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State of the Sector Report.

Executive Summary

This report.

Welcome to our third State of the Sector report. This report summarises the results of a survey that was conducted in May and June 2022, and was designed to gather the perspectives of Australian educators about the challenges and opportunities they face in the school workforce.

The results in this report are aggregated at the national level. If you'd like to know more about using our research to support your decision-making at a school, association or system level, please get in touch.

Contact PeopleBench

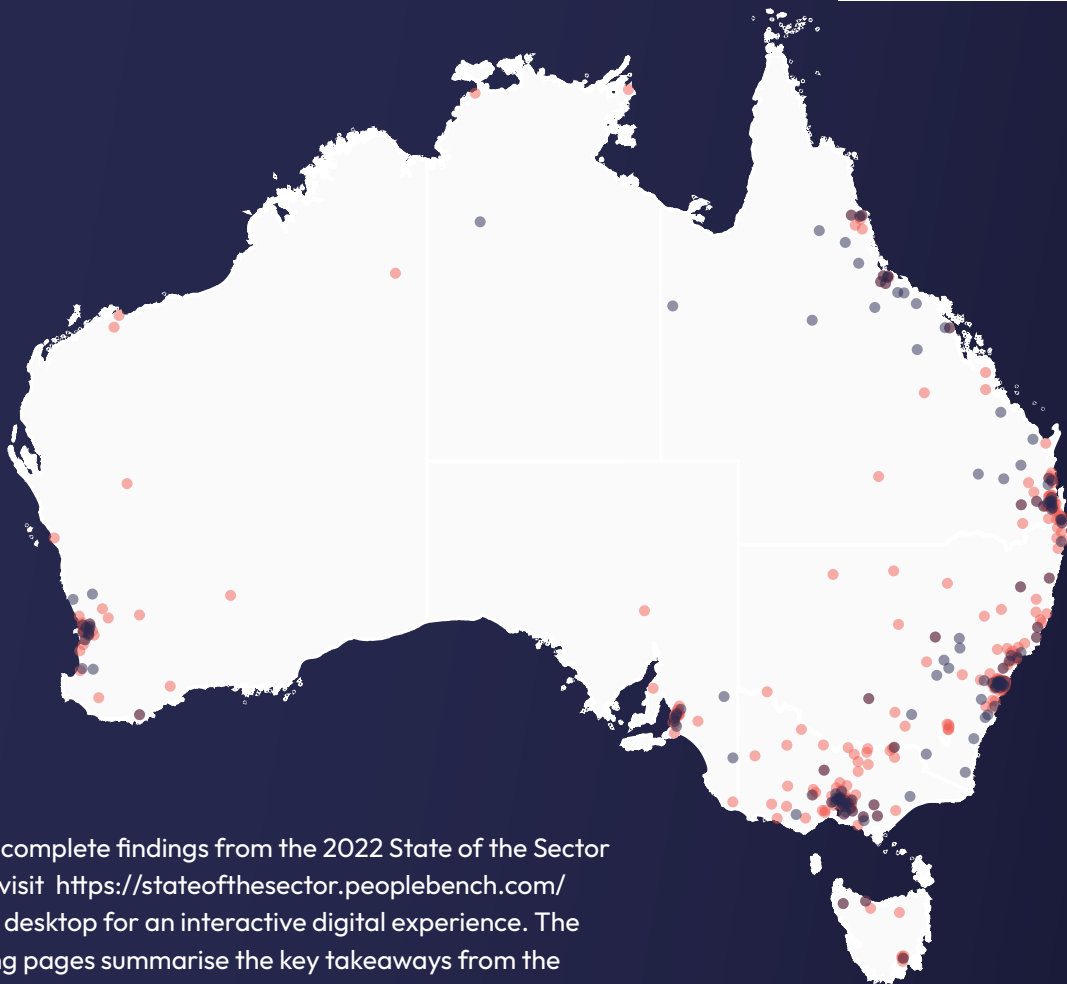
Read more.

Read the interactive digital State of the Sector report online:



● 2021 Respondents

● 2022 Respondents



For the complete findings from the 2022 State of the Sector survey, visit <https://stateofthesector.peoplebench.com/> on your desktop for an interactive digital experience. The following pages summarise the key takeaways from the State of the Sector report.

The sample.

The *State of the Sector* report reflects the responses of
This report reflects the responses of 197 Principals, 92
Other School Leaders, 31 Middle Leaders, 122 Teachers, and
59 Business/HR Managers across Australia.

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Section one:

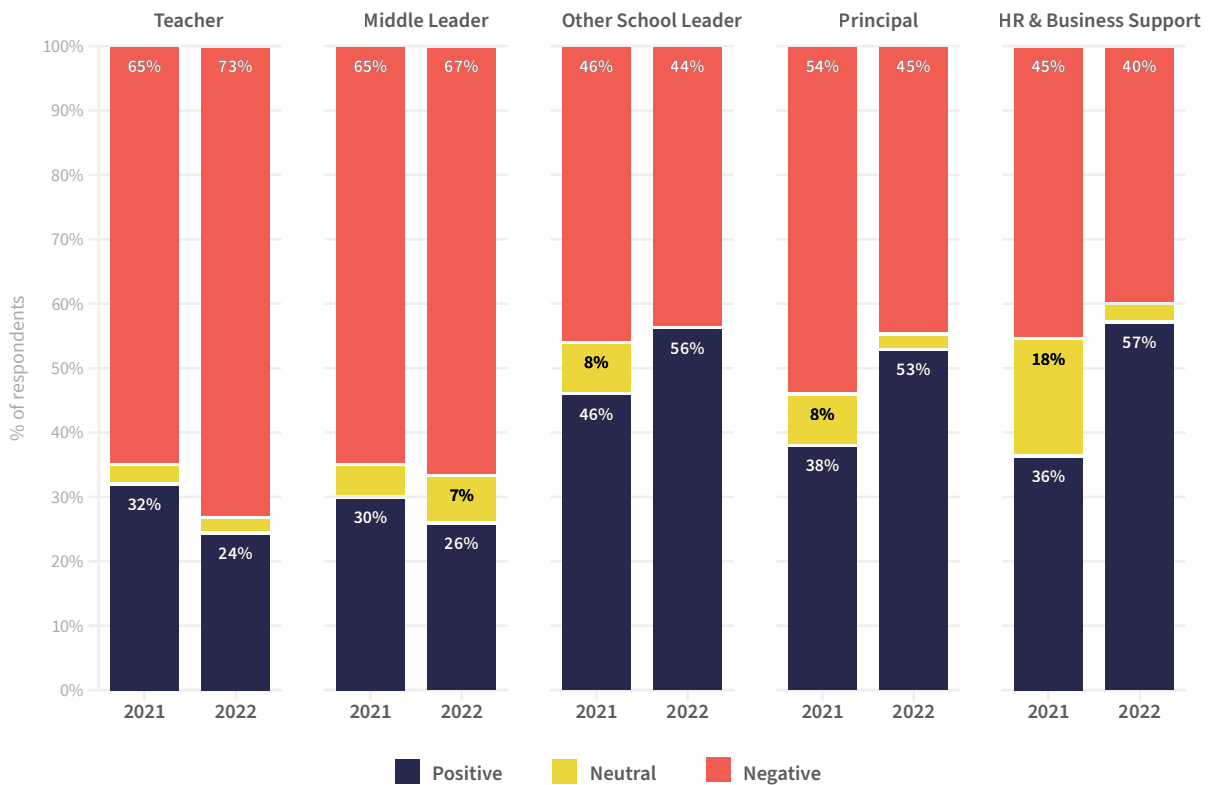
Sector sentiment.

