



**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY**  
**FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY**

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STANDING COMMITTEE ON ECONOMY AND GENDER AND ECONOMIC EQUALITY  
Ms Leanne Castley MLA (Chair), Ms Suzanne Orr MLA (Deputy Chair),  
Mr Johnathan Davis MLA

## **Submission Cover sheet**

**Inquiry into the future of the working week**

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Standing Committee on Economy and Gender and Economic Equality  
Legislative Assembly for the Australian Capital Territory

**Inquiry into the future of the working week**

Dear Committee members,

The ACT Branch of the Australian Education Union (AEU) welcomes the inquiry into the future of the working week. As a union representing over 4,300 ACTPS workers, we commend efforts to explore ways in which the ACTPS can continue to improve its working conditions.

As the committee's discussion paper noted, there is nothing natural or inevitable about a five-day work week. These are conditions that were fought for and won by workers. Indeed, history shows workers fighting for six-day work weeks, 10- or 12-hour days and the abolition of child labour before we arrive at contemporary arrangements. The current status quo marks a particular point in this evolution, rather than the end of the journey. The workers, their unions, and the early employers who instituted five-day work weeks dared to see workers as humans with the right to full and dignified lives, rather than just resources to be deployed. We can and should continue this project.

We represent thousands of educators who are passionate about delivering an outstanding public education system for the ACT. Throughout this submission we argue that we should be open-minded about what this means, and that we should prioritise equity, quality of life for workers and impactful learning experiences for students.

Please find below a discussion paper that considers the impacts of such a proposal on our members, their schools, and CIT. We look forward to continuing to work with the ACT Government on initiatives like this that can improve the working conditions for our members and the wider ACT community.

Regards,

**Angela Burroughs**  
Branch President

**Patrick Judge**  
Branch Secretary

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## **Introduction**

We welcome the opportunity to consider the benefits of a four-day work week for our members. The public service should be an exemplar employer and we acknowledge the ACT Government's willingness to be a leader in the ACT and in Australia on many issues of workplace conditions. We also welcome this opportunity to consider how public schools in the ACT could function in a way that offers quality learning experiences for students, safe and rewarding work for employees, and responsible use of public money. We make this submission both as a union with industrial expertise and a deep knowledge of our members' experiences of work, as well as the sole professional representative body for public system educators in the ACT.

In this submission, we presume an arrangement of a four-day work week (20% reduction in overall working hours) with no associated reduction in pay or other conditions. We do not write in support of a compressed work week, which is already possible under the flexible working arrangement provisions of the ACTPS Enterprise Agreements.

The Inquiry's Terms of Reference are silent on the scope of such reform, so we presume that any change will be pursued within the ACTPS, with other employers able to follow suit if they wish. The ACT Government holds no power over how the Commonwealth public service or private industry manage their workforces, and so discussion of potential reform for those sectors is presumably only within the Inquiry's scope in a hypothetical sense. In this submission we refer only to the workforce that the ACT Government does direct, the ACTPS, and the legislation it can change. The ACTPS employs 11.5% of the ACT's working population and many more people are affected by its service provision in education, health, transport, city and community services, and so on. We note, therefore, that while we limit the scope of our submission to the ACTPS, the potential for impact Territory-wide is significant.

We welcome the [submission from Workforce Capability and Governance – Workplace Safety and Industrial Relations of CMTEDD](#) which notes that a move to a four-day work week would both "without question establish Canberra as one of the most progressive cities in the world" and "be an attractive proposition for high quality talent, including for many professional streams in the ACTPS which are projected to be in high demand in the years to come, such as nurses, ICT, and teachers". We agree with and strongly support both claims.

We see the main questions of this Inquiry to be, "would there be benefit to workers in instituting a four-day work week, and if so, can the ACTPS deliver the same or better services with such an arrangement in place?" As the peak representative body of the ACT's public education system and as experts in teaching, learning and school operations, we argue that with reference to schools and CIT, the answer to both questions is yes.

## **General benefits and issues**

We acknowledge and support arguments made in the discussion paper and other submissions regarding the benefits of a four-day work week on worker health and

wellbeing. The case studies presented offer little evidence of lost productivity – in many cases, workers with four-day work week arrangements appear to be more motivated and rested when they were at work, and have an enhanced sense of belonging to their organisation due to employee wellbeing being specifically prioritised. We note the examples offered on pages 23-24 of the discussion paper, in which various industries reported that a four-day working week made for better retention and attraction, and that employees were more focused, happy, relaxed, engaged, and took fewer sick days. We believe that similar positive effects would occur in the ACTPS should a four-day work week be instituted. We look forward to learning of the results of the survey that accompanied this Inquiry and argue strongly that workers should be trusted if they report that such reform would positively impact their wellbeing and quality of life.

The argument that a 20% reduction in working hours correlates to a 20% reduction in output is an overly simplistic understanding of the way that work often happens. It assumes that workers are productive for all their time at work and that they stop working when they get home. Both assumptions do not represent reality, especially for workers in 'white collar' industries. We do not see compelling evidence that reducing hours at work would correlate strongly with a reduction in productivity for many ACTPS workers, depending on the nature of their work.

