

# TEACHER SHORTAGE TASKFORCE

## FINAL REPORT

ACT Education Directorate and  
Australian Education Union (ACT Branch)

August 2022

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report outlines the work undertaken by the Teacher Shortage Taskforce to investigate and gather information about teacher shortage and discuss existing or ongoing measures to address this challenge. Further and more importantly, the report highlights the outcomes delivered by the Taskforce and makes findings and recommendations on the identified workforce challenges.

The work of the Taskforce has been informed by a suite of ACT Education Directorate (EDU) workforce data and insights from the Australian Education Union (AEU) Staffing Shortage Survey.

In gaining a better understanding of teacher shortage in ACT Public Schools, the Taskforce acknowledges that the demand for teachers in the ACT will continue to grow and recruitment will be increasingly challenging in the context of a national teacher shortage and ongoing impact of COVID-19 in our schools and broader community. Given this, it is important to have a future-focused approach to workforce planning and develop incentives and initiatives for ACT Public Schools to be the education system of choice for teachers, both graduate and experienced.

Further, the Taskforce agrees that the current casual relief model no longer meets the day-to-day staffing requirements in schools. Consequently, there is a need to develop a model that will increase teacher availability to cover unplanned absences and support schools in the day-to-day management of their operations.

With teacher supply in a decline and COVID-19 impacting our staff availability, the Taskforce agrees that there is a need to continue to invest in retaining our current teaching workforce. At a system level, new educators should continue to be supported and engaged during their five-year transition into the teaching profession. It is also important that teacher and school leader workloads are sustainable and effectively managed.

## BACKGROUND

The ACT Government is committed to delivering quality education services across ACT Public Schools empowering all children and young people in the ACT to learn for life. The government strongly recognises the value of the teaching profession and our teaching workforce in delivering quality learning outcomes for our students and our school community.

This is demonstrated by the fact that the ACT is the only jurisdiction in Australia that meets the minimum funding requirements as set out by the Schooling Resourcing Standards. In the ACT, all public schools are funded through the [Student Resource Allocation Framework](#) (SRA) reflecting a student needs-based school funding model.

In 2019, the ACT Government delivered a significant investment totalling over \$200 million over four years to attract, retain and support our teaching workforce through a collaborative and productive interest-based bargaining process for the [ACT Public Sector Education Directorate \(Teaching Staff\) Enterprise Agreement 2018-2022](#) (Agreement).

Over the years, the education system and the teaching profession seen an increasing pace of change with impacts on students, workforce and, more broadly, our school community. Population growth and increases in student enrolments are driving the demand for teachers and at the same time there is a decline in the number of teaching graduates, which is contributing to a national teacher shortage.

In March 2021, the ACT Education Directorate (EDU) introduced an inaugural [EDU Workforce Strategy 2021-2023](#). This strategy aims to build a workforce that will ensure delivery of learning outcomes for children and young people in the ACT. It outlines critical challenges for the workforce and delivering evidence-driven workforce planning and a future-focused recruitment approach and actions as key focus areas over the next three years.

In response to growing calls from members regarding shortages and workload pressures, the Australian Education Union ACT Branch (AEU) ran a survey of members to gauge the extent and nature of issues facing public school educators. In August 2021, the AEU published their findings through the [Under-staffed, under-resourced, under-appreciated: The teacher shortage and its impact on our schools Report](#) (AEU Survey Report). It outlined the challenges faced by ACT public school educators where increasing demands on schools and staff are impacting their workload and contributing to ongoing staff shortage.

From 2020, the education system has faced additional pressure on our teaching workforce from a global pandemic, with COVID-19 safety measures resulting in community lockdowns and schools shifting to remote learning. The public health advice shows that COVID-19 will continue to be in our community for several years and that variants and transmissions will have an impact on our teaching workforce.

Acknowledging the significant challenge of a national teacher shortage and continuing impact of COVID-19 pandemic on staff and schools, EDU and AEU understand that workforce planning and strategic recruitment of teachers are critical to meet the current needs of ACT Public Schools and demand for teachers as our population continues to grow.

## TEACHER SHORTAGE TASKFORCE

A joint EDU and AEU Teacher Shortage Taskforce (Taskforce) was established in September 2021 and was in place until June 2022 to enable ongoing dialogue on teacher recruitment and retention. The key objectives of the Taskforce were to:

- investigate and gather information about the teacher shortage, including existing or ongoing measures to address teacher shortages,
- make findings based on the information gathered,
- develop recommendations, on a consensus basis, to address the teacher shortage, and
- ensure that recommendations include the implementation and evaluation of the measures proposed.

