

2018-19

State of the Sector

REPORT

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Schools across Australia face an enormous opportunity right now: to harness the power of information and better understand how the shape of their workforces influence outcomes for today's learners.

This report paints a national, multi-sector landscape of Principal insights to help education leaders everywhere access an evidence base to inform their ongoing improvement — ultimately helping to maximise their impact in the communities they serve.

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Executive Summary.

This report summarises the results of a nation-wide survey of Australian school principals.

It is intended to capture their perspectives on the greatest challenges and opportunities which come with leading a school workforce.

A total of 155 principals responded to the survey, a relatively small yet representative sample of the national principal population in terms of: geographic distribution; the proportion of systemic and independent schools; and the proportion of primary, secondary and combined (e.g. K-12) schools.

Participants were asked a range of questions in the areas outlined below. Many of the questions sought principals' reflections on their school workforce both now, and how they anticipated the workforce to be in five years' time.

PRINCIPAL SENTIMENT

We asked principals how they felt about leading their school's workforce, and the greatest challenges which came with this leadership role.

- Principals in our sample reported overwhelmingly optimistic sentiments, though this is expected to decrease slightly over the next five years, particularly in regional and remote areas.
- Managing student and staff wellbeing; leading pedagogical changes; and managing parent relationships were front-of-mind when principals thought about their greatest leadership issues now, and they are expected to remain a challenge in five years' time.

- Teacher capability and improving staff resilience are the top workforce challenges facing principals today and are expected to remain major challenges in five years. principals are also expecting that challenges to do with attracting and retaining new staff and the supply of suitable new teachers will become more prevalent in five years' time.

WORKFORCE DIVERSITY

We asked principals for their thoughts about the diversity of their school workforce on dimensions such as cultural/ethnic background, gender mix and professional diversity (i.e. bringing non-education experience to the school setting).

- While a majority of principals note the importance of workforce diversity across several different dimensions, this is not well-reflected in the make-up of the current workforce. This represents an area of potential focus for principals as they plan the future of their school.

PERFORMANCE & PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

We asked Principals about how they typically measured the performance of their school workforce and how they went about developing staff capability and addressing gaps.

- Presented with a range of performance measurement methods, principals most commonly reported using formal qualitative feedback. They also considered it the most effective method.

- Ad-hoc feedback was the second most commonly-used method despite being considered the least effective.
- A large majority of respondents spent less than 20% of their staffing budget on professional development, and the bulk of these spent less than 10%.
- In-service sessions were almost ubiquitous as a method of professional development, though peer supervision, formal training outside school and conferences were also very widely used. Of these methods, principals were least confident in the effectiveness of conferences as a means of professional development.
- When asked about their workforce's single greatest capability gap, principals' responses were mixed. Pedagogy and lesson design was the most commonly cited current gap, though it was expected to be overtaken by managing relationships with parents, technological skills, and leadership and management over the next five years.

THE TALENT PIPELINE

We asked principals about the quantity and quality of candidates available in the market for teaching roles, and the factors which would have the greatest impact on their workforce in the future.

- Both the quantity and quality of primary teachers in the market was generally considered sufficient to meet schools' needs.

- In secondary teaching areas, respondents had least concern about the quantity and quality of available teachers in the areas of English, HPE, Humanities/Social Sciences and Year 7-10.
- Respondents had most concern about the quality and quantity of Maths and Physical Science teachers, VET teachers and senior secondary teachers.
- Of a list of factors expected to affect the future of the school workforce, respondents identified teacher capability as having the likely greatest impact.

WHAT'S NEXT

Perhaps the most important workforce question of all is: What impact do the characteristics of the school workforce have on outcomes for students? We at PeopleBench find that this question has been overlooked in much of the Education sector research to date, and it is our mission to conduct research and create tools for school leaders which help address this gap.

Our upcoming workforce analytics solution will provide principals and school system leaders with data analytics and dashboard capabilities, so schools don't need to develop these on their own.

If you'd like to be a part of this solution, we'd love to hear from you. Contact us at hello@peoplebench.com.au to discuss how you can join our community of like-minded schools engaged in collaborative practice around workforce analytics, so that lessons learned will benefit students everywhere.



Welcome.

Welcome to the inaugural PeopleBench State of the Sector (SoS) Summary Report.