Globally, the Education workforce is in crisis. The supply of qualified teachers, after a long period of decline in many countries, is completely unsustainable for our current—let alone future—needs (See & Gorad, 2020). In 2022, the sector’s drawn-out battle with COVID-19 disruption has compounded staff wellbeing risks that were already critical. In this section, we seek to understand how these circumstances are affecting how leaders and

teachers experience their work now, and how they expect that to shift over the coming years.

Across Teaching and Middle Leadership roles, there has been a decline in positive sentiment, relative to our 2021 survey results; a difficult 12 months seems to have taken a toll on the mindset of those in classrooms.

In one word, how do you feel about a) your role in the school workforce today, and b) your school workforce overall?

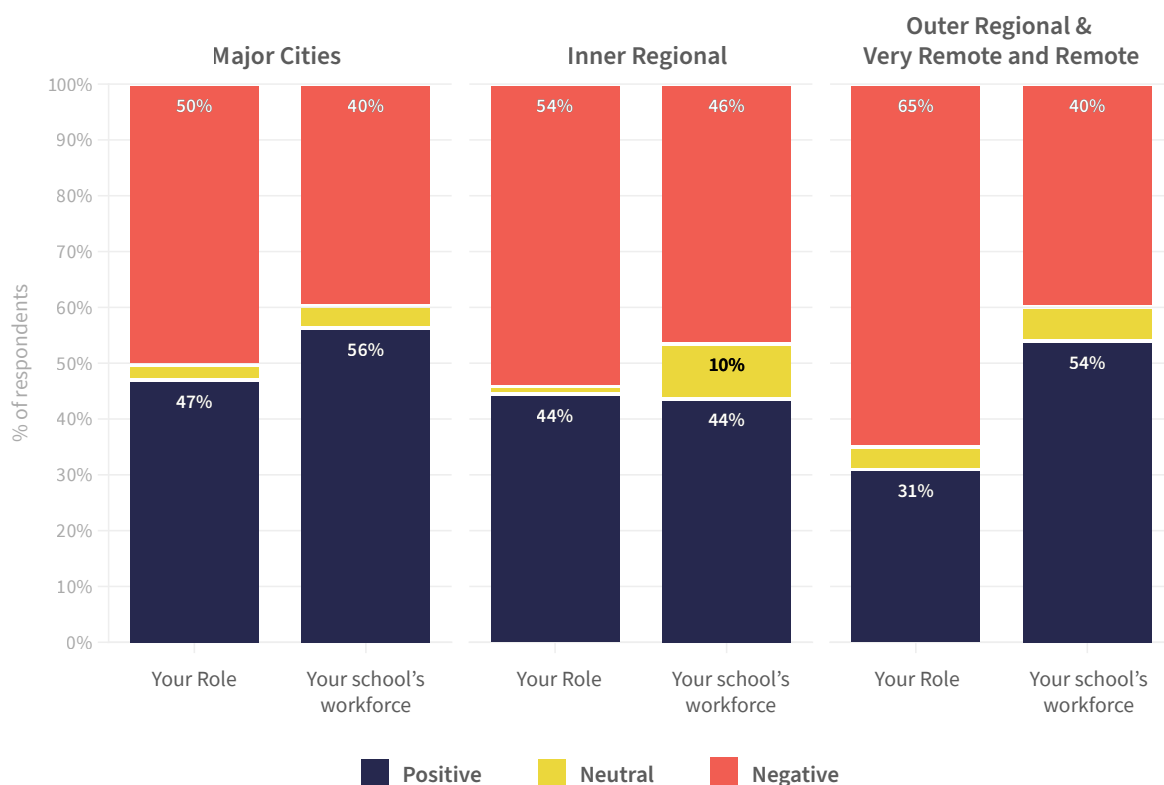


As in previous surveys, results told a tale of two workforces: those whose roles are focused on whole-of-school leadership and advisory work, and those who are focused on delivering teaching and learning.

The difference between these cohorts is stark: Principals and their Senior Leadership colleagues were much more likely to think positively about their roles and the school's workforce overall than those staff in Middle Leader and Teacher roles.

Our data speaks to the challenges of working in geographically-isolated schools: respondents based outside major cities were less likely to describe their role, their school's workforce, or its preparedness to deal with future challenges in optimistic terms. We know from other research that teacher shortages and teachers teaching out of field are already far more prevalent in these areas (Cuervo & Acquaro, 2018; Sharplin, 2014).

In one word, how do you feel about a) your role in the school workforce today, and b) your school workforce overall?



