

Submission to Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training

Status of the Teaching Profession

Outcomes:

1. Increasing the attractiveness of the profession for teachers and principals, including workplace conditions, and career and leadership structures.
2. Provision of appropriate support platforms for teachers, including human and IT resources.
3. Identifying ways in which the burden of out-of-hours, at-home work can be reduced.
4. Investigating ways to increase retention rates for the teaching profession, and avoid 'burn out' among early-career teachers.

Background / Issues to Raise:

I will first identify background issues from my personal experience which are directly affect the above outcomes.

Teaching today, as always, is comprised of two key factors:

1. The care of children. This encompasses wellbeing and creating a safe environment, which necessarily involves knowing students well and having the time to meet their personal needs.
2. Dynamic and innovative education. While definitions may change, more and more is certainly expected of schools in terms of the experiences which students take as we prepare them for life beyond the classroom.

I would like to reference the International Baccalaureate's ATL (Approaches to Learning) skills: **Thinking skills (including critical thinking), Communication Skills, Self-Management Skills, Research Skills, and Social Skills** as well as their learner profile: reflective, open-minded, principled, balanced, communicator, caring, thinker, risk-taker, inquirer, knowledgeable.

While they are not from the NSW DoE syllabus I think they sum up exactly what we are looking to have our graduates do and be, separate from content in syllabuses. I have heard similar terms used constantly in syllabuses and training from the DoE.

Additionally, we need to be masters ourselves in our learning areas and constantly update our knowledge / maintain our technical skills. Cross-curricular learning is a new buzzword to also consider.

How do teachers prepare engaging lessons that can allow students to succeed?

It is clear that teaching content from a textbook is not going to prepare our learners to meet the above skills and learner profiles.

A teacher who is going to constantly provide engaging lessons which do not just allow students to learn content but also acquire skills, both social as well as technical, will need the time and 'head space' every day to prepare. As teachers become more experienced and their efficacy increases they are able to refine and deliver learning activities with higher efficacy.

However, the welfare needs (point 1 above) also need to be taken into account. Each teacher, every day should get to know the needs of their individual learners, who change from year to year, and be able to adapt the lessons accordingly. This is something for which we truly do require 'head space' and planning time every day to ensure happens.

The reality

Teachers enjoy a range of support within schools, be it from the print room, admin staff, or welfare team. There are many excellent systems in place and I would say that most teachers are well aware of 'best practice' and when they achieve it they see changes.

I teach at a high school with 4x75 minute periods per day, as well as roll call. Within a week, I can expect to have 4 free periods. This is an average of 60 free minutes a day outside class time. We receive 70 minutes of break time a day, although we have recess / lunch duties and time is spent moving between classrooms and staffrooms and preparing for the next lesson, which inevitably cannot be done within lesson time.

I could now quote many articles that compare Australia to the OECD average including average working hours, administration or management, and class sizes. I have personally taught in Japanese public schools as a licensed school teacher and I can see many advantages of the Australian school system in comparison, as well as many differences.

However, I think the best thing is to share my personal experience – that every day, I spend 20+ minutes on email, 20 minutes talking to colleagues about various matters, including collaborative planning, and 30+ preparing physical resources for lessons outside of class time. That 60 minutes of 'free time' has disappeared, and does not count the innumerable tasks including grading of student work which cannot occur during lesson time. Or students who come to seek our time and advice outside of their lesson times.

We have no time to look at the children in our care and provide the best learning for them.

In particular – admin tasks

However, the reality is that administration tasks grow yearly for teachers. From this term in NSW schools (Dec 2018), we are now required to process our own receipts for faculty purchases through an online system.

We scan past assessment tasks, we keep logs of HSC student work as well as 3 samples per task for all grades. We input report marks, but also create the online markbook, decide the weightings, and indeed plan the assessment schedules. We plan excursions, write risk assessments, and collect and confirm payments.

We are drowning under a mountain of paperwork that inevitably happens outside of lesson time and does nothing but lower the quality of our in-class time. And if we think we have it bad, our head teachers and executive staff spend their evenings and weekends sifting through emails and creating more pieces of paper.

The fact that teachers are being asked to input and process receipts is a slap in the face from the attitude of economic pragmatism that has taken over our system. Of course it is simpler to ask the classroom teacher, who created the activity and supervises it, to process payments. But it is an admin task that a support staff member could easily do for us.

I have not attempted to list the amount of things that I do everyday as a teacher. If we are expected to complete all of these tasks then we need less classroom hours to give us back the time required. But is this really the best approach?

The question

The question this committee most dearly needs to consider is the following:

What should teachers be focused on when they enter the workplace?

- 1) The needs of the students in front of them and how best to meet them through their teaching practice
- 2) Checking their emails, processing receipts, inputting results and being 'accountable' through constant recording of student data.

Inevitably, we have all moved to 2).

Addressing the Outcomes

I believe the above provides a good background and paradigm for which to view the original outcomes for this committee:

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

I believe that the teaching profession initially is becoming more and more attractive as a stable and rewarding profession.

However, many potential teachers see that there are not enough structures to allow teachers to fulfil their students welfare needs as a school and create safe learning environments. This discourages potential teachers from 'going for the job' as they do not believe they will have adequate support.

I believe myself to be an efficacious teacher – I have reached the 'top' of the ordinary pay scale at age 30, and could potentially consider head teaching opportunities as they came up. However, schools are finding it harder and harder to resource middle and upper management positions, as teachers are aware that the demands of the job are unrealistic.

Perhaps even classroom teachers may spend their weekends planning lessons and collaborating, but this at least brings reward when we see the results in our students. Our management and exec staff are buried under mountains of unrealistic administrative expectations and are tied to their PCs all weekend simply administrating the school. They need help.

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

We need more **administration staff**. We should not be processing receipts or doing payments, particularly when our work schedule does not allow us the time.

We need more **welfare staff**. The 3 period allowance (75x3 per fortnight) at my school is nowhere near adequate for Year Advisors and does not allow them to do their job of managing a grade of 300+ students including parent contact.

We certainly need **more IT resources and training** to allow us to prepare students for the graduate aim of having good technological skills.

Our **managers need more time**. The head of an English department can have upwards of 10 staff to individually manage.

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

- Reduce administrative load

- Consider a realistic day for teachers which allows time for lesson planning and modification and adjust our loadings as such.

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

I believe this has been covered in the above. For high school, it is often unrealistic for early-career teachers to handle multiple year grades at once.

I appreciate the creation of this committee and sincerely hope these ideas are given due consideration.

Again, I have not aimed to 'overload' this submission with a long list of issues, but really ask the committee to consider the gap between what is considered best practice, what the true needs of students in schools are, and what teachers are able to do within their allocated working hours.