The agreed workplan for the Taskforce was based on prioritising short-term actions and medium to long-term approaches to respond to current and substantive workforce challenges, including but not limited to the following:

- Covering staff absences,
- Continuity of education, including the practice of splitting and cancelling classes,
- Teacher and school leader recruitment processes,
- Attraction and retention, including:
  - Teacher and school leader workload reduction,
  - Effect of work safety on retention of staff,
  - New educator entitlements, including early career salaries,
  - Permit-to-teach staff entitlements, including salaries and supervision requirements,
  - Hard-to-staff positions and settings, including identifying the factors that make positions harder to fill, and
  - System initiatives to attract and retain staff.

The Taskforce was comprised of the following members:

### ACT Education Directorate

- Ms Katy Haire, Director-General (Chair)
- Ms Jane Simmons, Deputy Director-General (Deputy Chair)
- Mr David Matthews, Executive Group Manager, Business Services
- Mr Daniel Ackland, Executive Branch Manager, People and Performance
- Mr Kris Willis, Director School Improvement, Belconnen Network
- Ms Kristine Reyes, Senior Director, People Strategy

### Australian Education Union – ACT Branch

- Ms Angela Burroughs, President
- Mr Patrick Judge, Secretary
- Mr Jacob Dunne, Director of Advocacy and Member Support
- Mr Vince McDevitt, Lead Organiser
- Ms Tahlia Bruce, Organiser South
- Mr Sean Van Der Heide, Organiser North

# UNDERSTANDING TEACHER SHORTAGE IN ACT PUBLIC SCHOOLS

## ACT Public Schools as a Growing System

### FINDINGS

- Demand for teachers in the ACT will continue to grow and recruitment will be increasingly challenging in the context of a national teacher shortage and ongoing impact of COVID-19.
- It is important to have a future-focused approach to workforce planning and develop incentives and initiatives for ACT Public Schools to be the education system of choice for teachers, both graduate and experienced.

As the ACT population increases, the ACT Public School system continues to grow. Over the last five years, the teaching workforce continues to grow as student enrolments increase.

The data below shows that the cumulative increase in student enrolment is marginally higher than the teacher FTE growth, with an average variance of 1.08%. As at 2021, the teacher FTE has slightly outpaced the cumulative increase in student enrolments with an increase of 156 teacher FTE. As at mid-2022, the cumulative increase in teacher FTE since 2016 is at 13.5 % with student enrolments at 14.0%.

It is noted that teacher FTE reflects the total number of teachers engaged which comprises permanent, temporary and casual employment to meet system needs. Workforce data from June 2022 show that there has been a marginal increase in permanent and temporary teachers (6.6 FTE) while casual relief engagement has declined by 35.7 FTE.

Table 1: Student Enrolment and Teacher FTE Growth 2016-2022

	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
<b>Enrolments<sup>1</sup></b>	44,831	46,557	47,945	49,152	50,272	51,153	51,088
<i>Cumulative increase</i>	-	3.9%	6.9%	9.6%	12.1%	14.1%	14.0%
<b>Teacher FTE<sup>2</sup></b>	3,365.6	3,430.6	3,561.3	3,653.6	3,694.3	3,850.1	3,821.0
<i>Cumulative increase</i>	-	1.9%	5.8%	8.6%	9.8%	14.4%	13.5%

As the teaching workforce grows, the School Assistant workforce has seen an increase of 47.6% and has significantly outpaced enrolment growth over the last six years. While School Assistants

<sup>1</sup> ACT public school enrolments according to Census of ACT Schools.

<sup>2</sup> Classroom Teacher and School Leader C FTE as at the last pay cycle in June, annually, consistent with Annual Report methodology.

are unable to undertake teaching responsibilities, they provide valuable in-class supports to students and perform administrative duties to support teachers and school operations.

Table 2: Student Enrolment and School Assistant FTE Growth 2016-2022

	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
<b>Enrolments<sup>3</sup></b>	44,831	46,557	47,945	49,152	50,272	51,153	51,088
<i>Cumulative increase</i>	-	3.9%	6.9%	9.6%	12.1%	14.1%	14.0%
<b>School assistant FTE<sup>4</sup></b>	867.3	953.9	995.2	1,118.1	1,131.7	1,264.1	1,280.4
<i>Cumulative increase</i>	-	10.0%	14.7%	28.9%	30.1%	45.8%	47.6%

### Growing Demand for Teachers

National projections over the next decade forecast strong overall growth in the demand for teachers, but a decline in the number of teaching graduates. As the system grows, EDU continues to undertake a range of workforce planning activities to better understand the current and future needs of our workforce in the ACT.

One of these activities is to determine the total number of classroom teachers required by the system over the next five years based on student enrolment projections and teacher FTE data and separation rates. Given that the student enrolment forecast is the core data to inform the teacher workforce projections, EDU noted that this data is inherently subject to fluctuations and external impacts. This means that workforce projections will need to be updated and reviewed regularly.

