

# Australian Education Union

## Briefing Paper

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## Research Snapshot 2016: Teachers and Workloads

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### Executive Summary

Australian teachers are struggling under increasing workloads, which have become the key reason teachers consider leaving the profession.

While teachers remain committed to the profession and the vast majority see themselves teaching for the long term, the increase in the number of teachers expressing dissatisfaction with workloads should be a warning to governments that they must address this issue if they want to retain experienced and highly-qualified staff in our schools.

OECD surveys have shown Australia's teachers work longer hours, and have bigger classes, than the global average. Australia's school systems also have some of the most inequitable funding levels in the OECD, which increases the workload pressure in our most disadvantaged schools.

The AEU's State of our Schools survey for 2016 confirmed that workloads are a major issue with concerns significantly greater than in the 2015 survey. Other evidence shows that stress levels for educators, in particular for school leaders, are a major issue.

The survey found that 77 per cent of teachers believed their workload had increased in the past year, with only 2 per cent saying it had decreased. The majority of teachers were working over 45 hours per week, with 26 per cent working over 55 hours.

While only 17 per cent of teachers say they are considering leaving the profession, that number has risen from 14 per cent in 2015, and 74 per cent of those considering leaving cite workloads as the key reason. It is clear that our public school teachers remain passionate and committed to the job but we cannot discount the long-term impact of rising workloads on morale and retention.

Rising workloads cannot be blamed solely on the greater expectations being placed on teachers, a more crowded curriculum or the complexities of the modern classroom. They are the result of a lack of resources in our school system which has come from a long-term underinvestment in schools and inequities in funding.

The Gonski reforms are delivering much needed resources directly to disadvantaged schools, but only one-third of the resources needed will be delivered by the end of 2017. The future of needs-based funding beyond then is in doubt, with the Federal Government still refusing to fund schools according to need.

The Gonski Review recommended a major investment in schools, with the biggest funding increases going to schools with high levels of disadvantage, so that all schools could reach a minimum level of resources.

It also recommended an increase in funding for students with disability to meet the unmet need which sees over 250,000 students with disability who require funded support fail to receive it.

Australia has some of the biggest inequities in schools funding in the developed world, due to our high reliance on private schools. While Australia's total spend on schooling is around the OECD average as a percentage of GDP (3.9% in 2013 compared to the average of 3.6%) a high proportion of this comes from private spending on education. Only 82% of schools funding comes from governments, compared to the OECD average of 91%.

Our schools need to be properly resourced, to ensure that students receive the support they need, and that teachers are able to deal with the demands which are placed on them.

Australian teachers deserve the international standards of initial education and training, the professional development, working conditions, secure employment and remuneration recognised in the 1966 ILO/UNESCO Recommendation concerning the Status of Teachers.

The rise in casual or short-term contract employment is having a negative effect on the profession, particularly among early career teachers, and needs to be addressed.

There can be no successful school system which does not invest in its staff to ensure they are supported and given the resources and training they need.

## **Teacher workloads are rising.**

The AEU's 2016 State of Our Schools survey of teachers found that there has been a significant increase in workloads in just one year, and that workload is the main reason teachers give for considering leaving the profession.

### **Key findings from the survey include:**

- Teachers are working significantly more hours in 2016 than they were in 2015 – 26% say they are working 55+ hours per week (up from 23% in the 2015 survey) and another 45% say more than 45 hours (up from 42 per cent in the 2015 survey).
- 77% of teachers say their workload has increased in the last year, and just 2% say it has decreased.
- Significant growth in the number of teachers who believe it is getting more difficult to retain teachers: now up to 69% from 58% in 2015
- While only 17% of teachers are considering leaving the profession, this number has increased from 14% in 2015.
- For these teachers workload is by far the biggest issue, with 74% saying it would be the most important factor in any decision to leave, up from 66% in 2015.

**This is backed by the *Staff in Australia's Schools* survey of teaching, which finds that, on average, teachers are working close to 50 hours per week.**

	Face-to-face teaching (hrs pw)		All school-related activity (hrs pw)	
	Primary	Secondary	Primary	Secondary
Teachers	24	20	48	48
School Leaders	5	5	56	59

Source: *SiAS 2013*, pxxii.

