



United Voice

**Submission to the
Productivity Commission's Draft Report
on the
School's Workforce**

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1. Introduction

United Voice welcomes the opportunity to present our submission to the Productivity Commission ('the Commission') regarding their draft report on the schools workforce ('the report'). While a majority of the report's findings do not directly impact our members, the Commission does make two key recommendations that do concern us, and directly affect the working rights of our members.

Who Are We?

United Voice is an organisation of over 120,000¹ Australian workers, brought together by our belief in the dignity of workers and the right to fair and just treatment at work. Our representation extends across five main areas: property services, hospitality, children's services, health & aged care, and manufacturing, mining & miscellaneous. United Voice has a strong interest in the report as some of the findings directly impact our members employed as school support staff, particularly educational assistants and school cleaners.

United Voice children's services members include teacher aides and educational assistants. Since teacher aides became established in the state education system in 1974², the LHMU has provided their industrial representation, tirelessly working to achieve recognition of education assistants and the important role that they play in our education system.

United Voice's property services members include school cleaners and gardeners. United Voice has collectively protected and improved school cleaners' and gardeners' wages and conditions over time through effective enterprise negotiations securing: workers compensation, health and safety regulations and training, among other benefits.

In our submission the term 'school support staff' will be used to group, and refer to, these three occupations.

This submission will mainly address issues raised in Chapter 8 and Chapter 11 of the report, specifically 8.3 *School Autonomy* and 11.3 *Industrial Relations*. It will first outline some basic trends in the Education Assistant, School Cleaner and School Gardener workforces. This submission will then, drawing on the experiences of some of our members, highlight the many positive aspects of strong industrial agreements in the schools workforce. Finally it will look at the issue of increasing autonomy in government schools and, using the WA Independent Public School system as an example, bring to light current problems with the system and raise United Voice's concerns regarding anticipated future issues.

¹ United Voice, "About United Voice," <http://unitedvoice.org.au/about> (accessed December, 2011).

² United Voice, "Teacher Aides," <http://unitedvoice.org.au/branches/qld/queensland-teacher-aides-lighting-the-way-together/> (accessed November 2011).

2. Defining the School Support Staff Workforce

a. Education Assistants

Workforce Snapshot³

| | |
|---|--|
| Employment Level | 64,600 |
| Proportion working in Education and Training Workforce | 94.5% |
| Weekly Earnings | \$895 |
| Full-Time | 23.5% |
| Median Age | 46 years |
| Gender Composition of Workforce | 70.6% are Females Part Time 19.8% Females Full Time 5.9% Males Part Time |

Education Assistants (EA), or Teaching Aides, provide an invaluable, and often unrecognised, service within schools. While the role of an EA within a school may vary, general tasks that they often undertake include: demonstrating, supervising and participating in activities which enhance the physical, social, emotional and intellectual development of children; assisting children with intellectual, physical and behavioural difficulties; working with and/or translating for deaf children or children for whom English is their second language.⁴ Their role has changed quite dramatically over the past decade, from volunteering mothers helping out at their child's school to today, where almost 65% have post-school qualifications.

EAs have the highest median age of the Education and Training Sector (ETS),⁵ the highest proportion of females in the ETS⁶ and are also the third highest employing occupation within that sector, at 7.6%.⁷ Their average earnings are low (in the first decile) and there is strong growth anticipated in the EA workforce over the next five years.

b. Commercial (School) Cleaners

Workforce Snapshot⁸

| | |
|---|--|
| Employment Level | 156,400 |
| Proportion working in Education and Training Workforce | 9% |
| Weekly Earnings | \$750 |
| Full-Time | 35.4% |
| Median Age | 46 years |
| Gender Composition of Workforce | 43% are Females Part Time 21.6% Males Part Time |

School cleaners provide a necessary service to ensure a stable environment for the Education and Training Sector. In general, growth of cleaning is sensitive to prevailing economic conditions. In low economic growth or recessionary periods, cleaning services are perceived by clients as an area where service levels can be lowered & prices reduced.⁹

³ JobOutlook, "Education Aides," <http://joboutlook.gov.au/Pages/occupation.aspx?search=alpha&tab=overview&cluster=&code=4221> (accessed December 2011).