A proposal such as a four-day work week requires clear analysis of the diversity of the ACTPS workforce. Within it, there are employees whose time on-the-job directly correlate with service delivery capacity (for example, bus operators) and employees who could reduce their working hours with no decrease (or an increase) in output (for example, a policy officer in a Directorate). As this submission will discuss, teachers fit somewhere in both categories.

Relative to workers in many industries, ACTPS workers have good working conditions and job security, due to a strong government commitment to the ACTPS and healthy union density. If ACTPS employees were to work four-day work weeks, they would have more time to spend with their families, to volunteer, to exercise and spend time outdoors, to pursue hobbies and creative interests, to engage in further study, and even to engage in small business (subject to employer approval). These are all activities that undoubtedly enrich a person's quality of life, their physical and mental health, and in some cases their financial status as well.

The main shortcoming of this proposal is that it may serve to widen inequality between higher paid and lower paid workers in the ACT. Canberra is already a city with unacceptable levels of socio-economic inequality, and such advantages given only to one segment of its population may serve to widen this. Workers who are in lower-paid and less secure jobs in sectors such as retail, services and hospitality, or private aged- and child-care would not enjoy the benefits of this arrangement. Workers in these sectors are more likely to be women, more likely to have lower educational qualifications, more likely to be in lower-income households and more likely to be in temporary or casual employment.

### **How a four-day work week might work in schools**

As previously stated, we see that it would be useful for the Committee to understand not just whether a four-day work week would be beneficial, but how such a reform might be implemented without diminishing service delivery. Over the next section, we outline ideas on how this might be achieved, based on our experience as a representative body of teachers, school assistants and principals. Central to our discussion is the idea that we should think flexibly and critically about education, and not simply accept that we should do things the way they have always been done. We seek possibilities that maximise quality learning, improve employee wellbeing, and make schools better places for everyone.

We do not recommend that schools would be open only for four days a week, because of the impact on equity as described above. It would not be acceptable for parents who work, say, in retail to have to pay for childcare one day a week while schools are closed, while parents who work for the ACTPS or who can easily access the flexible working arrangements of higher paid occupations do not.

Rather, we propose that if the ACTPS introduced a four-day work week, teaching hours could be reduced while schools continue to operate from 9am to 3pm, Monday to Friday. Later in this submission we discuss the evidence that such an approach would not negatively impact student learning experiences.

For the purposes of this submission, we assume that a 20% reduction in working hours (of 36.75 hours for classroom teachers and CIT teachers) would mean a new weekly work time of 29 hours and 24 minutes, or five hours and 53 minutes per day. Most employees would take one day off per week (and still have the hours of 8:30am – 4:51pm) but there could also be accommodations made for employees who want to spread their reduced work hours across five days. Such arrangements might mean, for example, that working parents could pick up their children from school every day. In this submission we refer to a 'four-day work week' but this can mean any way in which a workplace and employee choose to arrange 29 hours and 24 minutes across the week.

A reduction in teacher working hours by 20% would mean that we would need to reduce classroom teaching hours (called 'face-to-face teaching hours' in the ACTPS Teaching Staff Enterprise Agreement) by the same amount. This would mean that maximum face-to-face teaching hours for a full-time teacher, currently at 21 hours for primary teachers and 19 hours for secondary teachers would become 16.8 hours for primary and 15.2 hours for secondary.

Students would still need to be supervised during non-classroom time by teachers and school assistants. However, for teachers, this increase in non-classroom time would be more like playground duty or the 'general supervision' arrangements that some schools move to during acute staffing shortages. In these situations, class size limits do not apply, and teaching does not happen. Because there is no teaching, school assistants can be rostered on to help meet supervision ratios. Students can access a combination of longer break time, semi-structured play or educational games, homework or private study time,

extracurricular activities, or social and emotional learning activities. A rotating and pre-programmed roster of such activities could be centrally designed by the Education Support Office of the Education Directorate in collaboration with schools. This would build on the work already done by the Education Directorate to offer a suite of educational resources throughout the Covid-19 pandemic.

The arrangement we sketch here could be expressed as follows:

Teachers	Students
Working hours (reduced by 20%)	Time spent at school (same)
Face-to-face teaching hours (reduced by 20%)	Time spent in formal lessons (less, by about 20%)
Class size (same or less, to reduce teacher workload)	
More teachers and school assistants recruited (because of more attractive ACTPS conditions) who can be used to supervise non-teaching time at school	

## **Possible arrangements at each education stage**

### ***Preschool***

The ACT Government is currently looking to expand its preschool provision to 15 hours per week for all three-year-old children in the ACT, in line with similar expansions in NSW and Victoria. As such, there is a strong demand for preschool teachers, and the ACT could stand to benefit if a four-day work week could attract more teachers.

Preschools typically have timetables that involve five days of attendance per fortnight, which gives some level of flexibility to staffing arrangements. Preschools are staffed with a high ratio of learning support assistants to teachers, and as the former are more readily available to recruit than the latter, some of the impact of the preschool teacher shortage may be ameliorated by recruiting more school assistants.

