



Teacher progression: the link between **recognition** and **retention**



Significant numbers of Australian teachers are leaving the profession each year. As high teacher turnover is a growing issue set to become more prevalent in the future, our education departments need to budget for increasing expenses related to hiring and training new staff. Australian school leaders need to be accountable for the retention of teachers in their school communities, which is an increasingly difficult task within the rapidly changing landscape of our education sector.

- ♦ 57.6% of primary school leaders experience difficulty in finding teachers and 40.8% experience difficulty in retaining teachers.*
- ♦ 73% of secondary school leaders experience difficulty in finding teachers and 61.11% experience difficulty in retaining teachers.*
- ♦ 24% of employed teachers have been with their current employer for less than five years.**
- ♦ Teacher shortages are already evident in remote and regional areas and these are likely to increase with the number of students predicted to rise by 26% by 2022. **

The National Teaching Workforce Dataset Project report is one of the few current references we have with insights into reasons why teachers leave. With nine parallel education systems across Australia it's even harder to track the number of teachers leaving the profession.

We've conducted research and surveyed our database of Australian teachers to understand what they found frustrating about their job and to capture their views on their workload, wellbeing, pay, support and job security, as well as if they were considering leaving the profession. The survey data was captured during September 2017 from teachers across the country.

Based on our findings, this whitepaper focuses on one particular area that survey results indicated was most likely to affect retention – progression opportunities. With large numbers of primary and secondary schools struggling to retain their current teachers, investigating methods that keep teachers interested in their school community is the key to overcoming this issue.

We've also obtained insights from Smart Teachers' network of senior leaders across schools in Australia to offer practical guidance on how best to address teachers' concerns about career progression.

Teacher satisfaction

49.15% of surveyed teachers feel that their school had adequate career progression opportunities.

Of that group, 38.65% acknowledged career progression opportunities do exist, but they're happy in their current role.

Teacher dissatisfaction

20.4% of surveyed teachers feel there is lack of progression at their current school which will make them look elsewhere for opportunities.

17.2% of teachers who feel unsupported from their leadership team said they will look to move schools within the next three years, but would stay if this changed.

48.8% of surveyed teachers thought there was a lack of career progression at their current school.

These sentiments are supported by the *National Teaching Workforce Dataset project report, 2014* that showed that 44.5% of primary and 50.6% of secondary teachers that were looking to leave the profession due to insufficient recognition or reward for their work.

Insights for school leaders

Overall, these statistics indicate that half of the Australian teacher work force is dissatisfied with the levels of support and opportunities that they are receiving within their current roles.

Surveyed teachers who were looking to leave their current school in the next few years did say that they'd consider staying on if:

17.2% - They had more support from leadership

10.2% - They had more opportunity for career progression

The Tes View

These findings suggest that half of schools in Australia don't have adequate progression opportunities which is causing issues for just over 1 in 5 teachers – many of who intend to leave their current role within the next five years.

The survey suggests that there are a significant number of teachers who wish to progress but think that they can't within their current school.

The onus is on leadership to educate their staff and make them aware of career progression routes within their current role so they can make informed decisions.

Progression doesn't always have to be a step-up. Longer-term planning for teachers who wish to progress to leadership positions could include stints stepping sideways if it can be integrated into a longer-term development plan in the school.

Industry insights

In addition to our survey research, we interviewed four senior school leaders to understand the extent to which staff progression is an issue for them at their respective schools. Their experience and insights will form recommendations that other schools across Australia can use for developing management strategies that support their staffrooms and empower their teachers towards career progression.

The leaders interviewed work in a cross-section of schools: non-denominational private, Christian and government. The schools were selected from different locations across the country, of which three are in metropolitan areas and one is located regionally.

Meet our experts



Orlando dos Santos

17 years' experience

Founding Principal of an Australian school that has grown to 600 enrolments over seven years.



Lyn McDonald

30 years' experience

Extensive government school experience working as a secondary Business and ICT Teacher, Head of Department, Deputy Principal and is now Principal at a state high school.



Sue Daly

44 years' experience

As chief of staff at an Anglican school, teacher recruitment, retention and staff development have been a key focus for many years.



Nigel Fairbairn

23 years' experience

Has worked as an independent school Principal since 1995 at day and boarding schools in both Australia and New Zealand.

Managing teacher progression

The survey data indicates that lack, or perceived lack, of progression is an issue for a significant number of teachers. Debate suggests that teachers view progression as either a pay rise or a promotion. Naturally, not every school has the budget or the staffing allocation to allow for this, which means: what, if anything, is the solution?

'I like to give staff the opportunity to develop their own personal vision and achieve that first. I literally say to them that I am giving them the opportunity to write their own CV. When a position does become available staff have collected a 'CV currency' which they are able to trade with. If the school can't accommodate the staff member's progression, I let them know that I will be a referee for them so that they can further their career. If they get discouraged and give up that also tells me a lot about them for future positions. Progression isn't a destination. It is the start of a journey.'

