

Submission
to the
Australian Department of Education
Public Consultation
on the
Draft National Teacher Workforce Action Plan (*'Plan'*)

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19 November 2022

Summary:

This experiential submission focusses on teachers' reported perceptions of their ever-changing roles in schools, the relentless increase in the number and scope of their required tasks and duties, and their reports of what is currently happening in their classrooms. The submission concludes by proffering reasons which teachers have confidentially reported as to why they are wishing to leave the profession: the job is simply not what they signed up for.

1. What is this submission about?

This submission is made in response to the call for submissions by the Australian Department of Education in the context of the Public Consultation on the Draft National Teacher Workforce Action Plan (*'Plan'*): [Public consultation: Draft National Teacher Workforce Action Plan - Department of Education, Australian Government.](#)

I note the Department's advice that submissions will be accepted until 1 December 2022.

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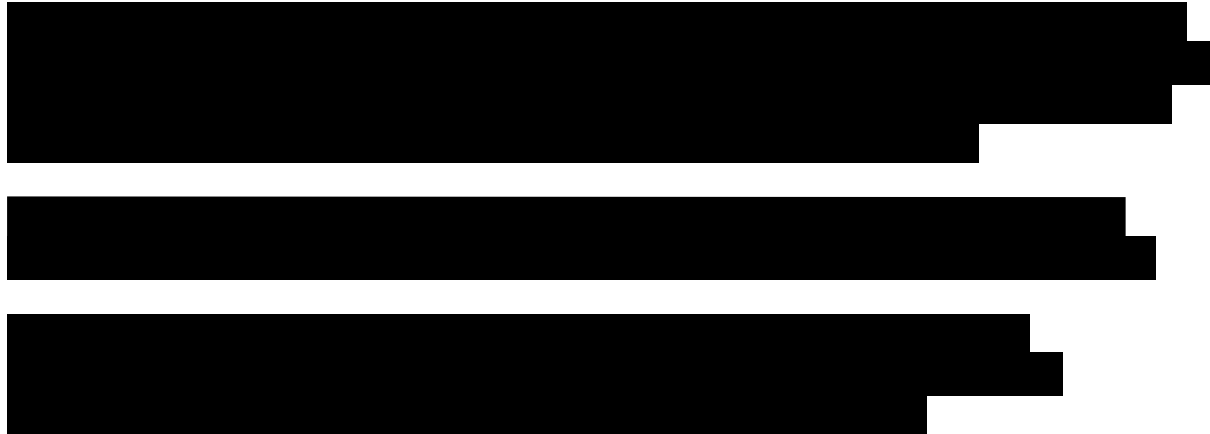
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Confidentiality

This is **NOT** a **confidential** submission, and I expressly grant permission for it to be published on the draft Plan's website and/or circulated to anyone who the Department believes might wish to see it.

2. Narrowing the scope of this submission

This submission will be confined to the following issues:

Priority Area 3, Action 8: "Trial new ways of ...keeping teachers in the schools that need them most"

Priority Area 5, Action 14: "Pilot new approaches to reduce teacher workload...to maximise the value of a teacher's time"

Priority Area 5, Action 15: "...maximise teachers' time to teach"

3. Why are so many teachers leaving the profession?

Ever increasing number of tasks and duties and burdensome mandated professional development (PD)

Does anyone know a teacher who chose teaching as a 'second best' career because they couldn't get accepted into what they *really* wanted: nursing or social work or occupational therapy or counselling or community development or welfare administration or disability studies or mediation or data collection or actuarial science?

No, neither do I.

Teachers report to me that they originally chose teaching because they wanted to teach reading and math and science to children who were ready and eager to learn.

Here is a list of tasks and topics which teachers claim they must now prioritise above the teaching of 'mere' academic subjects. Teachers are told that school is no longer about academic progress, or educating the next generation of Australia's leaders, thinkers, vaccine hunters and poets. Rather, school is now all about 'wellbeing'.

So, teachers tell me they have been instructed to complete professional development (PD) in the following:

- consent education
- driver education
- pedestrian safety
- train safety
- drug education
- dealing with bullies
- trauma informed practice
- media literacy
- financial literacy
- restorative justice
- buddy programs
- teacher welfare
- NCCD
- preparing for NAPLAN
- policy compliance training
- growing vegetables and herbs, and planting seeds
- sleep hygiene
- healthy eating (for students and for teachers)
- animal cruelty
- supporting parents recovering from trauma
- public transport etiquette
- the new NSW Disability Strategy
- the new NSW inclusive education policy
- the new NSW behaviour policy
- the new NSW suspensions policy
- the new NSW restrictive practices policy
- how to deliver remote learning
- cyber safety
- bushfire safety
- flood safety
- bicycle safety
- beach and water safety
- chemical safety
- electricity safety
- evils of plastic straws and takeaway food containers
- planning for and responding to disasters
- administration of medicines
- wellbeing and mental health considerations for both students and teachers