### ***Primary (years K-6)***

While the younger age of students in primary schools necessitates closer and more regular supervision than with older students, primary schools are experienced in accommodating flexible and part-time working arrangements. This is because primary schools are predominantly staffed by women who still undertake most of the unpaid labour associating with caring responsibilities, which often see them returning to work part-time after having their own children. As a result, it is not uncommon for classes to have teachers who job share, meaning that students already experience having a different teacher for part of the week and school leaders understand how to manage timetables in this way. Many of the same principles as job-sharing would apply if full time staff worked four days a week.

In order to achieve a 20% reduction in working hours in primary schools, meet or exceed the current learning outcomes of students, and achieve the same hours of operation for supervision purposes, primary schools would need to be able to roster on specialist teachers and more school assistants. The Education Directorate is currently mapping its workforce including understanding how many of its teachers specialise in music and languages, and Service Design and Delivery group of the Education Directorate is currently undertaking a review of how languages might be delivered more equitably and flexibly. Knowledge such as this will be crucial to understand how primary schools can be staffed effectively with fewer working hours.

The [2021 AEU survey](#) found that primary school teachers work excessive hours and are some of the most likely to attend work when they are ill or injured, because of the difficulty in sourcing relief teachers and the consequent guilt they feel in accessing basic entitlements like sick leave. Later in this submission we discuss the teacher shortage and how the introduction of a four-day work week may alleviate some aspects of this crisis, which would have flow-on effects to primary school teachers.

### ***High school (years 7-10)***

Timetabling in secondary schools is a complex challenge and each school operates in a way that suits its needs. Some (such as, for example, [Campbell](#) and [Calwell](#) High Schools) have three longer lessons per day, while others have five lessons per day (such as [Melrose](#), [Alfred Deakin](#) or [Belconnen](#) High Schools). Timetables need to accommodate both pedagogical concerns of longer or shorter lessons as well as workplace arrangements for employees, who have limits to their face-to-face teaching hours. High schools arrange their timetables in terms of 'lines', for which each line represents a subject for a student. Each teacher will typically teach five lines, which means that there are five class groups that they teach each week.

With this in mind, a reduction by 20% in the teaching hours and workload of a high school teacher would generally mean each teacher teaching one fewer line. This would be a significant improvement to teacher workload. We suggest that implementation of such a change may need to include:

- The provision (by the Education Directorate) of some example timetables that schools could adopt or alter as they see fit, to reduce workload on schools
- Increase in the scheduling of private study or homework club, extracurricular activities, subjects such as music and languages, pastoral care programs and library-based classes
- Increase in recruitment of school assistants who could contribute to supervision ratios
- Longer break times in the school day for both teachers and students

### ***College (years 11-12)***

Colleges share some of the timetabling challenges of high schools discussed above. There is some extra flexibility afforded by the age of college-level students, who have times in the week when they have no class scheduled, and do not need to be on-site



during this time. Additionally, some colleges timetable a half day in every week (typically Thursday) in which no classes are scheduled. During this time, students study independently, and teachers work on their non-teaching responsibilities or meet with individual students when needed. To reduce working hours of college-based staff, this half-day could be increased to a full day, and each teacher would have a 20% (or one line) reduction in workload.

The major complicating factor for colleges is that the ACT Board of Senior Secondary Studies (BSSS) mandates that a standard unit of student represents a [minimum of 55 hours](#) of structured learning over one semester. The workforce data being developed by the Education Directorate currently should help us understand how colleges can meet these requirements while reducing teacher hours by 20%. Given the in-built flexibility of colleges as described above, these changes would not necessarily reduce structured learning time for students.

### ***CIT (VET sector)***

CIT teachers have their teaching hours defined by an annual limit set out by the CIT Teaching Staff Enterprise Agreement. CIT teachers have a maximum teaching load of 720 hours per year, which must be spread over 30 or more weeks. Work completed after normal business hours is counted at a higher rate against the 720 hours quota,<sup>1</sup> and the total is pro-rated for part time employees.

Just as with school teachers, CIT teachers must have a commensurate reduction in teaching hours if a reduction to the working week is to be meaningful. The CIT members of the AEU report high workloads and high rates of psychological injury and burn-out.

As with college teachers, the qualifications offered by CIT have minimum thresholds of learning time, called '[volume of learning](#)'. These are defined by the Australian Skills Quality Authority (ASQA) and so cannot be altered by CIT. There is some flexibility in how the volume of learning is defined because it includes unsupervised learning (private study, assignment work, or non-supervised work experience or field placement.)

The AEU is currently engaged in enterprise bargaining which may alter the yearly teaching hours arrangement in CIT staff. These negotiations may be useful in finding ways that CIT can meet ASQA requirements while also ensuring that it is a workplace of choice for VET educators through the introduction of a four-day work week.