As at June 2022, the student enrolment annual growth is outlined in the table below from 2022 until 2026:

Table 3: Annual Projected Enrolment Growth 2022-2026

	2023	2024	2025	2026
Annual projected enrolment growth (excluding preschools and specialist schools) <sup>5</sup>	1.7%	1.8%	1.6%	1.5%
Cumulative enrolment growth	1.7%	3.5%	5.2%	6.8%

EDU has applied a 13.3:1 student-to-teacher ratio based on trend analysis to identify the additional teachers required to meet the projected student enrolment growth. This student-to-

<sup>3</sup> ACT public school enrolments according to Census of ACT Schools.

<sup>4</sup> School Assistant FTE as at the last pay cycle in June, annually, consistent with Annual Report methodology.

<sup>5</sup> Preschool and specialist school enrolments cannot currently be accurately projected. This is due to factors such as preschool not being compulsory and overlaps with the childcare sector.

teacher ratio is comparable with other jurisdictions, with student-teacher ratios in the ACT consistently being slightly below the national average.

Table 4: Annual Teacher FTE Required based on Student Enrolment Growth 2022-2026

	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026
Required teacher FTE <sup>6</sup>	3,868	3,948	4,024	4,092	4,168
Annual FTE growth	18	80	76	68	76
Cumulative growth since 2021	18	98	173	242	318

In addition to student growth, workforce projections need to take account of staff separations due to factors such as resignation and retirement. Separation rates between 2016 and 2022 typically sat within the range of 4.5% to 5.5% per year. This range of separation rates is equivalent to separation trends in NSW and VIC teacher workforces.

Table 5: Projected Teacher Separation Rates 2022-2026

	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026
Required teacher FTE	3,868	3,948	4,024	4,092	4,168
Scenario 1 (4.5% separation)	174	178	181	184	188
Scenario 2 (5.0% separation)	193	197	201	205	208
Scenario 3 (5.5% separation)	213	217	221	225	229

The recruitment target for additional classroom teachers over the next five years based on the range of separation rates are outlined below:

Table 6: Projected Additional Teacher FTE Required (based on separation scenarios) 2022-2026

	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026
New teacher FTE (Scenario 1)	192	258	257	252	264
New teacher FTE (Scenario 2)	211	277	277	273	284
New teacher FTE (Scenario 3)	231	297	297	293	305

Based on current modelling, the teacher FTE required in 2022 is 3,868. Data as at June 2022 show that EDU has employed 3,821 FTE teachers, which is 47 FTE (-1.22%) teachers short of the 2022 recruitment target.

<sup>6</sup> Although preschool and specialist school enrolment projections cannot be accurately determined, for workforce planning purposes, assumptions have been about enrolment figures to enable a holistic projection of workforce requirements. These projections will be subject to variation and will be revised as required.



## Teacher Absences and Relief Teacher Availability

### FINDINGS

- The current casual relief model no longer meets the day-to-day staffing requirements in schools, and teacher absences are expected to increase due to COVID-19 transmissions.
- There is a need to develop a model that will increase teacher availability to cover unplanned absences and support schools in the day-to-day management of their operations.

The Taskforce discussed the challenges of day-to-day staffing requirements in schools to cover unplanned absences. The current model relies on having a large pool of casual teachers with the availability and flexibility to be deployed and/or engaged in schools as they are needed. However, increased absences and a greatly diminished pool of relief teachers have limited the capacity of this model and this impacts on the overall workload of teachers, school leaders and other staff in schools.

The casual relief pool continues to shrink with graduate teachers, historically joining the pipeline through casual engagement, increasingly gaining employment as either temporary or permanent employees. The Taskforce agreed that the current supply of registered casual teachers is not sufficient to meet the needs across the system due to limited availability and school preferences.

Schools implement various arrangements to cover daily teacher absences which includes using in-built relief teachers (who often teach in specialist areas), having School Leaders cover classes, splitting or combining classes, or shifting classes online for the college sector.

Based on the table below, the average daily casual gap (the gap between teacher leave taken and casual teacher FTE engaged) was 59.7 FTE in 2019. Over the past 12 months, this has increased to 162.2 FTE per day. This indicates that, on average at any day, relief for 162.2 full-time equivalent teacher absences is not being met through casual relief teachers.

