

Community and Public Sector Union  
State Public Services Federation Group

Submission

to the

Productivity Commission Study of the Schools Workforce

---

**Submitter:** David Carey – Joint National Secretary  
Suzanne Hammond – Senior Research Officer

**Organisation:** Community and Public Sector Union – SPSF Group

## 1 INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

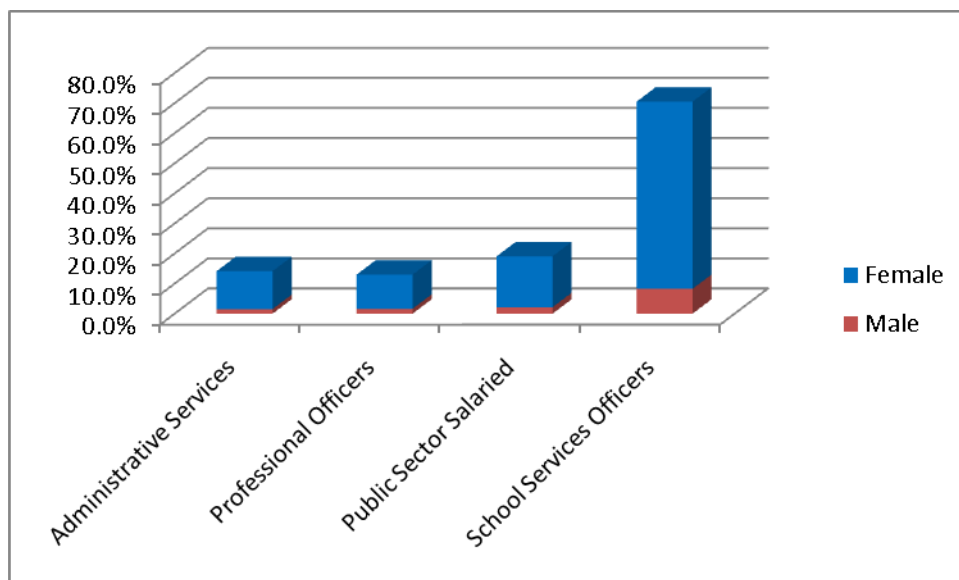
- 1.1 The Community and Public Sector Union – State Public Services Federation (CPSU-SPSF) represent non-teaching school support staff, general administration and educational aides and assistants in State public schools.
- 1.2 We take this opportunity to make this Submission on behalf of our members to the Productivity Commission’s study into the Schools Workforce.
- 1.3 We refer to the Issues paper released by the Productivity Commission in June 2011 and note the broad scope of the study. It is not our intention to address all issues raised by the Minister but to focus on workforce issues relevant to our members who are non-teaching staff.
- 1.4 We welcome a study of the Schools Workforce and submit with some dismay that the non teaching workforce has been somewhat neglected in research, policymaking and planning in the Australian educational sector. We therefore submit that in order to satisfy the Australian commitment to a quality education system more comprehensive research and greater consideration of policy must be applied to this sector of the workforce.
- 1.5 We submit that an efficient functioning workforce must attend to planning of all sectors of the workforce, not only the teaching sector. It must provide for a secure workforce which is properly remunerated and fairly rewarded and it must encourage and attract quality and appropriately qualified workers.
- 1.6 Our members who work as teaching assistants, education aides and classroom assistants play an important role in the delivery of quality education to students. If Australia is to deliver on its commitment to high quality education it must address workforce problems that have created an inefficient and discriminatory labour market. A workforce model that offers no attraction to career development and one which perpetuates gender discrimination. Labour force demographic changes will mean that workers in the future will not be attracted to working in this sector.
- 1.7 Furthermore, as we [submitted](#) to the Review of Funding for Schooling 2011, the funding model for this vital sector of the education workforce makes strategic planning and forecasting of employment impossible and only exacerbates existing problems. Funding for the non teaching sector has been given a secondary priority and seems to occur on an ad hoc basis. The allocation of funding for this sector of the workforce does not allow for effective workforce planning for either the schools or for the non teaching staff. As set out below many workers are on non permanent insecure employment arrangements. This inhibits school management from successfully planning the delivery of quality education and satisfying school and community needs.