### **Impact on learning**

Our proposal to decrease teaching time to decrease demand on teachers will not have negative impacts on learning and student outcomes. Australia has one of the highest hours of teaching for school aged children in the OECD. Many countries, including many

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<sup>1</sup> Work that is completed as part of the annual teaching load that happens after 5:30pm on weekdays is counted as time and one quarter, time worked on Saturday is counted as time and one half, and time worked on Sunday is counted as time and three quarters.

who perform better in the PISA<sup>2</sup> than Australia, have fewer hours of teaching in their school week. Figure 1 (below) shows that of the countries highlighted which performed better than Australia in the PISA in 2018, only 3 of these have higher teaching hours than us. Nine countries that do *better* than Australia in the PISA have *fewer* teaching hours – some, such as Estonia, Slovenia, Poland, Finland, Korea, and Germany have considerably less.<sup>3</sup> The OECD average is also less than Australia. This means that Australian students spend relatively more hours in the classroom without any demonstrable benefit, and that there would not necessarily be a trade-off in student performance if teaching hours were reduced.

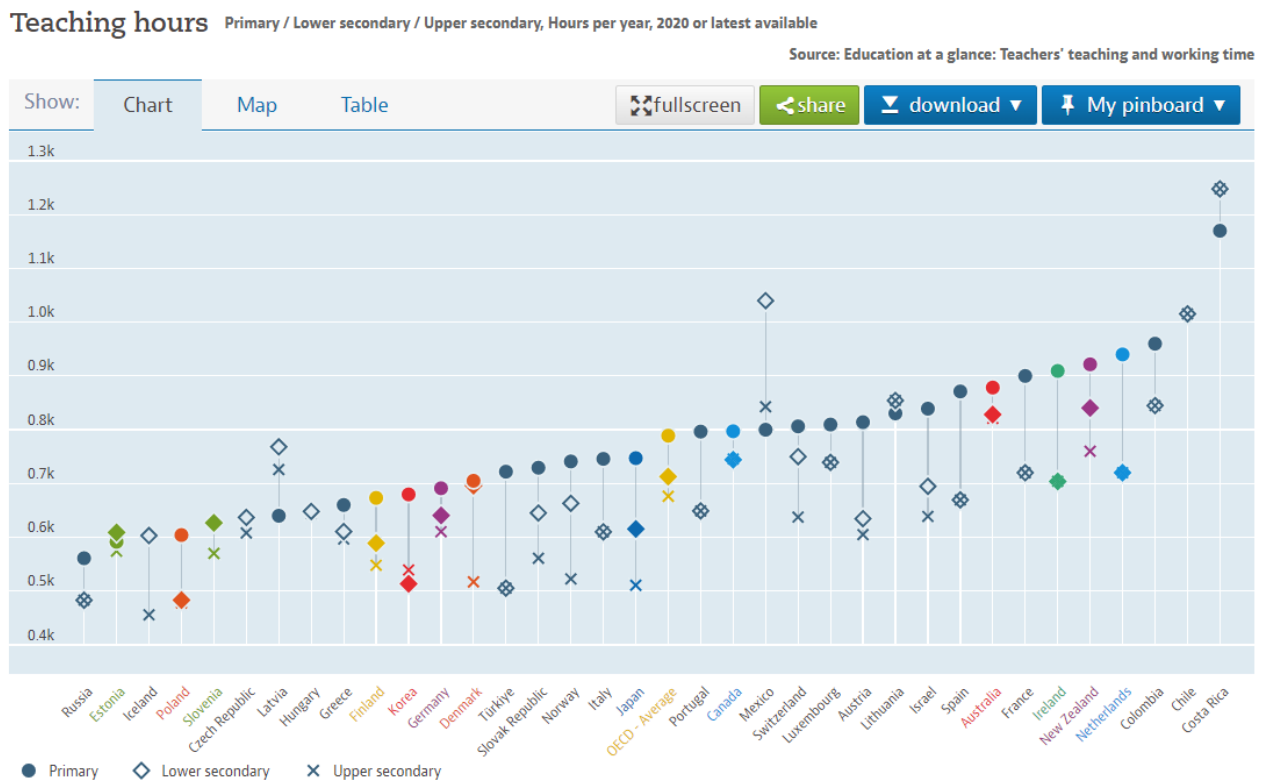


Figure 1: Shows annual teaching hours by country from the [OECD data portal](#). Countries highlighted in a colour are those that scored better than Australia on the 2018 PISA.

In a related analysis, Professor Pasi Sahlberg shows that over a student's time in compulsory instruction (in primary and lower secondary years), Australian students have

<sup>2</sup> The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) is the primary method by which to compare student performance by country. It assesses reading, mathematics and science ability through a standardised test administered for 15-year-old students. While the AEU is deeply sceptical of the value of standardised tests such as PISA, it is useful in this context to try to identify countries that have high performing education systems such as those highlighted in Figure 1.