Table 7: Average Daily FTE on Leave and Casual Gap

Sector	Measure	2019	2020	2021	2022
College	Average daily FTE on leave	38.7	41.8	38.1	40.7
	Average daily casual FTE engaged	13.9	10.8	7.0	9.1
High School	Average daily FTE on leave	51.9	46.8	47.6	57.1
	Average daily casual FTE engaged	29.5	26.6	20.7	21.1
P-10	Average daily FTE on leave	50.6	53.2	52.3	60.6
	Average daily casual FTE engaged	30.2	31.6	25.9	28.0
Primary	Average daily FTE on leave	106.1	113.8	121.7	142.8
	Average daily casual FTE engaged	111.3	99.7	88.2	83.1
Early Childhood	Average daily FTE on leave	3.5	4.8	6.1	6.9

Sector	Measure	2019	2020	2021	2022
	Average daily casual FTE engaged	6.3	6.7	5.8	6.9
Specialist	Average daily FTE on leave	6.8	9.3	7.9	10.4
	Average daily casual FTE engaged	5.4	5.0	5.2	4.9
All Schools	<b>Average daily FTE on leave</b>	<b>257.7</b>	<b>269.8</b>	<b>274.0</b>	<b>318.6</b>
	<b>Total teacher FTE</b>	<b>3,653.6</b>	<b>3,694.3</b>	<b>3,850.1</b>	<b>3,821.0</b>
	<i>Proportion of FTE on leave</i>	<i>7.1%</i>	<i>7.3%</i>	<i>7.1%</i>	<i>8.3%</i>
	<b>Average daily casual FTE engaged</b>	<b>198.0</b>	<b>181.6</b>	<b>155.2</b>	<b>156.4</b>
	<b>Average daily casual gap (FTE)</b>	<b>59.7</b>	<b>88.2</b>	<b>118.8</b>	<b>162.2</b>

**Note:** figures from the table above represent averaged figures over the preceding 12-month period and include periods of standdown. Data is collected and aggregated on a fortnightly basis aligned to the pay cycle and periods of standdown cannot be readily excluded from these calculations.

Relief teachers engaged in casual employment can exercise agency in preferences for how often and in which schools one works. In the week commencing 6 June 2022, 62% of registered casual teachers had preferences and/or availability to work in one to five schools only. The data below shows that the majority of casuals have worked on average less than one day per week and only 14.9% (98 casual teachers) have worked an average of 3 or more days per week (60% of full-time hours).

Table 8: Average days worked per week

Average days worked per week	Count	% of total
< 0.5 days	188	28.5%
0.5 to 0.9 days	110	16.7%
1.0 to 1.9 days	152	23.1%
2.0 to 2.9 days	111	16.8%
3.0 to 3.9 days	55	8.3%
4.0 to 4.9 days	40	6.1%
5.0 days	3	0.5%
Total	<b>659</b>	

Based on the results of the AEU Staffing Shortage Survey in 2021, most casual teachers are already engaged for most of their available days. Given this, the data suggests that only a relatively small cohort of approximately registered 100 casual teachers are available for three or more days per week to support staff absences across the system.

The current relief pool is also an aging cohort, with more than a third (33.8%) of casual teachers aged over 60 years compared to 5.8% of permanent and temporary teachers. This means that introducing additional incentives is unlikely to increase relief availability and enable this cohort to be engaged in schools where they are needed the most.

Table 9: Casual Workforce Profile

Metric	Measure	Casual Teachers	Permanent & Temporary Teachers
<b>Gender</b>	Women	77.9%	76.3%
	Men	22.1%	23.7%
<b>Age (Years)</b>	< 20	0.3%	0.0%
	20-24	1.6%	3.9%
	25-29	6.1%	14.8%
	30-34	7.7%	16.6%
	35-39	9.8%	17.0%
	40-44	12.2%	14.1%
	45-49	8.5%	11.6%
	50-54	10.0%	9.9%
	55-59	9.8%	6.2%
	60-69	25.0%	5.2%
	70+	8.9%	0.6%
	<b>Average Age</b>		<b>51.2</b>

The Taskforce recognises that there are particular schools that experience additional challenges in engaging casual relief teachers. In many cases, difficulty engaging casual relief is a symptom of broader issues that the school is experiencing. Not being able to engage relief teachers to cover these absences compounds the existing issues they are facing. The difficulty of engaging casual relief varies between sectors and schools, with the challenge increasing with greater teaching specialisation requirements (for example college and specialist school sectors).

### Ongoing Impact of COVID-19

Teacher absences have significantly increased during the COVID-19 pandemic, and relief teacher availability has not met the day-to-day operational and staffing requirements of the system. As outlined in Table 7, average teacher absences have increased since 2019, both in absolute terms and as a proportion of the teacher workforce.

During 2020 and 2021 when the ACT experienced a limited impact of the pandemic, the increase in teacher absences was minimal. This is consistent with the findings from the AEU Survey, which reported that more than three in four respondents saying that they came to work when sick because of staffing shortages at their school and an unwillingness to increase the workload burden on their colleagues.