⁴ Ibid

⁵ Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, "Employment Outlook for Education and Training," Canberra, 2010, 12

⁶ DEEWR, "Employment Outlook for Education and Training," p.15

⁷ DEEWR, "Employment Outlook for Education and Training," p.21

⁸ JobOutlook, "Commercial Cleaners,"

<http://joboutlook.gov.au/Pages/occupation.aspx?search=alpha&tab=stats&cluster=&code=8112> (accessed December 2011).

⁹ Allday, Alen, "IBISWorld Industry Report L7866- Cleaning Services in Australia," Melbourne, 2011, p.6

While there is slight growth in future employment predicted in the sector, this growth mainly relates to the expected greater use of casual and part-time staff to meet expanding client needs and maintain employment flexibility for firms.^{10 11}

Weekly earnings are significantly lower than all other occupations, and unemployment for cleaning is high compared with other occupations.¹²

c. Gardeners

Workforce Snapshot¹³

| | |
|---|--|
| Employment Level | 65,200 |
| Proportion working in Education and Training Workforce | Not Available (32% is non-household work) |
| Weekly Earnings | \$750 |
| Full-Time | 73.8% |
| Median Age | 37 years |
| Gender Composition of Workforce | 67.8% are Males Full Time 20.2% are Males Part time 6.0% are Females Full Time |

Demand for gardening services is seasonal and also highly sensitive to changes in household disposable income.¹⁴ As such, since this industry is very price sensitive, contract periods tend to only be short-term.¹⁵ At the same time, however, the gardening services industry is in a growth phase of its life cycle.¹⁶

Weekly earnings, as for cleaners, are significantly lower than all other occupations, and unemployment for gardeners is above the average of other occupations.¹⁷

¹⁰ JobOutlook, "Commercial Cleaners."

¹¹ Allday, "Cleaning Services in Australia," p.7

¹² JobOutlook, "Commercial Cleaners."

¹³ Job Outlook, "Gardeners,"

<http://joboutlook.gov.au/pages/occupation.aspx?search=alpha&tab=overview&cluster=&code=3622>

(accessed January 2012)

¹⁴ Allday, Allen, "IBISWorld Industry Report Q9525 – Gardening services in Australia," Melbourne, 2011, p.5

¹⁵ Ibid, p.7

¹⁶ Ibid, p.11

¹⁷ Job Outlook, "Gardeners,"

<http://joboutlook.gov.au/pages/occupation.aspx?search=alpha&tab=overview&cluster=&code=3622>

(accessed January 2012)

The Importance of Industrial Relations

United Voice would like to begin by acknowledging that the report recognises that school support staff are 'important to a well-functioning school system.'¹⁸ Accepting their crucial role in the daily running of the school-system is the first step towards giving these workers the recognition that they deserve.

However, there are contradictions in the way that the report acknowledges the importance of school support staff while promoting the decentralisation of industrial relations (IR) within the school workforce. The Commission's recommendation in *Draft Finding 11.1*, which asks for 'greater flexibility in the industrial relations regime,'¹⁹ will not provide school support workers with the job security and work conditions that they deserve and will directly undermine their role in the school-system.

This submission will begin by using examples of successful United Voice campaigns to show how recognition and respect for school support workers can be achieved through strong industrial relation agreements. It will then provide counter arguments against some of the points the Commission has raised in favour of IR decentralisation.

a. United Voice Campaigns

Education Support Workers 2004

United Voice's Education Support Workers Campaign was run in 2003-2004. The campaign aimed to improve the working conditions of, and increase respect for education support workers in the Western Australian public school system. This included developing a Level Three classification for education support workers, and moving them from temporary to permanent contracts. Prior to the 2004 campaign, Education Assistants felt that their work was not duly recognised, and a majority of the sector were employed on fixed term contracts from school year to school year, despite being employed year in and year out.²⁰

The campaign was a huge success, and In June 2004 an Enterprise Bargaining Agreement (EBA) was achieved which saw over 2000 temporary workers made permanent, and over 2000 employees reclassified to Level Three.