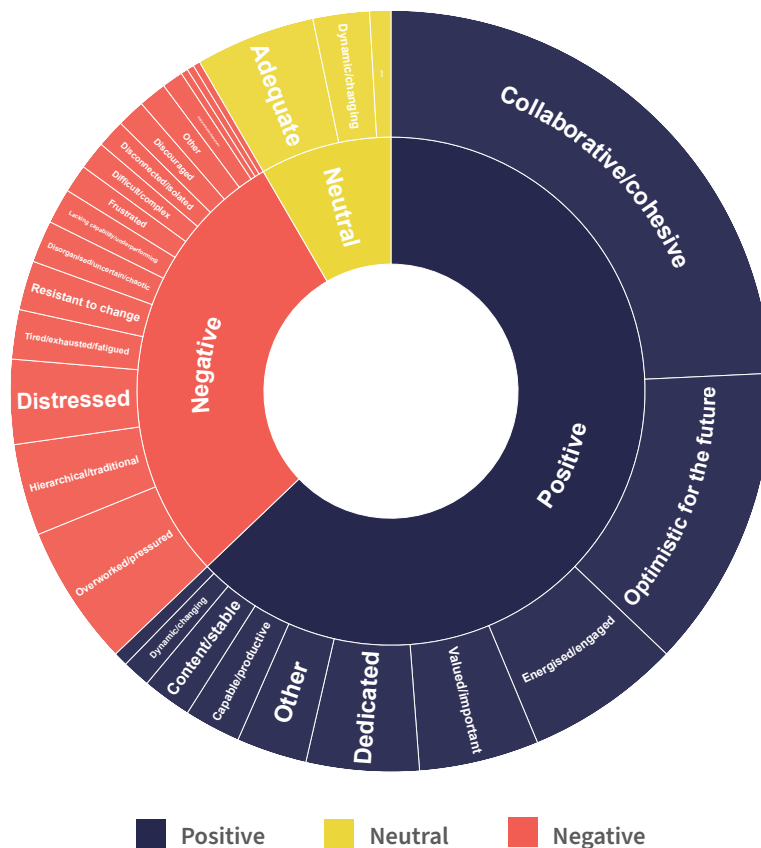
Section two:

Workforce culture.

In many organisations, culture is ethereal: observed, but seldom measured. We struggle to define it, yet we feel its impact daily. In schools, culture is often spoken about as a critical factor in attracting and retaining staff, but until we can articulate what our culture is really like, we'll struggle to make it what we want it to be. This section explores respondents' perceptions of culture in action, and what they'd like to see change in their school's workforce culture.

Despite considerable negative sentiment towards respondents' own roles and the school workforce (per Section 1), perceptions of school workforce culture were more likely to be positive than negative for most cohorts of respondents.

In one word, how would you describe your school's workforce culture overall?



Culture was most often described—somewhat paradoxically—using terms such as collaborative, cohesive, optimistic for the future, energised and engaged.

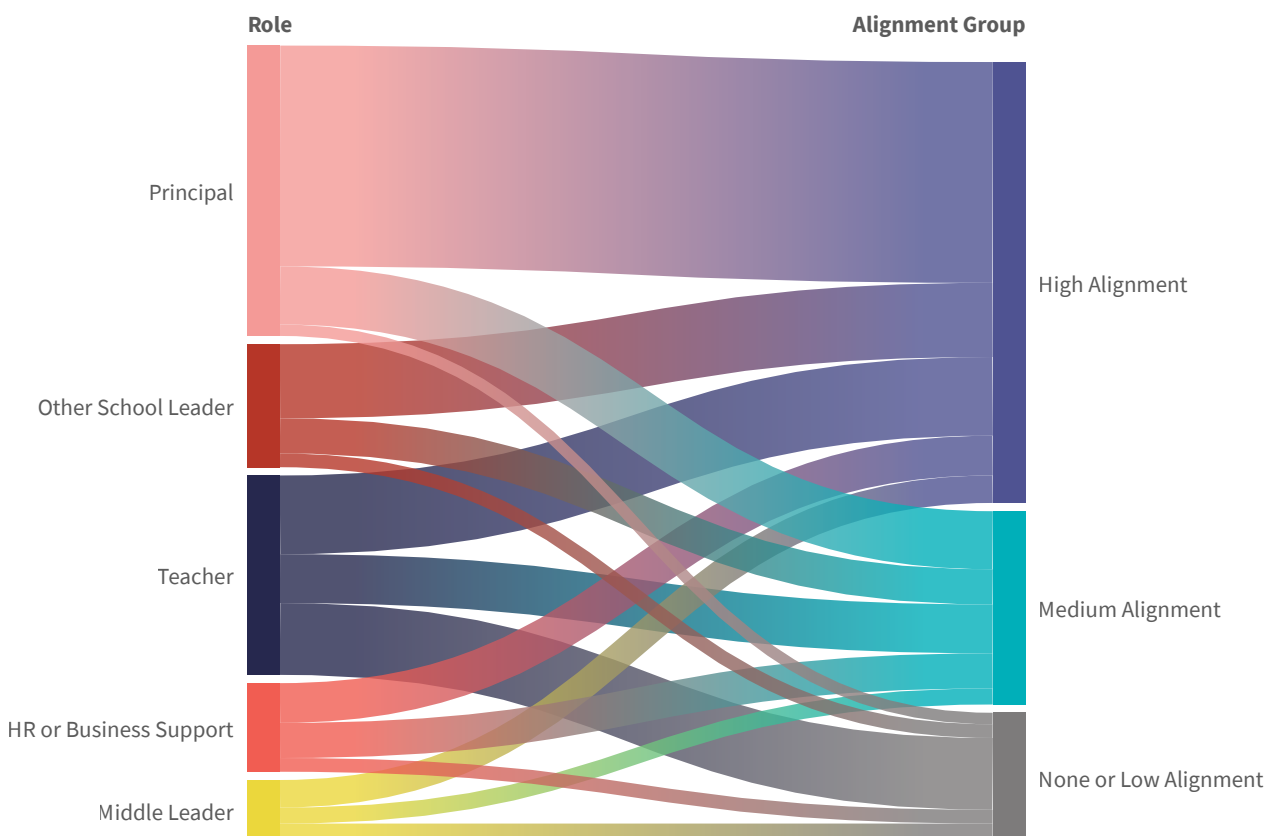
Consistent with these descriptions, respondents' examples of culture in action often referred to staff going 'above and beyond' to serve students, their peers, or the school community, or instances of collaboration and cooperation.

Still, large differences existed between different respondents' perceptions of culture: the more senior the respondent's role, the more likely they were to describe the culture positively

While it was not possible to conduct direct comparisons between leaders and teachers within the same school, our findings may speak to a potential disconnect between some leaders' optimistic ambitions for the school culture and the way culture is truly experienced 'on the ground'.

Ratings of the alignment between the school's culture and the individual employee's values also spoke to this potential disconnect: Teachers were much less likely to report a high degree of alignment. This is a significant risk to school workforces: employees are more likely to leave jobs/careers/locations that don't align with their values or satisfy their desire for purpose; COVID-19 has heightened this trend in some industries.

How well does your school's workforce culture align with your own values?