With the significant increase in community transmission in 2022, a sizable increase in teacher absences has been experienced. Relative to 2019, the average proportion of teachers on leave increased from 7.1% to 8.3%, which reflects an additional 46 teachers on leave per day based on current staffing levels.

It is important to note that the figures provided in Table 7 are averages based on the preceding 12-month period. The most significant increase in COVID-19 related leave took place from the start of 2022, where the average daily teacher FTE on leave has been 358.5, or 9.4% of teachers.

## Teacher Absences and Continuity of Learning

From Term 2 2022, schools have submitted weekly reports on teacher absences and the number of relief staff able to be secured to cover these absences. The weekly report data shows that schools implement alternate arrangements to cover teacher absences when relief teachers are not available, such as combining and/or splitting classes to continue to enable face-to-face learning for students. When these measures have been exhausted, moving to remote learning is necessary.

It should be noted that for high schools and colleges, ‘class’ may refer to individual subject ‘lines’, with a single teacher absence resulting in the reporting of multiple instances of additional measures for each impacted ‘line’.

Table 10: Instances of additional measures to address teacher absences in Term 2 2022

Sector	Splitting classes	Combining classes	Shifting to online learning
Primary	1,827	733	0
High School	336	619	0
College	0	0	2,397
P-10	723	443	0
Specialist	97	49	0
All Schools	2,983	1,844	2,397
<i>Average per week</i>	339	210	272

In Term 2, 2022, the reports show that in an average per week there are 339 instances of classes being split and 210 instances of classes being combined. In the college sector, there are 272 instances in an average per week of shifting from face-to-face to online learning. Further, there were 12 schools identified that have shifted to remote learning three times due to acute teacher shortage due to staff absences and lack of relief teacher to cover these absences.

## BUILDING AND SUPPORTING OUR TEACHING WORKFORCE

### FINDINGS

- Given the national teacher shortage and ongoing impact of COVID-19 in our schools and broader community, there is a critical need to ensure that we continue to retain our current teaching workforce.

### Recruitment Actions and Teacher Vacancies

In 2019, EDU established centralised classroom teacher recruitment. Ongoing national recruitment campaigns include teacher positions advertised in platforms such as JobsACT, SEEK, Teachers on Net, LinkedIn and CareerHub (University platform across Australia). EDU also continues to use social media platforms to increase visibility of teacher recruitment processes. Further, EDU has targeted recruitment campaigns to promote teaching positions internationally, specifically targeting Auckland and Wellington in New Zealand.

In addition to the central recruitment process, EDU has undertaken a trial of ‘standard advertising’ which means individual advertisements of classroom teacher positions by schools from Term 3, 2022. This trial is intended to supplement the central recruitment process and inform recruitment strategies based on applicant responsiveness for central and standard advertising. Schools with permanent vacancies, a high number of vacancies and/or specialist hard to fill teaching areas were selected to participate in this trial.

The table below outlines the recruitment outcomes from local and national campaigns:

Table 10: Teacher Recruitment Data 2019-2021

	Teacher Appointments
2019	281
2020	286
2021	316

As at 27 July 2022, there are 65 classroom teacher vacancies comprising 22 permanent positions (five-year placements) and 43 temporary vacancies ranging from three months to 12 months of engagement. Based on classroom teacher FTE as at 22 June 2022, this represents an overall vacancy rate of 3% which comprises vacancy rate of 1% for permanent positions and 6% for temporary positions.

### New Educators

EDU and AEU have a strong commitment to the development of beginning teachers and supporting effective transition into the teaching profession. The current Agreement articulates the range of entitlements and support provided for new educators in their first three years of teaching experience. These include a five-day system induction program, reduction of face-to-face teaching hours, six professional learning days, and coaching and mentoring from

experienced teachers in the school. Given that a significant pipeline for recruitment over the next few years will be through the graduate teaching cohort, investments in new educators is essential to attracting graduate teachers across the country to work in ACT Public Schools.

The Taskforce considered the components of the New Educator Development Program. This discussion was informed by the findings of the AEU Survey Report that indicated particular pressures experienced by this cohort, with one in three responding that they were considering leaving the teaching profession. The AEU Survey showed that many New Educators are not able to access the full range of entitlements because of staffing pressures at their school.

In reviewing the policy components and implementation of the program, the Taskforce agrees that the policy and advice are sound and appropriate. However, it was agreed that there is a need to ensure that new educators can access these supports to enable their professional development in the context of system-wide staffing and workload pressures.

Further, the Taskforce recognises the need to build the evidence base to inform strategies and initiatives to better induct and retain our beginning teachers. The following initiatives and actions were introduced in Term 1, 2022:

- New Educator Survey – to identify challenges and system-wide and targeted interventions/initiatives, and
- Updated New Educator Support Guidelines and New Educator Support Plan - to improve the current advice and clear guidance for new educators and school leaders in relation to the program.