United Voice member, Lisa Singh, reflects on the campaign and the impact it has had for education support workers:

Lisa Singh - Interpreter

The role of the Education Assistant had changed dramatically over the years, from mums coming in with glue and glitter, to people who were toileting children, feeding them, hoisting them from chairs to standing apparatuses etc. A lot of us fulfil the role of social trainers. For me personally, as an interpreter, I basically teach students a new language with its own grammatical structure (AUSLAN). I'm not just a parent who comes in to help. I studied for four years to help.

¹⁸ Productivity Commission, "Schools Workforce: Productivity Commission Draft Research Report," Canberra, 2011, p.125

¹⁹ Ibid, p.211

²⁰ Liquor, Hospitality and Miscellaneous Union (WA Branch), "Nomination for ACTU Workplace Campaign of 2004," Perth, 2004, p.4

We were all doing jobs like these, but we were still getting paid glue and glitter rates. So a group of us, helped by the union, found ourselves sitting in negotiations from seven or eight at night for a good couple of weeks. It was hard, but it was worth it. The success of the campaign allowed for more recognition for the job we do. It made a huge impact.

I would not be without my union. Collaboratively you can get more done; individually, not on your life.

Contracting School Cleaners

United Voice has tirelessly campaigned for improved conditions for school cleaners over the years. From 1997 through to 2004 the union worked to abolish contract cleaning in Western Australian public schools and was finally successful in 2004, with the Gallop State Government prohibiting schools to be contract cleaned.

United Voice member Terry Milligan worked as a contract cleaner until, with the help of the union, he was able to start work for Melville Senior High School (WA) as an in-house cleaner.

Terry Milligan - Cleaner

Being a member of United Voice worker's union has helped me a great deal. I have been a cleaner for 15 years. I used to work for contract cleaning companies and they were terrible. We worked for a pittance of a wage; barely a couple of dollars more than the dole. Since then, the union has worked extremely hard to give cleaners and gardeners a wage. It's not a good wage, but it's an improvement on working for contractors.

This is why I am glad that I am a union member. The benefits are good, and work-wise my conditions have improved immensely. Thanks to United Voice, six years ago I was able to move to work in-school as a cleaner at Melville Senior High School. I'm much happier working for the school and having the department paying me.

I would not like to return to the bad old days working for any cleaning contractor. I feel the need to speak out against them because they are so bad. Everything is so much better now. I would still like more respect and more cash in my pay, but you have to fight so hard to get it. In the Department's eyes you're only a worker and can look after yourself. They're very mistaken, and they don't recognise that we need the support of the union to have our voice's heard.

Brett Clements, another member of United Voice, has also had very similar, positive experiences, through being involved in the union.

Brett Clements – Cleaner

After years of running my own cleaning business, and some time working in hospitality, I currently work as Cleaner in Charge at a large senior high school in Perth. I have been working there since April 2005, when cleaning was moved in-house.

There were initially some teething problems with our pay. Some of my team went several weeks without being paid, others weren't paid the correct amount. I was constantly relying

on the support of United Voice to help ensure that we were paid the right amount at the right time, and together we negotiated with the Department of Education to secure a positive result. The fact that we were all union members helped immensely.

In 2008 I became the victim of workplace bullying. I came very close to a nervous breakdown as people spread lies about me that others believed. United Voice guided me through this hard time, giving me advice, listening to my problems and helping me in meetings. The union helped me to always feel safe in my work environment, and stopped the unfair treatment I was receiving. I felt like I had three thousand strong voices behind me.

There are many thousands more people like Brett, Terry and Lisa whose lives have improved immeasurably through the job security and respect that they have gained through the help of United Voice.

