Valuing the Teaching Profession Inquiry - Submission from the Teachers' Work in Schools Research Team

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The past ten years have seen considerable shifts reported in the amount and nature of work undertaken by teachers in schools. Our programme of research has documented these perceptions, and associated experiences, in detail across two state contexts (NSW and WA).

Collectively, our research highlights that **public school teachers in this country are experiencing substantial pressure** related, for instance, to administrative and data collection requirements, with this difficulty 'blanketing' teaching work across such factors as school type, geographical location and level of advantage. At the same time, our research has shown the **considerable and context-specific challenges** some teachers face in a system that is increasingly stratified, largely due to an ongoing policy of school 'choice'.

Teachers, across our publications, call for greater support from their employer, and wish to feel valued. In this submission to the *Valuing the Teaching Profession Inquiry*, we summarise our recent relevant publications and provide a list of recommendations for positive policy progress to address current challenges confronting teachers.

We make this submission aware that the panel is already well-acquainted with our work with the NSW Teachers' Federation and State School Teachers Union of WA, in particular the following reports:

- McGrath-Champ, S., Wilson, R., Stacey, M. & Fitzgerald, S. (2018). *Understanding work in schools: The foundation for teaching and learning*. Retrieved from: https://www.nswtf.org.au/files/18438_uwis_digital.pdf
- McGrath-Champ, S., Wilson, R., Stacey, M. (2017). *Teaching and learning: Review of workload.* NSW Teachers Federation: Surry Hills. Retrieved from: https://ses.library.usyd.edu.au/handle/2123/21927
- Fitzgerald, S., McGrath-Champ, S., Wilson, R. & Stacey, M. (2019). Understanding work in WA public schools: 2019 report to the State School Teachers Union of WA. Perth, Australia: SSTUWA. (https://www.sstuwa.org.au/news-home/2019/jul/wa-teachers-seek-pay-rise-and-support-workload-pressure-soars)

Below, we provide **details of publications which extend beyond these reports** and have resonance with the Terms of Reference for the Inquiry. We briefly **summarise the key findings** and explain the relevance of each, grouped according to the following five themes: teachers' work and workload; principals' work and workload; implications of school choice for teachers and principals; teachers' status; and the NSW Teachers' Federation and union strategy. This is followed by a **brief list of recommendations**.

Teachers' Work and Workload

1. Stacey, M., Wilson, R. & McGrath-Champ, S. (2020). Triage in teaching: the nature and impact of workload in schools. *Asia Pacific Journal of Education*, online first. doi: 10.1080/02188791.2020.1777938

   This article draws on data from the 2017 'Review of Workload' union study listed above. The article argues that changes to teachers' work and workload in NSW has led to a **process of triage occurring in schools, with teachers being forced to decide "what was most pressing and acting accordingly**, knowing that some tasks may ultimately never be completed" (Stacey, Wilson, & McGrath-Champ, 2020). The article also expands further on the findings of the original report to suggest that increased accountability via paperwork and reporting requirements may be operating to re-shape and re-define what it means to be a teacher, and just what a teacher 'does', with some participants experiencing ambivalence about what work was or should be considered most important. The sustainability of this settlement for teachers is thereby brought into question.

2. Fitzgerald, S., McGrath-Champ, S., Stacey, M., Wilson, R. & Gavin, M. (2019). Intensification of Teachers' Work under Devolution: A 'Tsunami' of Paperwork. *Journal of Industrial Relations* *61*(5), 613-636. doi: 10.1177/0022185618801396

   This article explores changes in work demands experienced by NSW teachers and provides **evidence of devolution-driven work intensification**. The paper examined teaching professionals' views through interviews with teacher union representatives from significant, qualitative investigation. The research was undertaken in 2014-2015 prior to the 2018 Major Study commissioned by the Teachers' Federation. It provides documentation of the very long working hours of teachers. Consistent with a model of work intensification, the **'tsunami' of workload increases were almost universally reported primarily in relation to 'paper work'** requirements. Founded in a smaller sample than the Major Study, this research initially discerned differences in the nature of intensification according to socio-educational advantage, level of schooling (primary or secondary), and location which were less evident from the subsequent, large-scale study.

3. McGrath-Champ, S., Fitzgerald, S., Gavin, M., Stacey, M., & Wilson, R. (Under Review). Commodification processes in the employment heartland: Temporary teachers' experiences of work and workload. *Work, Employment and Society*.

