



AEU Victoria



A TEN-YEAR PLAN FOR STAFFING IN PUBLIC EDUCATION

Every Victorian has the right to access high-quality, adequately and fairly funded public education, and to be taught by a fully qualified teacher who is assisted by properly trained support staff and led by educational leaders with the resources they need.

AUGUST 2022

Forward

When it comes to education, the most important promise we make as a community is that Victorians can access high-quality provision at their local kindergarten, public school, and TAFE. Public education is the fundamental element in our community's effort to achieve equity when it comes to educational and life outcomes. The proper and sufficient allocation of resources to achieve these goals is essential, not least in response to the increasingly complex needs of students and the associated work of educational leaders, teachers and support staff.

Ensuring student access to high-quality teaching and learning, and welfare supports, centres on fully qualified and well-supported educators who are respected for the important work they do.

Since the last state election and throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, workers in public education have been better recognised by the community for the contribution they make, the challenging nature of the work they do, and their dedication to their students. However, there has also been growing pressure related to the work required of educational leaders, teachers, and support staff. Excessive workloads and work intensification plague the staff in our kindergartens, schools and TAFEs, and it is taking its toll.

There is broad agreement that the pandemic has highlighted the longstanding inequities in public education, especially in relation to the absence of appropriate funding to match the needs of students and staff alike. The work and workloads of staff are more clearly seen, as is a looming shortage of teachers, support staff, and allied health professionals. Exhaustion, stress and burnout are seeing too many leave the profession and not enough new entrants being attracted. There is no more important time than now for investment in the workforce, which is, in turn, a direct investment in students, especially those with additional needs.

A failure to act, both in the short and longer term, will make it difficult for Victoria to deliver the promise we make to our students. Every person has the right to access high-quality, properly and fairly funded public education, including being taught by a fully qualified teacher, assisted by properly trained support staff, and led by principals and other educational leaders with the resources they need. But right now, we risk a crisis in which kindergartens, schools and TAFEs cannot employ enough staff to meet even the most basic needs of students.

This document sets out the recommendations for further action by the state government to ensure public education is appropriately funded and that kindergartens, schools and TAFE have the staff they need, so that all students, now and into the future, can access the high-quality education they deserve.

Meredith Peace
President
AEU Victorian Branch



Introduction

Action to address staffing shortages is needed urgently. Kindergartens, schools and TAFEs also need to be supported by medium and long-term plans to attract and retain staff. These plans must be appropriately funded by the state government. Without this, quality provision is at risk.

The efforts of the state government need to be bold. The cornerstone of quality provision comes from appropriately qualified teachers and other staff working with students. Right now, the ongoing disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and other illnesses means that too many students have their learning compromised because of teacher shortages, and the remaining staff carry a constant, heavy workload to fill the gaps. Vacancy rates are steadily increasing, with more kindergartens, schools and TAFEs than ever before unable to fill positions beyond the usually difficult-to-staff learning areas and geographic locations. As Victoria heads towards a state election, immediate action to keep existing staff through financial incentives is needed.

In the short and medium term, retaining existing staff is essential, as is creating incentives and providing more support for new entrants into the profession. The overwhelming reason teachers cite when they are considering or decide to leave the profession is excessive workload, including unnecessary and unrealistic administration and accountability which does not positively impact student learning. Some improvements and investment have been achieved through industrial processes, which is welcome – however, government and employers must continue to address excessive workloads.

Long-term efforts are needed to ensure the supply of staff meets the growing demand. The timelines associated with training teachers properly means that, without an adequate plan, Victoria risks not having enough teachers available. This may lead to expanded use or the introduction of minimalist teacher education courses that can undermine quality. Every student has a right to a fully qualified and well-supported teacher. The shortage of staff cannot result in a reduction of entry standards to the profession, which were hard fought for and won by teacher unions in the 1970s and 80s.

Beyond teachers, the attraction and retention of support staff and allied health professionals must be of equal focus. The pre-pandemic shortage of school-based psychologists has meant that student referrals have been difficult to secure and involve timeframes that do not meet the needs of students and families. This has been made significantly worse by the effect of the pandemic and the greater prevalence of mental health support needed across the community. Access to other allied health staff such as occupational therapists and speech pathologists is also limited. A comprehensive plan for staffing supply must include non-teaching staff.

Additional efforts must be made to encourage teachers to take up educational leadership roles across public education. The demands on school principals and others requires enhanced pathway support and considerable investment in

supports that further reduce workload, including removing duties and tasks not directly related to educational leadership.

The failure of the former Morrison government to lead a co-ordinated national approach to address the attraction and retention of school staff has let public school communities down, only to be matched by their belligerence towards teachers and active efforts to undermine the status of the profession. The Victorian government must work with their counterparts in other states and territories and the new Labor federal government to fix staff supply. Politicians across the political spectrum have an obligation to ensure teachers and support staff are held in high esteem in the community as this is an important way to attract those most suitable to the profession and to keep them.

