profession.

Incentives and scholarships

The *NSW Teacher Supply Strategy* also outlines a swathe of incentives, some of which are being increased or offered to a broader pool of potential and current teachers, in order to remedy the shortage. The key issue here is that such incentives have been offered since at least 2001 for TAS, science and mathematics teachers with other KLAs being added over the years, including English in 2002. Successive governments have invested public money in these programs for over twenty years with the aim of attracting more teachers to the profession and yet, we now find ourselves in the most acute shortage of teachers many of us can recall in our lifetimes.

As mentioned earlier in my submission, I was the recipient of one of those scholarships designed to fix a shortage of English teachers identified in 2008, and now, fourteen years later, the problem not only still exists, but has worsened. I posit that you can offer all the scholarships, incentives and 'sweeteners' to whoever you want – school leavers, university students or mid-career professionals – but what counts is what happens when people actually enter the profession. The figures provided in the department's annual reports are limited to how many scholarships have been awarded or how many teachers might have been placed. I believe that more detailed data needs to be made available to the education community at a minimum to prove that the benefit of scholarships is long-term and sustainable. I have not been able to locate any data demonstrating how long scholarship holders remain in the public education system, where they are geographically located, how quickly they move on from the school they are permanently appointed to, what proportion of scholarship holders break their deeds of agreement and pay back scholarship funds within the contracted time period, and whether scholarship recipients are remaining in the classroom or moving into executive and senior executive positions in schools.

Without this data being presented and evaluated, it is difficult to have a robust discussion about whether or not the next round of scholarships being offered will actually make a significant difference to the teacher shortage. A comprehensive and independent examination of all scholarship programs must be undertaken and the department should be compelled to provide evidence that the investment made into individuals awarded scholarships provides long-term benefits to schools and overall teacher supply.

e) Teaching workforce conditions

Teacher shortages have resulted in a significant decline in morale and the quality of the workplace environment for those who continue to work in the profession. If schools cannot locate enough teachers or enough appropriately qualified teachers, then naturally workloads increase for those who are already employed within that school, and there is little to no compensation, in-kind or otherwise, offered to those who are compelled to paper over the teacher shortage crack. Every teacher I know is having to plan additional lessons or teach additional classes on a regular basis, resulting in the loss of planning and preparation time.

Education, not administration

Workforce conditions are a driver of the teacher shortage, especially in public schools. The administration burden imposed on classroom teachers by organisations like the department and NESA results in educators frequently feeling as though they spend more time documenting and evaluating what they have taught rather than actually preparing for teaching or delivering lessons. The department claims that it has "cleared the decks" this year so teachers can focus on their classroom practice and school executives can concentrate on nurturing and leading their staff, but the measures implemented have afforded little real time-saving payoff for the average teacher, save for the fact that a Performance and Development Plan (PDP) was not required for every teacher in every school until the second half of this year when ordinarily it would be written in consultation with a staff member's supervisor at the beginning of the school year. That saved all teachers a precious couple of hours in the first semester of 2022 that then they had to find time for in the second semester of 2022.

The other measures that would supposedly free up time for schools, such as deferring the need to meet department-mandated targets, activities around school planning and external validation, and "decreasing the number of surveys distributed to schools" (a ridiculous suggestion of a time-saving mechanism – imagine having such a small barrel to scrape that's the best you can come up with to save your staff time) are things that don't apply to every school every year in the case of external validation, or have still continued in some fashion or another in most schools because there is an acute awareness that a snowball effect may come to be. Certain activities or initiatives might be paused by the department for now, but when they return the workload will be so immediate and significant that schools are better off continuing to try and do what they can to prevent these requirements becoming too intense in too short a period of time in the future.

The average teacher is bogged-down in compliance-based work that eats away at time for preparing teaching and learning such as monitoring the delivery of HSC subjects on a per-teacher basis instead of per subject or per faculty, completing convoluted and ever-changing risk assessments for daily activities and excursions, completing an increased number of mandatory training modules, tracking accreditation requirements, and analysing student data

from a host of standardised tests that teachers have very little hope of ever authentically embedding in their teaching and learning practice because their classes are getting larger, support for curriculum delivery is hard to access and time does not permit them to continually re-develop their teaching materials and resources for every one of the hundreds of children they teach each day in the case of high school teachers. If the department wanted to take meaningful action on workplace conditions, this is the kind of practical support they'd offer to make the job more about what the title is – teaching – and less about what makes bureaucrats look effective – administration.