This article draws on data from the 2018 Major Study and detailed historical case study analysis to explore the emergence of the fixed-contract or 'temporary' teaching position in New South Wales public education. These positions were established in 2001 to address the growing labour market insecurity experienced by 'casual' teachers. However, the devolution of staffing authority in schools, coupled with an **escalation of temporary teacher numbers, has created greater overall precariousness within the teacher workforce.** Temporary teachers report similar workload pressures to permanent teachers, while experiencing significant dissatisfaction with their precarious employment status. This employment category, ostensibly aimed at limiting 'non-standard' employment among teaching professionals, has allowed employing organisations to expect a **high level of work and organisational commitment without providing a corresponding level of employment security**.

4. Stacey, M. (2017). The teacher 'problem': An analysis of the NSW education policy Great Teaching, Inspired Learning. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education 38*(5), 782-793. doi: 10.1080/01596306.2016.1168778

This article discursively examines a policy introduced at state level in NSW in 2013. The policy reflects concern with teacher quality, both within schools and at the level of initial teacher education and flags a range of measures to be put in place to improve this perceived situation, including such policy technologies as the Literacy and Numeracy Test for Initial Teacher Education or LANTITE, as well as processes for ongoing professional development and the linking of the teaching award to level of accreditation. Using Carol Bacchi's 'What's the problem represented to be?' approach to policy analysis, the article argues that this policy is an example of 'neoliberalisation' in education, with **teachers being largely, although not entirely, 'responsibilised' for schooling** (which are discursively linked to national economic) outcomes. Meanwhile, there are **considerable 'silences' within the policy around broader systemic issues** such as funding, student segregation and cohort effects.

5. Parding, K., McGrath-Champ, S. and Stacey, M. (2020) Governance reform in context: Welfare sector professionals' working and employment conditions, *Current Sociology* (published online March 23). https://doi.org/10.1177/0011392120909859.

This article addresses the relationship between profession, organisation and spatial (geographical) setting, more specifically the relationship between welfare sector professionals' conditions for work amidst governance change. In previous research, the conditions for welfare sector professionals' work have largely been studied without taking the employing organisations or the local and regional situation into consideration. This article seeks to counteract this de-contextualised approach. The authors show that the circumstances of the specific workplace context are essential in understanding welfare sector professionals' working conditions, especially so in current governance contexts characterised to varying degrees by marketisation, via processes and structures which facilitate choice, competition, privatisation and devolution. This line of argument is illustrated in relation to how upper secondary teachers in Sweden experience their conditions for work and employment in eight schools across three different 'market types'. The authors contend that **whilst different conditions in different workplaces can to some extent always be expected, current governance agendas in the welfare sector**

seem to exacerbate these differences. The article's theoretical contribution, therefore, is in the privileging of local contextual dynamics. The authors suggest a stronger emphasis on spatially-informed frames of reference in future studies of conditions for welfare sector professionals.

See also 8, 10, 12.

See also later **Samples of Media and Engagement**.

Principals' Work and Workload

6. McGrath-Champ, S., Stacey, M., Wilson, R., Fitzgerald, S., Rainnie, A. & Parding, K. (2019). Principals' support for teachers' working conditions in devolved school settings: Insights from two Australian states. *Educational Management Administration and Leadership 47*(4), 590-605. doi: 10.1177/1741143217745879

   This paper examines principals' actions in creating and supporting teachers' working conditions in two devolved Australian state settings, NSW and WA. The paper reports on the initiatives 30 principals in a diverse range of devolved Australian government schools adopt to shape and support the local, school-level working conditions of teachers. Surprisingly, principals were commonly unable to articulate – or even respond to – this matter. More commonly principals reported being oriented to lifting capability through a focus on student outcomes, a focus that is consistent with much of the devolution and autonomy rhetoric. Of those who could respond regarding working conditions, dispositions of paternalistic 'care', basic distributive actions or even a lack of influence or control were reported. Principals' responses in metropolitan, regional and rural settings varied indicating that the spatially-differentiated nature of Australian schooling creates major openings for analysis of the inequitable layout of devolutionary school policies. Despite new leadership profiles tied to the leadership standard for principals (AITSL, 2014), an **understanding of principals in relation to teachers as workers, rather than as producers of ever-improving student outcomes, remains conspicuous in its absence.** The possibility of a causal relationship between principals' own role change and conditions, and their ability, inclination or opportunity to support their staff – a question we raise throughout this paper – is identified as a matter requiring further investigation. This paper is based on a significant interview study with principals conducted in 2014/15.