The complexity of student learning and welfare needs is becoming more evident as it becomes more challenging, exacerbated by the effects of the pandemic and coming on the back of pre-existing issues. The state government's investment in the Tutor Learning Initiative and more mental health support for students in schools is recognition of this. Greater investment by the state government to support school students with disability and additional needs has been welcomed, albeit the resources available remain too limited and timeframes associated with the promised funding and implementation too long. This means too many students continue to miss out on the support they need. This lack of support contributes to the pressure experienced by staff in public education and drives burnout, which causes employees to leave the profession.

Ten years ago, negotiations for new school funding agreements with the federal government and states and territories got underway, underpinned by the recommendations of the Gonski review. Ten years later, the funding levels outlined in the review have still not been delivered for public schools.

A student who started school ten years ago is now in Year 10, nearing the end of their schooling. The promise of funding public schools to at least 100 per cent of the Schooling Resource Standard (SRS) has not been met, which means Victorian students are not receiving funding at the level of the federal government's own funding benchmark. By 2023, the current generation of students in Victoria will only receive 90.4% of the SRS. Attracting and retaining staff in public education relies on a properly funded system to ensure staff workloads are properly managed. High-quality provision is undermined when staff are continuously overworked and exhausted, a direct result of chronic underfunding.

The status quo cannot continue – resources delayed are resources denied to students and staff.

Staff requirements in the next ten years

Australian context

The current and projected shortage of education staff is not unique to Victoria.

Federal government modelling from March 2022 predicts that 50,000 teachers are expected to permanently leave the profession between 2020 and 2025 nationally, and that STEM-qualified teacher shortages could affect up to 70,000 students each year by 2030. Across the country, the Australian Department of Education expects that “the demand for secondary school teachers is projected to exceed the number of new graduate teachers by approximately 4,100 teachers.”¹

Between 2021 and 2031, nation-wide primary and secondary student enrolment is expected to grow by 11 per cent and 10 percent respectively, whilst annual initial teacher commencements have declined by 8 per cent and completions by 17 per cent in the three years to 2020.²

The National Skills Commission, in a 2021 report, identified a national shortage of early childhood teachers.³

In vocational education and training, research conducted by the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) in 2021 found that “there were continuing shortages of trainers, and assessors across almost every industry.”⁴

The federal government’s promise to provide 465,000 fee-free TAFE places as well as additional TAFE places will require an increase in TAFE teachers.

Victorian context

Early Childhood

The Victorian government’s ambitious and important agenda in Early Childhood education with the introduction of 15 hours of funded three-year-old kindergarten, and the move to expand funded four-year-old provision to 30 hours per week, will require 11,000 additional teachers and 5,500 educators as a minimum over the next decade.⁵

1 *Teacher Workforce Shortages Issues Paper* @ <https://ministers.education.gov.au/clare/teacher-workforce-shortages-issues-paper>

2 Ibid.

3 *Skills Priority List Findings - Education Professionals* @ <https://www.nationalskillscommission.gov.au/publications/skills-priority-list-occupations/anzsco-sub-major/education-professionals>

4 Tyler, M & Dymock, D (2021) *Attracting industry experts to become VET practitioners: a journey, not a destination*, NCVER, Adelaide

5 *Teacher Supply and Demand Report (2020)* @ <https://www.vic.gov.au/statistics-victorian-schools-and-teaching>; *Victoria In Future (2019)* @ <https://www.planning.vic.gov.au>

Public schools

In our schools, the *Victorian Government Schools Agreement 2022* requires an additional 2,000 teachers to enable the reduction in face-to-face teaching by one-and-a-half hours by 2024, as a key workload reduction measure. This is in addition to the number of teachers needed to replace those retiring, leaving the profession, accepting positions in private schools, and student population growth.

The *Victoria in Future*⁶ report, published in 2019, provides the state government projection of population growth, including projected growth in the Victorian school-aged population.