The *Inclusive, Engaging and Respectful School* policy

The advent of the *Inclusive, Engaging and Respectful Schools* (*IER*) policy cannot be ignored against this backdrop. While teachers are completing huge chunks of their core business – lesson preparation, marking and reporting on student achievement – in their own time, the department's idea of support is to add more administrative work to managing student behaviour, one of the most complex aspects of the job. There is an enormous lack of support for schools catering to students with complex needs, including behavioural issues and challenges relating to childhood trauma. Many of the department's solutions, such as policy change or new professional learning, seem to operate on the assumption that teachers have five or ten children in a classroom and not thirty such is the intricate, time-consuming and individualised approach that these edicts require.

To ensure that teachers have safe working conditions, the department must scrap *IER* immediately and engage authentically with educators and their school communities to develop effective methods of supporting high-needs students and students who demonstrate behaviour that infringes on the rights of and endangers the safety of others. A key contributor to the teacher shortage, in my opinion, is the perceived powerlessness that teachers have to take action on poor student behaviour and how policies like *IER* amplify that perception. There is a stunning hypocrisy in "clearing the decks" and trying to minimise workload, and then releasing entirely new procedures and processes for managing students with only a term's notice.

The paycheque-shaped elephant in the room

There is, of course, one workplace condition that the department and many of the submissions you will receive will studiously do everything to avoid. At one of the recent teachers strikes, a man on the street asked me what our strike was about. I explained that we were experiencing a severe shortage of teachers and it was impacting our students. He said, and I quote, "why do you reckon that is? Do you think they don't pay teachers enough to deal with the little shits?" His question is a pertinent one. When one examines teaching on paper and sees the potential for a six-figure salary within a decade, a purported twelve weeks' holiday a year and a supposed workday that spans from 8:30am to 3:30pm, the question that needs to be asked is: why isn't there an enormous oversupply of teachers if the workplace conditions are so attractive and the remuneration so generous given the nature of the work?

Clearly the workplace conditions of teachers need to be to genuinely addressed in order to solve the teacher shortage, including the vexed issue of pay. Many of the perceived competitive advantages the teaching profession once had are being eroded by the workplace conditions increasingly offered in other professions, particularly those where flexible work practices such as part-time work or working from home are more common and/or feasible. If we hope to

attract high quality candidates to work in frontline professions, they must be compensated for the fact that their workplace operates in a highly specific way and these benefits will seldom be available to them.

h) The impact of workplace mandates

This is a very simple matter to address. While COVID-19 vaccination mandates have undoubtedly led to teachers being dismissed and positions being vacant, this submission has already presented a wealth of information indicating that teacher shortages are a historical issue. Internal department documents from 2019 – before the pandemic even began – demonstrated that an acute teacher shortage was imminent. To blame COVID-19 vaccination mandates for the teacher shortage is short-sighted and misinformed at best and a disingenuous tactic being employed by interest groups to make their views appear legitimate at worst. It may have added to the problem in a small way, but teacher shortages have been a reality in NSW public schools for quite some time.

i) The status of the teaching profession

The NSW Teacher Supply Strategy acknowledges that teaching essentially has an image problem in NSW. It outlines that there is research being carried out to determine "how we can make teaching more attractive and underpin campaigns to promote the teaching profession and attract the teachers we need to high-demand areas" (p. 8). There are two issues at hand here. The first is that window-dressing with marketing campaigns and feel-good slogans isn't going to drive the kind of change needed in the status of the profession and therefore teacher supply, and the second is that this research has already been done, but it would seem the conclusions reached by that research run contrary to the ideology that has guided decisions around education in this state for decades.

