



Dr Phillip McKenzie is the Research Director of ACER's Teaching, Learning and Transitions research program.



Painting a picture of the teaching workforce

The latest *Staff in Australia's Schools* survey has captured a detailed image of the current teaching workforce and has highlighted issues for future workforce planning. **Phillip McKenzie** describes the survey and its results.

ACER conducted the *Staff in Australia's Schools* survey in late 2010. The work was commissioned by DEEWR and overseen by an Advisory Committee of stakeholder groups. More than 17 000 teachers and school leaders (principals and deputies) working in Australian primary and secondary schools in all sectors provided information about their background and qualifications, their work, their career intentions, and school staffing issues. The survey builds upon the data collected in the previous *Staff in Australia's Schools* project undertaken in 2006-07. The results of the latest survey were published in two reports released in January 2012.

Final survey responses were received from 4599 primary teachers, 10 876 secondary teachers, 741 primary leaders and 838 secondary leaders from a representative sample of schools. While the number of responding teachers and leaders across Australia is very substantial, the overall response rates equate to 34 per cent of primary teachers, 32 per cent of secondary teachers, 44 per cent of primary leaders and 39 per cent of secondary leaders.

The average age of teachers and school leaders responding to the survey is shown in the table on the next page. The most common age band for both

teachers and school leaders is 51-55 years. The average age of primary teachers has decreased slightly since 2007, while the average age of secondary teachers has increased. The average age of school leaders has remained at a similar level to 2007.

The age distribution of the teacher workforce is important information for planning. For over a decade concern has been expressed about the ageing teacher workforce in Australia, as the higher the proportion of teachers in their 50s, the greater the likely demand for replacement teachers in the near future as teachers retire. The age profile can also have budgetary implications, since there is a broad link between pay and years of teaching experience, although teacher salary scales in Australia do peak relatively early. It can also provide an indication of the range of teachers working in schools, the recency of their pre-service education and the likely demands for professional learning.

Teaching has a high proportion of females. The gender composition of teachers remains similar to 2007 across the sectors, although in both primary and secondary schools the independent sector has increased its share of male teachers slightly, while the Catholic and government sectors have both decreased their percentages. Women,



however, are under-represented in leadership positions. At the primary level, 81 per cent of teachers are female but only 57 per cent of school leaders are female. In secondary schools, males occupy 61 per cent of leadership roles but only 43 per cent of teaching positions.

The overall job satisfaction of Australia's school teachers has increased slightly over the past four years, to the point that almost nine out of every ten teachers is either satisfied or very satisfied with their job. There was little variation in the results when separated according to school sector and location—in all cases over 80 per cent of respondents were satisfied or very satisfied with their current job. The aspects of the job that teachers were most satisfied with were their working relationships with their colleagues and with parents/guardians, while the areas of least satisfaction were the value society places on

teachers' work, and the amount of administrative and clerical work.

Yet despite such high overall job satisfaction, around a third of all teachers surveyed are unsure how much longer they intend to continue working in schools. Seven per cent of primary teachers and almost 10 per cent of secondary teachers indicated that they are certain to leave teaching permanently prior to retirement. The top two reasons for leaving prior to retirement were 'better opportunities outside schools' and 'the workload is too heavy'. However, the large numbers who report they are uncertain about how much longer they intend to keep working in schools indicate that career intentions are fluid, and difficult to predict with certainty.

One possible reason that some teachers feel there are better opportunities outside schools could be the apparent unattractiveness of leadership positions. Many current

leaders feel that way too: over one-third of school leaders agreed that school leadership positions are unattractive to qualified applicants. Only 11 per cent of primary teachers and nine per cent of secondary teachers intend to apply for either a Principal or Deputy Principal position within the next three years. The large majority of teachers did not intend to apply for a leadership position within the next three years. As in 2007, the three most important factors for not applying for a leadership position were 'I want to remain working mainly in the classroom', 'the time demands of the job are too high' and 'I would have difficulty maintaining a satisfactory work/life balance'.

Similarly, 44 per cent of primary leaders and 30 per cent of secondary leaders are unsure how much longer they intend to continue working in schools. The strategies that were most strongly supported to retain school leaders were more support staff, a more

Staff in Australia's Schools snapshot

	Primary Teachers	Secondary Teachers	Primary Leaders	Secondary Leaders
Average age (years)	42.1 years	44.5 years	49.5 years	50.2 years
Proportion of females (%)	81%	57%	57%	61%
Most common salary range (\$)	\$71 000–\$80 000	\$71 000–\$80 000	\$101 000–\$110 000	\$121 000–\$140 000
Average workload – all school-related activities (hours per week)	45.8	46.0	55.7	58.9
Average workload – face-to-face teaching (hours per week)	23.3	19.2	6.1	3.5
Average number of days spent in professional learning over the past year	8-9 days		13-15 days	
Average length of time at current school (years)	7.2 years	8.4 years	7.3 years	8.1 years

positive public image of the leadership position, reduced workload, and fewer changes imposed on schools. About 70-80 per cent also considered fewer student management issues, greater autonomy, and higher pay for leaders who demonstrate advanced competence would help retain leaders. More than half of the leaders felt that higher pay for extra qualifications and amendments to superannuation arrangements would help to retain leaders, while around one-third of primary and secondary leaders agreed or strongly agreed that providing higher pay for leaders whose students achieve specified goals would help to retain leaders in the profession.

Despite this 'wish list' of improvements, most of Australia's school leaders are satisfied with their jobs. Over 92 per cent of primary leaders and 95 per cent of secondary leaders report that they are either satisfied or very satisfied with their

current job, representing an increase since 2007 of 4 percentage points for primary leaders and 3 percentage points for secondary leaders. Working relationships with colleagues and parents/guardians were once again the most satisfying aspects of the job, while 'the balance between working time and private life' and 'the staffing resources at your school' were the areas of least satisfaction.

National workforce surveys such as the *Staff in Australia's Schools* project provide data to inform ongoing teacher workforce planning, including assessing current teacher shortages, future career intentions and the impact of significant events like the global financial crisis on teacher labour markets.

Staff in Australia's Schools 2010 was commissioned in response to the *Smarter Schools National Partnership for Improving Teacher Quality*. In effect since January 2009, the

partnership represents an agreement among the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) to 'attract, train, place, develop and retain quality teachers and leaders in our schools and classrooms'. One of the reform strategies linked to this agreement focuses on improving the quality and availability of teacher workforce data.

The *Staff in Australia's Schools* reports are available online:

Phillip McKenzie, Glenn Rowley, Paul Weldon & Martin Murphy (2011). *Staff in Australia's Schools 2010: Main Report on the Survey*, Australian Council for Educational Research.

<research.acer.edu.au/tll_misc/14>

Paul Weldon, Glenn Rowley & Phillip McKenzie (2011). *Profiles of Teachers in Selected Curriculum Areas: Further Analyses of the Staff in Australia's Schools 2010 Survey*, Australian Council for Educational Research.

<research.acer.edu.au/tll_misc/13>