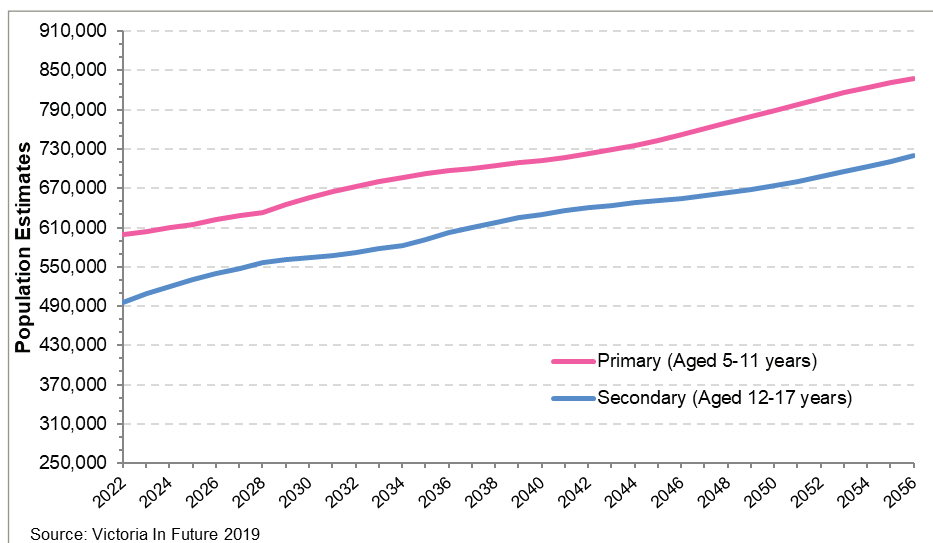


Figure 1 Projected school-age population growth

Initiatives introduced with the *Victorian Government Schools Agreement 2022*, combined with forecast enrolment growth will see the need for more than 11,000 additional new teachers over the next decade.⁷

TAFE

The state government has recognised the importance of TAFE in providing the skills required to support recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. Last year's announcement of the creation of 60,000 new fee-free TAFE places over four years is an expression of this recognition. The Commonwealth's commitment to create 45,000 new TAFE places nationally also recognises TAFE's centrality in addressing skills shortages. However, strategies are required to ensure the staff that will be needed are attracted and retained, and that the extra places are properly funded. In an environment where skills are already in high demand

⁶ *Victoria in Future* (2019) @ <https://www.planning.vic.gov.au>

⁷ *Teacher Supply and Demand Report* (2020); Australian Bureau of Statistics (2018) 3222.0 Population Projections, Australia.

across a broad range of industries, underfunded TAFE's will find it difficult to maintain staffing levels.

In the context of a skills shortage across many industries, and the need to have more Victorians than ever enrol in TAFE courses, an analysis of TAFE Institute Annual Reports shows that there were 179 fewer TAFE teachers in 2021 compared to 2019.

Currently, too many TAFE's are unable to fill teacher vacancies, with this disproportionately affecting those located in regional and rural communities.

Current pressures affecting public education staffing

It is challenging to provide a clear picture on exactly what is happening in regard to student and staff numbers in each of the public education sectors, as there is a lack of adequate, comprehensive, transparent and up-to-date data available. It is essential that this is addressed, at the state and federal level, if we are to properly understand the challenges we face and to develop solutions.

Workload

The pressures faced by workers in public schools, kindergartens and TAFE stem from a range of factors, including unsustainable workloads, an increasing lack of professional trust, salary, insecure employment, systematic undermining of the status of the profession, and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Many of these issues pre-date the significant impact of the pandemic, especially in relation to workload.

The Australian Council of Educational Research found in 2016 that Victorian teachers worked an average of 53 hours per week during term time, with an AEU survey of teachers in 2018 showing that only 3.9 per cent consider that they had sufficient time outside of classes for lesson planning, assessment, report writing and administration work within their paid hours. In 2016, principals reported that they were working almost 60 hours per week on average, whilst a large proportion of education support staff reported that they were unable to complete their tasks during work hours.⁸ A 2020 AEU survey of more than 10,000 teachers and principals made clear that excessive working hours had not shifted since 2016. A pre-COVID survey of AEU preschool members found that only 13 per cent of preschool teachers felt that their workload was manageable.⁹ In a 2017 survey, TAFE teachers reported working 6.8 hours of unpaid overtime per week and three-quarters had considered leaving TAFE in the previous 12 months.¹⁰ In a 2021 survey, more than 77 per cent of TAFE teachers reported that there had been an increase in their workload, with 44.3% considering the increase significant.

In 2022, disruptions to teaching and learning programs across kindergartens, public schools, and TAFEs due to staff and student absenteeism have added considerably to staff workload as they adjust and readjust the taught curriculum and pedagogical approaches. The splitting of student groups in kindergarten

8 Weldon, P. R., & Ingvarson, L. (2016) *School Staff Workload Study: Final Report to the Australian Education Union–Victorian Branch*, ACER, Camberwell @ http://puteducation1st.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/AEU-Workload-Survey-Report-FINAL-PublicVersion118_10-3pw-1.pdf

9 AEU Victoria (2020) *EC education suffers as heavy workload, low wages drive early educators out of teaching* @ <https://www.aeuvic.asn.au/ec-education-suffers-heavy-workload-low-wages-drive-early-educators-out-teaching>

10 AEU Victoria (2017) *TAFE teachers fight cuts to working conditions* @ <https://www.aeuvic.asn.au/tafe-teachers-fight-cuts-working-conditions>

and primary schools is commonplace to ensure adequate supervision of children, with too many secondary classes disrupted, not least those students in their final years of school. TAFE teachers have routinely picked up additional teaching hours in response to teachers retiring early and/or returning to higher paid and less stressful work in industry.

