

Teachers, fixed-term contracts and school leadership: Toeing the line and jumping through hoops

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Abstract

Fixed-term contracts are a relatively recent, yet growing category of employment for teachers in the public school system in New South Wales (NSW), Australia. In this article, we draw on quantitative and qualitative data from a large state-wide survey (N=18,234) of members of the public-school teacher union, the NSW Teachers' Federation, in order to explore the workload reports of teachers in temporary employment. We find that overall, these teachers report similar levels of workload to staff employed on a permanent basis. Experiences of work are, however, qualitatively different, with many in the temporary category feeling they must work harder than permanent teachers in order to 'prove themselves' to school executive. We argue that such experiences of precariousness may have particular 'scarring' effects for teachers in temporary employment, including gendered patterns of career progression, and discuss implications for leadership and policy.

Keywords: Fixed-term contracts, teachers, temporary, devolution, casualisation

Introduction

Forms of precarious labour are increasing globally (Cuervo and Wyn 2016). In public schools in the Australian state of New South Wales (NSW), the category of fixed-term contract work known as ‘temporary’ teaching has been growing steadily over the past 20 years. In this article, we examine this new employment category in NSW public schools, as a feature of the employment landscape with hitherto largely undocumented implications for experiences of work and career progression. To do this, we present quantitative and qualitative data from a workload survey of 18,234 teachers, about one fifth of whom were in temporary employment, situating our examination of these data within a policy context of devolved authority in schools.

In what follows, we present the background of the current employment policy landscape for public school teachers in NSW. We then explore the literature on precarious work in school teaching and outline the conceptual framings drawn upon in this article. After describing our research methods, we present our findings, exploring the nature of work and workload for teachers in temporary employment and current tensions, as well as implications, for leadership in schools.

Background

Teachers in NSW public schools work in one of three main employment categories – casual, temporary and permanent. The category of temporary teacher is the newest, established in 2001. Since then, while casual employment has remained relatively stable at 10%, the temporary category has grown to account for approximately 20% of the teacher workforce, while the proportion of permanent employment has declined from around 85% to 70% (McGrath-Champ et al. under review). The category of ‘temporary’ teacher in NSW was

established as a new industrially-recognised employment type in response to growing concerns around casualisation and a need to ensure greater employment security for, in particular, women returning to the workforce after having children. In a legal case run by the NSW public sector teachers' union spanning 10 years and reaching the level of the High Court, an industrial settlement was reached between the state teachers' union and NSW Department of Education providing for the category of 'temporary' teacher, enshrining improved employment conditions and pay (for a more detailed analysis of the evolution of this employment category, see McGrath-Champ et al. under review). Historically, 'casual' teachers in NSW had their pay and conditions protected under a Casual Teachers Award, however a 'barrier' on the teachers' pay scale prevented casual teachers reaching higher pay levels, acting as a catalyst for the creation of the 'temporary' category (see McGrath-Champ et al. under review). While originating at least in part out of concern regarding casual conditions, these shifts reflect broader national and international trends over the past half-century, in which the conditions of traditionally 'stable' forms of employment, such as teaching, have eroded alongside the introduction of 'new public sector management' strategies associated with greater precarity of work (O'Sullivan et al. 2020).

Explorations of temporary teaching as a burgeoning employment category in NSW are therefore likely to have resonance with other forms of fixed-term contract teaching work around the globe. Australia overall, at 14%, would seem to have a lower proportion of teachers on fixed-term contracts when compared to the international average (18%) (Thomson and Hillman 2020) (although notably, this international average is similar to the proportion in the state of NSW (CESE 2018; McGrath-Champ et al. under review)). The Australian average is higher than in lower-secondary schools in England (6%), but lower than in the United States (33%) (OECD 2014). Types of fixed-term contract and casual employment in teaching are sometimes referred to in these contexts as 'supply' (UK) or

‘substitute’ (US) teaching (Charteris, Jenkins, Bannister-Tyrell et al. 2017). In NSW, while a teacher employed in a casual capacity is ‘employed on a day-to-day basis to meet relief needs within the school’, a teacher employed in a temporary capacity is ‘employed full-time for four weeks to a year, or part-time for two terms or more’, receiving ‘most of the entitlements of permanent teachers’ (NSW Department of Education 2020), for instance including sick leave.