## 2 THE WORKFORCE

- 2.1 School support staff are a loyal, committed, hardworking workforce whose work is vital to the school and to the community. School support staff typically love their work, often described as a 'labour of love' and have strong commitment to the children and the local community.
- 2.2 The role and nature of work has changed over time with non teaching staff requiring skills to perform more complex tasks, greater inaction with staff and parents, and acquire technical and human care skills.
- 2.3 There are significant and increasing numbers of classroom assistants providing more complex support for learning and teaching and for care and welfare of children. Some classroom assistant's roles are straying into the work of professionally trained and paid teachers and health care workers.
- 2.4 We draw the Commission's attention to gender discrimination and the resulting pay equity problem that pervades the non teaching workforce. The workforce displays significant features of gender related discrimination identified in numerous equal remuneration cases. The work is poorly paid for the work performed, skills are unrecognised and undervalued, the work is insecure and workers lack industrial power.
- 2.5 School support staff are almost exclusively female, typically aged between 31-50 years tending to be concentrated at the top of this age range. The ageing nature of the workforce requires particular attention in workforce planning considerations. Much of the workforce will retire in 10-15 year time. The loss of these workers, projections of a declining Australian labour force taken with poor wages and an absence of training and skills accreditation will result in the sector not being able to meet workforce requirements. This issue must be addressed.
- 2.6 Non teaching staff are often employed on short term arrangements. Many workers have the experience of being continually re-appointed to short term contracts. Some workers have been on casual contracts for as long as ten years. These arrangements give no on going security to workers and they often face financial problems waiting for renewals to be put in place. Some workers are offered term by term or semester contracts which denies them leave arrangements enjoyed by the majority of the workforce. Some workers such as library technicians and lab assistants are 'stood down' over school holiday times. The unreliable status of their employment arrangements discourages workers from investing in their own human capital. Workers are unsure of their future in the sector and are discouraged from investing in training, formal skill accreditation and workforce attachment. Management is also discouraged from investing in staff development and training.

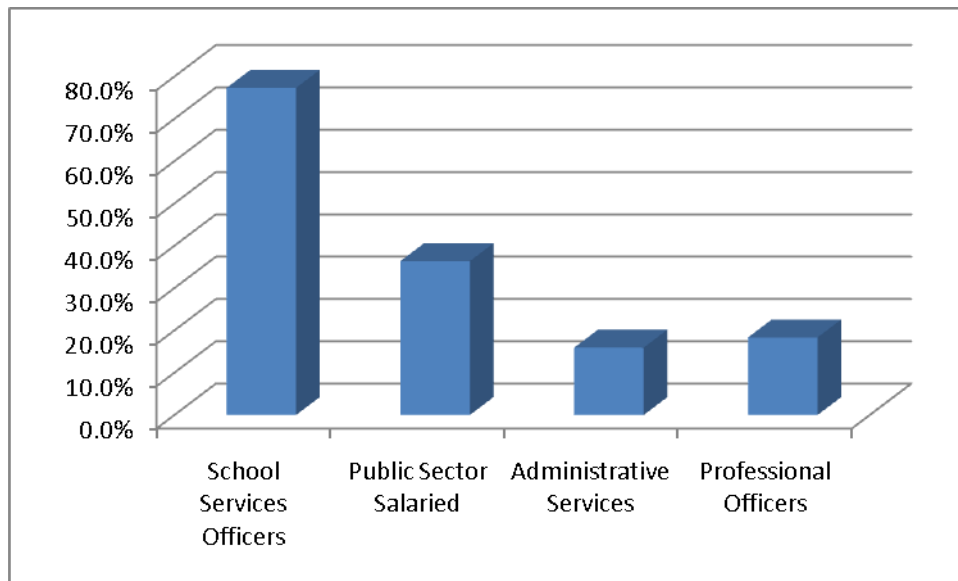
- 2.7 As indicated below non teaching staff in public schools are low paid in comparison with other public sector workers. This has serious implications in view of meeting the future workforce needs. Threatening labour market shortages will mean that potential workers will be more attracted to other areas of public sector employment or to private sector employment. These workers will choose better paid jobs.
- 2.8 The labour force is characterized by precarious employment status: About 20% of workforce are full –time, 80% part-time. Most of the workers do not have permanency status. 37.4 % ongoing employment and 62.6% on contract/casual. Most State awards have classification structures however most workers are clustered around the bottom of the structure. In the Victorian education sector we find that of 12,206 workers classified as education support staff approximately 10,000 or 82% are clustered ES1-1 and ES1-2 grades. Less than 1% of education support workers hold senior grade positions (Annual Report 2009-10 DEECD)
- 2.9 Employment in South Australia public schools also provides an example with approximately 60% on SSO1, 25% SSO2, 9%SSO3, 6% SSO 4 &5. These workers have very little opportunity for career progression and advancement. The insecure nature of employment discourages workers from seeking re-classification to higher positions in the salary scale. Non teaching careers offer little attraction, no financial rewards and no acknowledgement of skills and expertise currently performed by our members.