Welcome to the inaugural PeopleBench State of the Sector (SoS) Summary Report. This report summarises the results of a survey which was conducted between December 2018 and February 2019 and was designed to gather the perspectives of Australian principals about the challenges and opportunities they face in leading a school workforce.

The results in this Summary Report are presented largely in aggregate; if you'd like to learn about our results in more detail, including a breakdown by school system affiliation and geography, please contact us via www.peoplebench.com.au.

Who are PeopleBench?

PeopleBench is an education workforce analytics and research company.

The SoS project forms part of our broader suite of research initiatives into what makes an effective and impactful school workforce.

We work in close collaboration with education sector partners through a Community of Practice. Together, we are interested to understand:

- What are the features of a contemporary K/P-12 School workforce which most significantly impact the outcomes we achieve for, and with, the students in our classrooms every year?
- How can system and school leaders better manage their school workforces to do their very best in each of the areas we know to be most important?
- What are the key strategic and operational issues that school leaders face when it comes to leading their school workforces?

Throughout 2017 and 2018, 59 schools, comprising 22 000 students and 3 800 staff members, participated in a pilot project which explored these questions, and others, to start to better understand the relationships between school workforce factors and outcomes for students.

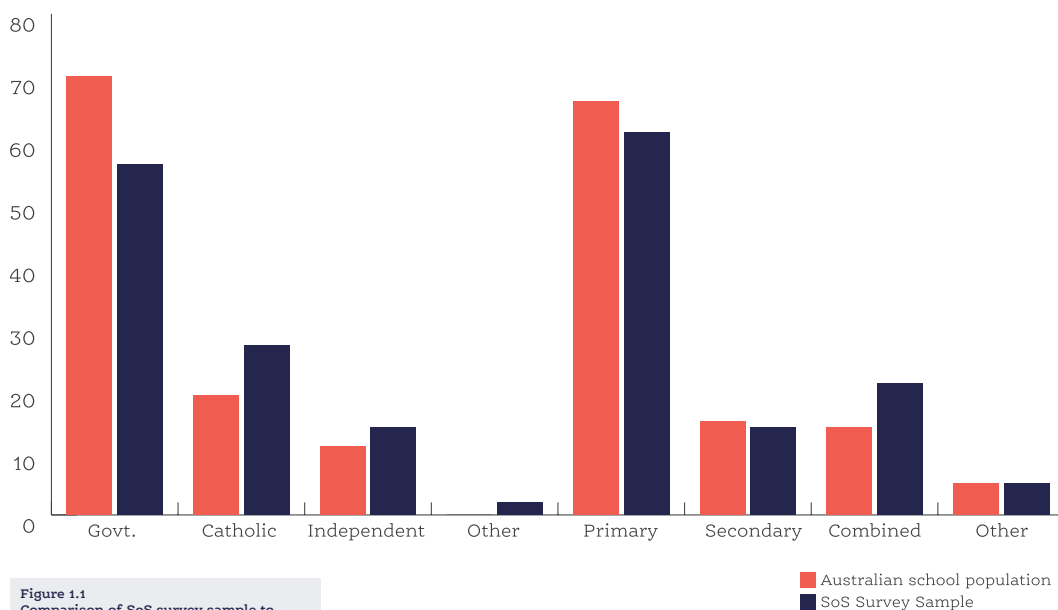
Throughout 2019, we will be inviting more schools to join us on this journey of exploration as we expand our dataset and begin to use our insights together to create a suite of online tools which help principals make the best possible workforce decisions on the basis of strong evidence, for the betterment of student outcomes.

SECTION 1

Survey Sample

A total of 155 principals responded to the survey.

While this represents a small portion of the national principal population (for example, there were 9,444 schools at the time of the Australian Curriculum, Assessment & Reporting Authority's 2017 review¹), it is representative of the population in terms of the split of systemic and independent schools (excepting a slight under-representation in the Government education systems), and primary, secondary and combined (e.g. K-12) schools, as shown in the graphs below.



Similarly, the sample is also representative of the population in terms of its spread across the Australian states and territories, as per the following graph, with the sole exception being a slight under-representation in New South Wales.