The creation and growth of the temporary employment category must also be understood in the context of devolved school governance. Along with enhanced flexibility and discretion around financial management afforded to local school principals (Gavin and McGrath-Champ 2017), the ‘Local Schools, Local Decisions’ (LSLD) reform, progressively implemented from 2012-2020, increased principals’ capacity for the selection of teaching staff. This policy shift enabled principals to make merit-based selection of one in two permanent staff appointments to their school, with the other half of staffing appointments filled by the central Department of Education. Meanwhile, all temporary positions are filled at school level, including – in particular circumstances, such as a projected decline in enrolments – the possible filling of a permanent position with a temporary appointment (NSW Government 2020). This policy context shaping NSW public schools has constituted a devolved employment settlement for Department employees, with greater decision-making regarding individuals’ employment in the hands of local principal ‘managers’ rather than the state.

Temporary Teaching in the Research Literature

Research on fixed-term contract teaching work is a developing area of scholarship, with a distinct lack of research noted around the globe (e.g. for an analysis of the Canadian context, see The Alberta Teachers' Association 2011). Research in Australia has focused primarily on day-to-day casual work (Bamberry 2011; Charteris, Jenkins, Bannister-Tyrrell et al. 2017;

Charteris, Jenkins, Jones et al. 2017; Jenkins, Smith, and Maxwell 2009; McCormack and Thomas 2005), unsurprising perhaps given that fixed-term work is rather ‘newer’. When fixed-term contract employment is examined, it is often rolled together with other forms of precarious employment. In Bamberry’s (2011) research, for instance, the temporary category is considered to be a particular kind of casual work, alongside the day-to-day casual.

However, the distinction between these employment types is important. McCormack and Thomas’ (2005) research with casual teachers found that they preferred employment in blocks of time at one school, compared to day-to-day casual employment, as it allowed for more relationship-building, stronger integration into the systems and processes of individual schools, and overall a broader sense of skill building. Teachers on fixed-term contracts, meanwhile, were more likely to embed themselves in the school but did not feel they received the same sense of investment in return, not receiving access to training or updates about curriculum changes, for instance (Bamberry 2011). The literature on fixed-term contract teaching work has also noted a positive relationship between organisational citizenship behaviours (i.e. a person's voluntary effort and commitment) and perceived job insecurity, reflecting a desire to ‘impress’ management (Feather and Rauter 2004). There is, however, some evidence that this relationship may not be as strong in contexts where there is less competition for temporary teaching work (Lierich and O’Connor 2009).

Notwithstanding the importance of distinctions between temporary and casual forms of precariousness in teaching – a central issue to which this article contributes empirically – insights can nevertheless be drawn from the literature which explores the experience of day-to-day casual teaching. This research notes that, for instance, casual teachers describe a sense of feeling surveilled and needing to be ‘deferential and grateful’ in order to be asked back (Charteris, Jenkins, Jones, et al. 2017, 520), often feeling marginalized and ‘othered’ within schools (Charteris, Jenkins, Bannister-Tyrrell, et al. 2017). While for some teachers a casual

position might mean additional flexibility, for many, it also contributes to a life of day-to-day uncertainty, not knowing the facilities and routines of different schools and often failing to be provided with the information and resources necessary to do what is asked (Jenkins et al. 2009).

The experience of insecure casual and temporary work is particularly significant for those commencing their teaching careers. In NSW, it is today considered normal for teachers to begin their career in a casual or temporary capacity (NSW Department of Education 2020). Around Australia, only 22% of teachers in their first year are estimated by Preston (2019) to be in permanent positions, reflecting a substantial shift in the period between 2004 and 2013, with a decline in permanent employment for those aged 20-24 of 32% to 20%; and for those aged 25-29, of 59% to 40%. For these newer and younger teachers, 'relationships are not only difficult to develop over the disjointed and relatively short-term engagements common for early career replacement teachers, but they are undermined by the common lack of authority and experience of early career teachers' (Preston 2019, 181). Indeed, 'casual beginning teachers' have been noted in the literature to commonly go without the kind of support, induction and professional development provided for permanent staff members and are rarely accorded the same respect (Bamberry 2011; McCormack and Thomas 2005; Mercieca 2017; Nicholas and Wells 2017). The impacts of casual and fixed-term employment for young teachers are also felt beyond the school environment, with difficulty securing things like bank loans and finding appropriate accommodation, if there is uncertainty around employment security in a particular location (Mercieca 2017). Drawing on a sample exclusively of early career teachers, Jenkins et al. (2009, 76) warn that 'potentially very effective teachers will be lost to the profession', demoralised by the uncertain prospect of permanency.