Orlando dos Santos

'The school has an Aspirants Program which encourages teachers to develop their leadership skills and capabilities. This program allows aspiring leaders to manage a change process and creates a pool of effective leaders for the numerous leadership opportunities which usually arise during the year. The Aspirants Program caters for teachers who wish to be more involved in coordinating students or curriculum projects or in coaching positions where they are helping other teachers to develop their capabilities.'

Lyn McDonald

'We seek to identify aspiring leaders through observation and professional conversations. Sometimes it is opportunity which prompts existing staff to make application for advancement. We look closely at what professional leadership development offerings would work for (aspiring leaders). We focus on the positive and strengths, support their progression journey and connect them where possible with appropriate professional learning opportunities and projects (internally and externally). By building an enhanced profile of their progression strategy, investing in our professional capital and connecting them to leadership programs, we send a positive message to all staff. It depends on the staff, but for many it is not always about progression in the promotional sense. A new project or focus can increase satisfaction and retention'

Sue Daly

'Give the opportunity for people to shine in front of their peers. Something that I saw in other schools was a small committee. Everyone who went on personal development had to share three things they got out of it and that would be beneficial for other staff. Enhancing people's professional standing with colleagues goes along way.'

Nigel Fairbairn

The Tes View

If there are no traditional progression opportunities available in your school, are there other roles that you can allocate to staff to help them feel a greater sense of responsibility?

Managing teacher expectations

When schools have many staff seeking progression, it can be difficult to manage expectations. It's important to understand why staff want to progress. Is it because they want more money and status or do they want to develop their skills?

Orlando dos Santos thinks teachers need to become self-aware and commit to self-improvement. If they have the correct motive (i.e. to develop their skills and grow as a teacher) they will work to develop their career. He also added that staff need to feel valued and appreciated; if they feel they're getting support from management and they're encouraged to grow and develop, they'll often remain in their school rather than chase a position of status or higher pay.

Nigel Fairbairn believes in giving teachers the opportunity to shine in front of their peers. In his school, everyone who goes on a personal development course has to share three things they felt could help colleagues. He added that managing short term projects, coaching a sports team or directing the school play can act as a huge motivator for staff.

Sue Daly echoed Nigel Fairbairn's suggestion around extra-curricular activities. She also encourages her staff to join new projects. She has found this leads to greater satisfaction and retention.

The Tes View

One solution may not work with all teachers. If possible, assess what the individual teacher would find rewarding and match it with opportunities available at your school.

Strengthening bonds between teachers and their schools

One of the ways schools and senior leaders can enhance retention is by offering teachers the opportunity to develop. With numerous options for teacher development and potential cost constraints, our leaders suggest that development doesn't always mean support for further study.

'We adopt a needs basis personal development program that develops teacher capability with customised options. Teachers participate in an annual goal setting program and are provided with ongoing feedback in many areas of their roles. In addition to traditional workshops and professional development opportunities, we have an embedded culture where teachers regularly watch other teachers teach, either by entering their classrooms or watching classrooms via a custom built viewing room. This open-door culture has helped with ongoing progression and development teachers pedagogical implementation.'

Lyn McDonald

'Stick-ability can be enhanced by knowing staff. We have very experienced staff keen to share their expertise and inexperienced staff who need more support and development. We work hard to build and grow quality teachers and encourage collegial partnerships. We create coaching and mentoring programs offered by experienced staff to help grow the less experienced. Pleasingly, this usually results in enhanced learning for all and strengthens the supportive culture of school.'

Sue Daly

'Even though necessary, I don't believe that 'one-off' intensive seminars have a long-term effect. 'Intensity with consistency' in the development of ideas, in an environment of encouragement, are the key to personal victories and growth.'

Orlando dos Santos

'Critical to retention is the development of trust and the provision of honest feedback. Trust is number one. Running alongside this is a sense of integrity. Advice given, advice taken up, follow through and give feedback.'

Nigel Fairbairn

The Tes View

Some schools are wary that even if they invest in their staff, they will still leave the school. It's inevitable that some leaders you train will move on. However, it's better to invest in their development and foster a culture of continuous progression than have a quality member of staff leave because they feel undervalued. Staff development doesn't need to cost money. Often experienced staff enjoy the change to mentor junior teachers and the experience can be rewarding for both of them.

The role of recruitment in a school's retention strategy

Hiring the right, high quality teacher for your school is crucial when you're recruiting with retention in mind.

Lyn McDonald's school uses a detailed selection process that includes various members of staff. They take a 'needs based' approach as they feel it helps them hire candidates that are willing to stay in the school. She also highlights that an induction programme is critical, alongside creating relationships with the new member of staff.