The Taskforce also notes the workforce data on the distribution of classroom teachers based on experience (new educator, and experienced teachers 1 and 2) across schools. As at February 2022, the data shows that there are 16 schools with more than 25% of their staffing profile at the New Educator classification level which highlights that there is an unequal distribution of teacher experience across schools.

There is a need to consider the use of levers at a system level to achieve a balanced teacher profile across schools to ensure that we have the spread of New Educator and Experienced Teacher classification levels in schools. This will assist with measures to improve the effectiveness of beginning teacher mentoring and coaching.

### **Teacher and School Leader Workload Management**

EDU and AEU acknowledge that teacher and school leader workload is a critical issue that needs to be addressed and that workload should be monitored at all levels to ensure equitable distribution and the maintenance of healthy and safe workplaces. The Agreement outlines the principles and expectations for sustainable management of workload and practice in schools. In support of this, the School EA Implementation Plan (School EAIP) process is coordinated every year in conjunction with the AEU.

The AEU Survey Report indicated that 97% of the full-time teaching workforce who completed the survey work unpaid overtime during a typical week. When asked to describe their workload, 78% of respondents said it ranged between 'difficult' to 'extremely difficult' to meet expectations, including 70% of school principal respondents giving an answer ranging from 'very difficult' to 'extremely difficult'. This survey's results were broadly consistent with other surveys

conducted by bodies such as AITSL and the Monash University Faculty of Education, as well as other branches of the AEU.

In April 2022, the AEU published the report on the outcome of the People at Work Survey for their 96 principal union members with 54.17% response rate. People at Work is a survey that can be used to support a psychosocial risk assessment process and aims to help workplaces identify, assess and manage risks to the psychological health of workers and volunteers within a workplace. The report shows key areas of strength showing low group relationship conflict, task conflict and role ambiguity under job demands, and high co-worker support, job control, and praise and recognition under job resources. High emotional demands and role overload has been identified as an area of improvement based on response results. The insights in this report will further inform the implementation of the EDU Principal Health and Wellbeing Plan developed in partnership with the ACT Principals Association.

AEU members have shared the workload pressures they face and the impact of this on staff as outlined in below testimonials:

*“I am an experienced, passionate and capable teacher. I am overworked. I am broken and I am exhausted and ready to leave the profession if something doesn’t change soon. I love teaching however the cumulation of the current staffing shortage, massive class sizes from split classes and missed planning time has got me drowning without a lifeline. Most days I go home crying from the pressure I am under and my personal life is suffering as well as my mental and physical health.”*

*“Every single day we have been required to fulfil duties that are outside our core roles – whether it is exceeding class sizes to cover the vast staff shortages, preparing extra work for split children, having too many children in our classrooms for the physical space density, having release and student support programs collapsed due to shortages, having to sit with sick children sometimes an hour after phone calls were made for them to go home – the list goes on. The staff that remain at school are mentally and physically exhausted.”*

Testimonials such as these demonstrate that there is ongoing need to reduce teacher workloads and to support schools in meeting complex challenges.

The Taskforce took immediate action in implementing initiatives that respond to current workload challenges in ACT Public Schools in Term 4, 2021, putting in place a range of measures to:

- Ensure that staff have better clarity and transparency on their roles, responsibilities and their access to staff entitlements and supports.
- Prioritise essential requirements, programs and activities in all schools to support teachers and school leaders as they respond and manage to COVID-19 impact.
- Establish a clearer and fairer process for teachers to be converted to permanency to enable retention in the teaching workforce.
- Enable easier and faster access to Education Support Office (ESO) supports, including a dedicated hotline and recruitment officers supporting schools with temporary and casual requirements as well maintaining classroom teacher pool.
- Develop and build the evidence base through workforce data to investigate casual relief, staff absences and workforce projections.
- Implement system-wide workload reduction strategies across all schools.

The Taskforce monitored feedback on these measures and used this information to inform the substantive work undertaken from Term 1, 2022.

In Term 2, 2022, EDU implemented six workload reduction strategies to address the ongoing impact of COVID-19 on staff availability, in conjunction with the AEU:

- Reduced student academic reporting requirements,
- Implemented additional two school staff planning days (pupil free),
- Revised timelines for performance development,
- Updated 2022 School Review process,
- Implemented rollover of 2021 School EAIPs, and
- Established a central teacher relief pool.

The Taskforce recognised the continued commitment and dedication of educators in ACT Public Schools to deliver high quality education to children and young people especially over the last two years of uncertainty, rapid change, and disruption. Further, the Taskforce agreed that there is a continued need to address the workload of teachers and school leaders to safeguard their wellbeing into the future.