Understanding Precariousness in Fixed-Term Employment

Preston's (2019) work on precariousness in teaching, cited above, draws on labour market segmentation research that differentiates between primary labour markets (with high income and job security) and secondary labour markets (with low income and job security). Preston argues that fixed-term 'replacement teaching' usually falls into the category of secondary labour markets, making it 'an unattractive "bad job"' (Preston 2019, 177). Yet Preston notes distinctions here, too. If one is repeatedly hired at the same school you are part of an *internal, organisation-led* secondary labour market which allows the development of social capital and professional networks, and recognition of skills. Those who are hired in casual or fixed-term positions across multiple schools operate within an *external, market-led* secondary labour market, which limits their capacity for networking, relationship-building and professional recognition.

Such nuances are clearly important in understanding experiences of precarious work and can be considered part of what is broadly referred to in employment relations literature as 'job quality'. Burgess and Connell (2019) suggest that the numerous elements of job quality can be captured under four broad dimensions: *job prospects* (e.g. including job security and career progression); *extrinsic job quality* (e.g. pay and benefits and occupational health and safety); *intrinsic job quality* (e.g. work organisation, skill development/recognition and supervision and organisational support); and *working time quality* (e.g. work scheduling discretion and the impacts on home/family life). This fourth dimension underlines that the impact of job quality extends beyond the health and well-being of the individual employee (Findlay et al. 2013, 447) and acknowledges impact on 'the health and well-being of employees' children, relationships and household life' (Knox et al. 2011, 8).

Given the wide range of factors that can be taken into account, it is therefore important to note that job quality has also been described as 'very much a contextual

phenomenon’, and largely dependent ‘on the amount of choice a person has over the kinds of jobs s/he can obtain’ (Findlay et al. 2013, 448). Indeed, according to Loughlin and Murray (2013, 532), ‘job status congruence’ is important – that is, whether employees are ‘working full-time, contract, or part-time *by choice*’ (emphasis in original). Thus Preston (2019) notes that for some, casual or fixed-term work can be a ‘good job’ where it is part of the primary labour market, with those in such roles (e.g. consultants) having authority and status as recognised ‘specialist’ professionals.

The impact of precariousness has also been considered in relation to the concept of labour market ‘scarring’, a metaphor from labour market segmentation literature which sees bad jobs as having long term ‘scarring effects’, reducing skills and future earnings (e.g. Taubman and Wachter 1986; Burchell and Rubery 1990). Teachers working in temporary employment may experience less employer ‘investment’ in professional learning and development opportunities, which may ‘scar’ by impacting future employability (Mooi-Reci and Wooden 2017). However, as Egdell and Beck point out (2020 7), most research on scarring has focused ‘at the macro- and meso- levels’; it is also ‘empirically useful to understand scarring from the perspective of those who experience unemployment and/or poor work’.

In this article, we contribute to addressing this gap through the exploration of both quantitative and qualitative data, considering not just ‘what is precarious employment, but “what does precarious employment do”?’ (Cuervo and Chesters 2019, 296). To our knowledge the question of what fixed-term contract precariousness ‘does’ to those in the field of education has yet to be explored. Given the newness of the temporary teaching category and the lack of attention it has thus far received in relation to such concepts as job quality and scarring, it is worth looking more closely at how work within this employment category is

experienced by teachers. In the next section, we outline our approach to providing such an examination.

Method

This article draws on data gathered via a large state-wide survey of teachers in NSW, Australia. The survey was not specific to teachers working in temporary positions, but rather aimed to gather the views of a representative sample of all public school teachers regarding the nature and experience of work and workload, as well as strategies to address such work. The large data set provides an opportunity to explore the category of temporary teaching – how it might compare to that of permanent staff in relation to workload, as well as how this relatively new category of employment may be experienced and understood by those within it. In a companion article, we draw in part on this survey to explore the category of temporary teaching as a manifestation of union strategy resulting in a process of decommodification and recommodification (McGrath-Champ et al. under review). Here, we provide deeper analyses of survey data, highlighting the impact on and experiences of respondents in relation to ‘scarring’ and job quality, including apparent tensions between and within teaching staff and school leadership.

The survey on which we draw was commissioned and facilitated by the NSW Teachers’ Federation (NSWTF) in 2018 (McGrath-Champ et al. 2018). A total of 34% of the union’s membership completed the survey (n=18,234). With the union representing 82% of all public school teachers in the state of NSW, this sample can be considered quite comprehensive. Of the sample, the proportion of teachers in temporary teaching roles (21%, n=3,749) very closely reflected their membership of the union (19%). Those in permanent positions (77%, n=13,969) were slightly over-represented relative to union membership

(63%) whilst those undertaking casual work (3%, n=506) were under-represented (10%). The union membership figures across these three employment categories match recent government workforce profile data (CESE 2018).