7. Gavin, M. & McGrath-Champ, S. (2017). Devolving authority: the impact of giving public schools power to hire staff. *Asia Pacific Journal of Human Resources* 55(2), 255-74. doi:10.1111/1744-7941.12110

   This study on the piloting of 'Local Schools, Local Decisions' on 47 schools reveals early understandings of the impact of devolution in New South Wales public schools. The reforms, progressively implemented from 2012, increased principals' capacity for the selection of teaching staff, among other initiatives. This policy shift enabled principals to make merit-based selection

of staff and enhanced 'local' choice of school staff. Findings revealed that **while some principals responded positively to greater local decision-making and were able to cater to local student needs, there was undermining of trust and confidence in the merit selection process, increased managerialisation of the principals' role and problems for remote schools in attracting and retaining quality teachers.**

See also 9.

Implications of School Choice for Teachers and Principals

8. Stacey, M. (2020). *The business of teaching: becoming a teacher in a market of schools*. Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan.

   This book documents the **impacts of school choice policy approaches of the past forty years on teachers and their work.** Taking a multiple case approach, the book explores nine early career teacher cases working across highly diverse school sites, including public, Catholic and independent. **Teachers in schools enrolling students experiencing significant educational disadvantage described extensive socio-cultural, creative and relational demands, working with students marginalized within wider society and who experienced multiple and sustained challenges both within and beyond the school.** Teachers working in schools with more average levels of advantage were kept busy with various extra-curricular demands, part of marketing and promoting their school, yet shared with those working in elite settings a generally easy relational dynamic with largely compliant student cohorts, the latter also with considerable material and human resources at their disposal. **Workload across most contexts, however, was described as a concern.** Further explanation of these findings can be found in this 2019 blog post: https://www.aare.edu.au/blog/?p=4224

9. Fitzgerald, S., Stacey, M., McGrath-Champ, S., Parding, K. & Rainnie, A. (2018). Devolution, market dynamics and the Independent Public School initiative in Western Australia: 'Winning back' what has been lost? *Journal of Education Policy 33*(5), 662-681. doi: 10.1080/02680939.2017.1412502

   This article examines school devolution policies in Western Australia as exemplified by the expansion of the Independent Public School (IPS) program. Drawing on extensive interview data from two schools – one IPS and one non-IPS – we examined the ways in which the IPS initiative is contributing to the operation of new market dynamics within the public school sector in WA. We note that competition and choice associated with the **IPS program has created new mechanisms for the residualisation of particular, and specifically non-IP, schools and new pressures on teachers** such as that staff at both schools reported work intensification and significant dissatisfaction in their work.

10. Parding, K., McGrath-Champ, S. & Stacey, M. (2017). Teachers, school choice and competition: Lock-in effects within and between sectors. *Policy Futures in Education 15*(1), 113-128. doi: 10.1177/1478210316688355

In the context of considerable diversification of schools across and within both private and public contexts, this article draws on preliminary data within the state of NSW to argue that school segmentation and segregation can create '**lock-in' effects for teachers** through the development of context-specific skill sets. In addition, work arrangements including hiring practices and systems make **movement between sectors difficult for teachers**, indicating that once teachers are within a particular sector, they will tend to stay within that sector. Given the ongoing popularity of private sector schooling in Australia, politically and otherwise, this has implications for the public sector as potentially needing to compete for staff, not only at the point of employment but also subsequently.

 See also 2.

The NSW Teachers' Federation and Union Strategy

11. McGrath-Champ, S., Gavin, M. & Stacey, M. (2020). Strategy and policy: The case of an Australian teachers' union. In Lansbury, R., Johnson, A. and Van den Broek, D. (Eds.) *Contemporary Issues in Work and Organisations: Actors and Institutions,* pp. 110-126. Abingdon, England: Routledge. (ISBN 9781138341937)

This book chapter highlights the challenges facing unions, in particular the NSW Teachers' Federation, in finding new ways of working within a neoliberal context and the difficulties of policy implementation in a pluralist framework of industrial relations. In particular, it highlights a key tension of **teacher unions pursuing skill formation**, in this instance, via accreditation requirements as a form of occupational professionalisation. **In the context of work intensification and high workload, such new requirements can be perceived by teachers as yet another demand in a context of on-going reform to teachers' work**. Despite the best intentions of the union to promote and strengthen the standing of teachers through professionalisation processes, it appears that accreditation, in a neo-liberal political environment, can be perceived as exacting more intense work from teachers, greater 'value for money', and increased audit requirements.

