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Thursday 1 December 2022

National Teacher Workforce Action Plan
Department of Education
Commonwealth Government

Dear Minister Clare, Ministers and Advisors

Please find comments on the *Draft National Teacher Workforce Action Plan*.

Please contact me on [REDACTED] for any discussion.

Yours Sincerely

[REDACTED]

Comments on Draft National Teacher Workforce Action Plan

Thursday 1 December 2022

I refer to the document *Draft National Teacher Workforce Action Plan*
<https://www.education.gov.au/teaching-and-school-leadership/resources/draft-national-teacher-workforce-action-plan>

1. The formation of this plan

The plan was formed with little conversation with teachers - Not from a wide range and balance of ages; cultural backgrounds; genders; stages and levels within teaching.

The meeting held on 12 August 2022 had 7 teachers – many were Deputy Principals and staff at private schools. They did not reflect the vast, differing socio-economic and cultural places teachers work at across Australia. There was one male out of seven teachers. Ironically, while the visual images of the summit were broadcast across evening TV news broadcasts – probably not one sentence was uttered through the day about gender imbalance. I note there is not one mention of two words in the document: **Gender** or **Male**.

The lone male was symbolic to many. This was no wide spread canvassing of current and former teachers to come forward and list problems with Teaching in Australia and why there is a shortage. There was a failure to speak and engage to the vast majority instead relying on people who have failed before, to share some of their good ideas and partly successful programs they have run. I am certain there are successful programs that can be shared and copied between and this will help the situation in terms of supply.

Only two of the 16 State and Territory Ministers for Education and Heads of Department have a teaching qualification themselves and have ever taught. These people had a basic conflict of interest to not have disgruntled former and current staff members come forward and tell the newly appointed Federal Minister for Education, Mr Jason Clare how it really is.

The ability to comment is now open – but limited to a plan formed essentially by these elite experts who have created the problems by a decade and more of failing to plan. It is an action plan for the future for teachers to be recruited from, have careers within but prepared without canvassing qualitative insights and real life examples from actual teachers, both current and those who have quit. These views could have been summarised into categories and presented. There are REAL structural problems that need to be fixed.

2. The forgotten people who you need to actually speak to

The NSW Legislative Council Education committee held an inquiry into the Shortage of Teachers in 2022 where people could make submissions. In three days of hearings only one classroom teacher was invited and attended to give evidence. This NSW inquiry and this plan – teachers in NSW have had it reinforced that they are not valued enough, or seen as smart enough to have the status of a voice where they might raise inconvenient topics.

A shorter form in NSW on the committee's website, did not require detailed submissions. It asked Teachers "considering" quitting the profession to complete a pre-set list with no room for individual topic input. This resulted in a whole pile of data - which conveniently was transposed by the Teachers Federation into the very broad ranging "Pay and Conditions" – a mantra used with their own agenda as if this is all that is wrong. There is so much more to it.

In section 23 (page 11) there is still an opportunity for Mr Clare to save a future Minister, or himself having to re-tread this same situation. The plan says “3. Develop and publish comprehensive data about why teachers leave the profession and what careers they move into and what would improve retention”.

It then reads this data will be gathered by AESOC who will advise Ministers. Mr Clare, tear down the wall and begin the necessary dialogue. Delete AESOC who are Senior Education Officers – please ask for direct submissions and meet with actual teachers yourself.

That data – lots of numbers – merged issues into pre-set categories to hide actual real problems and headings such as “Bullying by Senior Staff” will never compare with hearing it direct. Mr Clare needs to travel state by state with 1-2 days of 30 minute meetings with submissions he and his closest staff select – only then will the severity of the situation be realised, instead of being hidden from him in sets of numbers delivered third hand at best.

There is no such qualitative survey I have ever heard about with Teaching. In NSW there is a Department run “Tell Them From Me” survey with mostly pre-set topics with checkbox/ dropdown boxes. It has a gigantic tracking code in the URL – which most teachers are too frightened to complete as they do not believe it would be anonymous and they could be victimised for their feedback. However, the vast majority say it would not make a difference.

Section 23 recommendation: Qualitative feedback – direct to the Minister – unfiltered. It will be the most productive 10-12 days Mr Clare could ever spend.

3. Three words you need to learn

There are three more words that do not appear in the document.

Casual

Temporary

Contract

These are Key Words. The Ministers should really try and learn them. Put them on your list.

Know your Employees. Know their backgrounds. Know the needs they have in their lives.

37% of Public school teachers in NSW are **Casual** or **Temporary** on **Contracts**. That is more than one in three teachers who do not have security and battle for loan approvals.

However only once in the document is there a mention of the word **Permanent** on page 4 in relation to a Queensland program. However it is mentioned twice more – but discussing migration and visas to ship teachers in and how the supply can be boosted.

Mr Chris Minns, MP, Leader of the NSW Opposition recently announced 10, 000 permanent teaching jobs if elected in March 2023. This was matched by Minister for Education Ms Sarah Mitchell by the time the breakfast radio time slots had ended – despite herself or her predecessors having done little about it in the past 11 years of Government.