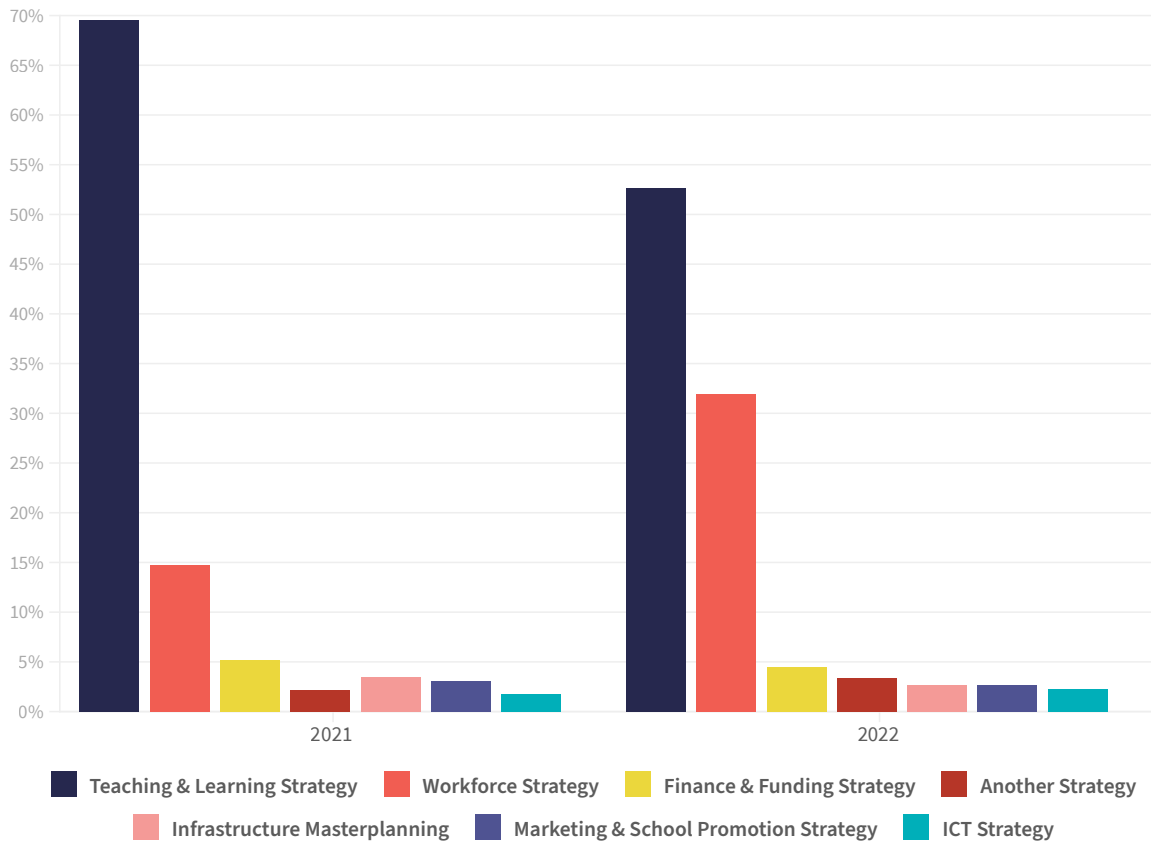
Section three:
Strategic priorities.


Schools are complex, multifaceted enterprises with a diverse array of stakeholders and scope of impact in the community that most private sector companies could only dream of. School leaders are stewards of considerable financial and physical assets; human resources; and the wellbeing and learning of our future generations of citizens. This complexity and scope of impact makes it all the more important for leaders to plan—carefully and deliberately—for their school’s medium- and long-term future. In this section, learn more about how

school leaders use strategic planning to focus their attention and resources.

Consideration of the most important strategic planning process in schools is a two-horse race and the margin is narrowing. Workforce Strategy was considered a distant second to Teaching & Learning Strategy in our 2021 survey, but has gained considerable ground: it was cited as the most important strategy by over a third of leaders in this year’s survey.

Top strategic priorities by sector.





This margin is especially narrow in Combined Years schools and Catholic systemic schools. The margin is greatest in Primary schools and Government schools, where perceived latitude to effect workforce change is likely the lowest. Still, in this year's data, Workforce Strategy has dramatically increased in prominence in these schools.

Section four:

Workforce challenges.

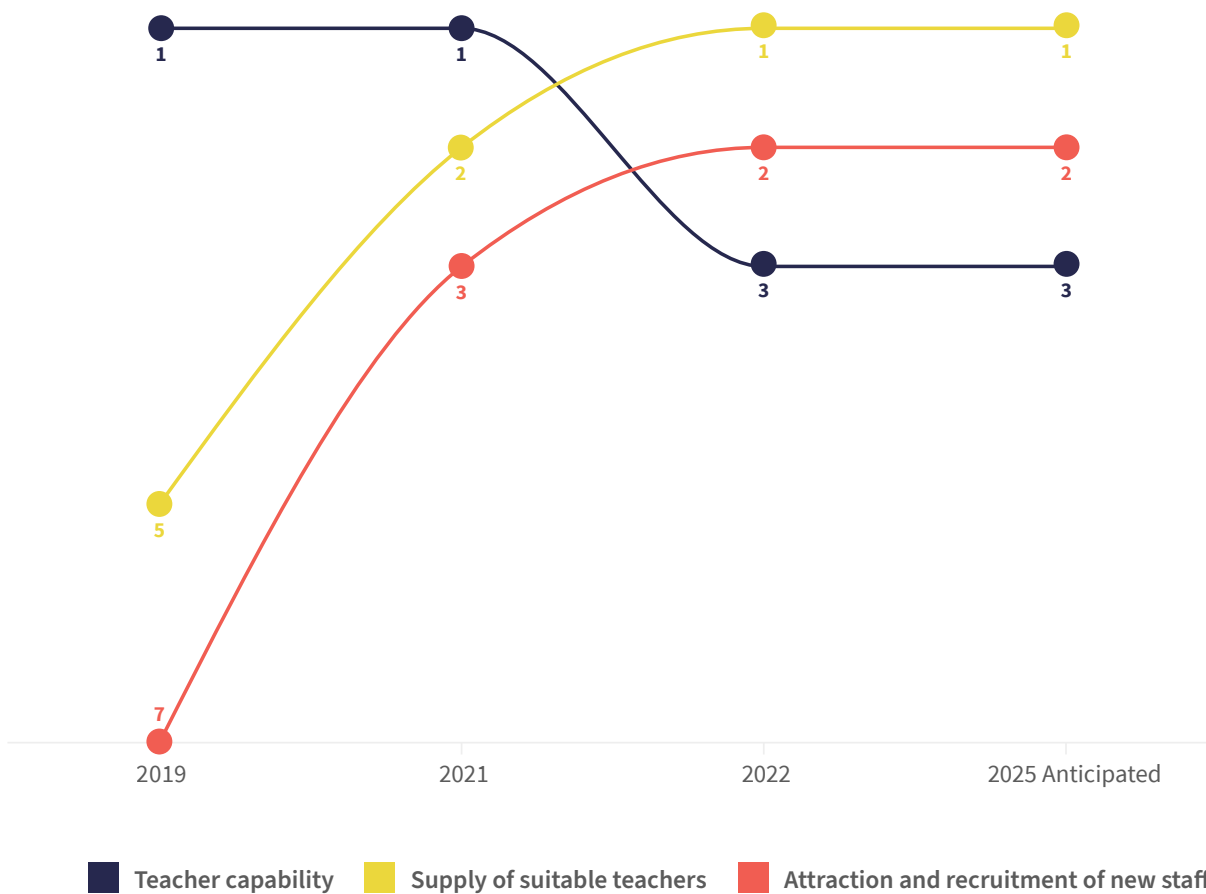
The national conversation about the workforce challenges facing our K/P-12 Education sector has grown louder and more public throughout the COVID-19 period. Indeed, during our lengthy periods of lockdown and remote learning and working, many parents gained a deeper appreciation for the teaching profession and exactly how much work goes into designing and managing learning for Australia's young people. This increased visibility has not translated into widespread change, however, and with the advent of 'living with' COVID-19 nationwide, schools across the country have experienced arguably the most disrupted year of teaching and learning in living memory, as leaders grapple to solve acute illness-induced staffing shortages on short notice, in addition to the chronic teacher shortage gripping most of the globe. This section explores which