- gender fluidity
- coaching children on how their parents should vote in the 'Voice' referendum
- engaging fathers in their children's learning
- individualised instruction
- personalised instruction
- targeted interventions (used to be called remediation)
- snake bites
- elementary first aid
- anaphylaxis
- family planning
- ableism
- pandemic coughing and sneezing etiquette
- mask-wearing etiquette
- asbestos avoidance
- positioning, operation and cleaning of classroom air filters and purifiers
- non-binary genders
- climate change (or climate emergency)
- something called 'indispensable skills for planetary survival'
- reporting domestic violence
- child protection
- differentiation
- UDL
- RtI
- MTSS
- neurodiversity
- mindset
- Aboriginal cultural training
- anti-racism
- counselling Aboriginal students who are perpetrating violence on each other
- playground supervision
- car pickup supervision
- teachers Code of Conduct, and not speaking out about anything in public
- teaching anxiety reducing skills
- nutrition
- obesity
- smoking
- vaping
- safe alcohol use
- safe partying
- personal hygiene
- menstrual hygiene
- email etiquette
- controlling student behaviour without touching

- women in leadership
- 'cultural competency'
- healthy ways to deal with workload intensification
- spotting the signs of radicalisation in classrooms
- how to manage students' friendships
- caring for pets
- table manners, how to set a table and how to use cutlery at a table."

Of course, not every teacher at every Year level is being asked to teach, or to do PD on, each and every one of these topics. However, I had been receiving so many "You'll never guess what I've been told to do PD on NOW!!" complaints, I began to record them. The above list is the result (so far).

Do teachers in the top PISA countries spend more of their classroom time on teaching reading, science and math, and less time dealing with the confusing array of disparate topics listed above? Do teachers in those countries complain that they are progressively being told to add more and more tasks and duties, and to accomplish these on the dining room table on Sunday mornings?

Schools are no longer schools. They have become principally agents of social and political change and [largely unsuccessful] providers of mental health support.

Teachers are increasingly being asked to assume the role of unofficial, school-based quasi-parents and carers. Whether they want to or not, teachers are now expected to cover in their classrooms all sorts of topics which used to be the exclusive province of families. They are told that this is necessary in the interests of 'equity', because so many children come from 'disadvantaged' homes where such topics are not raised or taught or even considered. Yes, that's true perhaps, but why is that a teacher's problem? And was it not always thus?

There are simply some things that are outside a teacher's control.

Of course, no one denies that there are inequities in society. But **why are schools being asked to find the solution to all of society's problems?**

Schools did not invent or cause all of society's ills and inequities. Why must schools be called upon to unilaterally fix them?

Who decides which problems are worth making schools the scapegoats for in this way - and which problems are not? Teachers? Education departments? Perhaps people who themselves were 25 years younger the

last time they set foot in a school classroom? Or have never been trained as teachers at all?

And teachers are painfully aware that some of the members of the professions listed at the beginning of this article would be more skilled, and have better success, at addressing the myriad of the non-academic and non-pedagogical issues and tasks.

What is education about these days?

One would expect that a publication called 'Teacher Magazine' would be about *teaching*, no? While it does indeed feature articles about various aspects of teaching, a recent issue is devoted to advice about how to cope with a relationship breakdown: [Wellbeing - Teacher \(teachermagazine.com\)](http://www.teachermagazine.com). Former issues have included topics such as healthy eating and even healthy recipes – one molecule removed from the *Women's Weekly*. The tenor of many articles is increasingly, "Here's how to preserve your wellbeing and to cope with the unreasonable and intolerable stress we know we are putting you under." Teachers are sentient adults. Do they really need this kind of advice from a supposedly professional publication?

Teachers wonder why schools must be used to create little activists who are being exposed to perhaps only one view of multi-faceted adult topics. Teachers tell me that they are not 'allowed' to depart from the received position or to calmly present both sides of a controversial issue. Years ago, teachers who disagreed with a policy or allegedly mandated opinion were simply ignored. Now, it seems, they must be silenced.

What is happening in classrooms these days?

In my experience, the vast majority of teachers do the very best they can for most students, most of the time. When they don't, it is not because of ill will, but rather because they have simply never been trained to do what is suddenly being expected of them.

Why must teachers be required to single-handedly meet the needs of an ever-increasing number of students with complex and serious disabilities (and sometimes the disruptive and even dangerous behaviours occasioned by the concomitants of those disabilities) – students who are progressively being transferred into mainstream from special schools, sometimes forcibly, against their parents' wishes?

