Workload reduction a priority

It would be no surprise to our members that Australian teachers have one of the largest workloads as reported by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).

The OECD report was released at the end of last year from its Teaching and Learning International Survey 2024 (TALIS). The report shows that Australian teachers teach less than the OECD average but spend an additional 26 hours a week on non-teaching tasks. In his analysis of this report, Trevor Cobbald states: “A major component is planning, marking, and collaborative tasks. Australian teachers spend 18.1 hours per week on these activities - the fourth highest in the OECD. Half of all Australian teachers report that excessive marking is a significant source of stress, among the highest proportions internationally.”

“One likely factor is the time spent preparing students for NAPLAN tests,” he continues. “Australian schools often devote weeks of class time to NAPLAN preparation, and teacher union surveys confirm that most teachers believe NAPLAN substantially increases their workload. While other OECD nations also use standardised tests, it is unclear whether they require similar volumes of classroom practice.

“Administrative burden is another defining feature of Australian teachers’ workload. TALIS 2024 shows that Australian lower secondary teachers spend 4.7 hours per week on administrative tasks, the fourth highest in the OECD. The OECD average is three hours; teachers in Finland and France spend only 1.5 hours. Administrative work is a major source of stress for 69 per cent of Australian teachers — the third-highest rate internationally.”

The SSTUWA’s *State of our Schools* survey 2026 show that the key contributors to workload include: Behaviour data collection; class sizes; dealing with student behaviour; lack of classroom support; meetings; mental health challenges of students; parental communication; preparation, planning and resource creation; reporting and assessment and staff shortages.

The SSTUWA is a party to the Workload Intensification Taskforce, which was set up after the last round of bargaining to alleviate workload pressures for teachers and school leaders. Clause 29 of the current *General Agreement (Schools)* explains that the taskforce is independent of the Department of Education’s (DoE) EREC and will identify compliance tasks that can increase in workload, alongside complex behaviour management, professional learning, small group tuition and documented plans.

The union is aware that reporting to parents has been linked to workload pressures for our members. It has taken several years to finally reach a consensus on comment requirements for reporting to parents in pre-primary (PP) to Year 10.

Our member feedback indicated that writing comments was onerous and time consuming. New reporting changes will see comments reduced to a general comment of up 1,000 characters in PP- Year 6 (including a progress on English and Mathematics), and up to 600 characters in Years 7-10.

The work of the taskforce on reporting requirements will see a further focus on senior secondary, education support and English as Additional Language/Dialect.

Other workload reduction strategies from the taskforce will include a streamlined documented plan template for mainstream students which will be communicated to schools at the end of Term 1.

While this template is not mandated, we strongly encourage our members to use this template from Term 2 onwards when creating new documented plans. By using this template, members can rest assure that they will be adhering to Clause 68 (student documented plans) and Schedule J (Framework for Documented Plans).

This template will remove the need to over report, while keeping to its key focus of being student centred and for teachers to be able to use their professional judgement. As stated in Schedule J, 8: “The Document Plan needs to be kept as simple as possible. While addressing the needs of the student(s), due consideration is given to Teacher workload.”

For school leaders, and administration, a significant amount of work has been done on compliance requirements on the go with this. This will be tabled once completed. Like the work done by the unions with the DoE on streamlining consistent

process for water and power outages, the SSTUWA is pleased that another administerial task for school leaders has been done.

The SSTUWA's next workload priority for the taskforce will be the need for clarity around graduate portfolio requirements. At the time of writing this article, the SSTUWA is compiling a formal report to table at the next taskforce meeting.

As we prepare to go back into bargaining this year, we know our members will be expecting the SSTUWA to continue advocating for the alleviation of workload pressures for all.



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