<sup>3</sup> A detailed summary of teacher working hours and student learning hours (and days, and weeks) in OECD countries can be viewed [here](#). The columns which display the number of teaching weeks in the school year show that most OECD countries have shorter school years than Australia, typically due to a longer summer break. One notable exception is Germany, which has a school year duration like Australia, but the school days are typically much shorter, with instruction often concluding by early afternoon. The diversity in arrangements shows that the Australian status quo is not necessarily the best arrangement for students or for teachers.

far more classroom hours than other countries. The OECD average is also highlighted. Figure 2 (below) shows a compelling comparison of countries. Note that Finland, where compulsory education in calendar years is only two years less than Australia, has a total of five fewer overall years spent in instruction hours over a student's lifetime. This is due to differences in time spent at school in lessons every year.

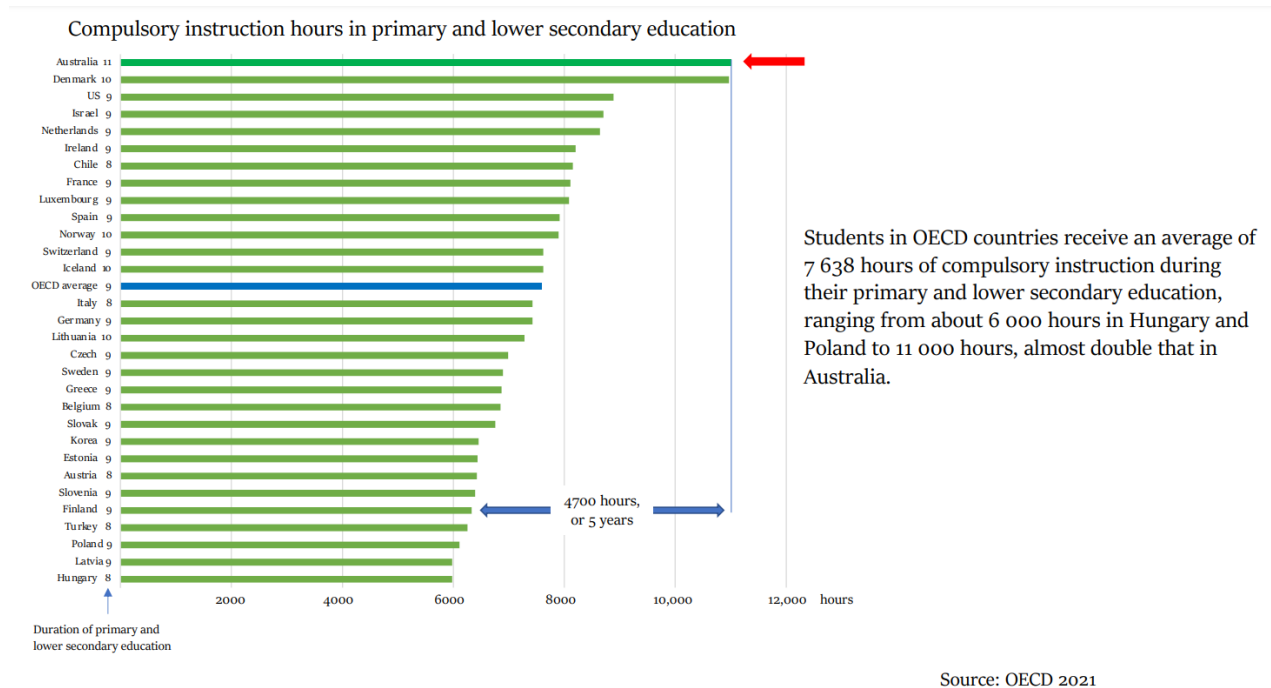


Figure 2: Shows compulsory instruction hours by country, prepared by [Pasi Sahlberg](#). Due to long hours, long school years and high overall compulsory years, Australia tops the list.

[OCED analysis](#) additionally shows that there are factors that improve student outcomes that could be beneficial corollaries of introducing four-day work weeks for teachers and school staff. For example, they show that simply having a room where students can do their homework is “associated with higher scores in reading, after accounting for the socio-economic profile of students and schools”. Scheduling ‘homework time’ in schools and providing some resources and supervision for this activity could reduce the working hours of teachers and possibly improve student outcomes.

The United States offers many examples of reduced school weeks that we can learn from. As of the 2018-19 school year the United States had more than 1,600 schools in 650 districts using a four-day school schedule. [This article gives a summary](#) of many reviews of this arrangement in diverse settings and shows that four-day school weeks saw generally minimal to no effect on academic outcomes. Research such as [this article](#) demonstrates minimal or positive relationship between reducing the time in a school week and academic achievement.

These examples demonstrate what teachers know: that good student outcomes are not necessarily the result of *more* time in the classroom, but *better* time in the classroom. Quality teaching happens when teachers have the time to plan and collaborate, when

those teachers are respected and have good wellbeing, and when schools are resourced adequately.

Best practice guides such as those published by the Education Departments of [NSW](#) and [Victoria](#) note that quality teaching involves setting goals, lesson design and structuring, explicit teaching, providing worked examples, making opportunities for collaborative learning, giving effective feedback, using data to inform practice, differentiation of learning depending on the needs of each student, managing the classroom effectively, and ensuring student wellbeing. This long list of complex tasks shows that teaching requires plenty of time away from the classroom to ensure that time spent in the classroom is as meaningful as possible.

