

Our 2020 vision: A spotlight on the profession



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The start to the school year brought with it tremendous challenges that we would all hope to never be experienced again. For many of our members, their students and families there was no summer vacation.

In far too many locations across the state, our members and our school communities have suffered great loss due to the devastating bushfires.

Mindful of the climate emergency which is upon us, Federation has devised a plan to look after our members, our schools, our communities and our planet.

Addressing the needs of our members in affected communities must be a priority, because unless they are met we cannot expect them to manage the serious emotional and psychological needs of our students.

With duty to our members at the forefront of our thinking, this year we will put the spotlight on the profession.

It has been more than 15 years since the changing nature of work, the skills and responsibilities of teachers and principals was last examined and no one can deny that the changes since have been significant.

From technology to the curriculum, to student needs, schools complexities, social and parental expectations, government policies and prescriptions; all of these factors have contributed to substantial change over those years.

The last time such an examination of teachers' work took place was in 2003 before a full bench of the NSW Industrial Relations Commission (IRC). On that occasion, recognising the change in the nature of teachers' work over the previous decade, the IRC awarded salary increases of between 12 and 20 per cent.

Denied the opportunity — due to regressive changes to the NSW industrial relations system — to present a similar case before the IRC, Federation has established an independent inquiry, Valuing the teaching profession — An independent inquiry.

On March 15, Geoff Gallop will announce the terms of reference of the inquiry and call for submissions.

Federation will provide advice to Federation Representatives to ensure the collective voice of members in all schools is heard.



Furthermore, Federation will also assist members representing all classifications, classroom teachers, specialist teachers, executive teachers, principals and non school based officers in the production of witness statements to be submitted to the inquiry.

In term 2, the panel will gather relevant material on changes to the work of the profession since 2004, after the last Work Value case. During term 3, the inquiry panel will conduct site visits and hold public hearings across the state taking testimony from witnesses and other experts.

The panel will deliberate in term 4 with a view to presenting in February 2021 its findings and recommendations on how to best improve the status of the teaching profession, including, but not limited to matters going to remuneration.

Of course, there are immediate pressures when it comes to the workload of teachers and principals; many of which have been created by a shift of responsibility and blame by the Department through Local Schools, Local Decisions.

Against the backdrop of terms such as “school autonomy” and “local choice”, system support has been gutted and the profession’s core responsibility of teaching and learning has been swamped by insurmountable workloads largely driven by compliance regimes and managerial obsessions.

This requires our immediate attention.

The goal of our school staffing campaign is to achieve a dramatic extension of release time for teachers and executive staff by increasing the permanent staffing entitlement of all schools, allowing members to engage in important and effective collaboration and planning, while also addressing workload.

This is a robust agenda for the year ahead. Together we will make a difference for our profession, our students and the communities we serve.