¹ACARA National Report on Schooling in Australia 2017

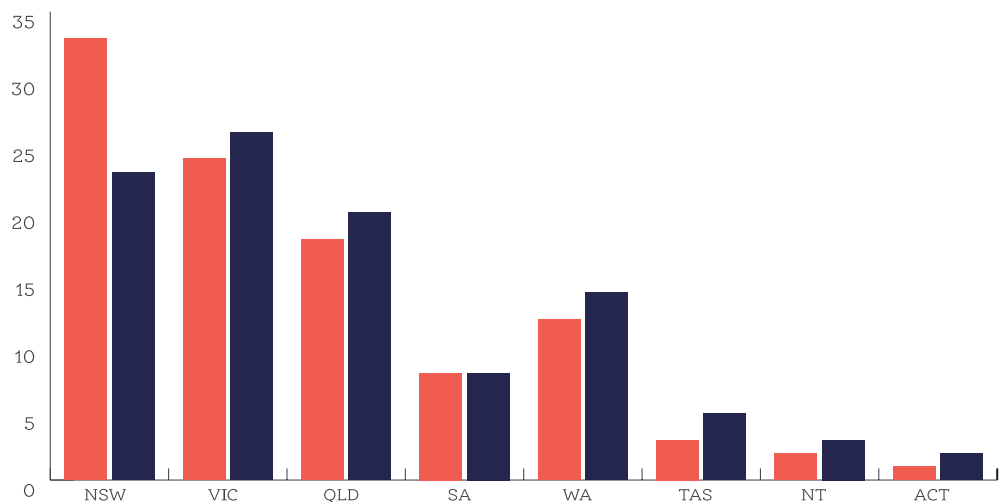


Figure 1.2
Sample Breakdown by State

■ Australian school population
■ SoS Survey Sample

While it was not possible to source information about the geographic breakdown of Australia's population of schools beyond the state level, by referencing Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) geographic classification data we are able to use the national student population as a proxy. The table overleaf presents the distribution of respondents according to the ABS framework. Relative to the distribution of students across the country, more of our respondents were based outside the major cities.

