The Schooling Workforce

A submission from the CPSU/CSA
to the Education and Training Workforce Study

The Community and Public Sector Union/Civil Service Association (CPSU/CSA) covers non-teaching para-professionals and administrative staff in WA's public school system. The occupations under CPSU/CSA coverage in schools are Business Managers, Registrars, School Officers, Library Officers, Laboratory Technicians and IT Officers. This occupational grouping will be referred to in this submission as 'School Support Staff'.

School Support Staff play a vital role in supporting the practice of teaching, and are integral to the everyday functioning of the 800 schools across WA.

This submission will address issues of relevance to the Commission's study relating to workers under our coverage under the three main points of the Terms of Reference in relation to the Schooling Workforce. This submission will also address the issue of school autonomy (raised in the Commission's Issues Paper), with reference to the WA government's move towards Independent Public Schools (IPS).

Terms of Reference

Our members have identified a number of issues relating to the three main points in the Terms of Reference relating to the schooling workforce that need to be addressed in order to ensure the attraction and retention of School Support Staff and to ensure that they can be efficient and effective at supporting the practice of teaching into the future. It should be noted that these issues have been placed under the broad headings that the Commission has identified in the Terms of Reference, however the issues are interrelated, and all need to be addressed in order to have School Support Staff functioning at optimal levels now and into the future.

1. **The current and future supply for the schooling workforce:**
   Our members have identified some issues that need to be addressed in order to improve attraction and retention for School Support Staff:

   a. **Training and development:** Many School Support Staff note that they undertake new and complex tasks in the absence of any training; eg. training in new technology systems, managing staff, financial management and dealing with difficult parents. Our members note the difference between training issues and issues of tasks being devolved to School Support Staff without adequate resourcing; for example, as more IT support tasks are devolved to School Support Staff in the absence of specialised IT support staff at each school, our members state that they are not adequately trained to carry out

many of these tasks. They note, however, that these tasks should not be their role, and that additional resources in the form of specialist IT Support staff should be allocated these duties. Our members feel strongly that there needs to be training relevant to their JDF and training to facilitate professional career development, rather than, as one member states, 'simply up-skilling us so we can take on extra jobs that aren't in our JDF.' Our members also report a shortage of trained relief staff to cover School Support Staff jobs. This leads to additional workload, with School Support Staff spending a significant amount of time searching for relief staff to fill in, and then spending time conducting 'on the job' training with these relief staff. Lack of available relief staff and excess workload pressures are also cited as common reasons for School Support Staff not applying to undertake professional development.[1]

b. **Career path and transfers:** Expanded career progression pathways and opportunities are needed to improve the attraction and retention of School Support Staff.   Many Schools are now multimillion dollar organisations and the role of the School Registrar and/or Business Manager is critical to the business. The accountability and reporting requirements have grown enormously over the past decade without appropriate consideration of the administrative requirements to support this shift. There are currently no positions within the structure that provide for higher level support to Registrars/Business Managers above a level 1/2 School Officer.   This does not provide the necessary career pathway that an Assistant Registrar/Business Manger would provide. The age demographic of the School Support staff in the Education Department of Western Australia is cause for concern. Without the capacity to train up the next generation of school Registrar/Business Managers there will be a very real risk of the loss of significant corporate knowledge to the sector over the next few years. Principals rely on this expertise to assist them in running the business. While the statistics are will articulated there is very little forward planning exists to support this generational change.

c. Our members have raised concern over the inability for school support staff to transfer between workplaces without having to merit select for the position. School Support Staff currently only have the ability to transfer to a like-for-like position on compassionate grounds, and must meet the strict criteria for this transfer. Our members believe that School Support Staff, having already won a position through merit selection, should have the ability to transfer to a like position in another school to accommodate a change of residence, or for career development reasons. The ability to transfer to a new workplace could bring new challenges and opportunities to enhance and broaden the knowledge and skills of School Support Staff, thereby making them more effective at their roles. Merit selection of employees is a costly and lengthy process for the government, and is stressful and time consuming for the employee. These employees have already proven they have the necessary skills and abilities to undertake their current role and should have the opportunity to transfer these skills if they so wish. A mobility transfer scheme for School Support Staff would aid in the retention