In this article, we draw on quantitative data primarily in relation to demographic information as well as work hours and demands. In addition, we explore qualitative responses to the three main open-ended items in the survey, analysed via a combination of content analysis and thematic analysis (Ezzy 2003). Content analysis based on the shorthand term ‘temp*’ captured abbreviated and full use of the word ‘temporary’, raised by those who were themselves currently in temporary employment. Mentions of ‘temp*’ that were not referring to the temporary teacher employment category were excluded. Questions and numbers of responses from teachers employed in a temporary capacity and mentioning ‘temp*’ in relation to such employment are as follows:

- ‘Please feel free to comment on any changes to your workload over the last 5 years (2013-2018)’: n=55
- ‘Please feel free to provide any other ideas you think would support you in your work’: n=51
- ‘Please provide any additional comments you would like to make in relation to your work in schools or other workplaces. We are keen to hear your perspective’: n=112

We note that these questions did not ask about temporary work specifically, meaning that those who referred to temporary teaching voluntarily raised this issue. The resulting qualitative data were coded thematically, as presented below.

Results and Discussion

Workload in temporary teaching

In our sample, teachers in temporary employment reported very similar demands in their work to permanent teachers. Teachers in temporary roles estimated working an average of 56 hours per week during term time, compared to 57 for those in permanent positions and 40 for those employed as casuals. Figure 1 represents reported increases in: hours; complexity of work; administrative tasks; and collection, analysis and reporting of data across permanent, temporary and casual staff.

