



HUNTER WORKERS
Join Unions

SENATE SELECT COMMITTEE ON JOB SECURITY

Re: Supplementary Submission

Casualisation and insecure work for public school and TAFE teachers in the Hunter is a major issue. The following gives a brief overview of the issues, and possible solutions.

Gaining a permanent public school teaching position in the Hunter is extremely sought after. Permanency is crucial for financial and job security and the Hunter is one of the most desirable locations in the state. Although there is currently a casual teacher shortage in the area and across the state, the desire for permanency and competition for positions is great. According to the recent Gallop independent inquiry into teaching, the casual teacher shortage is more to do with falling salaries, rising workloads, and the increasing complexities of the job.

This would also be reflected in the insecurities and difficulties of casual teaching. For example, temporary teachers, in the Hunter have, expressed frustration at the precarious nature of their work. They want a permanent position but because of their status feel they are not valued yet are required to perform the full role of a permanent teacher. Under the present staffing arrangements with a permanent position vacancy at a school, the school can generally offer a serving temporary teacher candidate only one of each alternate vacancy. The temporary teacher applying for a permanent position goes through a long local selection procedure. As the temporary teacher is seeking security of tenure, they generally assume extra duties to impress with their willingness and to “prove” themselves. Many teachers report that in so volunteering they lose control of their workload and at times their ability to advocate for their working conditions.

Casual teachers are employed day to day by schools and are in extremely precarious work situations. The pandemic has and will exasperate the precariousness of their work. Casual teachers most of the time do not have access to sick leave, extended leave or even maternity leave provisions despite undertaking similar work and being a key part of the teaching profession. As casual employees, there are restrictions and a lesser set of working conditions than exist for their permanent counterparts. Casual employees are also subject to an incremental salary barrier regardless of experience and expertise. Casual teachers live week by week and are particularly vulnerable to changing circumstances at the school and societal level.

The growing workload and demands on casual and temporary teachers, hostile accounts of teachers' capacities and motivations through various culture wars, growing reports of the pressures teachers experience in their work, shows the multiple and overlapping effect on teachers of the lack of time to actually undertake the escalating duties, and logging of data on them, when added to the

declining relativities of salaries in other professions, all add up a profession that needs, and deserves, a considerable reappraisal by Government with regard to respect and support. In the Hunter this has been exasperated by politicians like Mark Latham.

The casualisation explosion in TAFE in NSW is directly related to the marketisation of the vocational education sector in Australia. The deregulation and restructuring of the eighties, nineties and present day in Australia heralded the dominance of "market design" ideology, at the same time as pressure related to globalisation resulted in employers increasingly pushing costs and risks on to workers. Women joined the workforce in great numbers in these decades and by the new century families generally required two incomes to survive. Neo-liberalist governments have moved away from provision of public services and sought market solutions for their provision. This has resulted in dominant rhetoric around "user choice" which results in the individual paying for something which was once provided. The rhetoric around casualisation is also around "flexibility" and individual choice. Consequently, funding for the provision of public vocational education by state and federal governments has declined whilst competitive tendering has increased. The devastating impact of Smart and Skilled policy and contestable funding cannot be overstated.

Part-time casual teachers employed by TAFE NSW endure similar precarity of employment as casual schoolteachers. The TAFE Commission of NSW Teachers and Related Employees Enterprise Agreement defines a part-time casual teacher as 'a Teacher engaged to teach on an hourly basis'. Although most TAFE part-time casual teachers are offered a program of teaching on term or semester basis, if classes are cancelled or if they are 'advised that their services are not required', the teacher is not paid for the programmed duties if they are given at least two hours' notice of the cancellation. The Enterprise Agreement also states that '[i]t is the Employer's intention that no Part time Casual Teacher shall be engaged to deliver the Equivalent of a Full-Time teaching program for 12 or more weeks in a semester except where a Temporary Teacher is not able to be employed following recruitment action'. Yet a large percentage of part-time casual teachers working in Hunter TAFE colleges are indeed teaching in excess of a full-time teaching load and have been doing so for years if not decades. These teachers work side-by-side with permanent teachers, performing the same role and duties, yet are afforded none of the conditions and protections that tenure grants. Part-time casual teachers are always vulnerable to changing conditions and policies in the NSW TAFE system and are always the first teachers to have their employment hours cut. The COVID pandemic has exacerbated the precarity of employment for part-time casual teachers and the uncertainty of a regular pattern of work into the future. Most part-time casual teachers in the Hunter willingly enter the TAFE system with precarious conditions of employment as they see this as a steppingstone or a pathway to permanent employment. However, for most of these employees the opportunity to progress to a permanent teaching role never eventuates. It is not a rare situation to find a part-time casual teacher at Hunter TAFE colleges who has been in such precarious employment for 20 or more years.

The other aspect of insecure work that relates to our membership in the Hunter is regarding the students our members teach. Many students, both at school and post school study, are full time students but also part time or even full-time workers, and more often than not, casual employees. The insecurity of that work can have a significant impact on their study: last minute call-ins for work mean that assignments and study are disrupted, late or incomplete. Their capacity to organise and plan their study can be compromised and at risk.

Public School Teacher Recommendations

In respect of staffing, the following issues should be addressed by the Department of Education as a matter of priority: • staffing levels and processes that address the excessive use of temporary teacher employment, in particular of beginning teachers • frameworks of expectations and good practice in the induction of new staff to be mandatory in all schools • permanent staffing at a level to overcome the widespread shortage of casual teachers • school counsellors to be provided on the basis of at least 1:500 students and a corresponding increase in senior psychologists education by 2023 to address the significant increase in student mental health issues • implement a new state-wide, standards-based promotions system, at the centre of which is an on-the-job assessment affirming aspirants' teaching expertise and educational leadership capacity; such assessment to be conducted by the Department of Education and precede actual appointment to positions in schools • develop a more expansive career structure for teachers that includes centrally employed consultancy/advisory roles and better recognise expert practice within schools • teachers' work to be revised to provide further for professional activities such as collegial preparation and planning time, data assessment and oversight of individual student progress. The time allocations to be achieved to ensure a further two hours for all primary teachers and a reduction of two hours to the current maximum face-to-face. This increase in release time would lead to more permanent positions, greater job security and should be supported with comprehensive workforce planning, including selection and entry requirements into teacher training and scholarship programs to address shortages.

TAFE recommendations

In respect of addressing the excessive use of part-time casual teaching hours, TAFE NSW should consider the following as a matter of priority:

1. Identify all part-time casual teachers who have teaching load equal to or in excess of a full-time teaching load
2. Offer a temporary contract of teaching to these employees of at least 6 months, unless a compelling case can be made to demonstrate unviability
3. After two years continuous service with TAFE NSW in the same temporary position, as defined by the Fair Work Act 2009, the teacher is permanently appointed under the provisions of Subclause 15.5 of the TAFE Commission of NSW Teachers and Related Employees Enterprise Agreement 2020

It has been nearly 20 years since the Department of Education conducted a comprehensive workforce analysis and planning necessary to deal with issues of supply and demand. Resetting the staffing and resourcing of schools, including the provision of specialist support staff, and centrally employed staff is seen as crucial to the profession in the Hunter. This coupled with a reinvestment in our great TAFE system would create thousands more permanent positions for our casual and temporary teachers and provide a big boost to the local economy and student outcomes.