Despite their professionalism and commitment to their students, exhausted teachers with excessive workloads and teaching large classes can't deliver the quality and support our children and young adults need and deserve. Teachers across all public education settings must be provided with the time and professional trust they need to focus on their core work of teaching and learning.

Educational leaders burdened by excessive administration and compliance do not have a manageable workload. This limits their ability to provide the educational leadership needed for the delivery of high-quality educational programs to their community.

Student learning and welfare needs

Supporting the needs of learners has become increasingly complex, with this being exacerbated by the pandemic. Research has identified increased risks for student mental health, social and emotional wellbeing, and engagement with learning associated with disruptions to face-to-face learning.¹¹ Eighty per cent of respondents to an AEU survey of teachers conducted in 2020 felt that students from low socioeconomic backgrounds were further disadvantaged by remote learning and two-thirds felt that student stress and anxiety had increased.¹²

Supporting students with disability during COVID is complicated by the intense levels of individual support required by some students and by the fact that many of these students may well be medically vulnerable to adverse effects of infection. A survey conducted by Children and Young People with Disability Australia (CYDA) found that social supports, supervision, and individual support declined markedly during the first period of remote learning.¹³ In 2020, around 90 per cent of Australian government school principals reported reallocating funds from other areas to cover shortfalls in disability funding for their students.¹⁴ Although Victorian funding for students with disability has increased in recent years, accessing 100 per cent of the SRS allocation would significantly increase the amounts available for these students. Nationally, it is estimated that students with disability in public schools were short-changed by \$598 million in

11 Save The Children (2020) *Build back better: Student wellbeing, engagement and recovery in Australia* @ <https://www.savethechildren.org.au/getmedia/8af84232-1faa-41a0-a455-eb9645327b0a/stc01744-policy-brief-student-wellbeing%2C-engagement-and-recovery-fa.pdf.aspx>

12 Graham, G. (2020) Learning in the shadow of the pandemic, *Professional Voice*, Vol 13,3.

13 CYDA (2020) *Not even remotely fair: Experiences of students with disability during COVID-19* @ https://www.cyda.org.au/resources/details/173/not_even_remotely_fair_cyda_education_report_summary.pdf

14 AEU Victoria (2020) *Students with disability need additional funding support* @ <https://www.aeuvic.asn.au/students-disability-need-additional-funding-support>

2021 due to funding levels being well below 100 per cent of the SRS.¹⁵ Public schools are also disadvantaged due to a lack of resources for undertaking the assessments required to access disability funding, especially in comparison to non-government schools.

Initial Teacher Education

There has been a decline in ITE applications and completions. Between 2014 and 2020, first-year primary teaching enrolments fell by 31 per cent, whilst first-year secondary teaching enrolments fell by 24 per cent (Figure 2). Some of this decline may be attributed to the increased standard for entry, some to the decline in status of teaching and, arguably, due to the realisation that current education workloads are unsustainable.

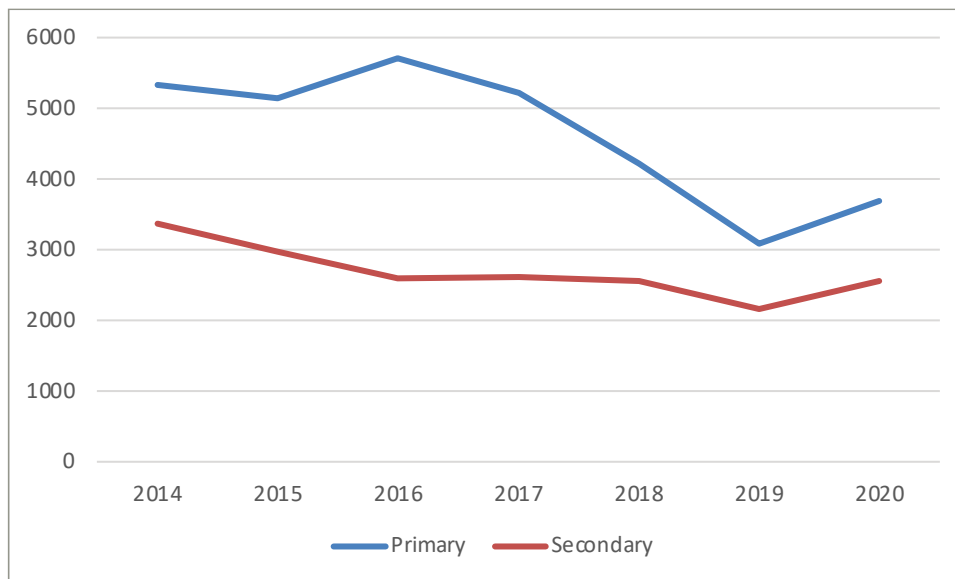


Figure 2. First-year initial teacher education enrolments, undergraduate and post-graduate¹⁶

(Note: Students in combined primary/secondary courses have been allocated equally to primary and secondary in this chart.)

