

**Submission
No 251**

INQUIRY INTO TEACHER SHORTAGES IN NEW SOUTH WALES

Name: Mr Noel Beddoe

Date Received: 29 August 2022

CHANGES TO THE EMPLOYMENT CONDITIONS OF THE PUBLIC SCHOOL TEACHERS OF NEW SOUTH WALES.

Over THE past fifty or so years the employment conditions of teachers in the public schools of New South Wales have changed massively. Some of those changes were inevitable – the availability of units in The State Superannuation Scheme, for example, could not be continued due to the massive increase of life expectancy of pension holders. Whether the products of necessity or the arrogant ignorance of massively naïve people, each of the changes has made employment as a public school teacher significantly less attractive. The crisis of teacher supply which now we face results from the implementation of these changes without any additions being made to counter the loss of competitiveness of the education industry as an employer. Below are some of the changes, with some reference to how, as an example, earlier provisions affected my career.

1. The abandonment of tertiary scholarships for trainee teachers.

I lived until I was five in a one bedroom house in a paddock with my mother, father, brother, grandmother, uncle, aunt and five cousins. For some periods another uncle and aunt and two more cousins moved in with us. We moved when I was five into a Housing Commission house in Seven Hills where I lived until I was twenty two when I went to Bulli High School to teach English and history. When my father died he left goods to the value of six hundred dollars. It cost nine hundred dollars to bury him. In 1961 I worked as an advertising copy writer and paid “board” at home of three pounds a week. I took up a trainee teacher’s scholarship to attend Sydney University in 1961. My scholarship paid four pounds ten shillings a week; I paid three pounds a week of that to my parents in “board”. As it was, I became the first person in the extensive seven Hills Housing Commission community to be awarded a university degree. Had the provision of s scholarship which paid all of my university fees and a small living allowance not existed I could never have become a teacher. Recently I attended the showing of the Jeffrey Smart exhibition at The Australian National Gallery. With me were my wife Vivienne, who had a prolonged and distinguished career as a senior teacher of English, history and Aboriginal Studies and served for eight years as Supervisor of Marking of Aboriginal Studies at the HSC, and David Funnell, a former science teacher, head teacher of science and highly regarded inspector of schools on the state’s north coast. We agreed – had the teacher training program that recruited us not existed none of us could have become a teacher; David thought he might have taken a clerical job; Vivienne would have gone to a secretarial school. I maybe would have become a policeman.

It is nonsense to suggest that we have a shortage of young people who would value a teaching career. They exist in their thousands in the humble working class families of the state, probably living in rented accommodation; this has always been the greatest source of our public teaching service. In my more than forty years of working in schools it was rare for me to encounter a colleague who had what might be described as a middle class background. Teaching was a step up, a source of social mobility for most of us. The neoliberal belief that “the market” could be relied on to supply the mass of our teachers was the naïve hope of people who had never sent their children to public schools, worked in public schools nor attended public schools themselves. Here we find ourselves.

2. The requirement that all teachers be four-year trained.

This well-intended reform linked to the first point. When I started eighty per cent of the teaching service was two-year trained. At Bulli High School, my first appointment, one third of the staff had university degrees. Many teachers on staff recorded that they could delay gaining a wage (though their payments were pretty meagre) for two years; four years was out of the question. A concomitant of the situation was that many teachers in those days were pursuing university studies part time. Obviously they gained satisfaction from their progress through their degrees and the increases in salary and status that went with that progress. Had four years of training been required then, with the massive debts that these days accompany study, we couldn't have staffed the schools at that time.

3. The closing of The State Superannuation Scheme to new unit holders in 1984. Vivienne resigned from permanent teaching in 2000. I did in 2003. Since then, between us, we've received something in excess of two million dollars in State Superannuation Scheme payments. Our entitlements remain, tax free, indexed for inflation. I guess we've got maybe another decade – well over a million bucks – to go. Our contributions to the scheme, between us was maybe a bit over a hundred thousand dollars, spread over forty years. Our employer contributed twice as much as a part of our salary package. A few of us recently tried to evaluate what current employees would have to be earning to supply their old age to the level that ours is provided. We agreed for a high school principal the salary package would have to be well over four hundred thousand dollars a year – current principals are paupers by comparison with the provision made for school leaders of my era. I'm not sure if this fact affects recruitment – I didn't think about superannuation much when I was a young man; when colleagues moaned about their salaries they commonly gave no weight to the fact of their superannuation entitlements. The scheme certainly had a massive impact on retention. By the time we were into our forties and receiving offers from other employers the inability of others to match the superannuation provisions weighed very heavily in the decisions of many of us to remain where we were.

4. The disbanding of the inspectorate.

We received our Teachers' Certificates as the result of an inspection by a senior out-of-school figure, in my case George Conomy, later an Assistant Director General. I took a first list inspection after my fourth year of teaching. Inspectors were experienced people who moved between schools, noting the promising, acting as agents for the exchange of practise between schools, giving encouragement and also advice for improvement, acting as agents to create sophistication as to opportunities that existed outside schools. It seems to me that most teachers to-day operate entirely within the culture of the particular school that employs them, that we have lost the sense and the advantages of being a part of a massive system with all sorts of approaches and opportunities existing. In my experience, the only person in the school the school director speaks to these days is the principal. The inspectorate also provided the elements of school supervision that these days are provided by people endlessly filling in forms. I'm told that the process which creates people to-day as master teachers, whatever the term is, has created a grand total of 187 in a work force of over sixty thousand. Decades ago, if such a provision had existed, an inspector would have turned up, watched some work, spoken to colleagues and made a judgement. In 1970 no appropriately-credentialed teacher was willing to take up the position of head teacher English and history at Narrandera High School. The inspector doing the staffing operation at Bridge Street was aware that I was supposed to have gone pretty well at a List One inspection that year and I was invited to go to

Narrandera in a relieving capacity. To-day, if there was a promising young teacher who might be wooed to a relieving position, who would know?

