

AEU Federal Women's Conference

November 02, 2020

AEU Federal Women's Conference, held in October, was held online.

The theme was "Strengthening Public Education — a feminist-led approach".

Women's and Anna Stewart Program Restricted Committee member Sharryn Usher, reflected on her participation in the panel discussion "Her Story — Women, the real essential worker":

"NSW TAFE teachers' story is arguably no different from our colleagues in other states and territories. We remain highly casualised, well over 70 per cent, and face ever-increasing workload issues. Prior to COVID-19, compliance requirements continued to plague teachers with constant changes and looming deadlines. These did not disappear with the changing nature of our work during COVID-19 but continued to plague teachers, adding to the stress for many.



"Knowing how important it was to keep our students engaged, teachers adopted various approaches. The digital divide was glaringly obvious among our students in career prep. Not only did they not have the computer skills or knowledge to embrace an online platform, they also lacked access to a suitable device and/or reliable internet. Instead, teachers produced printed booklets for these students to complete and they stayed connected through phone calls. Thankfully in term 3 we were able to bring our students back to the classroom, socially distanced of course.

"Looking back over the past months, it is clear that the survival of our casually employed teachers has been largely due to the continual work of our union. COVID-19 has taught us many things: the importance of secure work, the importance of connection, and the importance of unions."

Committee member Hannah Archer Lawton also reflected on one of the key topics:

"Federal Women's Conference had a major focus, this year, on the importance of preschools and childcare. Not just for our children, especially our most vulnerable children, but also for the nation.

"The Government's welcome initiative for free childcare during the pandemic — which was also one of the first to be removed — has helped shaped campaigns Australia-wide for better conditions and more public preschools.

"The conference highlighted the benefits to the economy as far as increased employment opportunities go, especially for women. Even the Prime Minister advocated for the economic benefits that come with free childcare earlier this year. Free childcare, as shown globally, can and will boost the economy.

“Let’s hope the state government in NSW follows the footsteps of the Victorian state government and sees sense when it comes to free access to early schooling. We need our members to echo the union’s calls to increase the provision for public pre-schooling in NSW.”