Making school meetings beneficial for all

By Matt Jarman
Senior Vice President

Over the course of the past few years staff meeting time has been altered by workload demands. What is best used for both school leaders and classroom staff to work collaboratively has, at times, been adversely impinged by increasing workload demands upon both.

Whilst there is no such thing as a one-size-fits-all approach, there are consistent concerns both leaders and teachers are enduring, which can be avoided.

One undisputed shared goal is the hope for more time to focus on quality instruction and student progress compared to what is often considered as compliance related work.

Our 2021 Log of Claims (endorsed by State Council Conference delegates, SSTUWA Executive and members) is targeting strategies to best reduce the impact of increased compliance workload and other similar pressures.

As recently reported in the media, 87 per cent of SSTUWA members surveyed in the 2021 Save Our Schools survey said workload was causing them to consider leaving the profession.

Not having a say and being given more work to complete during staff meetings was part of the feedback from our members.

An increase in the need for all types of staff to complete online learning compliance is cited as a growing issue, particularly when this time is not being counted within clause 9.3(a) of the General Agreement.

Sixty-four per cent of members said they felt great pressure to attend out of hours meetings, while 16 per cent said they felt they had no choice.

Question 19 of the survey asked: “Is there an expectation and/or requirement for you to attend beyond the five hours of ‘out of school’ meetings?” The responses were:

- Forty-two per cent required and expected.
- Thirty-five per cent expected but not required.
- Eighteen per cent not expected or required.
- Five per cent unsure.

In this same survey 27 per cent of members also reported that they believed they were already doing more than 60 hours a week, with 54 per cent saying they were doing between 50-59 hours per week.

The Schools General Agreement 2019, clause 9.3(a) does not state it must be five hours per term, the clause states “can require”.

The SSTUWA knows of many happy schools where less than five hours are used per term. The clause also states “collaborative purposes” and this is another of the common tension points.

The Department of Education (DoE) touts high-performing schools as including “staff and school leaders working together to agree on what good teaching looks like”.

I’d suggest there is no better time to do this than during sanctioned time and that there is no such thing as one-sided collaboration.

Sometimes as a school leader I knew I had to stand up in front and lead the way, other times I had to stand aside and let staff do the talking and leading, appreciating the need to take on a different role in the decision-making process.

Clause 9.3(a) then proceeds to make suggestions, but maintains flexibility for school-level decision-making; as it

should be.

Clause 9.3(b) then provides further flexibility, which is grounded in “full and proper consultation with staff” and goes on to state the importance of equity in these considerations.

Clause 9.3(c) simply reinforces the role of the principal which must be respected at all times, especially given their increasing workloads and challenges.

But this should not be confused as a licence for positional power decision-making, a low form of leadership not recommended anywhere within current DoE leadership strategy and professional learning.

Clause 9.3(d) is simply good practice and 9.4 is a standard workplace provision.

The SSTUWA recommends that 2022 school development day and staff meeting planning takes into account these clauses, as professional learning and compliance balances are considered and planned, with a stronger focus on teaching, learning and staff health and well-being balance.

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