The evidence we present in this section represents the shift in educational theory and philosophy away from a deficit-based view of students, in which they are conceptualised as empty containers to be filled with knowledge through passive learning experiences, and towards a constructivist view of knowledge and skill acquisition, where more innovative learning of critical thinking and related skills happens through inquiry, collaboration, and interaction. This is echoed by the [Australian Curriculum](#) which has a list of general capabilities that includes not just literacy, numeracy and ICT capability, but also critical and creative thinking, personal and social capability, ethical understanding and intercultural understanding. Such capabilities are enhanced not through more time in the classroom, but by opportunities for learning that enrich and extend a student's experience of life. As passionate and skilled educators, our members work every day to create these opportunities. A reduction in teaching hours will not diminish their work in this regard.

### **Teacher workload**

The AEU has campaigned extensively on the problem of excessive teacher workload. [Our 2021 survey found that](#),

- Nearly all teachers and principals (97%) work more than their paid weekly hours of 36.75. This includes working on the weekends, at evenings and during periods of leave or stand down.
- More than one third of principals work between 10-15 hours over-time per working week and further third work more than 20 additional hours per week. This does not include weekend hours.
- Three quarters of respondents reported working more than five hours over-time per week on weekdays. More than 40% are working more than five hours over-time on their weekend. Three of every five respondents are working more than 10 hours per week during stand down (school holidays), which is stipulated in the Enterprise Agreement as time when teachers are not required to attend work "in recognition of the breadth of their professional responsibilities".
- Almost all teachers report working unpaid overtime every week with more than 40% of them working 10 or more hours unpaid overtime during the week, and even more hours when weekend work is included.
- In a normal work week, an average primary school classroom teacher does 21 hours of face-to-face teaching, 6 hours of non-teaching related work, and 13 hours

and 39 minutes of lesson planning. This means that the average primary school classroom teacher is doing almost four hours of unpaid overtime every week during term time. Adding the weekend to this, where 43% of respondents report working for five or more hours, we arrive at an average workweek of 45 hours and 39 minutes. Given this, a conservative estimate would have that 20% of teachers' work is unpaid.

These findings show that there is not an easy correlation between working hours that a worker is paid for and the hours that they actually work. A teacher's workload is a result of a complex blend of many variables, including (but not limited to):

- Their formal working hours of 36.75 hours per week full time,
- How many students they teach,
- How many hours of teaching they do (that they must plan for),
- The unique needs of the children in their class(es),
- The meetings and professional learning requirements of their school and TQI registration,
- Parent communication,
- Assessment development, marking and report writing, and
- Activities that contribute to school community

We currently are in a situation where the aggregate of these demands means it is normal for a typical primary level classroom teacher to work almost 9 hours more than what they are paid every week. Altering just one of these variables in isolation will not reduce the hours that teachers work, it will just mean that more work happens at home. The AEU has spoken to many teachers who are employed part time for three or four days per week, but whose actual working hours easily fill and usually exceed the paid hours of a full-time employee. This is additional evidence that simply reducing hours at work does not automatically reduce actual working hours.

A central element of the four-day work week proposal is a shift from employees being remunerated for the hours they spend at work to employees being remunerated for their output in a more holistic sense, regardless of how long or short their hours are. Arguably, teachers and principals are already in a system where the latter occurs, but such flexibility has had perverse outcomes.

The AEU would consider it an achievement if the typical classroom teacher were able to attend to all the demands of their job in 36.75 hours. Reducing their weekly hours by 20% would require reducing workload by at least 20% just to maintain the current work-to-paid-hours ratio.

In order to do this, we would need to see some (or all) of the following actions undertaken in concert with a four-day work week model:

- Smaller class sizes, so that workload in the areas of lesson differentiation and parent communication are lessened commensurate with the reduction in working hours

- More support for inclusive education with additional employees embedded in schools and centrally, as well as on-demand resources and support
- Reduction in professional learning requirements (stemming from both professional learning communities and the requirements of TQI teacher registration)
- Development of central bank of exemplar lesson plans and assessments for all curriculum areas and year levels
- The recruitment of more classroom teachers, school assistants and administrative staff

### **Teacher shortage**

The AEU has worked extensively with the Education Directorate on the issue of the shortage of teachers. The final report of the joint AEU-EDU Teacher Shortage Taskforce found that the Education Directorate must recruit between 250 to 300 new teachers every year for the foreseeable future. It also found that schools experience acute staffing shortages when staff absences cannot be filled by very limited pool of casual relief teachers. The Taskforce consequently recommended that the Education Directorate encourage the use of 'in-built relief' teachers – teachers who are employed at a specific school on a permanent or long-term temporary basis, who can be used flexibly to cover classes when absences inevitably happen. This signals a recognition that the current model of calling on casual relief teachers does not meet the day-to-day staffing requirements in schools.