**Australian teachers teach their students in classes whose numbers are at or above the OECD average.**

	Average Class Sizes (Public schools)	
	Primary	Lower Secondary
OECD Average	21	23
Australia	23	23
UK	26	20
US	22	28
Canada	m	m
NZ	m	m
Finland	19	20

Source: *Education at a Glance 2016* [EAG 2016], Table D2.1. 'm' indicates the data is missing, not reported by the country for the level of education indicated and so not available.

**Australian teachers are teaching more weeks per year, more days per year and more hours per year than the OECD average and the average in comparable countries.**

	No. of Weeks Teaching per year				No. of days Teaching per year				Net Teaching Time per year (hours)			
	EC	Prim	LS	US	EC	Prim	LS	US	EC	Prim	LS	US
OECD Average	40	38	37	37	190	183	181	180	1005	776	694	644
Australia	40	40	40	40	197	197	197	195	885	872	812	804
UK	38	38	38	38	190	190	190	190	722	722	745	745
US	36	36	36	36	180	180	180	180	m	m	981	m
Canada	m	37	37	37	m	183	183	183	m	796	743	744
NZ	m	38	38	38	m	192	191	190	m	922	840	760
Finland	m	38	38	38	m	187	187	187	m	673	589	547

Source: *EAG 2016*, Table D4.1

**Australian teachers and school leaders work in schools which are not the safe and healthy workplaces, Australians expect them to be. There is a direct link between high workloads and increasing stress on educators.**

The 2015 Australian Principal Occupational Health, Safety and Wellbeing Survey found that, while passionate about their work and reporting high levels of job satisfaction:

- Principals experience high levels of emotional demands and emotional labour when compared to the general population. This is correlated with higher levels of burnout and stress symptoms (difficulty sleeping, somatic symptoms and cognitive stress, and depressive symptoms) and poorer overall quality of life.
- The greatest source of stress for all principals and deputies/assistants in every state and every sector is the sheer quantity of work, closely followed by a lack of time to focus on teaching and learning.

- They experience offensive behaviour, adult-adult bullying, threats of and actual violence at rates far higher than the general population.
- Their positive measures of well-being (Self-rated health, mental health, happiness, coping, relationships, etc) are below general population averages and their negative measures (burn-out, stress, sleeping troubles, and physical symptoms) are higher than general population averages.

**Source:** Phillip Riley, *The Australian Principal Occupational Health, Safety and Well-being Survey 2015*, pp12-13.

- School teachers are second only to defence force, fire-fighting and police personnel in accepted workers compensation claims for mental health disorders (640 out of 7820 total claims per year).
- Work pressure, workplace harassment and bullying and exposure to workplace or occupational violence are the primary recognised causes.

**Source:** Safe Work Australia, *Work-Related Mental Disorders Profile 2015*, Figure 1 and Table 2, pp4, 7.

### **Too many Australian teachers cease their professional registration and leave the profession permanently.**

	<b>Number of Leavers</b>	<b>Percentage of Leavers</b>
ACT	164	2.15%
NSW	2,180	4.06%
NT	980	15.94%
Qld	4,102	4.26%
SA	1,828	4.96%
Tas	799	7.87%
Vic	8,960	7.79%
WA	2,391	4.93%
<b>Total</b>	<b>21,404</b>	<b>5.72%</b>

**Source:** Australian Government, *National Teacher Workforce Dataset-Data Analysis Report*, June 2014, p81.

### **In addition too many teachers are in insecure forms of work such as casual or short-term contracts.**

- Less than half of all early career teachers are in on-going or permanent positions (*SiAS 2013*, pxxii and Table 5.1, p43).
- And between 14% - 22% of teachers generally are in insecure employment:

	<b>Primary (%)</b>	<b>Secondary (%)</b>
On-going/permanent	78	86
Fixed-term contract < 1yr	8.2	5.4
Fixed-term contract 1-3 yrs	10.9	6.5

**Source:** *SiAS 2013*, Table 5.2, p44.

### **Workloads remain main reason for leaving the profession.**

Workload, insufficient recognition or reward, imposition of change from outside the school and poor public image are the major factors expressed by teachers for considering resigning from their profession.

The following table summarises the reasons for leaving teaching and is extracted from the *National Teacher Workforce Dataset-Data Analysis Report* (p83), based on data from the *Staff in Australian Schools Survey 2013* [SiAS].