**Percentage of Part time Employees in the South Australian Public Sector on Short Term Contracts by Employee Type and Gender**



Source: The South Australian Public Sector Workforce Information  
June 2007: Summary Report

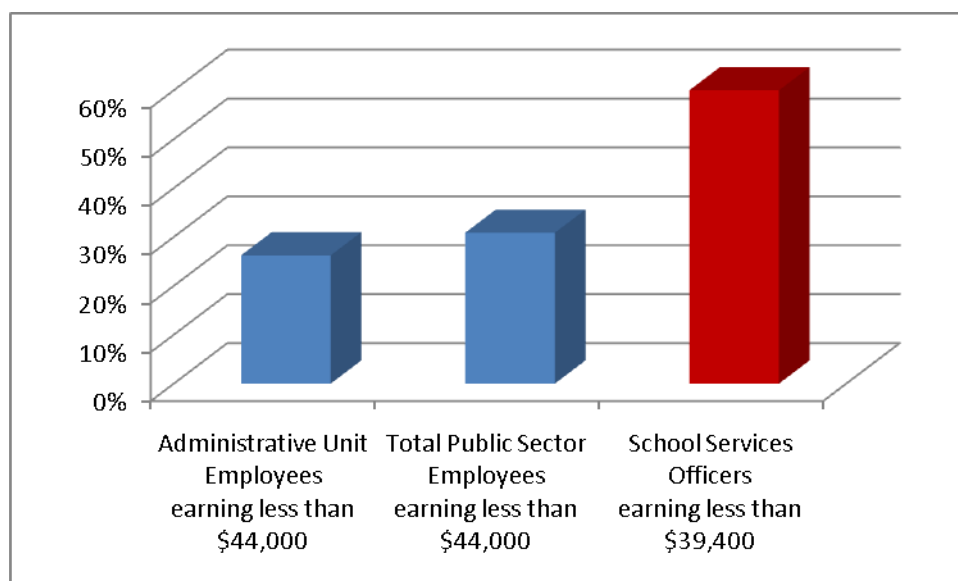
## Part Time Employees as a Percentage of Total Work Force by Occupation



Source: The South Australian Public Sector Workforce Information  
June 2007: Summary Report

- 2.10 We submit that these insecure employment arrangements perpetuate gender inequality and discrimination.
- 2.11 Grimshaw and Rubery ('Undervaluing women's work' 2007, European Work and Employment Research Centre) found that part-time work increases the likelihood of undervaluation and discrimination. Not only does it fail to give access to higher earnings but it also has a sustained negative impact on future pay levels. (pvii)
- 2.12 Joshi and Paci (in Grimshaw and Rubery) suggest that women working part-time suffer a double wage penalty from their concentration in low paying firms, jobs and occupations as well as from their greater experience of discrimination. (p34)
- 2.13 The continuing flexibilisation of work and employment and part-time work in particular, deserves special consideration. Undervaluation interlocks with poor employee rights and entitlements in part-time work, including vulnerability, limited discretion over working hours, a pay penalty, work intensification and limited opportunities for career development or pay progression. (p92)
- 2.14 Further, these workers are low paid by public sector standards. When we examine their wages compared to other (male) workers in public sector occupations we find that work is undervalued and underpaid. The nature of their employment, their work, their desire to work with children is a classic illustration of how work associated with caring roles is undervalued and therefore underpaid.