The warm-and-fuzzy of teaching, the 'noble profession'

Teaching has long been advertised as a noble and fulfilling profession, offering would-be educators the chance to shape young minds and secure the future of our state and nation. While this is certainly my experience of the profession, and one of the reasons I am trying so very hard to hang on, the simple fact is that if we want teaching to be a high-status profession, it has to be funded and remunerated as one. A teacher can't take an envelope full of joy down to the bank to pay their mortgage or a box of personal fulfillment to the grocery store to exchange for their weekly supplies. If we could, we'd be very financially rich indeed.

A sense of purpose or meaning in one's work is in no way a substitute for pay and reasonable working conditions, and to continually sell this message is to continually tell would-be and current teachers that their happiness in the job should be enough payment, their inability to afford to live where they teach and the need to spend their own income on additional supplies for work be damned. The rhetoric is that the work somehow transcends a 'job' but at the end of the day, that is precisely what it is in terms of the labour market and attracting talent – it's a job, among thousands of other jobs, and one that needs to remain competitive with other university-educated fields. If we see the wages of teachers as a kind of status price signal, then the message is clear – both the government and society have no interest in seeing you be as important as engineering, law, economics or business, because you don't earn the same as people in those fields.

Political rhetoric of teaching

The second component of the status of the teaching profession is that while, on the one hand, we have governments running campaigns about the promise and fulfillment of teaching while they continually degrade current teachers on the other. The public message is, frankly, confusing and contradictory. Teachers have become the 'fall guy' for the failings of the education system, and governments cling on to this to avoid any accountability for the fact that they run and fund the system and if there is a problem with it, they are ultimately responsible. A world-first study by Associate Profession Nicole Mockler of the University of Sydney published just weeks ago found that discussion of teachers in the media is overwhelming negative with a fixation on the notion of "teacher quality" Mockler outlines why this is a problem clearly: "It puts the emphasis on the purported deficiencies of individual teachers rather than on collective capacity to improve teaching. It detracts from system quality - the systemic problems within our education system. "Teacher quality" is a way for politicians to place the blame elsewhere when they should be committing to addressing the root cause of these problems: inadequate and inequitable funding, excessive teacher workload, unreasonable administrative loads, or teachers being required to work out of their field of expertise."

Two narratives have been established about teaching and its status in our public discourse, and somehow governments are now acting as though they are surprised that no one wants to be a teacher when their marketing campaigns – which obviously have a lot less cut-through than media headlines about "teacher quality" – don't succeed in attracting sufficient staff to teach in schools. If the government is so determined to fix the teacher shortage, its first step should be to respect the staff that are already part of the profession rather than using them as a political tool to absolve themselves of responsibility for their systemic failings.

o) The approval to teach process in NSW

Theoretically, the gatekeeper of who can teach in any NSW school is NESA. Teachers must seek accreditation with NESA in order to be employed in any NSW school and meet NESA's requirements as to sufficient university study to teach in specific KLAs. A extra layer of approvals instituted by both public and private schooling systems then decides who is able to teach in government or non-government schools. The question this raises to me is: if NESA's processes aren't enough to provide information about who should teach in a public or private school, then why does NESA exist in the first place?

Approvals for new teachers

This multi-layered system of approvals is confusing and time-consuming for those navigating it. The systems are not effectively interlinked, meaning that teaching candidates need to submit the same information and documentation to both NESA and their teaching system of choice. There is a significant amount of unnecessary duplication as a result of this. For example, teachers must send their university transcripts to NESA to achieve provisional accreditation and have their teaching subjects confirmed, yet the department also requests these transcripts to ensure teachers have completed sufficient study in their subject area(s) to be accredited to teach those subjects in the department. This continual verification of the same information by different bodies indicates that there is a serious disconnect between the accrediting body and the employing body, and this should be remedied in order to make the approvals process easier for teaching candidates.

Approvals for promotion positions

There are also separate approvals processes for head teacher positions, particularly for KLA head teachers who must have a university major in a relevant subject area to that faculty. In an eighteen-month period, I had to send my university transcript to the department's HR teams four times before my eligibility to be a Head Teacher English was permanently added to my staffing profile. This is information that could be recorded on staff profiles as their transcripts are verified upon entry to the profession. At the time it was finally added to my profile permanently, I was on the eligibility list for a Head Teacher English job following a merit selection process which required me to send my university transcript for verification, yet HR requested I send it again. To me, this is an indicator of serious inefficiencies in the management of staff information and the general administration of the approvals and HR processes within the department. There is a lot of opportunity for better information exchange and streamlining of approvals processes, making it easier for qualified individuals to gain their approval to teach and approval to fill executive positions.