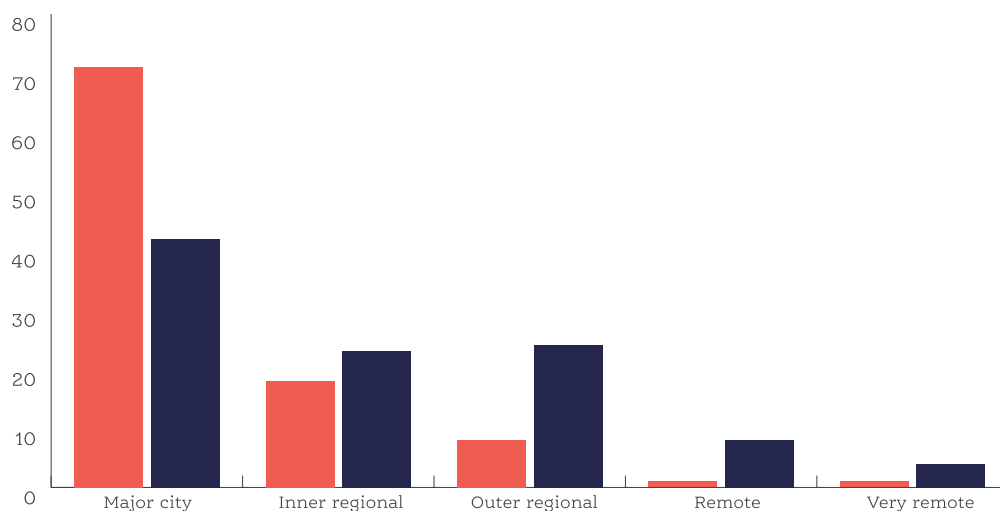
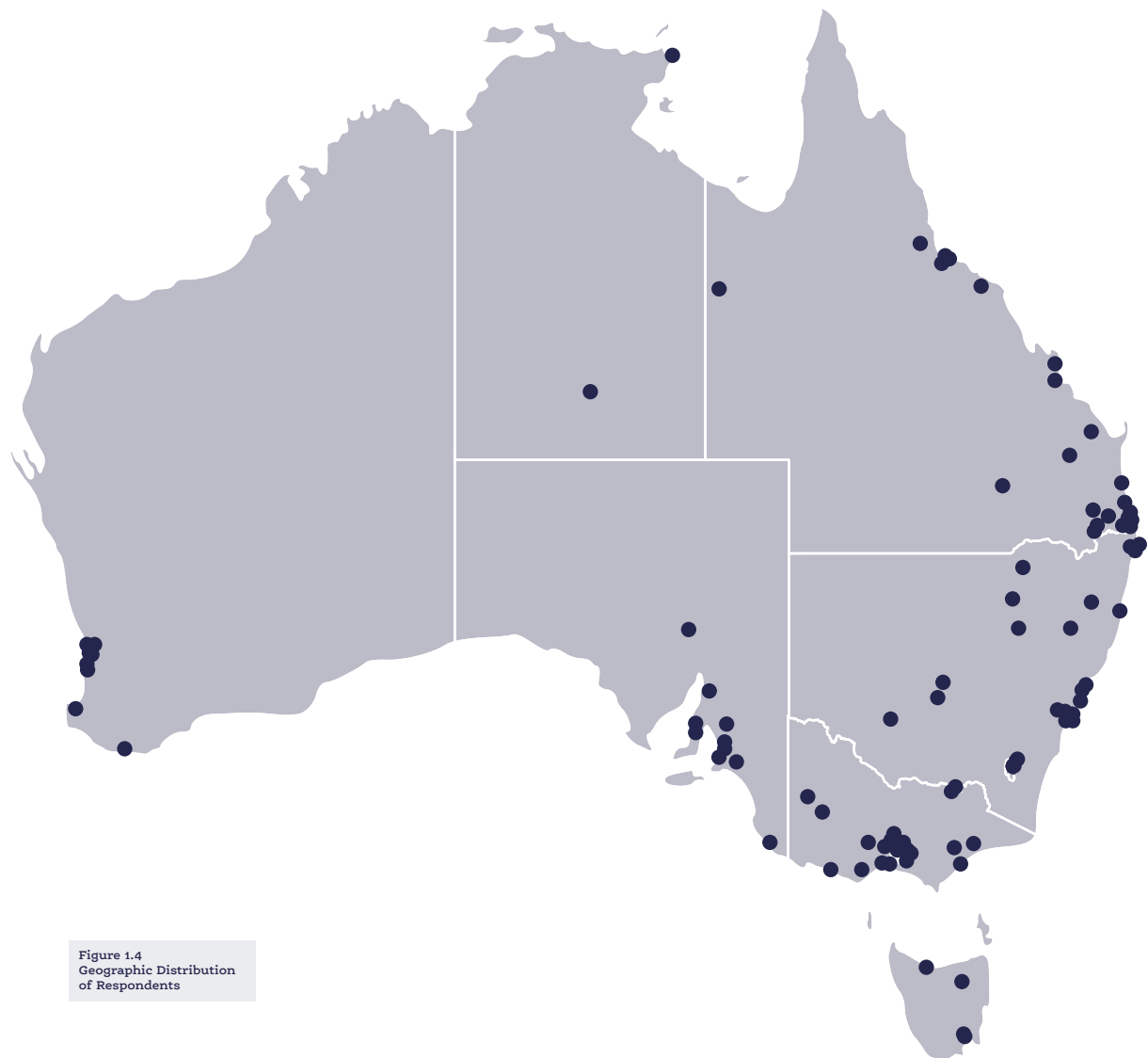


Figure 1.3
Sample Breakdown by
Geographic Classification

■ Australian school population²
■ SoS Survey Sample

*ABS Schools Australia Report 2018

The figure below illustrates the broad geographic distribution of participants across the continent. As the figure shows, respondents to the survey lead schools from Hobart in the south to Arnhem Land in the north, west to Busselton and east to Byron Bay.



Survey respondents ranged broadly in terms of their experience in the role, and their schools ranged broadly in size and ICSEA profile, as shown in the tables below.

Principal Tenure	Min.	Max.	Mean	SD
Tenure in Schools (years)	4	48	28.1	10.7
Tenure in Principalship (years)	1	36	10.8	10.1

Figure 1.5
Sample Composition:
Principal Tenure

School characteristic	Min.	Max.	Mean	SD
School population	8	2500	487.2	481.9
Staff headcount	2	650	63.7	74.4
ICSEA score	444	1617	1002.6	117.1

Figure 1.6
Sample Composition:
School Characteristics



SECTION 2

Principal Sentiment

Principal Confidence Index.

Principalship is a tough gig. A growing body of research — for instance, the Australian Principal Health and Wellbeing Survey³ — speaks unambiguously to the emotional and personal challenges which come with the role. In spite of this, the principals in our sample reported overwhelmingly optimistic attitudes when we asked about their levels of hope, confidence and preparedness to lead their school's workforce, as the following charts illustrate.