Supply of VIT registered teachers

The 2020 Victorian *Teacher Supply and Demand Report* also shows that the overall supply of teachers has been declining over many years.

¹⁵ "Private schools win millions in disability funding", *The Saturday Paper*, Saturday 6th August 2022

¹⁶ *Teacher Supply and Demand Report* (2020)

Year	Number of teachers
2015	42,321
2016	41,796
2017	42,228
2018	42,024
2019	41,041
2020	39,426

Table 1. School potential supply pool, by year¹⁷

(Note: The school potential supply pool is defined as teachers on the school register that are not tagged to an employer sector. The supply pool includes casual relief teachers, teachers working in non-school settings, teachers working in schools where the school had not updated their employment details at the time of data collection, and registered teachers who are not currently teaching.)

Vacancies and applications

The most recently available Department of Education and Training data outlines the pressures on the school sector in relation to filling vacant positions, particularly based on the location of the vacancies.

Remoteness		No appointment rate
Major City	Primary	8.6%
	Secondary	17.9%
Inner Regional	Primary	6.0%
	Secondary	19.2%
Outer Regional	Primary	13.1%
	Secondary	29.8%

Table 2. The no appointment rate, schools (2020), by remoteness¹⁸

AEU principal class members report a serious and worrying increase in the 'no appointment' rate, reflecting the lack of suitable applicants, with previously unaffected metropolitan schools being impacted for the first time.

Casual Relief Teachers

The available data regarding the supply of a casual relief teachers (CRTs) shows that just under 9,000 CRTs were available in Victoria in 2019. More recent data is unavailable.

The well-regarded Tutor Learning Initiative program, established to assist students impacted by lengthy periods of remote learning due to the response to the COVID-19 pandemic, funded for the 2021/2022 school years, employed approximately 6,400 teachers.

¹⁷ Teacher Supply and Demand Report (2020)

¹⁸ Teacher Supply and Demand Report (2020)

A significant number of CRTs made themselves available for this program, along with other staff increasing their time fractions, returning from leave, or returning from recent retirement, often on a part-time basis, to take up positions.

The lack of supply of CRTs in 2022 is well documented, leaving schools unable to cover classes and in some cases dismissing students. This is particularly the case for schools in regional and rural areas, where the supply of CRTs is more limited compared to metropolitan Melbourne.

Remoteness		Number of Casual Relief Teachers
Major City	Primary	4,445
	Secondary	2,456
Inner Regional	Primary	1,005
	Secondary	500
Outer Regional/ Remote	Primary	205
	Secondary	102

Table 3. Victorian government casual relief teacher numbers (2019), by remoteness

The most recently available data shows year on year that availability of CRTs is becoming more challenging.

Year	Primary	Secondary
2016	339	180
2017	357	175
2018	469	258
2019	517	NA

Table 4. Victorian government casual relief teacher difficult to fill vacancies, by year¹⁹

Funding

The chronic lack of funding across public education in Victoria has been well documented over more than 15 years.²⁰

For too long, public education has been asked to do more without the appropriate financial support from all levels of government. This cannot continue. Various government sponsored reviews have outlined the minimum requirements when it comes to resources for public education in Victoria. These include the *Lifting Our Game* report on Early Childhood education, and reviews

¹⁹ *Teacher Supply and Demand Report (2020)*

²⁰ AEU Victoria (2018) *Investing in Victoria's Public Schools* @ <https://puteducationfirst.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/PE1-School-policy.pdf>; Productivity Commission, 2021, *Report on Government Services* @ <https://www.pc.gov.au/research/ongoing/report-on-government-services/2021/child-care-education-and-training>

into TAFE provision arrangements²¹, along with the Gonski²² and Bracks²³ school funding reviews.

Early Childhood

For a long time, government preschool funding in Australia has lagged well behind the rest of the developed world when measured as a proportion of Gross Domestic Product (GDP). In 2017, Australia ranked 24th out of 26 countries on this measure, spending just 0.2 per cent of GDP, compared to the OECD average of 0.61 per cent.²⁴ The *Lifting Our Game* report recommended that Australia should increase its investment to at least the OECD average as well as expanding access to three-year-old and four-year-old preschool. Recently announced initiatives in Victoria creating universal access to three-year-old preschool and doubling the amount of four-year-old preschool over the next decade, may see Victoria's funding levels approach the recommended amounts of government investment. However, the decentralised and heterogenous nature of preschool provision in Victoria means that the quality of provision can be uneven and may benefit from more centralised coordination and oversight.