In the *Sydney Morning Herald* on 17 August 2022, “Number of temporary teachers in NSW schools almost doubles in a decade” Ms Sarah Mitchell said: “Temporary positions are not necessarily a bad thing. School principals often use their autonomy when it comes to using record flexible funding by engaging temporary staff to support the delivery of specific programs or to support specific students.”

This quote says it all. It is all Operational/ Budget focused – not what is best for the teachers. The staff and their own needs in life are really seen as an afterthought.

Section [NIL] Recommendation: There is no section in the plan that discusses raising the level of permanent positions, even working across sites/ short term programs. I recommend.

4. A different class of Teacher created at law vs the weight expected

A sudden rush to offer permanent positions will not suit all teachers. Many teachers are semi-retired or mothers returning to work. Some might be completing a PhD. These people might find Casual or short term temporary contracts actually suit them. These kind of people – it is good money for them, and they are not worried about extra pay to stay working. However, there is one catch to the system that needs to be exposed.

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[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

I was getting ready to conclude my case study and start formally writing everything up.

[REDACTED]

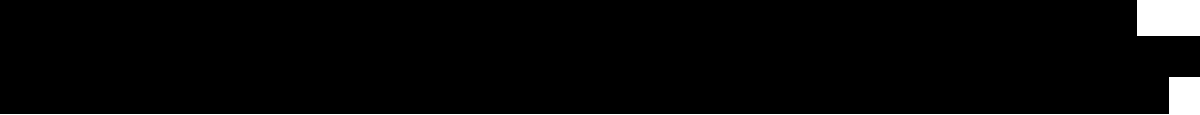
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The point I make is this: in exchange for the weight of five years of study + \$50k HECS debt/ payment + enormous amounts of support, all the talent, dedication an individual and their family brings can be wiped out if they dare to speak about issues.

Every teacher shut down is a reverse salesperson warning potential teachers and parents what can happen – and that 5 years family support and \$50k debt could be better invested.

The main points arising from this is that what actually happens to staff and how they are treated is so different to what the Department of Education purports to do.



The reality is NSW has a system where the legal rights of more than 1/3 of your staff are treated the same as typically enjoyed by a McDonalds or Coles employees who have much shorter periods of training, sometimes just a few days, and which are paid for it versus what is required to become a teacher. This creates this oppressive advantage for senior staff from the first day one in three teachers walk into a school from Graduation or returning to teach.

Mr Jason Clare, MP, the Federal Minister, said in Parliament yesterday (30 November 2022) that “30-50% of teachers leave the profession in the first five years”.

What steps has Mr Clare taken to individually write to each one of them and offer them an opportunity to meet him to tell him direct? How many of them have lived under the precipice of bullying and threats. I can introduce many – the kind that will never reach this round table.

Section 1 talks about *Elevating the Profession*. It says “To recognise the value teachers bring to students, communities and the economy.” It then sub-heads with “A targeted national campaign to raise the status and value the role of teachers.” None of these slogans matter or count a bit – certainly not a “\$10 million contribution towards advertising” unless Ministers are willing to hear direct what is happening.

A further example is a school that I have teacher friends at. There is less than 70 teachers, but it is believed at least 18 of them are leaving the site at the end of 2022. Maybe many of these will leave teaching altogether or another bad experience will finish their career.

This is complete instability for students to say the least but imagine what staff have been through to trigger such exodus. A very good friend of mine has five unanswered letters to Ms Sarah Mitchell, MLC, NSW Minister for Education about treatment of staff, students and parents at the site. Others have been responded to on her behalf by local Directors who have not asked one question. The site is a few kms from Mr Clare's Electorate office.

The issues raised include: Racism; Sexual Harassment and Violence against Girls; Bullying - staff and students; Homophobia; Mental Health; Asbestos issues still not resolved and many others. These are simply passed back to the school site for their own self-investigation. A GIPA recently found a Director explained they had not looked into the person's claims as they were told by the Director previously responsible that they were “serial complainants”.

The point made here is – that any letter of complaint by staff, student and parent alike is given to a Director, who gives this information to the school, and in turn responds on the Minister's behalf. There is no clear, independent way to provide feedback without fear of retribution. An inquiry into this site would show national issues in teaching and learning.

It is an entirely different generation now. A lot of the younger generation born from the mid-1990s understand that they will possibly never afford a home and will rent. They already feel short changed. They are strong and resourceful and quickly remove themselves from “signing up” for a mortgage and cop this top heavy type of bullying that I saw first-hand. They would rather quit and unlike myself, they will not even bother to waste a breath telling a formal body why. You should welcome every complaint you ever receive and not hide them.

They walk out one day and never return. They return to Summer holiday jobs at hotels, clubs and retail and are paid more, offered pathways and treated much better. They become more reverse sales people warning first year Education students not to continue. They have social media, don't mind sharing opinions and this generation can see and work it out themselves.

5. The McDonaldisation of Teaching and the Supply side

The plan itself is very much another plank in the McDonaldisation of the system. Many of the topics include, but Sections 5 to 9 are all about supply with Sections 10 to 12 really as well.