## Percentages of South Australian Government Employees Earning Low Wages



Sources: The South Australian Public Sector Workforce Information  
June 2007: Summary Report

2.15 Wage rates clearly indicate that School support staff are low paid workers.

### South Australia (2010)

SSO1            \$36,763            \$18.82 (hourly)

Top of band    \$43,046            \$22.05

SSO2            \$46,287            \$23.73

Top of band    \$50,096            \$25.68

### New South Wales

On employment    \$31,044            \$15.93

SSO1            \$43,576            \$22.37

4<sup>th</sup> year            \$51,948            \$26.66

## Australian Bureau of Statistics 6306. Ordinary time hourly earnings August 2008

Carers Aides	\$20.60
Education Aides	\$19.60
Child carers	\$20.60
Personal carers	\$21.70
Sales Support	\$20.80

## National Minimum Wage

\$589.30 per week                      \$15.51 per hour (June 2011)

- 2.16 School Support Staff are underpaid when compared with wages paid in the general community.

Full time adult weekly earnings – ordinary time-

Weekly \$1288.00                      yearly \$66,976.

Females adult weekly ordinary time

Weekly \$1141.80                      yearly \$59,332.

(ABS Average Weekly Earnings February 2011)

SSO2 base rate cluster \$46,287 is about 69% of full time AWE and about 78% of female average weekly earnings.

- 2.17 Another illustration of the poor pay can be gleaned from the NSW public sector where the median annualized remuneration for non casual females in 2008 was \$61,686.00 and the School Learning Support Officer at the highest of the four yearly range was \$51,948.00.

- 2.18 Their work is undervalued as much of their work is not visible in formal job description, their skills and nature of their responsibilities has been inappropriately valued, the value added by classroom assistants is hard to quantify. Low wages have been seen as compensating for fitting in with their own family arrangements. However these are past ideas which are out of place in a modern workforce with high female participation rates and commitments to flexible work and requirement to balance work and family responsibilities.
- 2.19 International research also replicates and acknowledges the patterns of gender discrimination that are a feature of the workforce. The Department of Labour, Pay and Employment Equity Unit - New Zealand pay investigation comparing School Support Staff with Corrections Officers found that these jobs are of a similar job size to the Corrections Officer Level 1 position, and that they have been historically undervalued in the terms of actual skills, responsibilities, demands and working conditions required in the role.
- 2.20 These wage comparisons indicate that non teaching staff fit within the low paid sector of the workforce. They indicate that the wage paid does not properly value the type of work performed and is inconsistent with the desire to create a quality education system operating within an efficient labour market.
- 2.21 With greater integration of special needs students, changes in work functions, changing technology and increased responsibility, the skills of this work lack formal recognition and there is little reward for career development and formalised training. These employment features impinge upon investment in employment and the delivery of high quality education to all students and in particular to those with special needs.
- 2.22 Non teaching staff play an integral role in the education of students and specifically in the school experience of special needs students. The diagnosis of a wide range of special needs and disabilities requires more specialist training and assistance in the classroom if Governments are to meet their commitment to social inclusion and quality education. Productivity Commission data shows that in 2009 79.1% of students with disabilities and special needs attend government schools. These students come with wide ranging and complex needs and abilities. Increasing integration of special needs students has created more diverse classrooms with workers required to undertake wide ranging occupational and functional abilities.
- 2.23 Non teaching staff perform general classroom duties assisting teachers with administration and teaching functions. They also assist pupils with education and practical tasks, help children with physical difficulties, assist in evaluating children's learning and development. They attend to the welfare of children, managing behavior, caring for minor accidents; they are often involved in medical situations such as administration of medicines and first aid. They often deal with children with autism and spectrum disorders. This often involves a mix of skills and knowledge that requires specialist training and protocols in behavioural control and specialist



learning, personal and health care. Non teaching staff play an integral role in supporting both the school and the needs of students.