United Voice's members are the ones playing an integral, often unrecognised, role in the schools workforce and they are the ones who are most impacted by the Commission's recommendations concerning the industrial relations regime. As Terry Milligan said, most people think that '[they're] only.. worker(s) and can look after [themselves]'. However, people need to understand that this isn't always the case, and that it is particularly important that, when governments are trying to improve 'flexibility' and 'autonomy' in the schools workforce, there are strong unions protecting the rights of the workers that these policies often try to undermine.

Geoff Spence – Gardener

We workers need unions: when you complain to the education department nothing really happens and you feel isolated and alone. But with a union, you feel like there are other people there supporting you. If people try to bully and intimidate you, you know you've got someone in your corner there, ready to help you make it to the next step.

b. Experiments in Flexibility – Part 1

Section 11.3 of the Commission's draft report clearly outlines the Commission's position on the importance of industrial relations in the schools workforce:

*'Centralised restrictions on the employment of temporary (contract) workers can... reduce the scope for schools to deploy staff and organise their workplaces in ways most suited to their particular circumstances.'*²¹

*'It is important that provisions in awards and enterprise agreements do not obstruct or unduly slow the implementation of agreed reforms, or impede school-based trialling of approaches that might have application across a wider range of schools.'*²²

This position concerns United Voice for the simple reason that when schools experiment with and trial new approaches to staffing arrangements, it is the support staff who often suffer.

²¹ Productivity Commission, "Schools Workforce," p.208

²² Ibid, p.209

School support staff are regularly placed on temporary contracts at the convenience of their employers, who prefer to maintain tight control over their workforces than employ workers permanently. This leads to unions moving to impose 'centralised restrictions' on the employment of temporary workers, in an effort protect the working rights of their members.

There have been many cases where Education Assistants and cleaners have been placed on 'fixed term contracts' (FTC) over an extended period of time, undermining their right to job security for the convenience of their employers. In 2007, United Voice Western Australian Branch lodged a complaint with the Western Australian Industrial Relations Commission (WAIRC) on behalf of twenty-three ethnic education assistants (EEAs). Each EEA had been placed on FTCs ranging in duration from one term to one year, despite having undertaken their roles on a continuous basis for several years, and in some instances over periods up to 17 years. The WA Department of Education maintained the position that these EEAs were working on 'special projects', which justified their continuous employment as temporary workers. However, the WAIRC ruled in favour of United Voice, on the basis that the EEAs performed a considerable number of duties on an ongoing and continuous basis 'notwithstanding the cyclical nature of the language requirements of the students EEAs teach.'²³

Without the support of United Voice, who fought to restrict the employment of temporary EEA workers, these employees would have continued on temporary contracts, without ever knowing if their employment would be ongoing.

Even though they have expressed their concerns of possible workload increases for school support staff²⁴ the Commission neglects to recognise the one thing that constantly supports and works to garner respect for schools support staff - a strong industrial relations regime. United Voice questions how the Commission believes 'greater career progression and skills development for teacher aides'²⁵ and 'improved training for support staff to assist teachers in dealing with specific pressures'²⁶ can occur in a workforce environment where support staff aren't permanent members of staff, and don't have strong union support throughout their working life.

While the 'achievement of workforce flexibility'²⁷ within the schools workforce may be a desired outcome for education departments, schools, and the Commission, United Voice feels that the phrase 'workforce flexibility' is synonymous with the phrase 'workforce destabilisation'. Experiments, trials and flexibility within any workforce don't necessarily lead to increased productivity through innovation. They do however lead to the subversion of worker's rights, which creates a demoralised workforce with lower productivity.

c. Successful Negotiations

United Voice agrees with the Commission's belief that 'delivering... beneficial outcomes for both students and the workforce will be dependent on the goodwill of all parties and a capacity to bring a constructive, open and forward looking perspective to the negotiating

²³ Western Australian Industrial Relations Commission Decision, "Dispute RE Fixed term Contracts of Union Members," Perth, 2009, s.148.