(p) the impact of casualisation, temporary contracts and job insecurity and (q) the measurement of staff turnover particularly in regard to temporary staff

These issues are intrinsically linked and must be analysed together. A graduate is generally not able to apply for a permanent classroom teacher position via open merit selection because the criteria are such that someone without substantial experience cannot adequately respond to them, meaning that many must work casually and on temporary contracts before they are even in a position to be competitive in a merit selection process. Meanwhile, some teachers are appointed to 'targeted graduate' positions that do not have clear and transparent criteria, meaning trainee teachers cannot be sure as to how they can gain one of these coveted permanent appointments. Some teachers are blessed with job security early in their careers, whereas others are consigned to long-term temporary employment, creating conflict and resentment in staffrooms around the state.

Part of the problem is job insecurity and part of it is ongoing job security for the mostly older teachers that hold permanent positions. The very generous availability of secondments and leave without pay mean that teachers can be on leave for three years, and at principal discretion more, without relinquishing their permanent position. This has a significant impact on the availability of permanent work, particularly with numbers of non-school based teachers and officers deployed to NESA increasing. Teachers can substantively occupy permanent positions they have no intention of returning to for long periods of time, meaning they are backfilled for years or even decades by a temporarily contracted teacher. This is somewhat understandable given that if a teacher resigns from a position within a school, they technically resign from the department and their approval to teach is no longer valid, meaning they lose all accumulated entitlements including long-service leave. More permanent work could become available and therefore better secure teacher supply through modernising aspects of the industrial system such as this.

Better workforce data needs to be recorded and shared in order for the true nature of the teacher shortage to be understood. It is known that turnover of temporary and casual staff is not effectively measured, making it hard to judge exactly how many teachers leave the profession each year. There is essentially no job to separate or resign from, so the loss of casual and temporary teachers is not well-tracked. Another piece of workforce data that is not effectively

monitored, or not in a way that is made public, is the number of teachers working in temporary higher duties positions. This is essential for the provision of targeted professional development to support teachers in developing the right skills and knowledge to meet the enormous demands of school leadership. Better data on all types of temporary employment must be gathered and made available to truly understand the teacher shortage.

Conclusion

I know that my submission must paint a grim picture of what is currently happening in NSW public schools. I point out so many negatives, so many shortcomings and so many problems to be solved because I care deeply about what is at stake.

The work I do is in many ways both life-defining and life-affirming. I chose this profession initially because, as a young person finishing high school in the thick of the Global Financial Crisis, a teaching scholarship offered financial support and certainty I needed being from a low-socioeconomic home. Now, after I have more than paid my debt back to the department, I stay because I love this profession, I love its people, and I love working with my students and seeing them grow, thrive and learn. I became a middle leader in schools because I am endlessly fascinated by makes schools tick and what makes teachers succeed, and I hope to be a small part of that to the school I work in and the staff I work alongside.

This industry has run on its employees' goodwill for far too long, and now we find ourselves in a situation where there are not enough staff with enough goodwill left. We are in profound need for strategic, evidence-based reform – and we haven't a moment to lose. We've seen the numbers, and we know we just don't have enough teachers in too many places. To save our system, the issues outlined in this submission need to be rapidly fixed.

I have written this submission because, as a committed teacher and school leader, I feel I must take responsibility for sounding the alarm to decision-makers who can influence course we follow from this point on. I must speak on behalf of all of my colleagues who are too crushed under the weight of their work responsibilities to formulate a coherent submission, who are too time-poor to do the research, who are so burnt out they have already left and want nothing more to do with the profession. Our collective future depends in large part on the outcomes of inquiries like this, and I implore all members of the committee to authentically engage with teachers in order to improve the situation and alleviate the dire teacher shortage.

I thank you for consideration of this submission and, being ever the optimist, hope that change will swiftly follow.