Schools

The current funding agreement in place between the federal and Victorian governments sees Victorian students funded to just 90.4% of the Schooling Resource Standard (SRS) by the end of 2023. The long-term trajectory sees Victoria reach 95% of the SRS by the end of 2029. There is no current plan to bring the funding to 100%.

This needs to be addressed as a matter of urgency.

Achieving 100% of SRS would mean an extra \$1,991 on average for each Victorian school student. For a school of 500 students, this would mean \$995,500 in additional funds in 2022 alone.²⁵ If the ability for the Victorian government to claim a 4% depreciation and other system costs as part of its SRS contribution was removed, then achieving 100 per cent of the SRS would

21 Mackenzie, B, and Coulson, N (2015) *VET Funding Review: Final Report* @ <http://hdl.voced.edu.au/10707/392319>; Macklin, J. (2020) *Future Skills for Victoria* @ <https://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/about/department/macklinreview-finalreport.pdf>

22 Gonski, D. (2011) *Review of Funding for Schooling: Final Report* @ <https://www.dese.gov.au/school-funding/resources/review-funding-schooling-final-report-december-2011>

23 Bracks, S (2015) *Government Schools Funding Review: Final Report* @ <https://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/about/department/government-schools-funding-review-march.pdf>

24 Pascoe, S. and Brennan, D. (2017) *Lifting Our Game* @ <https://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/about/research/LiftingOurGame.PDF>

25 Rorris, A. (2020) *The Schooling Resource Standard in Australia* @ https://puttingourkidsfirst.com.au/application/files/1216/2277/6954/Amended_Rorris_report_-_combined_doc_-_The_Schooling_Resource_Standard_in_Australia_2.pdf

see an extra \$2,810 per student or an extra \$1.4 million for a school of 500 students in 2022.²⁶

This funding would enable a range of issues to be addressed, including:

- a range of measures to address staff shortages
- a greater breadth of curriculum to be offered
- better support for students with disability and those with additional needs
- workload relief to enable teachers to focus on the work that is most valuable – teaching their students.

TAFE system

The Macklin review into the delivery on Victoria's future skills needs outlined the urgent need to develop an understanding of costs, subsidies, prices, loadings and concessions to enable the Victorian government to produce a new VET funding model linked to the development and delivery of the Victorian Skills Plan.

The review outlined that current subsidies for VET courses often do not reflect the real costs of quality provision. This results in the skills education required to address skills shortages not being widely offered, as the TAFE institute cannot make these courses financially viable.

The AEU calls for at least 70% of state government VET funding to be quarantined for public provision through TAFE, with the remaining 30% allocated on a contestable basis to providers, including TAFE. Victoria's recurrent expenditure per annual hour needs to increase to at least the national average.

²⁶ Senate Estimates, 2021-22 Budget Estimates, AQON SQ21-000848; Cobbold (2022), *Public Schools in Victoria Face a Funding Crisis* @ <https://saveourschools.com.au/funding/public-schools-in-victoria-face-a-funding-crisis/>

A ten-year plan to staff public education

The AEU is calling for a range of strategies to address the current and anticipated public education workforce shortages and ongoing supply.

It is essential that these strategies include immediate steps, as well as medium and longer term approaches. Retaining the existing workforce is critical alongside attracting new employees.

It is clear that existing efforts to retain and attract staff are insufficient, and that the government and other employers need to be bold in taking action to build the workforce. They should be under no illusion that the circumstances we currently face are not purely a result of the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. Action must be taken to ensure all our students are being educated by suitably qualified staff, both now and into the future.

This action must be a combination of ensuring that the conditions of employment meet the needs of workers by directly addressing pressures such as excessive workload; providing adequate resources to support all students; reducing the risk of occupational violence; eliminating insecure employment; and offering fair and reasonable salaries, as well as new financial incentives that provide adequate and timely support to match the career stages of employees.

A significant boost of new entrants into the education profession is required to cover attrition, the growth in student numbers over the next decade, and the expansion of education programs such as in early childhood. There needs to be a continued focus on, and growth of, the current incentives put in place by the state government to attract new entrants into initial teacher education, for school leavers and those changing careers.

Greater effort is required by employers to identify qualified staff who are not currently employed in kindergartens, schools and TAFEs and to provide incentives for them to return. Such an approach is important especially in relation to teachers who are on parental leave, or on other forms of unpaid leave.

Immediate action

The immediate staffing needs of kindergartens, public schools and TAFE is best met with a combination of measures to retain existing staff and a renewed approach to attracting new employees. We will not realise the benefits of attracting new staff if we continue to lose excessive numbers of existing staff due to issues such as stress and burnout.

To this end, the AEU is calling for:

- a retention payment to be paid to existing staff in kindergartens, schools and TAFE to provide an incentive to retain them in the workforce given the cumulative effect of high levels of workload and stress experienced in 2020–2022, on top of the usual high demands, which is leading to education worker burnout and a greater likelihood of retirement or resignation.