²⁴ Productivity Commission, "Schools Workforce," p.128

²⁵ Ibid, p.127

²⁶ Ibid, p.127

²⁷ Ibid, p.209

table.²⁸ However, we do not agree with the way that the report implies that the process of negotiating changes to remuneration and working conditions is 'time-consuming'²⁹ due to the inflexible, stubborn nature of unions during the process. In doing so, the Commission fails to acknowledge the role of the employer in negotiating agreements. It is just as much the responsibility of the employer to bring a constructive and open perspective to the negotiating table as it is that of the Union, It is often the employer's inability to truly consider the situation of their employees that prevents these negotiations from moving forward.

Take the recent 'Spot the Difference' campaign being run by United Voice's Western Australian branch. Support staff have been challenging the large discrepancy between wage increases awarded to them and to State Government MPs. While Western Australian Government MPs awarded themselves an 8.4% pay rise over the last two years, government employed school cleaners and gardeners were only awarded a minimal pay increase of 5.75% and EAs were only awarded 7.5 % pay increases as they were told 'we all have to tighten our belts' due to the financial crisis.³⁰ This is not the first time that employers have failed to treat the needs of their employees as equal to their own. This is why unions must work to ensure that the needs of their members are understood and respected.

As the report states 'judgements about which measures would be the most worthwhile are best made by practitioners at the forefront of education delivery...[who are] best placed to know what's best.'³¹ While this quote is in reference to innovation in the school workforce, we believe that it is just as applicable to the process of IR negotiations, and the role of industrial regimes within the school workforce. United Voice exists to represent our members. We understand the needs of our members, and as such our judgements and opinions during negotiations should be considered to be 'worthwhile,' as they represent the judgements of 'practitioners' at the forefront of the schools support workforce.

Lisa Singh, who was involved in United Voice's 2004 EA campaign, believes that changing the Department of Education's perception of the EA role in schools was a step in a positive direction for their negotiations. 'I think until they saw that [what EAs do] happening the Department had no idea what we did. Seeing that helped.' Similarly, it took the personal statements of 19 EEAs in the 2007 WAIRC case to change their employment status for the better. Until then, the Department had an incorrect impression of what the role of an EEA was, which lead to their misemployment.

It is not until employers recognise and respect the opinions of our members, that IR negotiations will be less 'time-consuming'. Successful negotiations are a two way process.

²⁸ Ibid, p.210

²⁹ Ibid, p.208

³⁰ United Voice, "Spot the Difference: A Call for Fairness," <http://unitedvoice.org.au/news/spot-the-difference-a-call-for-fairness> (accessed December 2011).

³¹ Productivity Commission, "Schools Workforce," p.130

3. Independent Public Schools

United Voice is concerned by the report's *Draft Recommendation 8.1* that 'State and territory governments should complement initiatives to provide greater autonomy to individual schools.'³²This concern is due to the negative experiences of our Western Australian members within the Independent Public School (IPS) system, as well as our anticipation of future issues that will undermine the rights of our workers within the IPS system.

Also of concern is the report's unsubstantiated support for the IPS system in WA. The IPS system was rolled-out in 2010, with 34 schools in the 2010 intake, and 64 schools in this year's 2011 intake.³³ As already mentioned in the CPSU/CSA's submission referred to in the report, the scheme will not undergo any independent review until 2013.³⁴ Despite the lack of any independent reviews, the report uses the IPS system as a benchmark for other, similar, systems being rolled out throughout Australia, including the Federal *Empowering Local Schools* (ELS) initiative. According to WA's Education Minister Liz Constable, ELS has 'borrow[ed] and piggyback[ed] on what's already happening here in Western Australia,'³⁵It is worrying that a nation-wide restructuring of Australia's education system is modelling itself on a recently rolled-out education system that has not been reviewed.

As such, these arguments are not directly aimed at the WA IPS system, but oppose the concept of increased autonomy in public schools in general, using the IPS system as an example.

a. Experiments in Flexibility – Part 2

The IPS system places too great an emphasis on achieving 'workforce flexibility'. In 2007 United Voice WA successfully lodged a complaint with the WAIRC regarding the incorrect employment of EEA's as temporary workers. In 2010 it was necessary for the Union to lodge another complaint for a similar reason, as EAs were still being misemployed in public schools. A number of the schools being challenged were part of the IPS system.