12. Gavin, M. (2019). Working industrially or professionally? What strategies should teacher unions use to improve teacher salaries in neoliberal times?' *Labour and Industry 29*(1), 19-33. doi:10.1080/10301763.2018.1548068

Teachers' salaries have been subject to particular scrutiny by governments. Successive state governments have utilised adversarial tactics during salary negotiations with trade unions, placed legislative restrictions on wages growth and restricted union activity aimed at improving teachers' salaries. In this climate, a **shift in trade union strategy to improve teachers' salaries is needed, in addition to re-imagining the core function of teachers' work and value in society.** Such

strategies include renewing key messages to parents and the community around teacher salaries and the value of teachers in communities, as well as advancing the professional interests of teachers.

13. Gavin, M., McGrath-Champ, S., Stacey, M. and Wilson, R. (forthcoming) Women's participation in teacher unions: implications of a 'triple burden' for union gender equality strategies, *Economic and Industrial Democracy*

    Teaching is a gendered profession, yet **women are particularly burdened by the demands of 'work' and 'life', which can stifle union participation.** The intensification of teachers' work has distinct implications for the capacity of women to effectively engage in, and balance, various areas of their lives - their teaching (professional work), participation in their trade union, and (often) carrying out unpaid caring and domestic responsibilities. This phenomenon is known as **the 'triple burden'**. With the 'union heartland' shifting to more female-dominated professions (such as teaching), it is timely to consider strategies that teacher unions can use to support women's participation and representation in their union particularly in a time of work intensification.

    See also 3.

Teachers' Status

14. Wilson, R. (2020). *The Profession at Risk: Trends in standards for Admission to Teaching.* Retrieved from: https://www.nswtf.org.au/files/20042_theprofessionatrisk_digital.pdf

    This report, commissioned by the NSW Teachers Federation, provides an analysis of trends in entry and completion rates into Initial Teacher Education programs across Australia. It shows a lack of transparency in standards for admission, large and concerning declines in ATAR performance where data is available, and low and declining completion rates among students in teacher education. The report **argues that low standards at admission contribute to the current low status of the profession, and calls for the development of national teacher recruitment strategy.**

    See also 8.

Scholarly Theses

15. Gavin, M. (2012) *Devolving Authority to Schools: A Critical Analysis of the Impact of Changes to Hiring and Staffing under the NSW Local Schools, Local Decisions Policy,* Honours Thesis#
16. Gavin, M. (2019) *Changing conditions of work in neoliberal times: How the NSW Teachers' Federation has responded to changes in teachers' industrial and professional working conditions in NSW public education, 1985-2017.* Doctoral Thesis *#
17. Stacey, M. (2018) *Early career teachers' negotiation of a marketised hierarchy of schools: From the safety net to the high wire*. Doctoral Thesis (See also 8 above)*
18. Dabaja, I. (2019) *Control at the Chalkface: Principals' Experiences of Work, Control and Resistance after the NSW Local Schools, Local Decisions Policy Reform.*

(Availability: * University of Sydney Library; # NSW Teachers Federation Library or on request.)

Samples of Media and Engagement on Teachers Work and Workload

1. Wilson, R. and McGrath-Champ, S. (2018) 'New research shows NSW teachers working long hours to cope with administrative load'. *The Conversation*, 9 July, https://theconversation.com/new-research-shows-nsw-teachers-working-long-hours-to-cope-with-administrative-load-99453

2. Gavin, M. and McGrath-Champ, S. (2019) 'It's time to rethink our views of teachers to help them and students'. *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 21 June, https://www.smh.com.au/business/workplace/it-s-time-to-rethink-our-views-of-teachers-to-help-them-and-students-20190606-p51v22.html

3. Wilson, R. (2020) 'Your country needs you!' It's high time for a drive to recruit better teachers. *Sydney Morning Herald,* 20 Feb, https://www.smh.com.au/national/your-country-needs-you-it-s-high-time-for-a-drive-to-recruit-better-teachers-20200219-p5429i.html

4. **'We're not being trusted': Teachers drowning in paperwork at expense of teaching**
   Sydney Morning Herald (*Newspaper*), 8 July 2018 reported the study by University of Sydney researchers, commissioned by the NSW Teachers Federation, which found 97 percent of teachers reported an increase in administration duties since the Local Schools, Local Decision state education policy. The article was syndicated across Fairfax Media, including: *The Australian, Adelaide Now, Herald Sun, Brisbane-Courier Daily, Daily Telegraph, Cairns Post, Geelong Advertiser, Northern Territory News, Townsville Bulletin, Gold Coast Bulletin, Barrier Daily Truth, Weekly Times Now, Campus Morning Mail, Daily Advertiser, Illawarra Mercury, News Team. News.com.au, Yahoo! News Australia, Yahoo! New Zealand, News Team, News.com.au, EducationHQ News Team,* and MSN, and *2SM Sydney, Classic Rock Radio and Power FM Illawarra* (*Radio*) on 9 July 2018.