EDU and AEU continue to work together to review and develop strategies and initiatives at a system level to reduce teacher and school leader workload. While these strategies have been well-received, the Taskforce recognises the need to understand the drivers of workload in schools at a system and local level, which can lead to more effective strategies and actions.

### **Safety in the Workplace**

Occupational violence is a serious and complex matter requiring a measured and consistent response from staff, schools and the education system. The [Managing Occupational Violence Policy](#) outlines EDU's commitment to ensure that the risk of occupational violence to staff in workplaces is eliminated so far as is reasonably practicable and to minimise the impact of any exposure and to provide rapid response and appropriate support following any incident. EDU has developed evidence-based approaches to managing occupational violence risk to support safety at work.

The AEU Survey Report showed that there is a connection between teacher shortages and workplace safety which includes safety from physical violence, as well as psychological wellbeing.

In May 2022, EDU established a new safety culture team to deliver a system-wide transformation that will improve the safety and wellbeing of the workforce and students in ACT public schools. Immediately, the team led the coordination of a system response to issues identified by WorkSafe ACT in some of our schools regarding workplace safety. The team supported schools in completing the actions and implementing the recommendations identified by WorkSafe ACT in each local site.

In July 2022, the ACT Government announced the launch of the Safe@School Taskforce building on the work progressed by the safety culture team. The first tranche of work for the Safe@School Taskforce is to examine how the processes and practices that support safe systems are operating in ACT public schools. This will be undertaken through a series of reviews



that will inform and support the rollout of improved safety systems to help deliver appropriate safety supports for schools and students.

In addition, more investments in professional learning will be made to deliver cultural change across our ACT public schools, so both school and Directorate staff can be well-equipped to proactively support and promote a safety culture and respond to serious incidents.

The Safe@School Taskforce will be in place over the next 12 months to manage this critical work program and building a safety culture in schools and across the Directorate. EDU and AEU continue to work closely and collaboratively in ensuring that our teaching staff are safe and supported in their workplaces.

## Teacher Attraction and Retention Initiatives

With an increasingly competitive market nationally to employ new teachers and attract teachers with specific specialisations, the Taskforce discussed attraction and retention incentives for preservice teachers, mid-career professionals and re-engagement of teachers to the profession.

- **Pre-service Teachers**

People studying to become a teacher must undertake a period of unpaid professional experience ('practicum') in schools for a duration no less than 80 days for undergraduate teaching programs, and no less than 60 days for postgraduate programs. Consideration will be given to measures to support students in completing this requirement noting the significant financial impact of the practicum.

The Taskforce discussed the offer of financial support for pre-service teachers while they complete their practicum placements in ACT public schools and whether this could be tied to a requirement to work in the ACT public school system upon graduation.

EDU and AEU are also working closely to strengthen processes and provide clear advice for schools and preservice teachers engaging them for temporary employment to teach in schools in the last year of their studies through the Permit To Teach process.

EDU continues to focus on recruitment strategies for the Initial Teacher Education pipeline through our Affiliated School partnership with the University Canberra. EDU implemented conditional offers of employment to pre-service teachers at their fourth year with a view to expand this offer to those on their third year of teaching qualification studies.

- **Mid-Career Professionals**

Further, the Australian Government's [Report of the Quality Initial Teacher Education Review](#) (2021) found that loss of earnings while studying is a "significant barrier" to well-qualified mid-career professionals taking up teaching. The Review's Expert Panel recommended reform of prior learning recognition and funding to support innovative employment-based pathways to remove this barrier.<sup>7</sup>

The Taskforce discussed the opportunities to develop employment-based pathways and incentives for current staff in schools such as School Assistants to undertake and/or complete a

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<sup>7</sup> Recommendation 5 and 6, QITER.

qualification in teaching. The School Assistant cohort is another pipeline to consider in terms of a recruitment strategy given that they inherently have an understanding and experience in working in schools and supporting students in the classroom.

- **Re-engagement of teachers back to the profession**

The Taskforce discussed that there is a need to explore opportunities to re-engage with teachers on unpaid parental leave, long-term Leave Without Pay (LWOP) arrangements, return-to-work transition, or have recently retired.

As the majority of the teaching workforce are women the Taskforce discussed initiatives and incentives that could be considered to better support women particularly in relation to their personal and caring responsibilities and need for greater workplace flexibility.

## FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This section of the report outlines key findings and recommendations to address identified workforce challenges informed by the range of information, workforce data, and substantive discussions of the Taskforce. The Taskforce agreed that recommendations that are implemented must be evaluated in terms of workload impact, operational requirements, efficacy and potential to achieve improvement.