Under the IPS system, a school is able to 'alter its staffing profile'³⁶ in its transition to an Independent Public School. While this has been introduced to allow schools to be more responsive to the individual needs of its community, it has been at the detriment of many EAs. Changes have included; limiting the maximum EA hours, employing additional temporary EAs when hours become available rather than maximising hours for EAs who have asked for more hours, and converting temporary EAs to a minimum of 5 hours per week while keeping the balance of hours as temporary, providing little job security for those EAs. Permanent EAs are being treated as if they are temporary, to increase workforce flexibility.

³² Ibid, p.157

³³ Department of Education, "Home," <http://www.det.wa.edu.au/independentpublicschools/detcms/portal/> (accessed November 2011).

³⁴ Fitzgerald, Scott and Rainnie, Al, "Putting the Public First? An Examination of the Implications of the 2009 EAC Report," Perth, 2011, p.4

³⁵ Australian Broadcasting Corporation, "Federal Schools Programme Could Lead to Funding Cuts," <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2011-11-20/federal-schools-program-could-lead-to-funding-cuts/3682552> (accessed November 2011).

³⁶ Department of Education, "Unlock Your School's Future: Becoming an Independent Public School in 2012" Perth, 2011, p.7

As previously mentioned this kind of experimentation in the workforce impacts on the lives of school support staff. One United Voice member has said 'I'm just getting deeper into debt trying to exist on 25 hours per week.' For another, their school's choice to not maximise their hours 'really makes me feel that I'm not valued by the Principal and the school.'

Geoff Spence, a Gardener who works at two IPSs, has seen and heard of how gardeners employed at IPSs have been 'encouraged' to complete tasks that don't fall within their job descriptions, as schools work to utilise their existing workforce in a more 'creative' way.

Geoff Spence - Gardener

Even though we're employed by the Education Department, and employed under an award, IPS's have been trying to tell us that we can do more work. But we're not trained to do these extra jobs and they're not in our job descriptions. The schools are looking to get cheap labour, but there will be consequences down the track because of this attitude. I know there's a lot of bullying of other gardeners in other schools. I was talking to a bloke the other day who said he was going to paint a couple of rooms next week for another school he works for. I said to him 'Don't do that – You're not a painter!' I don't know why Principals pick on gardeners and cleaners. Some are bullied so much by their principals, they do just about anything they're asked to do like work on roofs and other things, which can become a real health and safety issue.

b. Lack of IR Understanding

The workforce impacts of flexible budgeting and staffing allowances is compounded by the lack of IR understanding and respect for IR processes within IPS's.

United Voice Industrial Relations Officer Courtney Allen, who has been involved in the 2010 EA WAIRC case, believes that 'the flexibility [IPSs] have in terms of budgeting leads to the mistaken view that they don't need to follow Industrial Relations Acts. There has developed a culture within IPSs where they feel that they can do what they want.' United Voice member Lisa Singh has also experienced this attitude and lack of knowledge firsthand:

Lisa Singh – Interpreter

At the moment I'm working in an Independent School, and recently I was told that my child was leaving. The school said that I could follow the child to the next school they went to. After talking to Union representatives I worked out pretty quickly that the school didn't understand the system. As a permanent employee of the government, I'm meant to become a super nummary and then be redeployed when a new job comes my way, not 'follow the child'. I could tell that, given this new autonomy, the school didn't properly understand our workplace agreements or the staffing system.