5. The removal of seniority and transfer rights.

Once we staffed the unfavoured areas by giving career advancement to those who took the jobs under a system of seniority. When the Schools Renewal havoc was being created I was secretary of the Riverina Branch of The Secondary Principals Council and, on behalf of that body, I wrote that the disbanding of seniority lists would mean that, if the unfavoured areas were going to retain staffing levels there would need to be massive increases in salaries for those places. No such step was taken. Here we find ourselves. And, of course, seniority and transfer rights provided very pleasant control over careers for those who had no interest in promotion. A massive attraction of teaching in public schools was that you could plan confidently to live wherever in the state appealed to you; a common habit was the purchase of a block of land in a coastal area once the home mortgage was paid, the building of a holiday home and then the acceptance of transfer in the later years of work so as to establish contacts in the retirement venue ahead of “the days of freedom”. It seems to me to-day that most young teachers have no sense of the unfolding of a decades-long career with entitlements increasing with the passage of time. We had that sense. It was very nice.

6. The creation of child protection procedures.

I once gave my traditional dressing-down to a boy who had behaved arrogantly to a young teacher. He went next door and complained to my deputy that I had hit him. I directed the deputy at once to make contact with district office in writing to report this accusation; as it happened, I hadn't hit him but if it had come to light that the deputy had heard the suggestion and not reported it then the deputy would have faced charges. A poor old chief education officer was sent out to investigate me. I arranged to have union representation present for the interview as a model to other members of staff as to how to react. There was no evidence to support the charge (pretty inevitable; it's hard to prove a thing that didn't happen). If I still have any record at a central level the fact of that charge will be recorded against my name with some statement like “Insufficient evidence to support” written next to it. That's the best you're going to get. Once a naughty boy would have been sent to the head teacher with a note and would have been caned : that would have been that. Now we have students' files, teachers spend hours writing incident reports. I once was called to the kitchens of a high school where, unprovoked, a male student had lifted a stool, thrown it at the teacher (a pleasant lady in her fifties) and knocked her to the ground. My response to that, involving union meetings, attempts (unsuccessful) to interview the boy's parents, meetings at district office, negotiations with the leadership of a nearby school resulted in my being investigated by district office, by the minister's office, and, ultimately by the ombudsman; this last exercise lasted for fifteen months. I received no assistance from any Departmental office nor my union. I spend most Sundays at work responding to the latest lot of complaints about my conduct from the ombudsman. In the end the ombudsman decided that I wasn't such a bad fellow after all and my decisions were left stand. Fifty years ago, the assault of a teacher in this way would have been unthinkable. Should one have occurred the boy involved would have been caned and told to leave and not come back. A distant age. The most common complaint under child protection is by a group of girls against a female teacher asserting Lesbian advances. I have no doubt but

that I have seen such charges made as a group effort to harm the career of a poor woman who was targeted for no other reason than the setting of high standards.

7. The existence of promotion selection panels.

In the days of inspections and promotions lists teachers were not in competition with each other. If you were senior to me on promotion list, that was that, accepted. New achievers of leadership positions were, generally, accepted as having valid claims. The fact that people moved around their home towns, or in some cases the state bringing successful strategies from other places was accepted and welcomed. To-day it is not uncommon for the creation of selection panels to become battle grounds for the teams of aspirants to a position. Outcomes are queried. Submitted materials might be a fair reflection of a candidate's work, a considerable exaggeration or a pack of lies. I have seen people win quite senior positions having claimed to do things which not only they had not done but which they had actively resisted. Where once inspections were occasions of group support and, hopefully, celebration the fact of the panels are too often the occasions of the damaging of relationships, the creation of resentments that never heal.

SO

These were changes made directly to the processes and provisions that affect teachers in New South Wales, my list. Other folk may have different lists. And, way back when things were so different, schools were difficult to staff. To these decisions can be added broader social movements which have impacted many areas of society, school staffing included. They include the cost of housing (I think of a person who retired from a classroom teaching job in the 1960s owning a pleasant three bedroom house near Parramatta – difficult to imagine achieving that to-day); the creation of an underclass of violent, dislocated youth – last year I accompanied a teacher from Walgett to a meeting at The New South Wales Teachers Federation; the officer to whom we spoke reported that she gets upward of twenty reports a day a teachers being assaulted in schools. Of course, police, nurses, ambulance drivers of all people also report attacks by members of the public. Meanwhile the range of jobs available in our society has expanded exponentially in recent years, particularly for women, who no longer must choose between nursing, teaching and secretarial duties for a career.

Meanwhile we face this situation – KPMG recently put the size of Australia's GDP at twelfth highest in all the world : by the middle of the century it will be 28th. Highest will be China, second the USA, third India, fourth Indonesia, from whom we already import our Toyotas, televisions and computers. The schools of Asian nations are well-staffed and their educational outcomes continue to rise.

It's just as well, isn't it, that education in Australia is being led by such insightful people.

Noel Beddoe June 2022.