challenges are most front-of-mind for educators in 2022, how these have shifted since the inaugural *State of the Sector* survey in 2019, and how they're expected to shift in the future.

The teacher supply and attraction crisis looms large in leaders' minds when asked to reflect on their greatest workforce challenges; these issues have increased in prominence with each successive *State of the Sector* survey since our first in 2019, and they're not expected to improve over the next three years.

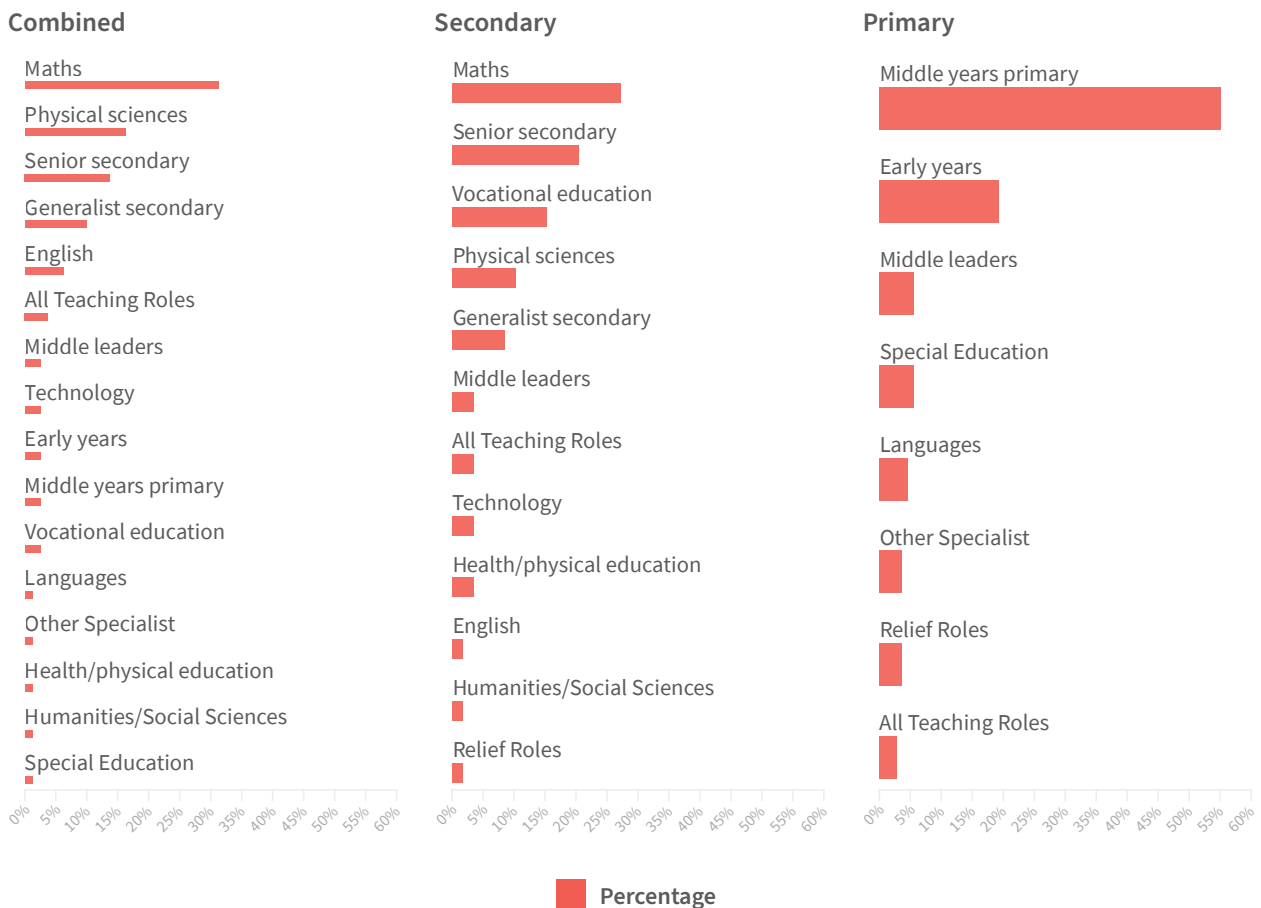
This crisis transcends sector and school type: leaders of all stripes identified these as the top two workforce challenges facing their school today, and expected them to become more prominent challenges in the future.

How well does your school's workforce culture align with your own values?



Specifically, supply of Maths teachers is considered the most acute issue in Combined Years and Secondary schools, while Middle Years teachers posed the greatest supply challenge in Primary schools.

Greatest Teacher supply challenge by school type.



Teaching support roles were consistently identified as the greatest supply challenge among the non-teacher roles in schools.