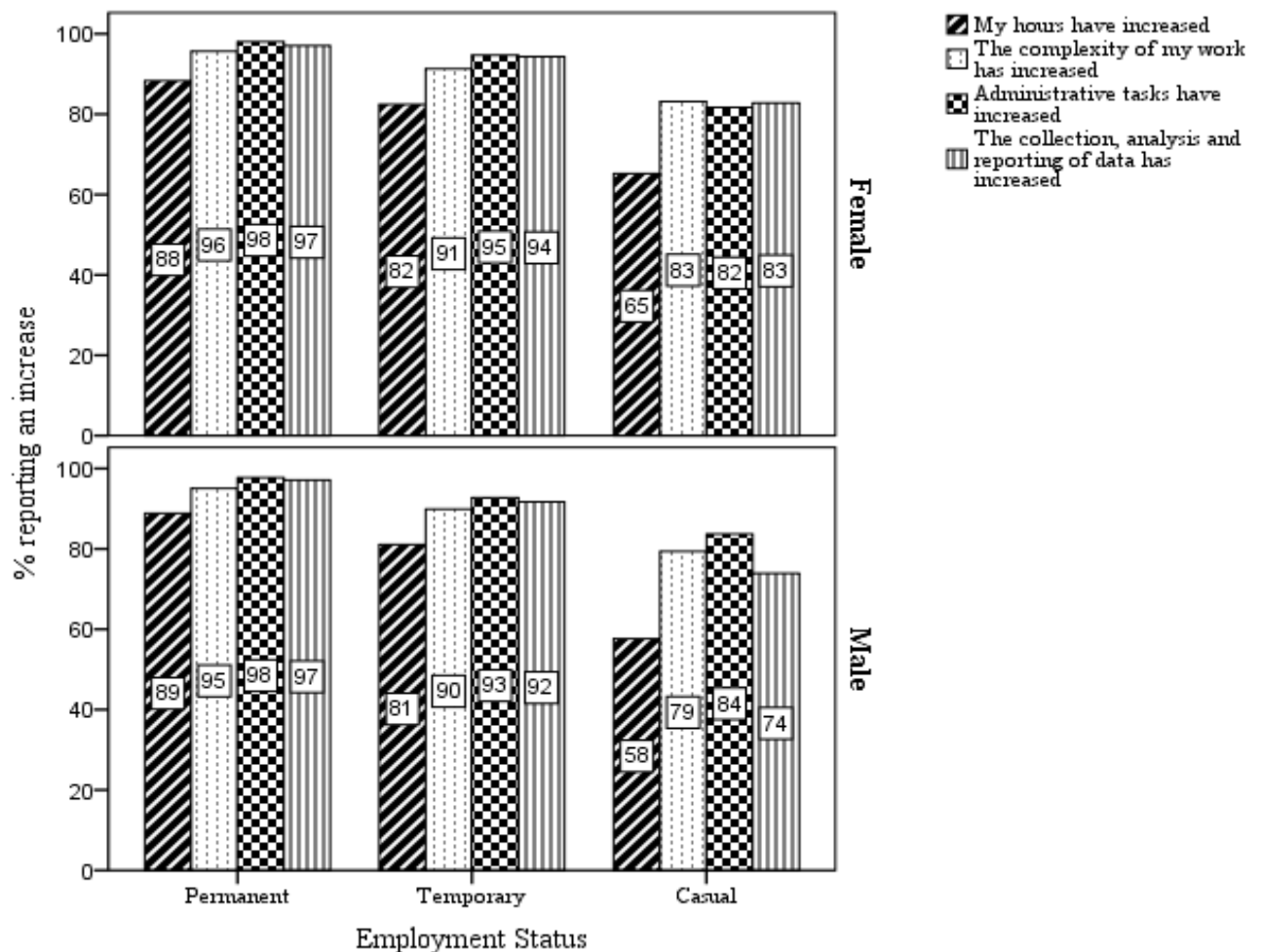


Figure 1: Changes to work and employment status - past 5 years

It is evident that high percentages of respondents report work increases across all employment types. However, they are markedly higher for employees in permanent and

temporary positions than for those in casual positions. This finding highlights the importance of examining the category of temporary teaching as distinct from casual work.

That there are, however, marginally lower proportions of respondents in temporary roles reporting increases in these dimensions of workload compared to permanent staff may reflect the fact that the temporary staff members are a younger average age (37 years, compared to 45 years for permanent and 48 years for casual, reflecting patterns also reported in McKenzie et al. 2014). This may make it difficult to perceive change over what may be a more limited period of time in the workforce. Indeed, comments in the qualitative data suggest this is at least partly the case; one respondent noted that it was ‘difficult to comment [on change in workload over the past five years] as I have been in various casual and temporary roles over that time’, or that they are ‘a new teacher so I can’t really comment on changes’.

In addition, the pattern of those in temporary employment reporting similar, but slightly lower levels and impact of workload is also borne out in reported ‘work demands’, as depicted in Table 1. Here we see very similar – and high – reports from both permanent and temporary respondents. However, these figures are rather different from those in casual employment, which sit consistently lower, perhaps indicating teachers in temporary positions experience poorer *working time quality* and *intrinsic job quality* than teachers working casually. In contrast, it is evident that there are lower percentages of permanent and temporary staff reporting often or always having enough time to complete their work tasks. The lower work demands reported by those in casual employment suggest that in some ways, at least in terms of workload, it can be a less intensive role.

Table 1: Employment status and work demands

		Employment Status		
		Permanent %	Temporary %	Casual %
Does your work require you to work or think very quickly?	Never	0	0	0
	Rarely	0	0	1
	Sometimes	4	4	5
	Often	30	28	33
	Always	66	68	61
Does your work require you to work very hard?	Never	0	0	0
	Rarely	0	0	1
	Sometimes	3	3	7
	Often	26	26	34
	Always	72	70	58
Does your work require too great an effort on your part?	Never	0	0	1
	Rarely	2	3	6
	Sometimes	25	25	39
	Often	36	35	28
	Always	36	37	27
Do you have enough time to complete your work tasks?	Never	24	20	9
	Rarely	42	42	31
	Sometimes	28	31	37
	Often	4	6	18
	Always	1	1	5
Does your work impose contradictory requirements on you?	Never	3	4	7
	Rarely	8	12	10
	Sometimes	44	46	47
	Often	33	28	25
	Always	12	10	10

While work hours and demands are generally similar between teachers in permanent and temporary employment, there are also some small but important differences in particular work tasks undertaken. For instance, teachers in temporary employment are more likely to plan lessons (90%), differentiate curriculum (87%) and complete marking (65%) as part of their daily labour than those in permanent employment (82%, 79% and 54% respectively). These teachers were also more likely to be running extra-curricular activities as a daily activity (21% temporary, 18% permanent). On the other hand, some daily activities are more

likely to be done by those in permanent roles, such as liaising with external agencies (14% permanent vs 8% temporary).

Considering these data as a whole, it is evident that teachers in temporary employment in NSW public schools are doing similar amounts of work to those in permanent employment, but with some differences in the nature of that work. Qualitative data indicate that teachers in temporary employment feel as though they are doing as much, if not more than their permanent counterparts. This was the second most dominant theme in responses to the open-ended question regarding changes to workload over time, raised by twelve out of 55 respondents. As one succinctly put it, 'I work as hard if not harder than many permanent teachers'. Indeed, for some there seemed to be a perception that those in temporary roles needed to do more, particularly in relation to extra-curricular activities – which supports the quantitative finding on this noted above. As one respondent commented: 'there is a huge expectation that teachers put their hand up for extra roles ... which adds to the pressure teachers (particularly temp teachers as we do more) feel'.