In order to recruit more teachers, we need to make teaching a more attractive career (attraction) and keep teachers in the classroom once they are qualified (retention). Much has been written on why people become teachers, and it is generally accepted that motivating factors include intrinsic factors such as the joy of teaching, intellectual fulfilment of imparting knowledge and desire to contribute to society; as well as extrinsic factors such as remuneration and stand down.<sup>4</sup> Once teachers are in the job, the reasons that they consider leaving the classroom include unmanageable workloads, detrimental impacts on their health and wellbeing, and feeling under-valued.<sup>5</sup> Making schools safe and rewarding places to work is critical to retaining educators. We know from rates of workers compensation claims in the ACTPS that education workers are disproportionately impacted by psychological injury. These injuries happen as a result of traumatic events at work, but also as a result of psychosocial hazards such as job demands, low job control, poor support, and inadequate reward and recognition.<sup>6</sup>

Moving to a four-day workweek is a tool that could enhance 'pull factors' (attraction and retention) and ameliorate 'push factors' (reasons teachers want to leave teaching). It would certainly make the ACT stand out as an employer of choice when teachers compare

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<sup>4</sup> See the Productivity Commission's [Interim Report of the Review of the National School Reform Agreement](#), pp. 137-138.

<sup>5</sup> Heffernan, A., Bright, D., Kim, M., Longmuir, F., & Magyar, B. (2022). ['I cannot sustain the workload and the emotional toll': Reasons behind Australian teachers' intentions to leave the profession](#). *Australian Journal of Education*, 66(2), 196–209.

<sup>6</sup> These hazards and others are identified by [Safework Australia](#).

conditions between jurisdictions. It would positively affect their mental health and wellbeing, leading to lower instances of psychological injury and burn-out. If a reduction in working hours was complemented by a meaningful reduction in workload, so that teachers could complete all or most of their work within paid working hours, it would increase job satisfaction.

Given previous measures to attempt to reduce teacher workload have largely failed, a bold move like a four-day workweek may be the kind of catalyst that could trigger meaningful change. If such a move attracted more teachers to the ACT and alleviated the teacher shortage, this would have significant flow-on effects on teacher workload and wellbeing.

### **How this would affect employees in ACTPS education**

#### ***Teachers***

The impact on teachers is outlined above. Generally, we believe a move to a four-day workweek would be positive on teachers, as long as there was a concerted effort to meaningfully reduce teacher workload commensurate with working hour reduction.

#### ***School leaders and principals***

With staff who are well-rested and who have reasonable workloads, the task of managing the workforce of a school will be made easier.

Given school principals have the most excessive working hours of all school staff, there would need to be special attention paid to reducing their workload so that it can be contained within four days. There are practical considerations for school operations too. If staff are only available for four days and schools must open for five days, it may necessitate complex scheduling negotiations, especially for smaller schools with fewer staff. There would be additional parent communication requirements to assure parents that learning was not being negatively impacted by fewer teaching hours. Finally, there would be scheduling demands necessary to ensure that while a school leader is on a paid day off, there was someone acting in their place as HR manager and to take responsibility during emergencies. These factors may increase demands on principals, deputies, and SLCs.

It would be important for all school leaders, including SLCs, to have training, support and resources in timetabling according to the new arrangements so that transition implementation is not a burden that falls solely on principals. The AEU office would continue to offer additional support when managers are unsure of their obligations.

#### ***School assistants***

Ordinary hours of work for most school assistants (those at levels 1-3) are 31 hours and 15 minutes per week, which for a full-time employee means 6 hours and 15 minutes per day with a 45-minute lunch break. School assistants engaged at a level 4 have weekly hours of 33 hours and 45 minutes or daily hours of 6 hours and 45 minutes with a 45-minute lunch break.



We would imagine that a four-day work week would also mean that school assistants would have their weekly hours reduced by 20%, and that this would not cause any more challenge to schedule than that of teachers.

If we reduced teaching time in schools to achieve this reform, it may necessitate the recruitment of more school assistants to perform the additional supervisory responsibilities in schools. Given the extra appeal of a four-day work week, it may make the ACTPS an employer of choice for those looking to go into school assistant work.

Insecure work is the issue most likely to affect school assistants. We discuss this in the next section, under 'impacts on casual and temporary employees'.

### ***CIT teachers and managers***

Our CIT members report the detrimental impact of work stress as they strive to deliver quality VET education. As discussed earlier, they are expected to meet an annual teaching hours quota and complete all the associated teaching work – planning engaging lessons that adhere to the strict requirements of the VET sector, meeting with students, developing lesson plans and assessments, marking, and so on. CIT teachers also need to keep their own industry currency updated, and coordinate with industry to deliver work placement opportunities for students that align with their classroom learning. The AEU office regularly assists CIT members who incur psychological injury resulting from workplace stress. A four-day work week would help CIT employees to attend to the important and rewarding parts of their job while having adequate time to rest and recharge.

Implementing a four-day work week in CIT would be simpler than for schools, because there are no supervision requirements of CIT's adult students. If there were fewer days in the CIT work week in a uniform way, it may improve access to courses for students who are usually also working while studying and may help in scheduling for students who do work placements as part of their qualifications.