- 2.24 These features required in 21<sup>st</sup> century education should not be left to chance but require thoughtful evidence-based workforce policy and planning.
- 2.25 We have indicated that the employment and labour force needs of the non-teaching staff in schools have been under researched. It is very difficult to obtain proper data in order to obtain a good picture of the present and future need of workforce planners. We suggest further research and collection of data by the Australian Bureau of Statistics. Comprehensive data collection needs to shed light on workforce numbers, age, sex, education and wage levels. The data needs to be explored with consideration of schools planning and population demographics so that accurate projections can be made and labour supply be met in the future. Research could call upon data collected from the 2011 Census. We also draw the Commission's attention to international studies of employment in the sector conducted in Scotland, the United Kingdom and New Zealand.
- 2.26 We recommend a comprehensive study and improved data collection of the non teaching workforce so that sound, evidence-based policy can be developed in a more coherent manner.
- 2.27 We draw the Commission's attention to their recent report into the Aged Care Industry 'Caring for Older Australians'. We note the similarities in the work performed by many school support staff and the work performed in the Aged Care sector. In Chapter 14 of this Report, the Commission highlights the nature of the formal aged care workforce and makes key points. The report indicates problems that will arise in the aged care sector that would reasonably be assumed to happen also in the area of non teaching staff in schools. The supply of workers is problematic in attracting and retaining workers and these difficulties are expected to intensify due to increasing competition for workers. Workforce strategies should include paying fair and competitive wages, improving access to education and training, developing well articulated career paths and better management, providing professional development.
- 2.28 We further submit that the non teaching staff at schools bear all the hallmarks of gender discrimination and pay inequity. We point out that these workers would provide a good case for seeking equal remuneration under provision Part 2-7 of the Fair Work Act 2009.
- 2.29 We recommend that, in order to attract and retain a quality workforce, wages for non teaching staff be increased to reflect the true value of the work performed.

- 2.30 We have also submitted that the ad hoc nature of funding of the positions of school support staff has exacerbated problems and led to an incoherent manner of addressing the needs of the school, management, workers and students. This unpredictable form of funding leaves both manager and workers with no security of employment and little encouragement to invest in human capital. Further the good nature of the workers is often exploited as they feel obliged to accept poor wages and conditions in fear that students might miss out.
- 2.31 We recommend a more reliable funding mechanism be developed.
- 2.32 We thank the Productivity Commission and the Minister for providing this opportunity for us to comment on behalf of our members who perform important roles in Australian Schools. Our members are committed to the delivery of a fair education system that provides good outcomes for all Australian students. Finally we follow with some views of our members who work in the sector.

### 3 Work as a School Support Officer – Focus Group

3.1 Below is a transcript of a small focus group conducted as part of this submission to give the Commission the views of some of the workers in the schools workforce. The focus group was conducted at a Victorian Special School. It gives a small but indicative insight into the nature of work and the expectations of a few workers.

### 4 Discussion:

4.1 **Clare** is 27 and holds a Bachelor of Fine Arts and a Degree in Education. She is newly qualified and is employed as a teacher at a Melbourne Special School. Her students are teenage adolescent children with wide ranging needs and abilities. Prior to obtaining her formal qualification Clare worked as a teacher aide. She had experienced working as a teacher and as a non qualified aide. Clare was mindful of duties that she allocated to the teacher aides as she was aware that they are poorly paid. She has final responsibility for classroom outcomes. Clare chose to pursue formal qualifications as she liked working with special needs students and she was able to use her arts experience and pass it on to special needs students. She didn't think that she could have remained in the sector as an aide as there was little room for career development and the pay was too low. Clare said that non teaching staff are required to perform many functions administrative, close student contact, some para health functions and assisting with remedial activities. She thought that non teaching staff were very poorly paid for the job and responsibilities that they perform.