This issue of those in temporary positions feeling as though they work as hard, or harder than those in permanent roles was also raised by ten out of 112 respondents in the final open-ended question of the survey. Here, one expressed frustration about 'temporary teachers who are valuable but not deemed worthy of permanent employment' and yet 'who work just the same as the permanent teachers'. Another commented:

I don't understand why I am treated differently to permanent staff when my workload is exactly the same. Very unfair. The only difference is that my stress levels are HIGHER because there is no certainty ... and I know that the department does not value me or care about me at all. All I am is a number.

There is clear frustration and a perception of injustice in these comments, as temporary employment '[closes] the door on the ability to plan for the future' (Cuervo and Chesters 2019, 307), with the uncertain prospect of permanency and a sense of being undervalued having a demoralising effect (Jenkins et al. 2009). This indicates how poor job quality, characterised by poor *job prospects* and *intrinsic job quality*, for teachers employed on a temporary basis can have unique 'scarring' effects for the future. Only two comments across the three sets of open-ended responses indicated anything positive about being in a temporary position. One of these was from a respondent that had recently moved from casual to temporary, which had meant some improvement in security and regularity of work; another was from a former Assistant Principal, who had moved to being a temporary classroom teacher to reduce workload (confounding employment category with role). In the following section, we explore these frustrations of employees in temporary work further, and discuss how this sense of needing to do as much or more than permanent staff members may be due to a particular need to 'prove' oneself to school leadership.

Temporary teaching and school leadership

Indeed, one reason why those in temporary employment may feel they have to do 'more' than those in permanent positions related to having to 'prove yourself'. This was the most dominant theme in responses to the question about changes to workload over the past five years, raised by 24 out of the 55 respondents who commented on their temporary status. As one respondent put it, 'temporary teachers ... feel they need to 'prove themselves' better teachers in order to gain permanent employment'. Another expressed:

I feel there is an unspoken pressure for temp teachers to 'do more' in order to heighten their chances to get work for the next year. This results in temp teachers to take on extra workload and may result in being overworked and stressed.

Permanent teachers, on the other hand, were perceived to be able to afford to do less, with one respondent reporting that ‘two permanent teachers have even stated, “I don't have to do anything else I am already permanent”’. There is a perverse relationship with school leadership indicated here. The need to ‘do more’ and ‘prove yourself’ is to impress the school principal and hopefully have your contract renewed or even converted into a permanent position. This may reflect a desire to avoid relegation to the external secondary labour market which might see them bounced across different schools rather than maintaining work within just one (Preston 2019). Respondents expressing this theme felt they had ‘become the silenced workers that say YES to everything that is put to us’, feeling that they ‘cannot say no’ as ‘principals have ultimate power’. As the quote in the title of this article indicates, teachers’ careers were felt to be ‘at the whim of principals who pick and choose according to who toes the line ... jumping through hoops to retain their position and add to their CV in order to gain permanency’. This suggests impacts on job quality, particularly in relation to teachers’ sense of control over their work, as they describe having to ‘take whatever is handed to you’ as ‘workload rules go out the window’. Similar findings have been noted for ‘substitute’ teachers in Canada (The Alberta Teachers' Association 2011), for teachers on fixed-term contracts in Victoria (Feather and Rauter, 2004) and for teachers working in casual positions in NSW (Charteris, Jenkins, Jones, et al. 2017). It would seem the need to continually ‘prove’ oneself means that teachers in temporary positions experience poor *intrinsic job quality*, compounded by poor *job prospects*.

It is possible that experiences of precariousness can also impact teachers’ relationships with other school staff as also noted in Preston (2019), highlighting the importance of recognising what precarious employment ‘does’ to those who experience it (Cuervo and Chesters 2019). This includes relationships with other teachers in temporary positions; one respondent perceived that ‘temp staff are constantly working against each other

in an uneasy one-upmanship to try and secure a full time position’. Another respondent explained that they felt ‘being a temporary teacher is something that is consistently held over my head’, causing them to ‘have to increase my workload to ensure that I am a more desirable employee, and someone they would keep over others’. This also suggests an experience of exploitation, as permanent staff members and/or executive ‘prey’ on temporary teachers by ‘[shifting] work’ to them, echoing research about the ‘othering’ of those in casual employment within schools (Charteris, Jenkins, Bannister-Tyrrell, et al. 2017).

Furthermore, our quantitative data suggest that a large proportion of temporary teachers are in their first decade of teaching and relatively young, working on average for more than four years in one school, and engaging in distinct efforts to maintain their contracts and/or convert to permanency. In Table 2 we see that temporary teachers have lower averages for the number of years working in their current school and their total years as a teacher. There is a statistically significant association between employment categories and the number of years working at current schools (ANOVA, $F= 10.22$, $p=.01$). Approximately 50% of temporary teachers have been working at their current school for four years or more. National data suggest that the proportion of temporary employment among young teachers (< 30 years) is 35%, much higher than the average of 14% (Thomson and Hillman 2020).

