

House of Representatives

Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training

Status of the Teaching Profession

Submission

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Increasing the attractiveness of the profession for teachers and principals, including workplace conditions, and career and leadership structures.

To deliver high quality education, the Department of Education must attract, develop, and retain effective teachers.

There are several factors that would increase the attractiveness for teachers – increased compensation, reduced workload, more support for teachers and professional development, less data collection and reporting as well as better public respect for teachers.

One of the main ways to increase demand for teachers is to improve the remuneration of teachers. As a teacher whose teaching load primarily comprises senior students, in my many discussions with young people, they are deciding against teaching as a career because of its perceived status, its increased workload and salary plateau at a low level relative to other professions. Some of these students would make excellent teachers but the reality of pay and conditions are turning them away.

Increases in teachers' pay do not appear to have kept pace with those in other professions. Since 1995, there has been no increase in the average real salaries of Australia's more experienced teachers. In 2018 the starting salary is \$67,248 for a five years trained teacher. If we are to improve student outcomes we need to invest long term to make the teaching profession as strong and attractive as in countries like Finland and Singapore, where salaries for teachers compare favourably with those in other professions. The private schools are also offering more attractive salaries and over the last few years we have lost many good teachers both casual and permanent to the private system.

Teacher workload has increased significantly over the last few years with large increases in policies and procedures, government initiatives, data collection, reporting, new syllabuses, NAPLAN and now Minimum Standards Testing, all of which are diverting teachers from activities of direct benefit to students and in some cases taking teachers away from their classes. The SAP management system is additional work and in some cases requires 50% more time to complete tasks than previous required. In particular casual pay worksheets are unwieldy, poorly designed and time consuming.

*'While nearly 90 per cent (87.2) said their hours had increased, almost 95 per cent (94.9) also said that their work had become more complex and more than 95 per cent (95.1) said that the range of their work related activities had increased.
More than 96 per cent (96.4) said there had been an increase in the collection, analysis and reporting of data and more than 97 per cent (97.3) reported an increase in administrative tasks.'*
University of Sydney 2018

<https://sydney.edu.au/news-opinion/news/2018/05/07/teachers-suffer-from--unsustainable--administrative-demands--fin.html>

'While most people expect to work a 38-hour full-time week, our public school teachers are working far more. In fact, teachers are working an average of 54 hours per week (43 hours at school and 11 hours at home) due to the increasing administrative demands on them to meet compliance standards. New research shows NSW teachers working long hours to cope with administrative load.'

July 9, 2018 The Conversation

As a Head Teacher Administration I start work at 6.00am and try to leave work by 4.00pm, often taking work home with me. I rarely stop for morning tea or lunch as I am working on administration or working with students. So my working week is roughly 50 hours plus additional hours at home. Teachers simply do not have the time to take on any additional work.

Public respect for teachers is also very poor and such derogatory rhetoric is disappointingly led by those who would seek to represent the Australian people, as seen when the Wentworth Liberal candidate Dave Sharma recently asserted that teachers work "three-quarters of a regular full-time job". Teachers are constantly in the news and constantly criticised for the poor results of students; conversely, very rarely is there a positive story about teachers. As teachers we are given a great responsibility to help children grow through learning and to help shape them as they progress from children to young adults but despite this level of responsibility we are not treated with the same respect as other professionals. Greater professional respect and the ability to use professional judgement would certainly increase the attractiveness of the teaching profession.

The last area is the current status of teachers; I have recently gained the status of 'Proficient Teacher'. I have been teaching for over 30 years, achieved a Head Teacher position, received an award for being an 'Outstanding Teacher' and additionally have had students achieve 1st, 4th, 6th & 8th in the NSW HSC in my subject area. Over and above my teaching duties, I coached my school baseball team to win the Combined High School State Sports Association State Final, receiving the schools only gold medal for CHS Sport. Yet I am deemed 'proficient', the same as a teacher with two to three years' teaching experience. This to me is one of the biggest insults as everything I have done for public education over the last 30 years is reduced to 'proficient', the same level as a novice teacher!

Provision of appropriate support platforms for teachers, including human and IT resources.

As a Head Teacher Administration overseeing NAPLAN and now Minimum Standards Testing, additional administrative support would be welcomed. My involvement in these tests take me away from my classes; I have three Year 12 classes for 2019 whose learning will adversely affected by my absence due to administrative reasons. My single focus as a teacher should be in class teaching my students to the best of my ability and not arranging tests and collecting data.

Providing teachers with greater administrative support to help with general administrative tasks would be a highly effective measure, such as typing, printing and basic marking.

Identifying ways in which the burden of out-of-hours, at-home work can be reduced.

Because of the added workload teachers are spending more time at home because they do not get the necessary time at school to complete all the required tasks. On average, teachers are in front of their classes five periods out of six. It takes no stretch of the imagination to comprehend that a singular fifty minute period will be grossly inadequate to plan, prepare and assess the work of those five classes.

Staff could be encouraged to focus more on a common approach to lessons but here we encounter another obstacle in teacher time: there must be time during the day when teachers can professionally collaborate to prepare common lessons that are both challenging and interesting. Most of this lesson preparation is done at home without the collaboration of other teachers and this is to the detriment of the profession.

There is a need for less written feedback and more verbal feedback would also be an effective measure. Written feedback should only given where it is needed, especially considering that report writing also takes up significant amount of home time.

Investigating ways to increase retention rates for the teaching profession, and avoid 'burn out' among early-career teachers.

As Head Teacher Administration one of my many jobs is to employ day to day casual teachers as well as long term temporary teachers. Over the past few years many of the casual teachers have sought jobs elsewhere or retrained into other professions. Teachers are leaving the profession in significant numbers — the latest figures from the Australian Bureau of Statistics suggest 53 per cent of people who hold a teaching degree do not currently work in education. Meanwhile I struggle most days to employ enough teachers to cover colleagues' classes.

Research conducted by the Australian Government in 2014 estimates that 20 per cent of education graduates do not register as teachers on graduating, meaning many teachers are leaving before they have even started.

A high quality induction and mentoring program would certainly help the retention rate of young teachers. One of the most beneficial things to support staff is shadowing teacher mentors and also teacher mentors shadowing teachers. They can give constructive, supportive feedback on practice. In the process of helping new teachers survive, thrive, and grow professionally is essential. But experienced teachers simply do not have the time to do this properly because of overwhelming workload requirements.

Young teachers need as much support as we can offer and a lack of mentoring from more experienced teachers is one of the biggest problems affecting young teachers.

Professor Robyn Ewing from the University of Sydney says, "A well-mentored new teacher is three times more likely to stay in the game." But again, time is needed for experienced teachers

to mentor new scheme teachers. More and more is required from teachers but nothing is ever taken away or reduced.

Another area would be to create better working conditions. Schools must promote a positive school culture where students and staff feel safe, trusted and respected. Some basic improvements in facilities like toilets and kitchen areas would go a long way in schools.

My final concern is the timing for submissions to the parliamentary enquiry. This would have to be the busiest time of year for teachers with marking, report writing and checking, organising award nights and preparing to roll over the school to the new year. Asking already burdened teachers to cogently and coherently compile a useful submission is a considerable demand at this time of the year.

For decades researchers and teachers have cited heavy workloads, poor salary, classroom management issues, lack of support as well as public respect as the main reasons for why teachers leave the profession.

Failing to recognise these issues will ensure we will continue to lose the teachers we need most.