Lisa's is just one example, yet there are many other cases where the decentralisation of staffing processes (i.e. implementing IPS) has led to the detrimental loss of knowledge of IR and staffing processes. Professor Al Rainnie and Dr Scott Fitzgerald's of Curtin University recent, study of the IPS system, and similar systems used internationally, made a similar finding:

'As well as the 'effectiveness' of the support services, the issue of the pay and conditions of support staff needs to be foregrounded. Although the industrial awards

***and individual EBAs remain in effect, 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.*³⁷**

While the report states that ‘the shift to greater school autonomy should generally be seen as a positive development in the sense that it removes an impediment to principals and other school leaders exercising leadership,³⁸ the Commission has neglected to assess how effective school leaders are once they are given more independence. And what is already becoming apparent through the WA IPS system is that principals and school leaders, in being granted more autonomy, disregard a crucial aspect of their leadership duties: their duty to their school support staff and their duty to uphold current industrial relation agreements.

c. Demand and Supply

A large focus of the report was demand and supply issues within the schools workforce. The report suggests, as shown below, that a response focused on the needs of the individual school will help abate demand-supply imbalances:

‘In seeking to achieve a better balance in the demand and supply of school workers, multiple and sometimes tailored responses are required.’³⁹

‘The Grattan Institute commented that centralised agreements ‘fail to recognise that there are numerous labour markets for school teachers, with differences stemming from subject and year level taught. Treating these labour markets as homogenous creates both surpluses and shortages in particular areas.’⁴⁰

What can be inferred from this is that the Commission believes that controls IPS’s are granted over their staffing profile allow IPSs to respond in a tailored manner to their workforce needs, more aptly addressing demand and supply imbalances than their centralised counterparts.

However, the IPS system could be seen to create more demand-supply issues than it addresses. This in many ways is due to disconnection between the centralised government and the decentralised IPS processes.

In Western Australia, when permanent employees of the government within the schools workforce are no longer required at their current school, they remain permanent employees of the government and must wait to be ‘redeployed’ to another school. However, schools under the IPS system are ‘[exempt] from central placement processes, including the central transfer process and placement of redeployees.’⁴¹ Even though they don’t have to use the central placement processes, any staff member that they employ automatically becomes a permanent employee of the government. This has led to a glut of ‘Super Nummary’ workers, who are often EA workers who no longer have a specific child to look after. United Voice member Lisa Singh explains her experience becoming a Super Nummary under the current system:

³⁷ Fitzgerald and Rainnie, “Putting the Public First?” p.6

³⁸ Productivity Commission, “Schools Workforce,” p.155

³⁹ Ibid, p.43

⁴⁰ Ibid, p.208

⁴¹ Department of Education, “Unlock Your School's Future,” p.5

Lisa Singh - Interpreter

I don't know how long I'll be a Super Nummary. Last time, The Department knew I was a Super Nummary from September, but I wasn't matched with my current school until July. The school I'm currently at had been advertising the position from April. The IPS system and the government systems don't match up, which leads to unnecessary surplus of EAs and other staff.

And what am I going to do when I go back to surplus? Maybe back to filing. That's what Special Needs EAs do when they don't have a child. But really, if I wanted to be a clerk I'd go and apply for a job as a clerk.

United Voice anticipates that this issue will continue to get worse as more and more schools become IPSs, and as the ELS system is rolled-out nationally. The more schools there are employing staff from outside the central placement system, the greater the number of underutilised government employees in the school's workforce.

There is also the issue of what happens to employees who do not agree with the ethos of an autonomous schooling system. Under the IPS system 'where existing school staff are not in agreement with the ethos and direction of Independent Public Schools, they may opt for redeployment within a semester of a school starting as an Independent Public School.'⁴² However staff that do not agree with the IPS ethos cannot be later employed by an IPS school. Thus the question arises as to what happens to workers who disagree with an autonomous schooling system, as more and more schools become independent across Australia as the government rolls-out the ELS initiative.

Demand-supply problems can not be solved through the current IPS system, and many measures put in place to help 'tailor' workforces and address individual demand-supply issues often create more systemic demand-supply issues within the workforce overall.

d. Anticipated Issues: Contract Cleaning

One of United Voice's greatest concerns, as public schools become more autonomous, is the possibility of schools contracting out their cleaning services. In Rainnie and Fitzgerald's report, it was found that within national and international independent public school systems that 'given the increased budgetary discretion... cutting and contracting out in the areas of grounds maintenance, cleaning and caretaking [has become] the norm.'⁴³ The report also predicts that 'given the governance of IPS, the contracting of these services can be expected to increase if and when 'choice' of service provision is extended to individual schools.'⁴⁴

This potential move towards contracting out cleaning services is concerning for two reasons; contracted cleaners work under terrible conditions, and they have little to no job security. United Voice has worked tirelessly over the years to ensure that cleaners like Terry Milligan and Brett Clements do not have to suffer through these conditions. Below, they share their experiences working for contract cleaners as compared with being employed in-house.