Table 2: Employment status and years of teaching experience

		Employment Status			
		Permanent	Temporary	Casual	Total
Years working as a teacher, consultant or other position at this school/workplace	Mean	12	6	11	12
	Median	10	4	5	10
	Range	57	48	50	57
Years working as a teacher, consultant or other position related to education in total	Mean	17	9	17	17
	Median	16	6	11	16
	Range	57	50	52	57

There may also be a gendered dynamic to understanding these experiences of temporary teaching and its relation to school leadership. OECD data, based on lower-secondary schools, indicates that the percentage of women who are principals in such schools in Australia (40%) is not proportional to those employed as teachers (62%) (OECD 2019). Overall, in our data, more teachers identifying as male (81%) reported being in permanent employment than did those identifying as female (75.5%), with fewer men reporting temporary employment (male 16%; female 21.9%). There is a statistically significant relationship between gender and employment category (chi-Squared= 61.154, $p < .05$) with women much more likely to be temporary and men more likely to be permanent. This results in nearly as many women in our sample employed as temporary teachers ($n=3,066$, 17% of total teachers) as men in permanent employment ($n=3,162$).

Figure 2 shows the age distribution of employment category by gender and suggests that women may also stay longer as temporary teachers than men do. Substantial proportions of temporary women teachers are seen in the 40 to 60 years age bracket, while among men the peak numbers of temporary employment, seen around 30 years of age (as with women), shows a more rapid drop off in older age groups. Further research is needed to confirm whether this reflects men moving up and out of temporary positions, and potentially on to leadership positions more quickly. Indeed, recent research has indicated that proportionally more men receive promotions in the NSW public school teacher workforce (McGrath, 2020), suggesting gendered implications for *job prospects*.

