



House of Representatives Standing Committee on  
Employment, Education and Training

Inquiry to examine the

**Status of the Teaching Profession**

December 2018

1. The Independent Education Union of Australia (IEUA) is pleased to have the opportunity to make a submission to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training inquiry to examine the status of the teaching profession.
2. The IEUA is the federally registered union that represents workers, including teachers, principals, and school support staff in Catholic, other faith-based and community independent schools and in early childhood education and care centres across all the states and territories of Australia. While the majority of IEUA members are teachers, the membership also includes workers engaged as teacher assistants, administrative staff, gardeners, cleaners and caterers. It has a current membership of approximately 75,000 members.
3. The IEUA would also stress that there are many teachers employed in early learning centres, childcare centres and pre-schools in Australia who are also part of the teaching profession and need to be included as part of this inquiry. These teachers, who have the same qualifications as teachers who work in schools, often do not receive the same level of recognition, status or remuneration because of the area in which they choose to work.
4. Twenty-one years ago the Australian Senate held an inquiry into the status of teachers and later released its report, *A Class Act*,<sup>1</sup> which included 19 recommendations on what should be done to help the teaching profession rebuild its status in Australian society. And now, at time when these recommendations should be coming of age after being implemented e.g. national teacher standards and registration, we find that there continues to be a marked decline in the morale and status of the teaching profession.
5. The following two paragraphs are taken directly from the overview in *A Class Act* and while they summed up the situation back in 1997 they continue to give a good illustration of what is affecting the status of teachers and teaching today.

*“Teaching in the 1990s is a highly complex and demanding activity. Despite shrinking budgets, alarmist media reports, unsupportive ministers, a crowded curriculum, and the disappearance of support services, teachers have continued to dedicate themselves to their students. The Committee has been encouraged by the evidence of the deep commitment of teachers, by their passionate concern for young people, and by the many examples of innovative and cooperative teaching practice brought to its attention.”<sup>2</sup>*

*“But all is not well in the teaching profession, and it is generally agreed that there is a widespread crisis of morale amongst teachers. The status of the profession is disturbingly low. Perceptions in the community about the low tertiary entrance requirements for teacher training, and the low status accorded in this country to children, contribute to this state of affairs. As well, the feminisation of the profession - that is the high percentage of women teachers - means that prejudiced views about the value of women’s work are also a factor. Few teachers recommend a teaching career to their children or their brightest students. Some are even ashamed to admit to*

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<sup>1</sup> Australian Government (1998), *A Class Act: Inquiry into the Status of the Teaching Profession*, Canberra

<sup>2</sup> Ibid 1

*being teachers. While teachers themselves value their work they believe it is not understood, appreciated or supported in the general community.”<sup>3</sup>*

6. The reasons for the continued malaise and loss of heart within the teaching profession are complex but the union believes that at the very core of this is the lack of control teachers have of the profession. Over the past twenty years the majority of policies and practices have been implemented upon the profession, very little has been done with the consent of the profession and even less has been instigated by teachers.
7. The IEU stresses that this inquiry needs to receive the full attention of the government and any recommendations offered will be thoughtfully considered and implemented. Hopes for this to occur are not that high considering the government response to the Independent Review into Regional, Rural and Remote Education conducted by Professor John Halsey.
8. After accepting all the recommendations of the final report the government was less than committed to being an active participant in implementing these. No priorities were laid out in terms of policies or funding, just a statement to mention the recommendations to the states and territories.

*“The most important commitment the Australian Government can give is to ensure that we take these recommendations into our conversations with states and territories, as the primary deliverers of education when implementing policies and programs in these areas of Australia.”<sup>4</sup>*

9. In its submission to the Teacher Education Ministerial Advisory Group (TEMAG), the Australian Council of Deans of Education (ACDE) discussed the shortage of teachers in maths, science and languages and believed these shortages, when compared to other career choices, were contributed to by ‘the present status of teaching and its desirability as a career, the constant negative media presentation of teachers and teaching, and the relatively poor remuneration of teachers as they enter their mid-career phase...’.<sup>5</sup>
10. There is no doubt the constant negative media coverage contributes to the poor status of the teaching profession. Well known radio personality, Alan Jones, recently commented that he was surprised parents weren’t marching on the streets because there are many teachers who aren’t capable of teaching the great works of literature such as Dickens and Shakespeare.<sup>6</sup>
11. Federal Education Minister, The Hon Dan Tehan MP, in his address to the recent Beyond Year 12 Conference, reiterated what has been the constant message of governments over the past ten years.