4.2 **Christine** has worked for twenty years as a teacher aide. She worked part-time varying from 3-4 days per week. Her contract was usually determined by school funding and school numbers. However in the last few years her contract became more permanent and reliable. Christine's functions involved assisting in the classroom with reading, setting up, helping students and knowing how to use computers for learning. Christine had to be aware of the medical, intellectual and physical abilities and needs of the students. 'The kids have all sorts of medicines and health protocols – you have to make sure things are right'. Workers were often exposed to physical abuse – this was part of the job. Christine also organised theatre for special needs students. She organised the school theatre production and also took children to see other theatre and entertainment. Christine loved her work but felt that the pay was 'really bad'. 'You know that there is a limit on the school's funding and that will affect your job and what the kids will get'. After years of work she has very little superannuation compared to many other workers because wages in the job are so low that this effects how much you have to retire on.

4.3 **Sam** is 21 and works as a teacher aide at a special school. It is unusual for a male to be doing this work. Sam has a short term part-time contract that will end at the end of the year. Sam is studying psychology at University. He also works as a

casual retail assistant for a large department store chain. Sam earns more on an hourly basis as a sales assistant than he does at the school. The work at school is much more demanding and complex and ranges for taking kids on excursions, swimming etc, toileting, feeding, working in the classroom, yard duty and doing administrative jobs. 'Dealing with a teenager that can't control their body or emotions is harder than selling a teenager a pair of jeans'. It requires significant knowledge and skill to communicate with and assist the students. He does not see a career as a teacher aide as the pay is too poor and the skills are not adequately recognised. 'Definitely not a career due to the wage'. There is a lot of stress put on you. Even if he works full time hours the wage was not enough to live on. The physical violence is a major stressor. Sam came to work as his father was a teacher and he knew what the work involved. You do similar work as the teacher but you are not paid the same. He didn't think his friends would consider working in the job. Most of the School support staff are older women, the younger staff at the school tended to be teaching staff.

- 4.4 **Peter** is a Principal of a Special School. He has worked in schools for 30 years. It has been a very stressful job. Getting funding and treating staff and students well has been an ongoing issue. Peter has always been an active union member and has always fought for better conditions for both the students and staff. He was angry that staff had little permanency and tried at all times not to employ people on short terms contracts. He tried to look after his staff as much as he could and tried to give staff secure and reliable employment. He said that when funding decreased that his job was made worse with parents, teachers and students bearing the brunt. He had parents call him in the middle of the night in distressed states. He had introduced procedures for handling different types of behaviours and medical conditions. All staff needed to be aware of how to handle all sorts of situations. Workers had to be aware of all sorts of situations, needs, appropriate ways to handle a variety of problems, dealing with parents and often physical violence. 'The pay's lousy and the work is hard.' The people do the job because they are caring people. The work also involved a lot of outside the job work – attending community functions and money raising activities for the school. Workers were involved in the local community and were often held in high esteem in the community.
- 4.5 I asked if he found it difficult to get staff. He said that for general staff people liked to work in schools because of public service conditions in State schools. He had no problem recruiting non teaching because of the age demographic- middle aged women who tended to stay in the job – it fitted with their family needs. He also had a few younger people on part-time arrangements but usually they didn't stay in the role and he encouraged them to get qualifications – it was no future for them. Staffing was a matter of good luck and local employment.

## 5 References

- 5.1 ABS 2011 6302 Average Weekly Earnings.
- 5.2 ABS 6306 2008 Employee Earnings and Hours.
- 5.3 Department of Education and Early Childhood Development Annual Report 2009-10 (Victoria).
- 5.4 Annual Report of the NSW Department of Education and Training 2009.
- 5.5 South Australian Industrial Relations Commission, South Australian Education Staff (Government Preschools and Schools Arbitrated Enterprise Bargaining Award 2010).
- 5.6 Grimshaw and Rubery 2007, 'Undervaluing women's work' (European Work and Employment Research Centre).
- 5.7 NSW Public Sector Workforce: A 2008 Snapshot.
- 5.8 Productivity Commission 2011 'Caring for Older Australians'.
- 5.9 The Department of Labour, Pay and Employment Equity Unit - New Zealand 'Pay investigation compared School Support Staff with Corrections Officers'.
- 5.10 Department of Education (UK) School Support Staff – The Way Forward.