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[1] Department of Education and Training and CPSU/CSA, *Workload Review – School Support Staff,* 2007, p. 31.

of staff to the sector, who might otherwise leave if they change residences or wish to seek different challenges and experiences to progress their careers.

d. **Classification:** In order to attract and retain quality School Support Staff, our members believe the classification of certain roles need to be reconsidered. In particular, the roles of School Officer and Laboratory Technician. Level 1 members often note they lack any career path or possibility for upward progression. School Officers are classified as Level 1, with financial experience required to progress to Level 2. A review of the classification pathway for Level 1 School Officers is needed to ensure that it is flexible to allow for upward movement. Many Laboratory Technicians are also classified as Level 1, despite the specialised role they perform in schools. Laboratory Technicians are required to have a high level of knowledge about science and Occupational Safety and Health: Laboratory Technicians are required to ensure the science environment is safe, and are often the sources of OSH knowledge for their school. Laboratory Technicians often train teachers who do not have a science background in the safe usage of chemicals and conducting experiments, etc; this issue occurs particularly in rural and remote schools where the school may not have any teachers experienced in science. Laboratory Technicians are still employed as Level 1 in many schools, however the expertise and knowledge required to fulfil this role, and the crucial way Laboratory Technicians support the practice of teaching and provide science knowledge to the school, support an argument for these Level 1's to be reclassified to Level 2. A reclassification of Laboratory Technicians to Level 2 would go some way towards raising the status of this role, and would assist in the attraction and retention of experienced and qualified staff to these positions.

The classification structure of Registrars and Business Managers needs a process of review that is clearly articulated and responsive to the evolving role of these positions. This needs to be supported by an assistant position that has a classification level that is appropriate to take on higher level human resource and finance functions.

2. **The structure and mix of the workforce and its consequent efficiency and effectiveness**

The biggest issue facing School Support Staff is that of excessive workload. Essentially, the structure of the Schooling workforce needs to be reviewed to fund more School Support Staff resources to deal with the growing workload in schools. This would make for a more effective and efficient workforce, as there would be adequate staff to complete the required tasks to support the teaching of WA children.

Excessive workload has been caused by government strategies such as the devolution of centralised processes to school responsibility,[2] and the 'classroom first' strategy, one aspect of which is devolving certain administrative tasks from teachers to School Support Staff, without increasing the FTE for School Support Staff to cope with

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[2] *Workload Review – School Support Staff,* p. 1.

these changes.[3] The effects of these additional tasks have resulted in excessive workload pressures on School Support Staff, where School Support Staff are generally unable to satisfy demands placed on them within the FTE and required timeframes. There is also evidence that many School Support Staff are not working within their JDF; they are often directed to undertake the responsibilities of other roles in the school. The effects on the individual staff members are high stress and poor work-life balance, with many staff reporting they generally work over and above their set hours. As one member commented: 'It is considered as normal practice to work additional hours and not get paid for them or not be able to clear it all via TOIL.'[4] It is common practice for staff to take work home to complete, and as one member noted, it is also normal for School Support Staff to 'work during vacation periods to try and "catch up" with tasks; this has a significant effect on my family life."[5]

A sample timesheet survey conducted by the Department of Education over an eight week period in 2009 supports this assertion: the survey showed that the large majority of staff surveyed reported working over their contracted hours. For example, all Business Managers surveyed worked, on average, above their contracted hours, one worked as much as 11 hours over the contracted 37.5 hours. A sample group of 55 Registrars showed similar results, with the majority of that group working over their contracted hours; only five Registrars in that group reporting they worked their contracted 37.5 hours, and two reporting they worked just below their contracted 37.5 hours.