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid

<sup>4</sup> <https://docs.education.gov.au/node/50796> Australian Government Response to the Independent Review into Regional, Rural and Remote Education, 30 May 2018, p. 6.

<sup>5</sup> Australian Council of Deans of Education (2014), *Teaching for Excellence: ACDE submission to the teacher education ministerial advisory group*, ACDE, Deakin, ACT, p. 21.

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.news.com.au/lifestyle/parenting/school-life/schools-accused-of-failing-us-on-basic-aussie-knowledge/news-story/1a6fc594a58bf6b6070a87f584c99145> Schools accused of failing us on basic Aussie knowledge – Stephanie Bedo 27 November 2018 (accessed 27 November 2018)

*“However, despite the states, territories and Commonwealth spending more money than ever before on education our performance is stagnating in parts and going backwards in others. Over the last fifteen years, Australian students dropped from 4th in the world for reading to 16th, we fell from 11th in the world in mathematics to 25th, and from 8th in science to 14th.”<sup>7</sup>*

12. And it is not just in academic areas where it is reported Australia’s students are going backwards. Professor Hans Westerbeek from Victoria University says the talent pool of Australian sportspeople capable of winning Olympic medals is shrinking ‘because our kids cannot run, catch, throw, jump and co-ordinate their movements in the way that previous generations learnt to do’. Westerbeek puts most of the blame for this on shortsighted politicians who phased out compulsory physical education lessons from our schools.<sup>8</sup>
13. Yet it is possible that a quote like this from Professor Westerbeek will be used to criticise teachers for not teaching these skills rather than the policy makers who made the decision to phase out the compulsory lessons.
14. Federal government MP, Andrew Laming, has made his thoughts about teachers known by questioning their commitment<sup>9</sup> and the value of work completed by teachers at home.

*“There is just no evidence that the work they are doing at home makes any difference, and there’s no evidence that what they do at home is actually where you’d want a teacher focusing their efforts.”<sup>10</sup>*

15. Very little media coverage shows politicians, journalists and commentators visiting classrooms to view the work of teacher practitioners. One Fairfax journalist, Jordan Baker, did just this spending a day with Dominique Chedel and her Year 2 class to research what happens in a classroom in 2018.
16. By the end of the day, after Chedel had been handed a student’s broken glasses to fix, Baker concluded, “After seven hours in her company, I knew teaching was not Chedel’s only skill – that day she had already been a performer, a counsellor, a referee and a choreographer. But surely it was too much to expect her to also be an optical technician?” Of course Chedel was able to fix the broken glasses. It’s all part of being a teacher.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> The Hon Dan Tehan MP, Speech to *Beyond Year 12 Conference – Towards better student outcomes*, 10 December 2018.

<sup>8</sup> Westerbeek, H. “We need a bold approach to strike new Aussie gold.” *Herald Sun*, December 11, 2018.

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.couriermail.com.au/news/queensland/queensland-andrew-laming-takes-aim-at-school-teachers-on-facebook/news-story/b3cdb7573d10015a8be38ab7425dbb05> Queensland Andrew Laming takes aim at school teachers on Facebook – AAP 11 January 2017 (accessed 27 November 2018)

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.news.com.au/finance/work/at-work/liberal-mp-calls-for-teachers-to-have-fewer-holidays/news-story/b74a9557f9c096edf97c0e75abe337b3> Liberal MP calls for teachers to have fewer holidays – Benedict Brook 2 May 2018 (accessed 27 November 2018)

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.smh.com.au/national/nsw/it-s-constant-triage-a-day-in-the-life-of-a-teacher-20181128-p50isp.html> *It’s ‘constant triage’: a day in the life of a teacher* – Jordan Baker 2 December 2018 (accessed 11 December 2018)