Only a handful of principals shared comments regarding their current sentiments. Among these, the most common themes were:

- Challenges with understaffing of schools
- The restrictions placed upon school decision making by system requirements and Industrial Relations obligations or processes
- The frequency and constancy of change within the school workforce
- The administrative burden of systems and processes, which distract principals from their “core business” of school leadership
- Gaps in teacher capability

When extending their focus to five years from now, slightly more principals reported feeling ambivalent or less hopeful and confident, compared to their current sentiments, though a vast majority either agreed or strongly agreed with the statements.

The most common themes to emerge from principals' comments in this section were:

- Challenges maintaining a sufficient pipeline of suitable talent to meet the school's needs
- A need for increased support, and a reduction in administrative requirements from, the school system
- A need for considerable capability building within the workforce
- Challenges to do with rural principalship (e.g. additional difficulty in attracting and retaining quality teachers).

³ Riley, P. (2019). The Australian Principal Occupational Health, Safety and Wellbeing Survey: 2018 Data.

Figure 2.1

When I think about my school's workforce **now**, I feel:

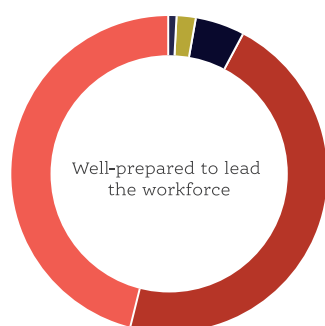
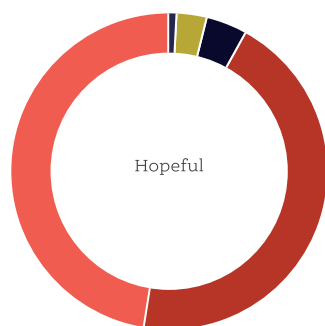
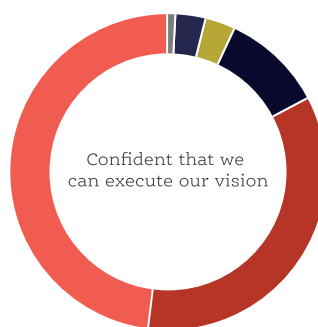
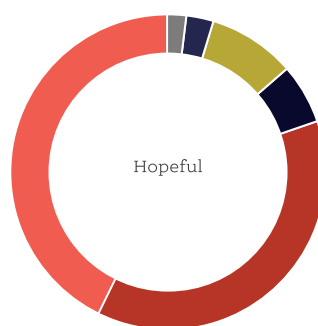


Figure 2.2

When I think about my school's workforce **five years from now**, I feel:



■ N/A ■ Disagree ■ Strongly disagree ■ Neither agree nor disagree ■ Agree ■ Strongly agree

The Challenges of School Leadership.

When exploring the particular challenges facing principals now and over the next five years, we find a high degree of consistency in responses.

We asked principals to name their top five issues as a school leader this year and their anticipated top five issues five years from now. The following chart represents the percentage of respondents who selected each issue in their top five.

As the chart shows, interpersonal and emotional aspects of school leadership seem to weigh heavily on principals' minds. Managing student and staff wellbeing registered frequently among principals' top challenges and are not expected to wane over the next five years, while community and parent engagement was the fourth most-cited challenge.

Only five factors are expected to rise in prevalence among principals' top challenges over the next five years:

- 1. Managing enrolment numbers**
(increasing from 31% to 43%)
- 2. Facility maintenance and improvement**
(from 37% to 44%)
- 3. Responding to educational policy changes**
(from 14% to 25%)
- 4. Effective use of ICT**
(from 21% to 23%)
- 5. Managing staff wellbeing**
(from 69% to 70%).

When we asked principals specifically about their top five workforce challenges, we found similar patterns. The following chart represents the percentage of respondents who selected each workforce challenge in their top five.