- public education employers to actively reduce the workloads required of staff, and implement measures such as:
 - increasing, where possible, the number of support staff roles to provide support for teachers and students. The government should consider additional funding support to enable public education employers to employ increased numbers of support staff
 - reducing the administrative and compliance burden to enable a focus on core teaching and learning programs and student welfare
 - reducing, delaying, or abandoning new initiatives and significant program changes until such time as the workload associated can be reasonably managed
 - implementing policies which ensure the 'right to disconnect' after hours
 - allocating work within the terms of industrial agreements to ensure work can be completed within paid hours. In schools, this includes effective implementation of the workload reduction measures introduced through the VGSA 2022 (face-to-face teaching reduction, provision of PPDs, changes to enable teacher directed work as part of the 30+8 model, time in lieu for structured school activities, pupil-free day for assessment and reporting).
- the current trial of reduced face-to-face teaching for early career teachers (ECT) in their first years of employment to be expanded to all public schools and be funded at the full cost of replacing the ECT and their mentor. In addition, experienced staff who are nearing retirement and may want to reduce hours, or recently retired staff, should be employed specifically to provide support to early career teachers to ensure they have the mentoring and coaching support in the first years of their careers.
- DET to offer ongoing employment to final-year initial teacher education students as soon as possible, with a view to enabling schools and early childhood employers to participate in a subsequent selection process to fill specific vacancies for the 2023 school year. Additional financial incentives could also be offered to final-year students in this pool who are prepared to teach in remote/rural areas of the state.
- state and federal government to fund several thousand Victorian studentships (with a focus on rural/regional, hard-to-staff schools, kindergartens and TAFEs). These studentships would:
 - provide cost of living financial support during ITE study
 - provide secure ongoing employment in a rural, regional, hard-to-staff area at the completion of study.

Students would be placed via a centralised process, and they would be bonded to work for the employer in the location for three years. This initiative should also be part of medium and long-term actions.
- DET to deploy staff in excess to suitable vacancies in schools.

Medium and long term actions

Retention

The following measures should be implemented by employers to retain existing staff:

- Expand early career teacher (ECT) mentoring support by an additional three years.
- Fund opportunities for ECT to come together to network, get support, and access graduate-specific professional development, especially in regional and rural Victoria.
- Fund programs for ECTs which draw on the professional expertise of recently retired staff through mentoring and support programs.
- Provide more flexible employment opportunities, including better access to part-time employment for staff moving toward retirement and those returning from leave, such as parental absence.
- Expand the current financial incentive program for staff to move to rural, remote and hard-to-staff schools and early childhood settings, increasing the current financial payment and numbers of positions available, subject to supply.
- Consideration should also be given to a retention incentive payment for all staff who are working in remote schools or early childhood settings.
- Increase the incentives and supports for teachers currently teaching 'out of field' to gain university qualifications in the subject they are teaching.
- Engage a pool of rural/regionally based school relief teachers as permanent employees, co-ordinated by DET, to be deployed to cover both longer-term absences such as long service leave and shorter term absences where required.
- Provide accommodation options for staff in areas where housing supply is limited. This could include giving priority to ECTs who have a rural/regional background or an interest in moving to those areas as an introductory opportunity – for both the graduates and schools. Employers should also work with local government authorities in regard to accommodation provision where appropriate.
- Significantly expand support for students with additional needs, including those with disability, ensuring timely access to assessment and prompt delivery of support so teachers have access to additional support and can focus on improving outcomes for all students. A focus in the early childhood sector would mean more students will commence school with the support they need. Early intervention is critical to ensuring improved outcomes for students, both at kindergarten, but also throughout their ongoing education. In schools, the rollout of the new disability inclusion program, including additional investment must be accelerated.
- Improve student support services in TAFEs to ensure students get the support and advice they need, which will assist in improving completion rates for students. Also relieve teaching staff from additional duties that currently are unpaid or under supported, which takes their focus away from teaching and learning activities.

Attraction

The following measures should be implemented by the state government to attract new staff:

Initial Teacher education

- Work with rural and regional schools to identify students with the capacity and aptitude for teaching to be encouraged to choose initial teacher education (ITE).
- Work with schools, families, and community to identify Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students with the capacity and aptitude for teaching to be encouraged and supported to choose ITE.
- Work with the federal government to tailor financial incentives for Victorian students with the capacity and aptitude for teaching to be supported during ITE and once they become an early career teacher.
- Provide appropriate allowances or stipends for rural students enrolled in ITE to cover study costs and the costs of living away from home.
- Fund ITE students to undertake practicums to cover the loss of earnings from part-time or casual employment and other associated costs such as travel. Financial support for students who undertake practicums in a rural or regional school should include additional incentive payments.
- Provide ITE students with fully subsidised accommodation when undertaking a practicum in a rural and regional school or kindergarten.
- Establish programs whereby employers in each sector (early childhood, schools and TAFE) work in a co-ordinated way to support rural/regional practicums including access to suitable accommodation.
- Fund a program to employ staff in each DET region to co-ordinate and support kindergartens, schools and TAFEs to take practicum students.
- Facilitate partnerships between schools and early childhood settings and ITE providers, to provide opportunities for ITE students to work within the setting over an extended period of time, i.e. a full year.
- State and federal government to fund several thousand Victorian studentships (with a focus on rural/regional, hard-to-staff schools). These studentships would:
 - provide cost of living financial support during ITE study
 - provide secure ongoing employment in a rural, regional, hard to staff area at the completion of study.Students would be placed via a centralised process and they would be bonded to work for DET in the location for three years.
- Expand school-based internships, where ITE students are able to be employed in their final six months of study as a paraprofessional with Permission to Teach, particularly in areas of subject or geographic shortages. This must only occur where the ITE students is supported with a comprehensive and fully funded mentor program which provides dedicated time release for the mentor.
- Fund EC practicums/job placements in rural, regional and hard-to-staff areas for students in their final six months of study, with a guaranteed ongoing position upon graduation.

- Establish a full-time employment priority system for those early childhood ITE graduates who want to work full time.
- Lobby the federal government to expand the number of ITE Commonwealth-subsidised places, with minimum entry standards.
- Lobby the federal government to expand on their election commitment for financial support for high-achieving ATAR students to take up a teaching degree.
- Lobby the federal government to reverse the tuition fee increases to humanities degrees.
- Lobby the federal government to implement a HECS-HELP loan reduction or time served payment for graduates that remain employed in public education for five years.

Career change pathways

- Through a partnership between government and universities, establish a TAFE teacher qualification/model similar to the 'Hawthorn model' used in the 1980s, which supported tradespeople to gain teaching qualifications. Former tradespeople were employed in TAFE settings whilst undertaking their teaching qualifications, with strong supervision, mentor and education support. This model could be used across a range of qualification areas, not exclusively trades.
- Resource partnerships for industry and TAFE to provide pathways, particularly in skill shortage areas, to work jointly to ensure we have teachers to teach the next generation of skilled workers.
- Expand the current early childhood scholarship programs to enable certificate and diploma-trained staff to gain an ITE bachelor qualification.
- Increase the number of free TAFE Certificate III early childhood courses and expand funded support to include Certificate IV and diploma-level courses. Additional support should be provided for students from regional and rural locations and for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people.
- Establish programs with universities to support mature-age students to enter ITE with a pathway to permanent employment when qualified.
- Provide a range of incentives for allied health staff to work in education settings, with priority for rural, regional and low SES areas where it is shown that, despite greater need, access is most difficult.

Incentives for qualified staff to return to the sector

- Expand the current early childhood incentive schemes – for eligible qualified early childhood teachers currently working outside the Victorian early childhood sector to take up a position at a service delivering a three-year-old kindergarten program – to include four-year-old kindergarten programs.
- Expand the early childhood incentive schemes to public schools and TAFEs.

- Provide support and placement opportunities through return-to-work programs for staff returning from long-term leave, such as parental absence.
- Re-engage recently employed former staff who were employed ongoing or on short-term contracts to return to the profession.
- Provide easier access to part-time options for staff currently on family leave, and staff who may have recently retired, to return to education settings.

Attracting staff from interstate and overseas

- Expand on existing efforts to attract teachers from other states and territories.
- Lobby the federal government to streamline immigration processes for suitably qualified teachers from overseas.
- DET to directly sponsor teachers from overseas, rather than individual schools, to work in Victorian schools.

Other improvements

The circumstances we find ourselves in should have been foreseen, at least to some extent. There has been a lack of a co-ordinated plan in relation to the workforce on a national basis, including clear and detailed workforce planning. At the state level as well, the need for better data and for it to be transparently available is vital. There is little to no information or assessment of the various current incentives – the number of staff who have benefitted; the impact on staff numbers; and any relief it may have provided to schools and early childhood settings, particularly in the longer term.

Research towards the Teacher Supply and Demand report on projected student numbers, and the resulting staff requirements, needs to be undertaken more frequently, as two to three years between reports is too long.

Support for the collection of data upon staff exit is also vital. Having a clear understanding of why employees leave and who is leaving, what education sector, demographic, location, specialist areas, roles and classification they are in, will help inform any new strategies to enable retention and attraction of staff.

Tracking of fixed-term employees is also vital, given they are not currently included in attrition data. DET must track how many employees are moving from short-term contracts to ongoing roles, how many leave the profession, and whether a series of short-term contracts become a disincentive to continuing in the profession.