17. The example above shows that there is much more happening in classrooms than what can be measured by a narrow range of tests conducted at a particular time of the year. Yet, it is this narrow range of tests and assessments that the teaching profession and Australian schooling in general is judged.
18. With the Federal Government continually stating that record amounts of money are being invested in education and that Australian students' results are not reaching the levels required for such an investment it may be time for the government to heed the Productivity Commission's advice.
19. In its report on the National Education Evidence Base the Productivity Commission acknowledged that in attempting to achieve excellence and equity in its national education system, Australia's governments have increased investment in education and concentrated on implementing 'reforms focussed on monitoring, performance benchmarking and reporting against national standards'.<sup>12</sup> And like other countries that have used similar strategies the results have been disappointing and there is now 'a growing consensus that even though resourcing and an accountability focus are important, by themselves they are insufficient to achieve gains in educational outcomes'.<sup>13</sup>
20. Further to this the Productivity Commission added there is a realisation that 'measuring and monitoring performance does not automatically lead to insights as to what policy and practice can do to help students to learn better, teachers to teach better, and schools to operate more effectively'.<sup>14</sup> To find out such things as these the Productivity Commission concludes that a 'bottom-up' evaluation of what works best in education policies, programs and teaching practices is required. In other words, check with the professionals working in the schools.
21. In 2015 the *Schools for All* panel did such a check with teachers in the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) by conducting an online survey into students with complex needs and challenging behaviour. The panel received responses from 1145 ACT teachers (approximately 21% of the ACT teaching workforce) and some of the results are listed below.
  - 34% of teachers reported that they experience students *disrupting the flow of a lesson* every day;
  - 21% of teachers reported that they experience students *verbally abusing teachers* once or twice a week;
  - 19% of teachers reported that they experience students *running away* once or twice each week;
  - 16% of teachers reported that they experience students *being physically destructive* once or twice each week;
  - 9% of teachers reported that they experience students *being extremely violent to other students* once or twice each week;

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<sup>12</sup> Productivity Commission 2016, *National Education Evidence Base*, Report no. 80, Canberra, p. 3.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid

<sup>14</sup> Ibid 6

- 6% of teachers reported that they experience students *being extremely violent to teachers* once or twice each week.<sup>15</sup>
22. Despite the negative media, intensification of workload, students with complex needs and challenging behavior, and the intense scrutiny of education by politicians, commentators and the general public the majority of teachers still enjoy their job.
  23. The 2013 Staff in Australia's Schools survey showed that 89% of primary teachers and 85% of secondary teachers were satisfied or very satisfied with their job. Teachers were most satisfied with their working relationships with colleagues and the accomplishments with their students while factors such as rewards available for superior performance, the amount of administrative and clerical work and the balance between working time and private life caused them most concern.<sup>16</sup>
  24. A 2014 survey conducted by the South Australian branch of the IEUA to identify pressure points in workload found similar results. From the close to 1200 respondents 78 per cent were somewhat or very satisfied with the teaching profession.
  25. With the majority of teachers still enjoying their work, even in these most challenging times, it is important to find solutions quickly before this changes. The IEUA believes the following will assist in rebuilding teaching as a career and, in turn, the status of both the teaching profession and schooling in Australia.
  26. Australia's education system needs to be depoliticised. The following two paragraphs from Associate Professor Philip Riley in the *The Australian Principal Health, Safety and Wellbeing Survey - 2017 Data* sum up the need for this to occur.

*"If Australia were to adopt a similarly courageous decision to the one Finland took five decades ago, and use the best minds in the country to develop, elaborate and evaluate effective, context-derived, educational policy in a cycle of continuous improvement we could expect to achieve similar national gains. However, Australia's mix of 3- and 4-year political cycles that intersect across states, territories and nationally does not lend itself to the development of long-term solutions or long-term evaluation and promulgation of best practice, so we must start with the fundamentals. If we do not, we are simply deluding ourselves that we can effect significant change.*

*"Short-term political cycles coupled with heavily politicized educational standpoints from major parties, has led to slogans rather than policy and short-term interventions open to further politicization and polemic. This is no surprise. Politicians are experts in politics not education. For Australian education to progress, we need the healthy clash of ideas in a complex discussion where experts and communities share the common goal of making schools the best places for our children; giving them the best opportunities in life. This would also provide the nation with sustainable, social and therefore economic benefit. Depoliticizing*

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<sup>15</sup> Shaddock, A., Packer, S. & Roy, Alasdair, (2015), *Schools for All: Children and Young People: Report of the expert panel on students with complex needs and challenging behaviour*, Education and Training Directorate, ACT Government, Canberra, p. 40.