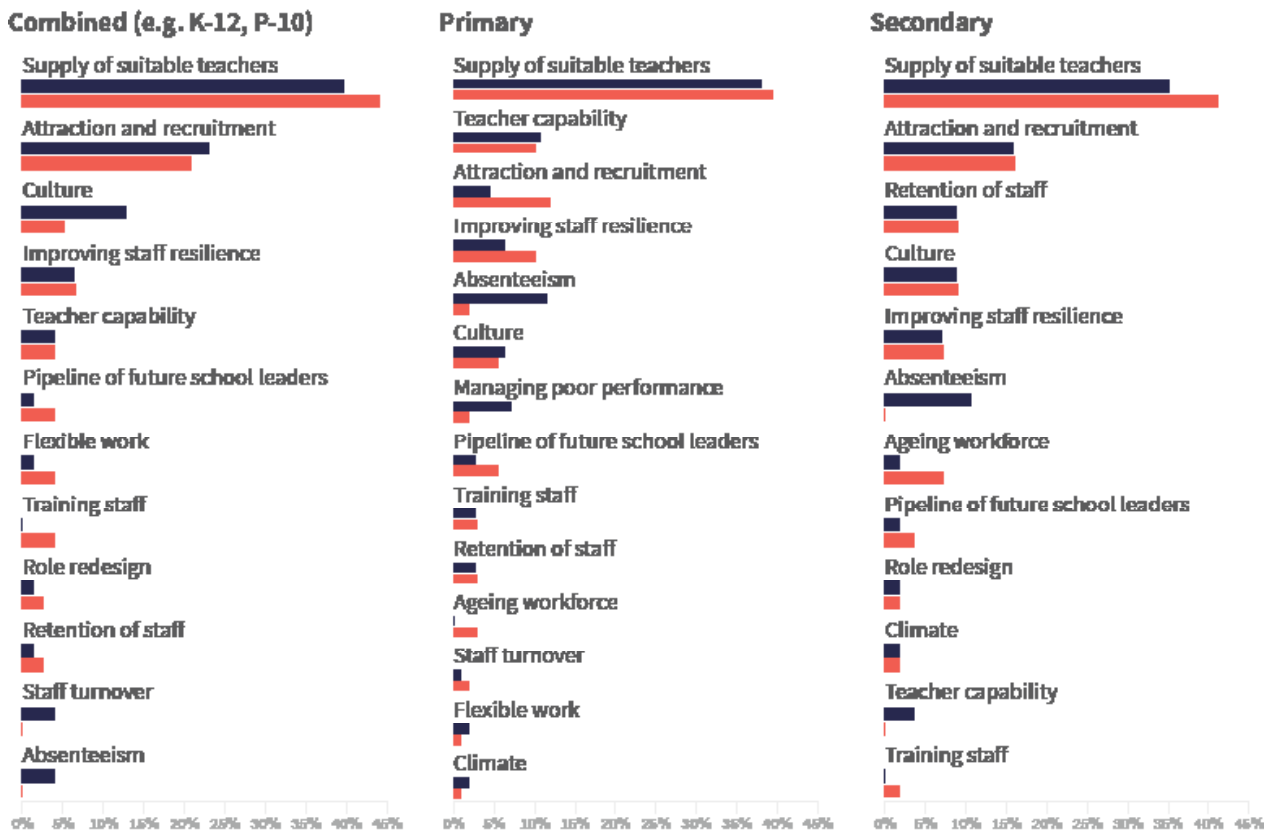
Workforce culture was consistently regarded as a top-5 issue, indicating a level of appreciation for its importance in schools.

Despite very high rates of turnover in some cohorts (e.g., early career teachers quitting the profession), staff retention did not feature prominently among the top challenges for most leaders. This in itself

is a risk: if leaders do not pay sufficient attention to the retention of quality staff, improvements in workforce supply will only yield short-term benefits.

That workforce capability has slipped in the rankings could speak to a related risk: when so much attention is dedicated to finding the next recruit, leaders may lose focus on investing in the development of current staff. Meaningfully building capability can improve the quality of student outcomes, which in turn makes it easier to attract staff in the future.

Greatest workforce challenges by school type*.



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*Categories with the lowest response are not shown on the chart.

Section five:

The HR function in schools.

While still maturing and lagging other sectors, Human Resources (HR) in the Education sector has been aided in many ways by the public attention on workforce issues in schools throughout the pandemic era. As the HR function in education matures there is scope for HR to become more strategic rather than operational. Consistent with growing public attention, more leaders in the sector are shifting their focus to the longer-term and bigger-picture future of the school workforce, and planning for the scenarios that may unfold in this uncertain future. This section addresses how the HR function in schools has kept pace with this shift, exploring the perceived strengths and gaps in capability and capacity to do this important work in schools.

Compared to the 2021 survey, this year's results saw a significant reshuffling of perceived strengths in schools' HR functions, though these strengths were modest across the board, suggesting there is still plenty of room for growth in this relatively nascent function.

Workplace Health & Safety was regarded as the top strength in the HR function across all school types and sectors; this is unsurprising given operational challenges of the 'living with COVID' era in Australian schools.

The strength of school HR functions.



Managing employee/industrial relations, staff retention, and workplace climate and culture were often among the top five strengths.

Training and developing staff, previously rated second-strongest in 2021, was only the seventh-

highest rated strength this year. This is a particular concern given the capability of the workforce was identified as a significant challenge in the previous section.

Section six:

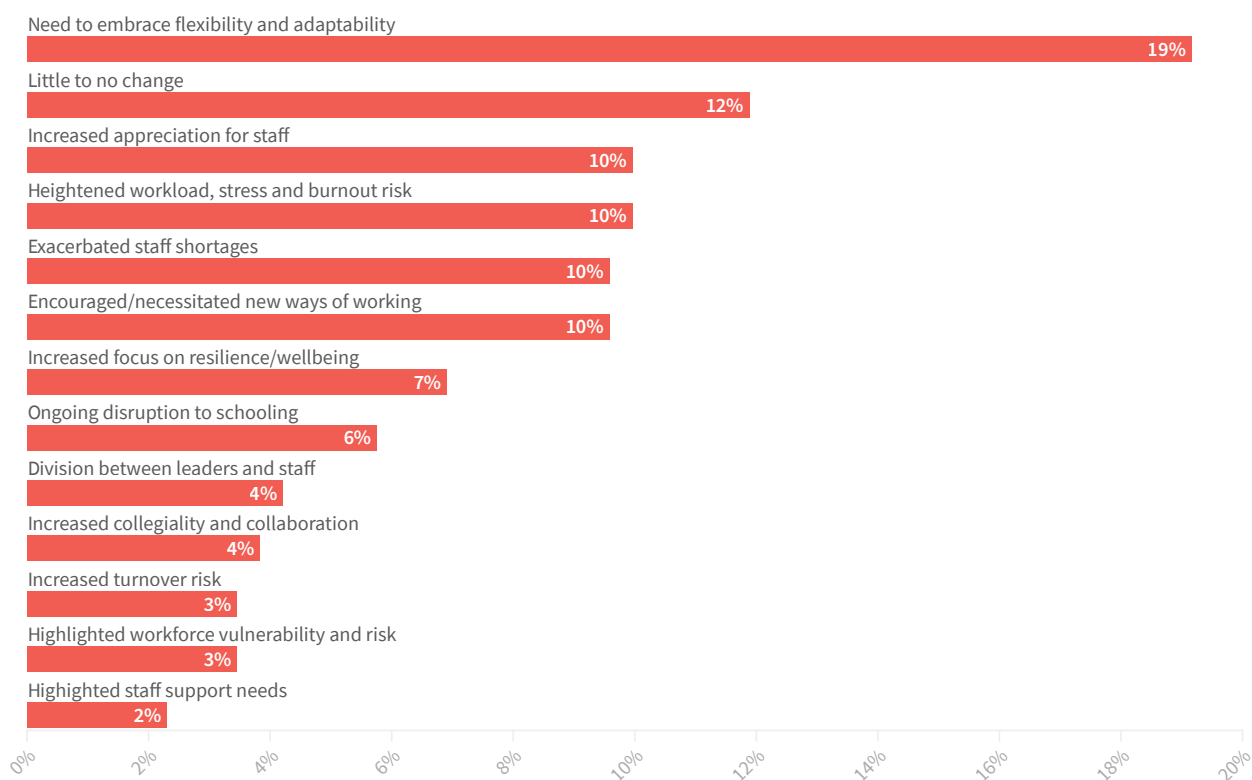
Looking to the future.

As the COVID-19 pandemic and the government and public response to it has shifted, so has its impact on the staffing of schools. In the early stages of the pandemic, operational disruption came in the form of local, state, and national lockdowns. In 2022, with lockdowns in the rearview mirror, schools now grapple with weeklong staff absences, sometimes in significant numbers, at short notice, as COVID-19 spreads freely through communities across the country. This year has seen a national equalising of the COVID-19 experience in schools. While some jurisdictions experienced the disruption of protracted lockdowns in 2021, schools in all states and territories are now faced with the

same COVID-induced operational and strategic challenges. It has not been easy; agility and rapid re-prioritisation are now non-negotiable skills for leaders and employees alike. What does the future of the school workforce look like? In this section we explore the factors most likely to shape this future—for better or worse.

Respondents' reflections on how their thinking about the school workforce has changed due to COVID-19 consistently referenced a shift to more flexible and adaptable approaches to work, at both the individual and school-wide levels.

How has COVID-19 led you to think differently about the school workforce?



This flexibility factor aside, responses showed plenty of variability: many Principals reported an increased appreciation for the efforts of their staff, while Teachers identified the heightened phenomena of growing workloads, stress, and burnout risks in many of their responses.

Differences of perspective between role types were also apparent when respondents were asked to identify the greatest positive and negative influences on the future of the school workforce.

Principals were most concerned about the negative implications of workforce supply over the next three years, while Teachers were most concerned about the impact of their working conditions, including workload, compensation, and recognition (Price & Weatherby, 2018).

For each of the potential negative influences on the workforce, however, our data also showed great opportunity; for example, effectively addressing working conditions was Teachers' most commonly-cited potential positive influence on the workforce.

Section seven:

What now for leaders?

Most of the challenges facing the Education sector right now are not new: they've been front-of-mind for some time. Our findings in this year's *State of the Sector*, however, suggest that even by these standards the past 12 months have been especially tough.

These challenges are urgent and global. It's time to get serious, creative, and focused on action.

All signs point to doing more work with fewer staff.

The supply of teachers is dwindling, we simply don't have enough of this valuable resource. In 2016, UNESCO predicted a 69M teacher shortfall against the needs of K/P-12 students globally by 2030.

To put this in context, prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the US Economic Policy Institute had predicted a 400,000 teacher shortfall across America by 2024. Today, in 2022, the impact of the pandemic has the current estimate at 1M teachers short across the USA alone. UNESCO's 2016 prediction was conservative at best and made with no knowledge of the impending impact of COVID-19.

In Australia, each State and Territory is experiencing its own symptoms of the international teaching supply crunch. It has been felt first and hardest in areas that are geographically and socio-economically disadvantaged, and it is placing continuing stress and strain on the incredible staff we are fortunate enough to have in our schools today.

Enrolment of young people into Initial Teacher Education courses and postgraduate Teacher Education courses is at an all time low (and declining), media sentiment about teaching is consistently and persistently negative. Recruiting harder will not produce more teachers.

No wonder, then, that this year's *State of the Sector* identified the "Supply of Suitable Teachers" followed by "Attraction and recruitment of new staff" as the top two workforce challenges facing Education leaders. They are anticipated to continue as the top challenges over the next three years.

Today, States and systems are competing against one another on location incentives, branding, and recruitment campaigns, only to find a continuing "hole in the bucket" when it comes to retaining the precious resources they've been able to attract. Teachers at all career stages are leaving.

How do you do more with less? Do it differently.

This year's survey highlights a key message for Education sector leaders—supply and attraction challenges exist for myriad reasons, including the fact that we have failed to design jobs and workplaces that people want to be in. This has to change, now.

As we contemplate the strengths of schools—in particular their ability to imagine what students of the future might need in order to thrive in an increasingly ambiguous, tech-enabled, possibility-filled world—we have somehow neglected to adopt the organisational processes used by other sectors to make school workplaces exciting and possibility-filled places to turn up to every day.

Service model redesign, organisational redesign, role redesign (including rethinking the role of Teacher), and process redesign are not things that system and school leaders have typically developed the lexicon or processes to do given their expertise is in education. Reluctance to explore or adopt these processes is evident sector-wide.

In the meantime, other sectors have focused on maturing strategy, redesign, and transformational change processes and leadership capability in each of these areas—and have become an attractive alternative employment option for the scarce humans who might otherwise have become our teachers of the future as a result. School

and System leaders can learn from and employ expertise from other sectors to make positive workforce changes for the future (Cameron & Grootenboer, 2018).