Nigel Fairbairn's school looks for shared values in the teachers they hire. He stresses how careful you should be not to make a hasty hire. He also believes that an induction process needs to offer real benefits to the new teacher and suggested a four-step approach:

- Right mentor teacher
- Choose carefully the subject a new hire teaches
- Foster an open-door policy
- Give tailored and regular feedback

Sue Daly's school looks for staff that demonstrate attributes consistent with the school's culture and ethos.

The Tes View

Effective development starts with quality recruitment and selection. Enhancing interviewing techniques and introducing selection activities such as lesson observation will help schools to create a more appealing profile of candidates. This will improve selection, lead to quality hires and assist in creating bespoke induction and development for new staff. Before your next hire, take the time to discuss and evaluate your current recruitment and induction process with other members of your leadership team. Are there any areas you can improve?

How do you keep teachers happy?

The survey results suggest that not all staff want to progress up the career ladder. Certainly, progression isn't the only thing that supports teacher retention. Other findings have suggested that supporting as well as rewarding teachers for their work go a long way in fostering strong relationships between a teacher and their school.

'This is a caring and happy place to work. The staff culture and satisfaction surveys we undertake regularly suggest that we have much to be grateful for in our existing culture. The staff know they are valued and appreciated. We make the time for whole school and cross campus wellbeing activities which are social, enjoyable and well-supported. We are a school with a beating heart, and a shared responsibility for the care and wellbeing of our learning community – students and teachers.'

Sue Daly

'Have as surprise up your sleeve. Have motivators that make staff feel appreciated. I used to believe in events but that should be run by social committee rather than the head. The principal needs to keep up the professional ethos. Principals need to be human. Admit when mistakes are made. The sense of humanity is important. The thing that we find as leaders is we have to work just as hard to keep staff focused and morale high just as much as day to day stuff. There is more of this than ever before and more so moving forward.'

Nigel Fairbairn

'Building relationships is the key to keeping teachers happy. Recognising and valuing what teachers do on a daily basis as well as celebrating successes and acknowledging them for their hard work. It is also important to recognise various times during the year when stresses are higher and to cater for staff's health and wellbeing and giving them the support they need.'

Lyn McDonald

The Tes View

Setting up regular surveys to obtain teacher feedback is useful for determining pressure points. Identifying what can be done to pinpoint concerns and alleviate stresses before they grow into larger issues will ultimately save school leaders time in the long run. Positive comradery and support from the leadership team can go a long way in developing relationships between teachers and their schools.

Current retention challenges

Retention is increasingly a challenge for schools across the country. Our four leaders highlight what they believe to be the main factors currently affecting teacher turnover.

'Our biggest challenge is recruitment. Our leadership team manages a big school with great results, but turnover is higher within leadership. Teachers want to move on to higher positions. This is something to celebrate but we still have to find new people.'

Lyn McDonald

'Times are changing. The demands on teachers continue to increase and teacher burn-out is very real.'

Sue Daly

'People are in far greater control of their careers. They are far savvier than in the past. They will move around more freely if not getting promoted or acknowledgement. It is far more fluid. We have to take retention far more seriously than in the past.'

Nigel Fairbairn

'Now that physiological needs are being met, individuals are seeking gratification in psychological needs which relate to achievement, recognition, greater responsibility and advancement. As leaders we need to know how to manage these needs and provide creative solutions.'

Orlando dos Santos



Conclusions

The lack of progression or the perceived lack of progression can be a problem for some classroom teachers. Here are some suggestions to help address progress opportunities in your school:

- ♦ Consider setting up regular surveys to ask staff what would increase their happiness levels.
- ♦ If there are no traditional progression opportunities available, are there other roles that you can allocate to staff to help them feel a greater sense of responsibility? Sometimes, ensuring that teachers can clearly see the positive differences they are making with students can be enough to keep them motivated.
- ♦ Some schools are wary that even if they invest in their staff, they will still leave the school. It's inevitable that some leaders you train will move on. However, it's better to invest in their development and foster a culture of continuous progression than have quality members of staff leave because they feel undervalued. When staff do leave your school, it's important that they have positive things to share with other teachers about the benefits they encountered by working there.
- ♦ Effective development starts with quality recruitment and selection. Enhancing interviewing techniques and introducing selection activities such as lesson observation will enable schools to create a more appealing profile of candidates. This will improve selection, lead to quality hires and assist in creating bespoke induction and development for new staff. Before your next hire, take the time to evaluate your current recruitment and induction process with other members of your leadership team.

Survey Methodology

Our survey was conducted in September 2017 had 1,314 respondents. As the whitepaper wanted to understand classroom teachers, the first step was to filter the data to remove school leaders and other education staff. Once the filter had been applied, there were 907 classroom teachers. The questions relating to career progression were free text and respondents could expand on questions if they wanted to. To show the percentage of respondents for each individual question a simple filtering method was used to determine the correct proportions of teachers that fell into each question bracket.

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