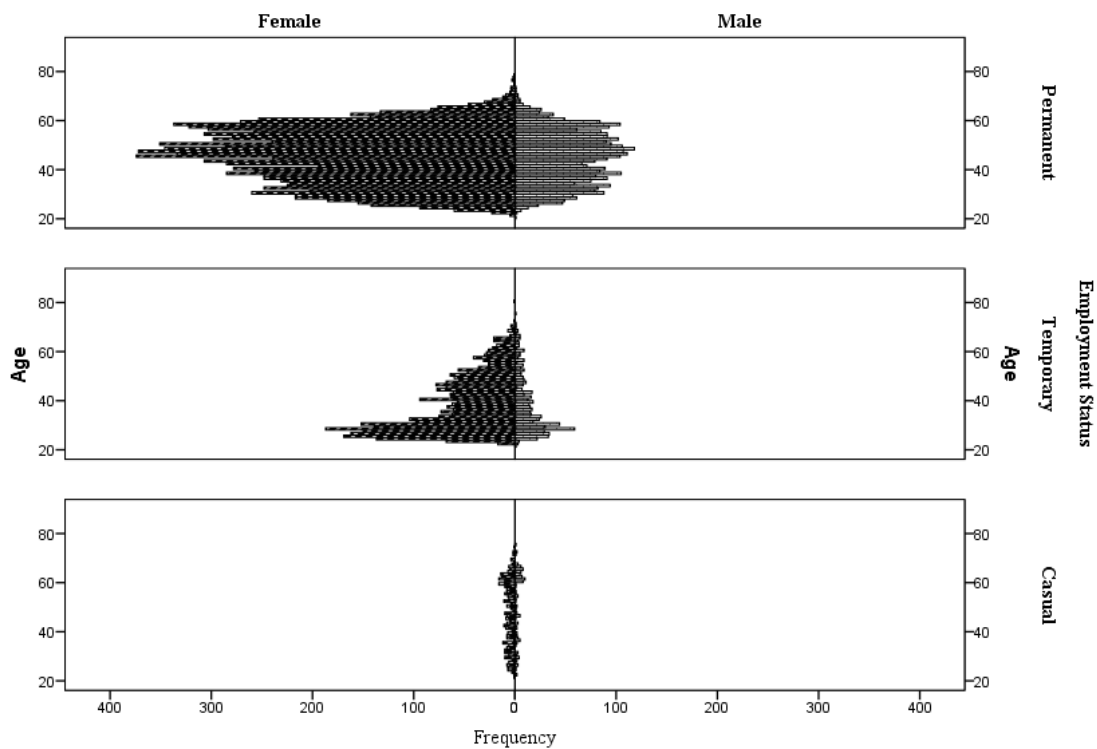


Figure 2: Employment status, gender and age

Possibly, the different gender likelihood and age structure of permanency may be due to perceptions of teaching as a ‘feminised’ profession and a bias, unconscious or otherwise, towards hiring men in permanent roles. Mooi-Reci and Wooden (2017, 1086) suggest that Australia-wide, women are ‘expected to have fragmented employment careers’, and thus experience less long-term wage scarring as a consequence of casual employment. However, our data indicate that in the case of the ‘feminised’ profession of teaching, there may indeed be a scarring effect of temporary employment for women, with an impact not only on wages via promotion opportunities, but also the job content and professional development opportunities attendant to such positions. Given the relative imbalance in school leadership, the ‘conversion’ of proportionally and absolutely more women teachers to permanent status may be one way in which to help redress this dynamic.

A final related theme within the qualitative data was dissatisfaction with the current process for gaining permanency. There was a perception that the ‘merit selection’ process,

with one in two permanent positions now selected locally (Gavin and McGrath-Champ 2017), was ‘unethical’ and ‘very unfair’, with ‘employment of temporary teachers on perception rather than merit’. This dissatisfaction was raised in open-response questions about change over time (6/55) and strategies (3/51), as well as the final open comment question (15/112). A small number (n=3) of temporary teacher participants explicitly linked this dissatisfaction with employment processes to the recent LSLD policy reform. One stated that ‘Since Local Schools Local Decisions, “power has gone to the heads” of principals and some executives’. Some respondents also expressed frustration with the practice of hiring ‘targeted graduates’ straight out of university into permanent positions, seeing this policy as ‘very unfair as new graduates are given priority to those who have been working for 10 years or more’. Respondents suggested that the Department of Education provide ‘more opportunities for temp staff to become permanent’. This recommendation, to convert temporary status positions to permanent, was the most prominent theme in open-ended responses to the question about strategies for workload management, raised by 30 out of the 51 who commented on the temporary category, and 30 out of 112 who mentioned temporary teaching when responding to the final open-ended question. In addition, quantitative data suggest that only 27% of those in temporary employment were working in that capacity by choice, indicating a lack of ‘job status congruence’, with teachers in temporary employment feeling ‘trapped’ within their work arrangements (Loughlin and Murray 2013, 532) and experiencing compounding pressures of poor *intrinsic job quality* and *job prospects* brought on by a mode of governance that elevates leader discretion and which has longer term ‘scarring’ effects.

Implications and Conclusion

Temporary teaching, a relatively new employment category in NSW public schools, is on the rise and has not yet received much academic attention. Yet it would seem that such attention is warranted, especially given that previous documentation on precarious work in teaching often considers fixed-term contract work either as a version of casual work (e.g. Bamberry 2011), or alternatively, considers it to be ‘like’ permanent employment by virtue of including leave entitlements (ABS 2019). Contrary to these categorisations, our data indicate that temporary teaching work is not like casual work – the hours and demands are considerably higher, and very similar to those reported by permanent staff. Yet temporary teaching is also experienced differently to permanent teachers’ work, with the development of interpersonal fault-lines between temporary and permanent members of staff, and between teachers and school leadership. Overall, our findings indicate that teachers in temporary positions experience most of the dimensions of job quality (Burgess & Connell 2019) negatively; working harder than they wish to and feeling insecure in their roles, while also facing poorer job prospects and the potential for future employment ‘scarring’. Our analysis further revealed a gendered dimension. Women are more likely to be temporary employees, and there are indications that women may be in temporary employment for longer than men, thereby bearing the impact of scarring more extensively.

To resolve these issues, principals might consider their work with employees in temporary roles and ensure that they, or other permanent staff in the school, do not take advantage of this vulnerability through delegation of work, the ‘dangling’ of employment contracts or the local appointment of staff based on reasons other than merit. However, with schools being highly pressured environments for all staff (McGrath-Champ et al. 2018), including principals, such recommendations are unlikely to have lasting or widespread impact. Instead, change must come from above, with the upward trend in proportion of fixed-

term contract positions actively reversed and priority given to those who have worked in a temporary capacity for greater periods of time, with a proportional gender balance. As Preston (2019, 178) notes, ‘even though replacement work is required for many reasons, it does not have to be undertaken by teachers in insecure employment’. These recommendations are only a beginning, but finding ways for policy-makers to address the issues raised in this article is important in optimising professional capacity, protecting the leadership pipeline and the future of work in schools. Teachers new to the profession must be supported, to enable effective leadership in the future as well as positive interpersonal dynamics within our schools in the present.

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