Educators in schools have been clear (in this survey and elsewhere): they want less administration; more teaching time; more trust and autonomy; more flexibility (Buchanan, 2020b; Price & Weatherby, 2018).

Governing bodies (Departments, Diocesan Offices, and Boards) have also been clear: they want schools to provide more visibility; carry less risk; provide greater accountability; and more demonstrable impact.

Both sets of expectations are possible concurrently, but new processes and skills will be required.

This year's *State of the Sector* highlights that teacher role design is now out of step with other sectors and is antiquated as a contemporary career choice. Existing research tells us that the most successful school systems in the world invest in the future (Schleicher, 2018). If we are to turn the supply or retention crises around, school and system leaders will need to get serious about redesigning the way schooling gets done, and what the role of Teacher will look like in the future (Zhao & Watterson, 2021).

People want positive, meaningful experiences of work. When we don't provide these experiences, they leave.

Results from this year's survey show that only one in four Teachers and Middle Leaders were positive about their role in the school workforce today, decreasing from one in three in 2021. When we provide people with an experience of work that leaves them feeling 'Tired/Exhausted/Fatigued', 'Overworked/Pressured', 'Distressed', 'Discouraged', 'Undervalued/Unimportant', we know that experience needs overhauling.

We know from existing research that effective HR practices can support retention (Van Buren, Greenwood & Sheehan 2011). We also know from credible educational research that teacher turnover negatively impacts student outcomes (Darling-Hammond, 2010).

Think of the sectors that now employ the adults who might otherwise have become (or remained) teachers. Many of these sectors have deliberately—not by accident—built a compelling Employee Value Proposition to create rewarding jobs and enjoyable workplaces.

Where others have made progress in this area, it's involved considerable investment (of both finances and time) and plenty of change management work. It's been hard, but dealing with the consequences of failing to act—as we've seen in this year's survey—is harder.

For Education to catch up to these alternative sectors of employment would mean thinking critically about the whole hire-to-retire lifecycle of employees in schools, including:

- How we find, recruit and on-board employees
- How we provide meaningful career progression and inspire employees to learn and grow throughout
- How we support their wellbeing
- How we create positive and engaging workplace cultures
- How we manage poor staff conduct and performance and consequent impact on others
- How we provide respectful and flexible work arrangements that reflect the realities of life outside school.

There are no silver bullets here. Each of these elements will be critical to building schools that enjoy a sustainable supply of staff—and a sustainable capacity to deliver high quality educational experiences.

Hope lies in the opportunities we've not yet taken.

For each of the challenges the Education sector is facing, there are at least a handful of potential solutions leaders have yet to try at scale (for example, the four-day school week; Fay, 2019). As a sector, there is still much we can learn from what's been effective in other industries, including those doing similarly complex, human centred and high-stakes work such as those in Health & Community Services.

The fact that in this year's survey over a third of leaders identified Workforce Strategy—an almost unheard-of concept in the sector just a few years ago—as the most important strategy in their school is evidence that there is significant appetite for change. This, in itself, is cause for hope. Translating this appetite into widespread uptake of Workforce Strategy as a process in schools will be a further significant step in the right direction.

Responding to complex problems requires a willingness to experiment with potential solutions; evidence to inform which solutions will work sustainably; and courage to admit when a solution is not the right one, pivot the approach, and move on.

Workforce Strategy is the glue that binds these elements. When leaders have their own strategy—unique to their context—to make their school a fantastic place to work from an employee experience perspective, which gives leaders the capacity to set goals, allocate budgets and effort, and experiment to find that works in a controlled way.

There is hope, too, in the fact that those who will shape the future of school workforces—Principals, Other Senior Leaders, and HR/Business professionals—are optimistic about their roles, their workforce, and its culture. In some cohorts, this has even increased since our previous survey, in spite of the difficult environment we've discussed.

The sustainability of school workforces will depend on how well these leaders can translate this optimism into action that makes a meaningful difference to those in classrooms.

In this context, leaders are called to:

- Know their workforce. Use data (in the Sector we have plenty of it!) to understand, monitor, and manage workforce risks. Ask staff about their wellbeing and their experience of work and what changes would make a meaningful difference.
- Rethink how learning can be delivered differently and plan for the likely scenarios we'll encounter (e.g., using fewer teachers and/or fewer specialised teachers). Consider what each of these scenarios will mean for the types of roles schools will need and the mix of these roles.
- Create an environment in which the culture and wellbeing of your workforce are working towards your goals, not against them. This starts with measuring these factors to establish a clear baseline against which to measure change and progress.

- Invest now in developing a workforce strategy for the future of the workforce that aligns with these likely scenarios, identifies the school's greatest workforce priorities, and plots a course of action to execute these priorities.
- Get curious and analytical about the design of work. Teaching work is diverse and involves a broad mix of activities; consider which of these activities can be performed by non-specialist or non-teaching roles. Identify opportunities to reduce workload by using efficient processes, technology, and automation to better manage repetitive, standardisable chunks of work.
- Get comfortable with innovation. Acknowledge that even within the constraints we currently have, there is still enormous scope to try new approaches to work in schools. Look outside the sector to learn what has succeeded elsewhere.
- Develop a practice of continuous experimentation. Use data to identify opportunities to do things differently and inform hypotheses about the likely best approach. Trial new initiatives, measure and evaluate progress, learn, adapt, and iterate.
- Build their knowledge of contemporary workforce development practices and share this knowledge with their peers and aspiring leaders. The school leaders of the future should have a strong understanding of what it means to lead a workforce before they ascend to these roles.
- Find opportunities to collaborate, rather than compete for talent. This will mean building partnerships with tertiary education providers, the private sector, and other schools.

About PeopleBench.

PeopleBench is an Education sector workforce improvement company. We build software tools and provide advisory services and research to help Education leaders make schools great places to work, so they can be great places to learn. The State of the Sector project forms part of our suite of research initiatives into what makes an effective and impactful school workforce.

We want to understand how leaders and policy-makers in the sector can use data to make smarter workforce decisions and build better school workforces. If you're interested in learning more about us or joining us on this quest, please visit:

[PeopleBench](#)




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Talk to PeopleBench today.

PeopleBench exists to help leaders in the Education sector proactively address the challenges facing their workforces. Talk to us about how to make your school a great place to work, so it can be an even greater place to learn.



[To discuss the findings in this report, or if you have questions, book a time to talk with us.](#)

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