This initiative is called 'full inclusion' and is allegedly required by UN instruments which Australia may have signed up to, but which are not

enshrined in Australian domestic law. Yet there is an education department policy on inclusion in both NSW and Queensland.

Said one teacher:

Full inclusion is not what I signed up for.

I am not a nurse or an occupational therapist. I am not trained to insert feeding tubes or to oil wheelchairs. Of course, I wish only the best for students with disability, and of course I agree that they deserve the best education our schools can offer, but I have not been trained to meet their complex needs – and a one-weekend PD on so-called 'inclusion' or 'differentiation' or 'UDL' or 'neurodiversity' won't do the trick.

My classroom these days is perpetually disorderly, and I am told that my students must now have the freedom to wander the room and sit wherever they choose – for as long as they choose. Otherwise, according to some in my staff room, I would be over-disciplining and over-regulating my students, and this is allegedly no longer allowed.

I am the only adult in the classroom. I am constantly being asked to do more and more, without ever having anything taken away. Teachers are being disrespectfully asked to do too much for too many with too little time and for too little pay.

Some days lately, all I seem to do is manage behaviour and intervene in violent fights amongst students. I am no longer teaching. I am just providing day care and crowd control.

Too many of my formerly engaged and academically ambitious students are now learning nothing, day after day, except perhaps how to minimise physical injury if another student decides to throw chairs or scissors.

I used to have time to regularly offer remedial instruction to students with disabilities such as dyslexia, but now I am totally preoccupied with the very complex needs of students with forms of disability whose challenges are not remediable (at least not by me).

When I compare the yearly learning growth of the students in my classroom several years ago with my students today, I am forced to conclude that the latter are learning nowhere near as much as the former. But then, learning growth is said to be inconsequential now – all that matters is 'wellbeing'.

One of my students announced that he wouldn't be coming to school the next day because, 'I have sat quietly and watched for the

last 2 weeks while you have taught the very same material over and over, and still some kids don't get it. I simply cannot bear to sit and watch you teach it all over again.'

The full inclusionists are trying to re-model the airplane, whilst the airplane is in full flight. And it's just not what I signed up for.

The Department of Education pays my mortgage and I dearly need for that to continue to happen. But the minute that's paid off, I'm gone!

I know that, by quitting my job, I will arguably be adding to the teacher shortage. There was a time when that would have given me pause. There was a time when I would have worried that the majority of my students are simply not learning the basics which they will need as building blocks for future education or careers. There was a time when I would have been keenly interested in my students. Now, I just don't care.

Said another teacher:

They should take all the money which they are currently devoting to wellbeing and useless PD ([Exorbitant fees, too theoretical and no follow up: much PD for teachers is useless — EducationHQ](#)), and use it to hire people to work with me in my classroom. Needn't be another fully qualified teacher – just another adult to share my load and take injured children to the school nurse without me having to leave the classroom. That would certainly improve MY wellbeing!

Further, why are teachers now expected to put up with unprecedented levels of violence against themselves? From both students and parents? And why are teachers no longer surprised to walk into a staffroom to find a colleague bloodied and crying? Or to be told that a colleague has had to go home to have a shower after being spat on by a student? And why do so many teachers just accept this treatment and not report what is happening? [Teachers most at-risk of assault, but unlikely to claim — EducationHQ](#) Why is it politically incorrect to suggest that students with chronically disruptive or dangerous behaviour should not be allowed to remain in mainstream classrooms until that behaviour improves? [Why do we accept unsafe classrooms and abusive parents as the norm? — EducationHQ](#) Surely it's cheaper for schools to nip such behaviour in the bud than for society to have to address it when these students become adults.

Educators report that recent initiatives (such as the current 'Plan') sound great at first, but offering ITE scholarships, and recruiting mid-career

professionals to shift into teaching, and opting for PR strategies to raise the status and value the role of teachers in the eyes of the public and the media, and offering precedent lesson plans drafted by others – it's all fluff if newly qualified teachers walk into their first classroom and are hit by a flying chair.

4. And so, why are so many teachers quitting?

And so, we wonder why so many teachers are quitting their jobs (or thinking about it daily...)? [Teachers burnt out, time poor: government survey :: New South Wales Teachers Federation \(nswtf.org.au\)](https://www.nswtf.org.au)

Regardless of the spurious and nebulous reasons which teachers tentatively proffer for leaving the profession (eg, workload and working hours, too much administration, low pay, lack of respect for teachers in the media, sudden overwhelming need to learn about French cuisine, desire to spend more time with the family, COVID, etc), the reality is quite different. Teachers are not allowed to verbalise their true reasons for leaving, since the reasons are deemed politically incorrect. But if you scratch the surface, and provide an anonymous format, you will hear the truth.

The job is simply no longer what they signed up for.

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