<sup>16</sup> McKenzie, Phillip; Weldon, Paul R.; Rowley, Glenn; Murphy, Martin; and McMillan, Julie, (2014), "Staff in Australia's schools 2013: Main report on the survey".

*education would allow conversations aimed at building cases for change with highest quality evidence drawn from many sources and not driven by short-term political advantage. As the Finns realized, education is far too important for that.”<sup>17</sup>*

27. As part of depoliticising education teachers will need to be given back control of the teaching profession. Politicians, bureaucrats, media personalities, edu businesses and self claimed education experts need to allow teachers to decide on aspects such as teaching standards, teacher registration, curriculum, assessment, reporting and teaching methods.
28. It must be strongly emphasised that teachers are not immune to working hard to achieve strong and positive results with and for their students. Yet, it is the intensification of work, on an already full workload, without a real net positive gain for students’ performance that causes them concerns. Teachers would prefer spending their time preparing creative, innovative and motivating lessons rather than completing paperwork they don’t see as having a direct impact on the learning progress of their students.
29. A recent survey of members conducted by the NSW/ACT branch of the union found that the number one issue impacting on workload were the ‘Administration’ expectations; which included red tape, compliance, regulation, filling out camp forms, risk assessments etc. Of the over 4400 responses to the survey 52 per cent declared it a major issue and over 80 per cent said it was a significant/major issue.
30. As a further illustration of the administrative workload changes, ABS data (4221.0 – Schools, Australia 2017) shows that in the ten years to 2017 school staff working in administrative and clerical positions increased by just over 70,000 FTE or close to 71% (at the same time the number of teachers increased by only 37,600 or 15%). These figures illustrate the recognition by schools and principals of the need to meet the increasing administrative burden, arguably at the expense of increasing teacher resourcing.
31. In 2018 the NSW/ACT branch of the union requested comments from members who were involved in the trialling of learning progressions as part of the NSW Literacy and Numeracy Action Plan. Learning progressions are used to show the detailed pathway learners most commonly use as they progress through a learning area.
32. Despite two members giving positive comments about the learning progressions helping them plan purposeful lessons with greater clarity about where students are heading and identifying areas of the curriculum not being covered the overwhelming responses were negative.
33. Members involved in the trial were concerned about:
  - a. The vast amount of time it took to track each student and the number of times this needed to be done throughout the year. Members felt their time

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<sup>17</sup> Riley, P., 2018, *The Australian Principal Occupational Health, Safety and Wellbeing Survey 2017 Data*, Institute for Positive Psychology & Education, Australian Catholic University, Fitzroy, Victoria, p. 25.

was being wasted feeding data into machines when they could have been planning interesting classroom activities.