5. **Teachers' core job swamped by paperwork**
   The Age (*Newspaper*), 5 May 2018
   Weekend newspaper Feature article on preliminary findings from Major Report and sparked immediate response by Minister of Education: 5 May 2018, Sydney Morning Herald, *The Age*, (Syndicated across Fairfax Media). *2GB Sydney and 4BC Brisbane* (*Radio*), aired an interview on the above study on 9 May 2018 and *Education HQ*, 7 May 2018. (The 2GB interview was the morning after the 2018 Federal Budget was handed down, signaling the significance of this study as a news item).

6. **Ross Gittins column endorsement of teachers' work major study**, 'What smart bosses do to get the best out of staff', Sydney Morning Herald, syndicated widely including: *The Age, Canberra Times, Brisbane Times, WA Today*.

7. **ABC Radio 702 Sydney interview** with Wendy Harmer and Robbie Buck, and 2SM, 25/7/2018 on teachers work research

8. Features in University of Sydney *News:* 'Teachers suffer from "unsustainable" administrative demands: survey' and University of Sydney Business School *News*.

Recommendations

Based on our collective and substantial research work as part of the *Teachers' Work in Schools* team, we present the following recommendations.

"(a) How best to support teachers and principals in New South Wales public schools, including through investment in the education workforce and capital infrastructure":

1. Reduce temporary employment proportions and accompany this with increased permanent full-time and part-time teacher positions (the latter for those whose circumstances determine a need for less than full-time employment). The casual and fixed-term 'buffer' appears disproportionate creating unacceptable levels of precariousness, employment insecurity, and employment 'scarring'.

2. Review and modify funding arrangements to provide principals with greater capacity for confidence in offering permanent positions to teachers.

3. If and where merit selection is to be maintained in staffing policy, ensure principals and school-level committees have requisite skills for equitable and effective merit-based recruitment and selection of teachers, and that recruitment/selection processes enable the exercise of these competencies.

4. Reduce administrative workloads (without establishing 'quasi-professional' teaching assistants), and audit data and paperwork requested to determine what is really needed, with the goal of a substantial, net reduction in the quantum of paperwork and data reporting. Further, apply these principles in relation to both existing and future requirements for data, compliance information and related administrative activity, and do so at all levels (teachers, principals).

5. Remove external, performative accountability processes; accountability, while important, should be embedded in teachers' everyday work and the exercising of their professional knowledges, rather than being imposed from above.

6. Reduce segregation across schools and fully support schools according to need.

"(b) How to best improve the status of the teaching profession, including, but not limited to matters going to remuneration":

1. Value teachers' professional judgement and understand the complexity of what they do.

2. <u>Develop a national, or state-wide, teacher recruitment strategy,</u> to induce greater interest in teaching careers, and through this affect heightened public/community perceptions of teaching and those who undertake teaching work.

3. <u>Provide greater transparency on the academic and non-academic standards required for entry to the profession,</u> with data provided for 100% of intake cohorts. One option is to provide minimum benchmarks for entry standards and completion rates for ITE providers, however, we caution that any such approach must take serious account of the role of advantage in schooling outcomes so as to ensure that the teaching profession recruits from all cultural and socio-economic backgrounds.

4. <u>Provide supports for, rather than purely make demands on, school staff,</u> with particular attention to the demands of educational agencies and government education departments in this matter.

5. <u>Work with media organisations to establish understanding of the vital role of teachers in creating and maintaining a vibrant, democratic society</u> plus strong student outcomes, and the benefit that can be achieved through deservedly positive reporting of schooling matters and teachers' work.

6. <u>Enhance teachers' remuneration to</u> equate with professions requiring equivalent years of study and professional work demands. Ensure that that such appraisals of work effort encompass all significant aspects including emotional labour and psycho-social dimensions of teachers' work. Provide a suitable pay gradient for teaching careers.

7. <u>Ensure future union campaigns around teachers' salaries and working conditions articulate the message of the value of teachers' to students learning and within the community</u>, and attract support from other stakeholders

Notes:

Forthcoming publications: accepted for publication and yet to be released by the publisher. Available on request.

Publications under review: available on request subject to considerations regarding the stage of review.

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