⁴² Department of Education, "Unlock Your School's Future," p.7

⁴³ Fitzgerald and Rainnie, "Putting the Public First?" p.6

⁴⁴ Ibid.

Terry Milligan – School Cleaner

The conditions in-house... have improved 100% from being with contract cleaners. Our machinery is 100% better compared to what it was before, when it was dangerously out of date. As a contracted worker, you were treated like a robot, a slave. You always had to keep working and there was no proper rest. Now that I am in-house, I get 4.5 weeks off with full pay. It gives you time to become normal. Before, when I was contracted, I was lucky to get the afternoon off. Your body would get so tired and yet the contractor would refuse to recognise that.

Since working in-house, we have all become a lot healthier and our work is safer. Now the teachers that are coming into school are smiling. They say to me 'You guys do such a fantastic job'. It wasn't always like that. It has got this way through pure hard work, a strong Principal who supports the union and good communication. And the Union has been very important in all of that. Without the Union we would not have what we have.

Brett Clements – School Cleaner

Working in-house is great for morale because people are secure in the knowledge that they have a job, and they know where they will be working every day. Every fortnight we get paid the same amount with sick leave and personal leave, 52 weeks a year.

When starting at our High School as in-house cleaners the school was so dirty that it took a week to clean it up to a healthy standard. The reason why it was so dirty: unhappy and unsupervised contract cleaners, with not enough time to clean their area, and no sense of belonging to a team.

I see the Independent Public Schools initiative as privatisation by stealth, and I'm worried that we're about to regress back to contract cleaning times. At some IPS's there is no job security for new employees as they're being put on contract when they come in. I feel that in today's unstable world it is important that people are employed on a permanent basis rather than casual.

As Brett's statement mentions, IPS's are already employing new cleaners on a short-term basis, with some cleaners being asked to renew their contracts to a temporary status. In remote areas such as the Kimberley region of Western Australia, schools already contract out their cleaning services, on the basis that hiring cleaners in these areas are too expensive, despite there being 7.3% unemployment in the region.⁴⁵

Cleaners, like EA's provide an invaluable service within the school system, and they should be properly recognised for it. Award wages and job security make a huge difference to the lives of cleaners and increase their productivity, allowing for cleaner, more hygienic, schools. It is doubtful that teachers and parents ever wish to help with light cleaning at their child's school, as happened in independent public schools in Victoria when they began to contract out their cleaning services.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Data Analysis Australia, "Estimates of Unemployment Statistics by Western Australian State Electoral Divisions," Perth, 2011, p.3

⁴⁶ Gibson, Sally, "Budget Cuts Force Parents To Clean Schools," *Sunday Age*, May 1993.

The threat of contracting services within public schools is a very real one, as there is increased pressure for IPS's to become more business-focused in an effort to compete for top students. It is easy to sell the idea that the money saved through contract cleaning can be used to buy another set of books or a new drinking fountain. Lisa Singh has already witnessed firsthand what this mentality can lead to:

“I heard that they had taken lump sum payments to pay for relief staff, because they thought that they could manage their relief staffing better than the department. But they ran out of money by about term three, so now administration staff are taking relief classes.”

In their quest to achieve ‘efficiency’ and ‘innovation’, school leaders lose sight of their employees. Instead of continuing to wholeheartedly support a move to more autonomous decision-making within schools, United Voice believes the Commission should first consider how much school independence *really* allows schools to be more responsive ‘to the diversity of student needs and the expectations of their local community.’⁴⁷

⁴⁷ Productivity Commission, “Schools Workforce,” p.150

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