- b. The stress/pressure/duress they were placed under to complete the checklists. One member expressed deep anxiety about the number of teachers who will leave the profession because of the increased workload. Another member could feel their work/life balance taking a dive for the worse.
  - c. The purpose behind using the learning progressions. They were asking for whom were they collecting this data. Members pointed out that it really didn't assist in report writing, as they are required to report using an A to E scale. They also said that it hasn't replaced any other assessment or data collection they were using previously. Members are still required to complete Early Years Assessment (EYA), write reports for parents on student progress and complete the Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) for Kindergarten students. Another mentioned the National Consistent Collection of Data (NCCD) as one more data collection to be completed.
  - d. A high degree of personal/professional conflict. Teachers of early years students know the importance of continuity of their presence in the classroom. Yet, to complete the learning progressions checklist these teachers needed to take time out of class so it didn't have to be done in their personal/family time. Further they were in conflict because time out of class meant the students could have a number of casual teachers and lose momentum in their learning.
34. The above trial only involved learning progressions in literacy and numeracy. With the above comments reflecting the the experiences of teachers in the early years using the learning progressions in just two areas then it is unfeasible for the learning progressions to be expanded across the eight learning areas and seven general competencies of the Australian Curriculum in the next two to three years and for the expectation that all Australian teachers will complete checklists for each and every student they teach. Such a plan will only further decimate the attractiveness of the profession for teachers and principals.
35. In the past a teacher's professional judgement was highly regarded. Such detailed checklists, as the learning progressions provide, devalue this judgement and teachers are now spending valuable time completing data entry. A more useful process would be for teachers to use their professional judgement to assess where students are in their learning and to use the learning progressions as a reference tool for planning and diagnosing specific areas when students are encountering difficulties.
36. A part of taking the competitiveness out of education will require changes to the National Assessment Plan (NAP), primarily focussed on modifications to the Literacy and Numeracy aspects of this (NAPLAN). These changes will need to be applied to the administration of the tests and the reporting of the results.
37. IEUA policy states that tests such as NAPLAN should be based on sample testing rather than census testing. Sample testing would provide a strong indicator of the standard of education throughout Australia while eliminating the time spent by schools preparing for and practising for NAPLAN each year.
38. In the reporting of data the IEUA believes the collection of students' individual, class and school performance data must be confidential. There should be no publication of

results allowing the comparison of individuals or schools in league tables or other inappropriate, misleading and invalid ways.

39. The publication of each school's NAPLAN results on the My School website does allow the comparison of school performance. It was hoped by publishing these results that a healthy competitive spirit would develop between schools as they strived to improve individual students' performances and, in turn, overall school performance. But as the Productivity Commission found in its report this type of focus on its own is not enough to achieve the desired results.
40. What has occurred is that there is now an unhealthy competitive spirit between schools, within and across sectors and jurisdictions, where there is little sharing of innovative ideas and strategies, students enrolling in secondary school have to produce a copy of their NAPLAN results, schools are using individual marketing plans to attract students and every school appears to be on its own.
41. It could be concluded that the time spent preparing for NAPLAN and the publication of the results on the My School website is continually increasing the risk of a narrowing of the curriculum and an overall lowering of the quality of education. And because of this the status of the teaching profession continues to decline.
42. For teachers to have longevity and to be the 'best they can be' in their profession early career teachers must receive the best possible induction and mentoring programs. Teaching is a career where a teacher is expected to turn up on the very first day and take responsibility for the students in their class/es. Once a teacher is in the classroom teaching they can't just go next door and ask for some advice, they can't check if this looks okay or if they are doing something correctly. Beginning teachers are, more often than not, on their own.
43. Teacher registration authorities must be proactive in their expectation on employers, government and non-government, to properly fund and support teachers in the requirements for gaining proficiency status, which ultimately is their licence to teach. While there is rigorous oversight on teachers seeking their accreditation/certification there has been a distinct failure to quantify the requirements for this process. This must be quantified to ensure that beginning teachers' rights to support during induction is realised.
44. At present there is no exemplar of what constitutes a high standard induction program that will give beginning teachers the highest chance of succeeding in the profession. It is also must be remembered that many beginning teachers commence their careers as casual or temporary teachers and that these teachers must also be catered for with high quality induction and mentoring programs.
45. In summary it could be said that over the past twenty years since the last inquiry into the status of the teaching profession there has been the continued subjection of schooling by policy makers and commentators to the ideology and rhetoric of the market place and economic rationalism. It is rhetoric which emphasises an individualistic, competitive and user-pays model, from which as well as winners, there must be losers. This jars with the collaborative and co-operative approach which most teachers believe underpins quality teaching and learning and their deep commitment to the education and welfare of every student, and that all students should be winners from their experience of school.

46. It is not that teachers aren't familiar with and successfully working within policy regimes of reform and restructuring in education. Teachers value support, order and flexibility in school organisation and want to be included in organisational decisions. In order to improve the status of the teaching profession Australian governments need to have a common strategic goal for Australian schooling and teachers need to be handed back control of the profession.

Chris Watt  
Federal Secretary  
January 2019