

Temp teachers pressured to 'prove themselves' are vulnerable to exploitation

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Credit: Liza Summer from Pexels

Teachers in temporary positions experience poorer job quality and feel they must jump through hoops to outcompete their colleagues and maintain employment, according to a new research publication led by

UNSW Sydney, with co-authors from the University of Sydney, University of Technology Sydney and Curtin University.

The publication, which draws upon a large state-wide survey of members of the NSW Teachers' Federation, reveals teachers on short fixed-term contracts have a similar workload to staff employed permanently. However, they feel they must work harder than permanent teachers to 'prove themselves' and stay employed.

"There's an unspoken pressure on temporary teachers to 'do more' to increase their chance of getting more work," says the lead author from the UNSW School of Education, Dr. Meghan Stacey. "They feel they have to jump through extra hoops or take on extra work just to have their contracts renewed or to be considered for a permanent position."

As one respondent commented: "There is a huge expectation that teachers put their hand up for extra roles ... which adds to the pressure teachers (particularly temp teachers as we do more) feel."

However, the need to go above and beyond to impress was not necessarily felt by those in permanent positions. As one respondent recalled, "two permanent teachers have even stated, 'I don't have to do anything else, I am already permanent.'"

Same work, without security

Temporary employment, a version of fixed-term contract work, is on the rise in teaching, while permanent teaching positions are declining. Today, about 20 percent of NSW [public school teachers](#) are in temporary positions. Most are early-career or new to the profession.

"Temporary teaching work is not like casual work—the hours and demands are considerably higher," Dr. Stacey says. "There's a frustration

because they're essentially doing the same work as permanent teachers, just without any security."

As one respondent said: "Temporary teachers [are] valuable but not deemed worthy of permanent employment" and yet "work just the same as the permanent teachers."

Teachers on temporary contracts also expressed dissatisfaction with the current process for gaining permanency, believing permanent roles are awarded based on perception rather than merit.

Some temporary teachers also reported feeling tension with permanent teaching staff over their employment, while also having to compete with others on temporary contracts in an uneasy one-upmanship to secure a full-time position.

One respondent explained that they felt "being a temporary [teacher](#) is something that is consistently held over my head," causing them to "have to increase my workload to ensure that I am a more desirable employee, and someone they would keep over others."

Others described permanent teachers' "prey[ing]" on temporary teachers by "shift[ing] work" to them and having to "take whatever is handed to you" as "workload rules go out the window."

"They know that their continued employment comes down to impressing those around them, particularly the school principal," Dr. Stacey says.

Temp experience could leave permanent scar

Dr. Stacey says the experiences of temporary teachers could prevent them from progressing further in the field.

"The uncertainty, and that sense of being undervalued, can be quite demoralizing," Dr. Stacey says. "It can also have a scarring effect for job prospects, not only on wages via promotion opportunities, but also professional development opportunities."

The research also reported more men being in permanent employment, with women more likely to be employed on a temporary contract. Only 27 percent of those in temporary jobs were working in that capacity by choice.

"Our data also suggest that women may also stay longer as temporary teachers than men do, with potential implications for future career opportunities and leadership positions in schools."

Dr. Stacey says converting long-serving temporary teachers into permanent positions, in particular, would help better manage workload demands, reduce turnover and promote career progression.

"New teachers working in today's classrooms are tomorrow's leaders, and we must do better to look after them and the future of public education."

More information: Meghan Stacey et al. Teachers, fixed-term contracts and school leadership: toeing the line and jumping through hoops, *Journal of Educational Administration and History* (2021). [DOI: 10.1080/00220620.2021.1906633](https://doi.org/10.1080/00220620.2021.1906633)

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