Unlike the three words not mentioned **Casual Temporary** and **Contact** – the word **Supply** is mentioned **11 times in the document**.

In a world which finds it hard to fathom about Peak Oil – there is no awareness there is a limit to the actual people in Australia that have the patience; ability to explain; the confidence and so many other attributes to be a teacher. We could call this $n = PT$ or the Number that is our Peak Teaching. In a world that often lives in denial – the same is happening in this plan that you will somehow find this untapped supply – when Departments are wasting it.

You will not find many more ways to boost supply. No amount of advertising will work if you are reaching those who could not mentally do the job. There have been so many schemes mentioned in NSW alone in the past year – asking retired teachers back; advertising overseas; parents doing office work of teaching loads and there are numerous more. These have been tried. I personally cringe when I hear panic talk about getting them from overseas (brought up in section 9) because it sends a message to existing “you are replaceable units”. In a microcosm really that migrant teacher could also be competing for that first home the Australian educated teachers is also bidding on.

All the suggestions in this plan to get more into “production”; ensure more are finished off the “production line”; and others are all good and it might tweak the formula $n = PT$ but the numbers will never fill the shortages. In fact the similar two words **streamlined** and **streamlining** are used **8 times**. This is 19 mentions of **supply** and **streamlining/ed** – excellent Economic and Management talk – but not engaging or speaking the language of the Teacher. They are being spoken about and not really involved in the conversation.

Mr Chris Minns, NSW Opposition Leader claimed on his Facebook page on 29 November 2022 “# REVEALED The teacher shortage in NSW has now reached 3,000 vacancies! Tripling in the last 18 months – this is a crisis.”

At least Mr Minns will admit it is a crisis. We have to first admit there is a problem before we can fix it. The federal plan has so much to do with supply but almost next to nothing about the actual real and serious problems – Bullying under Top Heavy Local Management.

6. Financial measure that could help

There are financial measures mentioned in the plan and have been others mentioned beyond this document.

However, in the past year inflation has run at approximately 7% - just easing according this morning's announcement under 7%. On a \$50k debt, this has seen early career teachers have approximately \$3.5k debt added to their ledger after tax. However, at the same time, their actual real spending power to pay rent, other items and save has been reduced by approximately 7% after tax. This is a double whammy.

A good will gesture for Christmas would be say that any new career teacher etc. including those in the “production” line will have a freezing of that increase – as it's a one off unexpected revenue rise / asset increase to the Commonwealth Government. This could be done for Nurses too and others with HECS who helped in the Covid-19 times.

This kind of message shows you are serious about them sticking with it. The only problem is those who have debts paid off or lesser debts could be displeased.

I also think you need to get Treasury to cost what is the impact for the Teachers who quit teaching altogether. The fact is for every one of the post mid 1990s generation who decides to focus on lifestyle and many deliberately try to earn under the HECS threshold for repayment – and have lesser job becoming a semi-drop out – how much does this cost the budget bottom line in ultimately not re-paying HECS.

The huge amounts of teachers quitting must have equal budgetary damage.

7. Review of global trends and comments

What research did any of the party's preparing this plan do reviewing the International and particularly the Western world situation? The trends in the USA and UK is well ahead of Australia and they are leaving in droves. You will find out why Australian teachers are leaving by reading just a handful of posts. Old style top heavy management and the extreme cases of Bullying will not work with the younger generation.

They want a better working lifestyle. They have no voice by means of legal or complaint to be heard. If society, refuses to legislate to ensure this happens, the future lies below.

These are just two Facebook pages:

Life after Teaching – Exit the Classroom and thrive has 107.6k members

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/LifeAfterTeachingExitTheClassroomAndThrive>

Leave Teaching .. and Smile : -) has 14.2k members

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/723596344668666>

8. One scheme after another: The Message of Panic and The Elephant in the room

Once or twice a week a new scheme is announced as the killer solution to all the problems – when it will be many approaches. There are some good ideas in the paper – except every time a Minister or Opposition talks about it a reciprocal message is sent to potential teachers there must be something wrong. Every family knows a teacher who has quit and these schemes are laughed at as another gimmick.

It is going to be a brave Minister to admit there is an Elephant in the room and name that too: Bullying. It is rampant against students in some schools and even more toxic and destructive by senior staff with younger and lower level staff left completely powerless. They face disciplinary action for speaking to the media; victimisation for making formal complaints and wait a decade or more for a permanent position.

This plan will only increase the numbers in part. However, by never mentioning the Elephant in the room and being willing to fix systems – it will fail.

There is a systemic and structural hierarchal powers for higher staff to bully and threaten backed up by Different classes created at law against all principles of natural justice. Higher staff are enabled to control investigations, often self-investigation. The approaches to Mental Health and Well-Being are completely out of line with community standards.

A problem is ten years in the making is one thing – but the next ten years can be a lot different if you engage the mid-1990s teachers and democratize the systems.

I could see through the eyes of the younger teachers whom I was once one who quit after one term in 1994 when told it was a seven year wait. I have no reason to comment other than to be a voice for all of those I know are oppressed. Without change you will fail.