### FINDINGS

- Demand for teachers in the ACT will continue to grow and recruitment will be increasingly challenging in the context of a national teacher shortage and ongoing impact of COVID-19.
- It is important to have a future-focused approach to workforce planning and develop incentives and initiatives for the ACT Public Schools to be the education system of choice for teachers, both graduate and experienced.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The Education Directorate will develop a five-year Classroom Teacher Attraction and Retention Plan by 2023 to recruit teachers to meet projected demand and retain current teaching workforce. Based on current modelling, the Directorate will need to recruit approximately 250 to 300 teachers annually to meet growth demand and attrition rates.
2. The Education Directorate will review and update the teacher workforce projections and additional teacher recruitment targets on an annual basis or as required. The Directorate will provide to the AEU a bi-annual progress report (end of Term 1 and Term 3) on the number of additional teachers employed against the recruitment targets.
3. The Education Directorate will establish the process for temporary engagement of Permit to Teach holders with the rate of pay at the 3-year trained classroom teacher classification level of the Agreement. The new rate of pay for PTT holders will be implemented by Term 4, 2022.
4. The Education Directorate will implement the expansion of conditional offer of employment in the ACT Education Directorate to students in their 3rd year of teaching qualification studies.
5. The Education Directorate will consider incentives for current staff in schools such as School Assistants to complete a teaching qualification.

6. The Education Directorate will undertake further work to consider incentives for preservice teachers to be employed in ACT Public Schools to access additional studies assistance and other supports.
7. The Education Directorate will develop strategies with the AEU to support parents and carers to return to the teaching workforce, such as facilitating access to early learning centres and out of school hours care programs.

## FINDINGS

- The current casual relief model no longer meets the day-to-day staffing requirements in schools, and teacher absences are expected to increase due to COVID-19 transmissions.
- There is a need to develop a model that will increase teacher availability to cover unplanned absences and support schools in the day-to-day management of their operations.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

8. The Education Directorate will encourage the use of inbuilt relief teachers in all schools to support schools in managing teacher absences. This will enable more secure form of employment through permanent appointment or long-term temporary engagement and less reliance on casual employment. The system approach will be developed in conjunction with the AEU.
9. The Education Directorate will develop centrally funded incentives for recently retired teachers or teachers to return from long-term leave including paid time for mandatory training completion and other supports such as payment of professional teacher registration and Working with Vulnerable People registration costs, and other relevant out-of-pocket expenses.
10. The Education Directorate will actively monitor and identify schools that are experiencing acute and ongoing teacher shortage due to high rates of teacher absences, unable to fill vacant teacher positions, and/or ongoing instances of splitting and combining of classes to respond and address these challenges.
11. The Education Directorate will implement targeted and differentiated strategies and initiatives to meet and support staffing requirements for identified schools with teacher shortage challenges. This will include considering incentives to encourage experienced teachers to be placed in these schools and strengthening teacher mobility process to enable the system to deploy teaching resources where they are needed the most.

12. The Education Directorate will continue to maintain a centralised engagement of temporary classroom teachers through the implementation of the *ACTPS Secure Work Conversion Policy*.
13. The Education Directorate will promote clear advice and guidance to ensure system-wide implementation of the *EDU and AEU Class Sizes Policy* and *Class Sizes Procedures*, specifically on what constitutes excessive class size.
14. The Education Directorate will continue to progress the *Schools Workforce Profile and Plan Project* which will identify drivers for teacher shortage and develop workforce data on teacher specialisations and expertise for each individual school and across all sectors.

## FINDING

- Given the national teacher shortage and ongoing impact of COVID-19 in our schools and broader community, there is a critical need to ensure that we continue to retain our current teaching workforce.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

15. The Education Directorate will develop and implement an assurance framework to ensure that the New Educator Development Program is implemented for all beginning teachers across all schools.
16. The Education Directorate will develop workforce data on beginning teachers to better inform strategies and interventions required as they transition into the teaching profession.
17. The Education Directorate will communicate formal advice and clear expectations on core role and reasonable working hours for teachers and school leaders. This will include supports available in relation to workload management and working hours for teachers and school leaders. Further, the Directorate will consider communications approach with school communities to promote reasonable expectations of teachers.
18. The Education Directorate will continue to assess, plan and respond to COVID-19 impact on school operations in conjunction with the AEU, including continued implementation of school workload reduction strategies that were introduced in Term 2, 2022 as required.
19. The Education Directorate will establish a Sustainable Workload Management Committee at a system level to identify drivers of teacher and school leader workload

and address these challenges. The Terms of Reference and membership of the committee will be agreed with the AEU.

20. The Education Directorate will undertake a system-wide safety review to strengthen the safety culture within ACT public schools for teachers and students and provide additional resourcing for training, communication, and project management to support the teaching workforce.