   a. **IT Workload:** In particular, our members have identified the tasks associated with the proliferation of Information Technology (IT) in schools as a growing source of excessive workload. System administration and troubleshooting work has been devolved to School Support Staff, in particular, Registrars, Business Managers, School Officers, and, due to most libraries having computer hubs, Library Officers, without any additional resources. Some schools fund their own IT Officer position/s from school funds, but many schools, Primary Schools in particular, cannot afford to fund these positions. Where there is no IT Officer at a school, or where the IT Officer FTE is insufficient, IT tasks are then added to the already excessive workload School Support Staff are under.

   b. **Health data workload:** Another issue compounding the pre-existing excessive workload of School Support Staff is the devolution of the task of data input of students' health and immunisation information. This is not simple data entry; this work involves inputting medical data gathered by the school nurse or provided to the school by parents, which takes a significant amount of time and often requires interpretation.

   c. **Workload in Regional and Remote schools:** The roles School Support Staff play in regional and remote schools is crucial, as due to the high turnover of teachers and principals, School Support Staff are often the stable workforce in the school and carry much of the corporate knowledge in that school. Due to the high turnover and the higher proportion of graduate teachers at regional and

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[3] Department of Education, 'Key Element 2 – A classroom orientation: sound teaching' in *Classrooms First Strategy,* http://www.det.wa.edu.au/classroomfirst/detcms/navigation/the-strategy/?page=4&tab=Main#toc4
[4] *Workload Review – School Support Staff,* p. 22.
[5] *Ibid.*

remote schools, School Support Staff spend a significant portion of time training teachers on Departmental policies and procedures, which has an impact on the workload of School Support Staff in these schools. School Support Staff in these schools also have difficulty finding relief staff, and also have to deal with issues relating to isolating location and issues of socio-economic disadvantage. These factors often compound the workload pressures on School Support Staff who work in regional and remote areas.

In order to remedy this situation of excessive workload, the Department of Education needs to review the Staffing Formula for School Support Staff, and increase School Support Staff FTE to ensure there are adequate resources available to complete the required tasks. Specialist IT Officers need to be allocated to each school in the Staffing Formula to deal with the demands of IT technology present at each school. Finally, each time a task is devolved to School Support Staff, there needs to be a thorough assessment of the workload impact of this task and additional resources need to be allocated accordingly.

3. **Workforce planning, development and structure in the short, medium and long term**

   Our members see the planning, development and structure of the workforce in the future as being dependent on the aforementioned issues of workload, appropriate classification, career path, and training and professional development. Our members also believe that their roles need to be recognised as vitally important in the school community, and be recognised as careers, rather than simply jobs.

   a. **The culture of the workforce and its employers:** Despite the integral role they play in the functioning of the school and supporting the practice of teaching, School Support Staff frequently express that they feel their roles are undervalued by the Department. Addressing the nomenclature of School Support Staff to reflect the important roles they play in the school community could work to improve the status of School Support Staff. A change in nomenclature to better reflect the professionalism, skills and knowledge required for these roles could change the perception of these roles and assist in attracting more staff to the profession, and to change the perception of roles like School Officer from a 'job' to a 'career.' As one member comments, '[The Department] needs to recognise how important our role in a school is...we are NOT the little housewife who is doing the job for "pin money". We have worked hard to portray ourselves as professionals...'[6]

   b. **School leaders:** Registrars and Business Managers perform vital leadership functions in their schools. These roles are becoming even more important with the shift to Independent Public Schools, with the Registrar and Business Manager taking on higher level financial and management duties, including managing larger one-line budget, applying for funding etc. to expand the types of courses and facilities at the school. Our members feel that Registrars and Business Managers should be recognised as an integral part of the leadership team in schools. As one member commented, 'I need

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[6] *Workload Review – School Support Staff,* p. 63.

to be included as a team member; education is not all about teachers – it is a team effort to manage and work in a school.'[7]

In relation to the Issues Paper

What are the advantages and disadvantages of increasing school autonomy?