## **Legislative and industrial issues**

### ***Impacts on part time employees***

As the submission from CMTEDD notes, implementation of a four-day work week will need to involve careful consideration of part time employees and those accessing flexible working arrangements. We agree with CMTEDD that offers of full-time work would need to occur as part of implementation, and that we should presume that employees currently on a 0.8FTE arrangement would default to full-time work. There would be a cost associated with this. For the Education Directorate, however, this should not be a problem, given the extent and persistence of the teacher shortage. Additionally, point 20(a) of the CMTEDD submission notes that,

*consideration may need to be given to a worker who is currently working 0.4 of a full-time position, that is working two days a week, as to whether their salary should be adjusted to reflect that they have transitions to a 0.5 full time position under a four-day working week model.*



We would argue that such a worker should have their salary increased, based on the logic that a four-day work week would reduce the number of hours in an FTE week by 20%, as discussed earlier. It may also be the case that some workers would choose to reduce their hours and receive the same pay under such arrangements. For this reason, a transition phase would need to include offers made to all part-time employees to either have their salary increased or their working hours decreased. We would argue similarly that rates of casual pay should be increased as part of this proposal (as raised by CMTEDD under point 21).

### ***Impacts on casual and temporary employees***

We do not believe that a four-day work week would necessarily increase job insecurity in the ACTPS. The ACTPS has one of the most robust policies of its kind, the [Secure Workforce Conversion Policy](#). The policy implements and extends the job security provisions of the *Fair Work Act 2009 (Cth)*. It compels Directorates to review positions for increase in security by default and instructs Directorates to look to the regularity of work hours, continuing need for the role, possibility of redeployment of the employee, merit, length of service, and whether the employee has met performance objectives. That the ACTPS is 76% permanent should serve as some evidence that the policy is adequate. The AEU has faced some challenges in the implementation of this policy, but these challenges have been related to the way that employees (particularly school assistants) are employed by the Education Directorate but engaged locally at a school. We do not see that switching to a four-day work week should impact the implementation of the Secure Workforce Conversion Policy.

The Education Directorate employs relatively few casual and temporary teachers relative to other jurisdictions, in part because of the policy discussed above, and in part because of the teacher shortage. The [AEU-EDU Teacher Shortage Taskforce](#) reported that as at July 27 of this year, there were 65 teacher vacancies in the system, including 22 permanent positions and 43 temporary positions ranging from three months to 12 months of engagement. Additionally, the Taskforce investigated the numbers of casual employees available for relief teaching and found that while there is a large pool 'on the books', many do not actively seek work in schools. The AEU is aware that some casual relief teachers would strongly prefer greater job security and access to entitlements that come via temporary and permanent employment, while others prefer the flexibility of casual work. Given a four-day work week will increase the demand for teachers, it may lead to a need for more teachers engaged on secure forms of work to increase the baseline staffing model in schools. This aligns with Recommendation 8 of the Taskforce report, which states:

*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.*

That this recommendation is currently being considered by the Education Minister means that the Education Directorate and the AEU are already working collaboratively to ensure that increasing need for staff does not mean an increase in insecure forms of work where it is unwanted by our members.

There are different considerations for school assistants, the demand on whom may grow substantially under this proposal. The Education Directorate has significantly increased its employment of school assistants over the last five years, with the total number employed almost doubling between 2016 and 2022.<sup>7</sup> School assistants are the most likely employees for whom this change may have detrimental impact in terms of job security, given many of them are engaged as casuals or on short contracts already. If a four-day work week was implemented, the AEU would work proactively with members and the employer to ensure that rates of job insecurity for school assistants did not rise.

***Leave accruals, workers compensation, superannuation***

The CMTEDD submission raises many important issues that will need further consideration if such a proposal is to be implemented. There is a healthy relationship between the ACT Government and ACTPS unions, which puts us in a good place to work on transition arrangements for instruments that may need amending to usher such a change into place.

We note that there would need to be a plan for transition arrangements for the new accrual and usage rates of annual, personal and long service leave, the latter of which may prove the most complicated.

We note too that a great deal of care would need to be taken around workers compensation and interactions with the *Safety Rehabilitation and Compensation Act 1988* (Cth). The transition would need to consider workers receiving incapacity payments who have had a calculation made of their normal weekly earnings or normal weekly hours under a five-day system.

There may also need to be consideration for superannuation, particularly for workers under CSS or PSS, regarding whether altering a worker's hours of work would change their defined benefit pension or invalidity pension.

In addition to these laws and schemes, and the others raised by CMTEDD - namely the *Public Service Management Act 1994* (ACT) and *Fair Work Act 2009* (Cth) - the education sector might also need to review any implications for the *Education Act 2004* (ACT) and *Teacher Quality Institute Act 2010* (ACT). Even if there are no amendments necessary, there may need to be some guidance for schools regarding the meaning of approved teacher under the TQI Act if an increase in non-teaching time meant that school assistants were increasingly deployed to assist with general supervision.

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<sup>7</sup> In 2016 the Education Directorate employed 867 FTE school assistants, and now in 2022 employs around 1,280.