The WA Government has embarked on its 'Independent Public Schools' project, with 98 schools currently IPS, and a further 109 schools planned to roll-in to the IPS scheme by 2013. In terms of the advantages and disadvantages for IPS for workers under our coverage, given the short period of time IPS has been running for (the first intake of 34 schools was in 2010), the advantages and disadvantages are not necessarily immediately apparent. The following are some initial observations of the advantages and disadvantages of increased school autonomy under the auspices of the IPS scheme:

a. **Advantages:**

    i. Our members see some advantage in the change to IPS, in that schools are given more autonomy regarding staffing levels. This means that schools are able to employ School Support Staff over and above what is guaranteed in the School Staffing Formula. Schools will be able to appoint School Support Staff to meet particular needs, which could work to resolve the existing workload issue in schools.

    ii. Schools will also have the flexibility to appoint staff members on a permanent basis, meaning that IPS can permanently appoint IT Officers, a position which is currently not provided to schools from the Schools Staffing Formula, and so has to be appointed on a contract basis from the schools own funds. This will make a significant contribution to easing workload pressure in schools, as well as providing staff with the security of permanent employment.

    iii. IPS provides our members with opportunities to develop new skills and assume higher level work, which could be the basis for pursuing a higher classification and new career opportunities.

b. **Disadvantages:**

    i. The WA government has rolled-out the IPS scheme quickly, with the first round of schools becoming IPS in 2010, the second round becoming IPS in 2011, and the recently announced third round of IPS to roll-in during 2012 and 2013. Despite this, the scheme will not undergo any independent review until 2013.[8] This could present some issues in terms of identifying issues resulting from a schools' transition to IPS and ensuring their timely resolution.

    ii. IPS could also add to the already heavy workload of School Support Staff, as many HR and finance functions are devolved to the school level, and as noted in the report *Putting the Public First?*,

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[7] *Ibid.,* p. 19.
[8] Professor Al Rainnie and Dr. Scott Fitzgerald, 'Part 2: Independent Public Schools' in *Putting the Public First?: An examination of the implications of the 2009 EAC Report,* 2011, p. 4.

'Unless government funding is increased, the ability to appoint additional appropriately qualified and paid school support officers will vary considerably between schools...'[9]

iii. It needs to be recognised that many School Support Staff, Registrars and Business Managers in particular, are undertaking higher level financial and human resource management tasks under IPS, and so a review of the IPS scheme will need to incorporate a classification review for School Support Staff to account for any changes in work value that have occurred in the transition to IPS.

iv. Although IPS will retain the same industrial instruments in use in non-IPS, as noted in *Putting the Public First?,* 'the devolvement of human resource management and employment matters to a school level will potentially lead to more instances of breaches of the industrial instruments. In this regard, registrars and business managers have been given limited support mechanisms to access advice from central office regarding contracts and employment levels.'[10] We have received anecdotal reports from our members that some IPS are creating their own JDFs for School Support Staff, which presents a number of issues regarding ensuring staff are appropriately classified and the ability for the Department of Education to oversee and advise on these issues.

References

Department of Education and Training and CPSU/CSA, *Workload Review – School Support Staff,* 2007.

Department of Education, 'Key Element 2 – A classroom orientation: sound teaching' in *Classrooms First Strategy,* accessible at http://www.det.wa.edu.au/classroomfirst/detcms/navigation/the-strategy/?page=4&tab=Main#toc4

Professor Al Rainnie and Dr. Scott Fitzgerald, 'Part 2: Independent Public Schools' in *Putting the Public First?: An examination of the implications of the 2009 EAC Report,* 2011.

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[9] *Ibid.,* p. 6.
[10] *Putting the Public First?,* p. 6.