While a comparable number of workforce challenges are expected to rise in prevalence over the next five years, the magnitude of these increases tends to be greater than for the general school leadership challenges on the previous page. These challenges were:

- 1. Attraction and retention of new staff**
(increasing from 34% to 51%)
- 2. Supply of suitable teachers**
(from 45% to 58%)
- 3. Ageing workforce**
(from 27% to 36%)
- 4. Staff turnover**
(from 18% to 21%)
- 5. Teacher capability**
(from 70% to 74%)
- 6. Training staff**
(47% to 49%)

Somewhat offsetting these increases, we observed considerable decreases in the expected prevalence of two challenges over the next five years: managing poor performance (dropping from 40% to 32%) and absenteeism (dropping from 15% to 6%); this phenomenon was not observed in the general school leadership issues.

Figure 2.5

What are/what will be the five most important issues to you as a school leader?

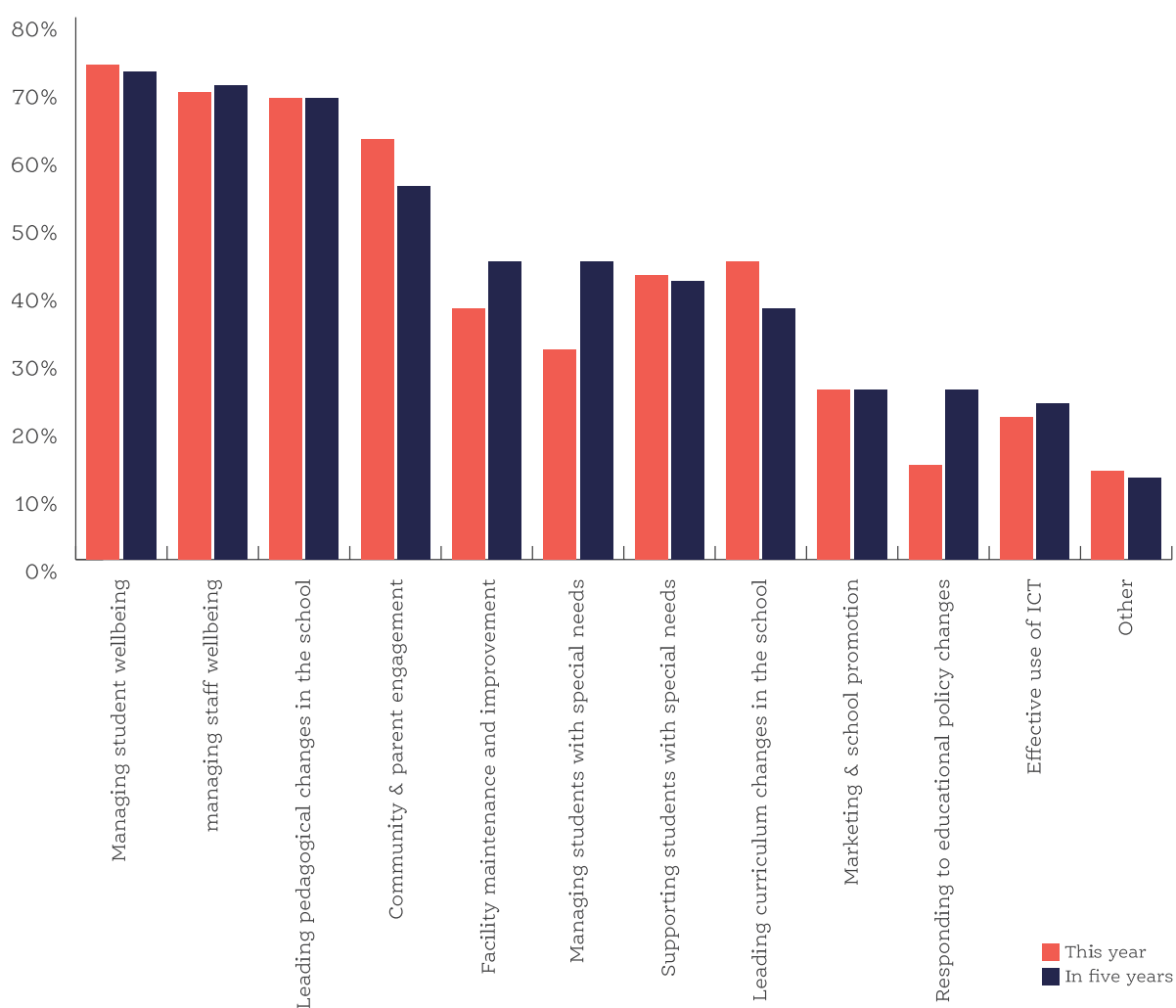
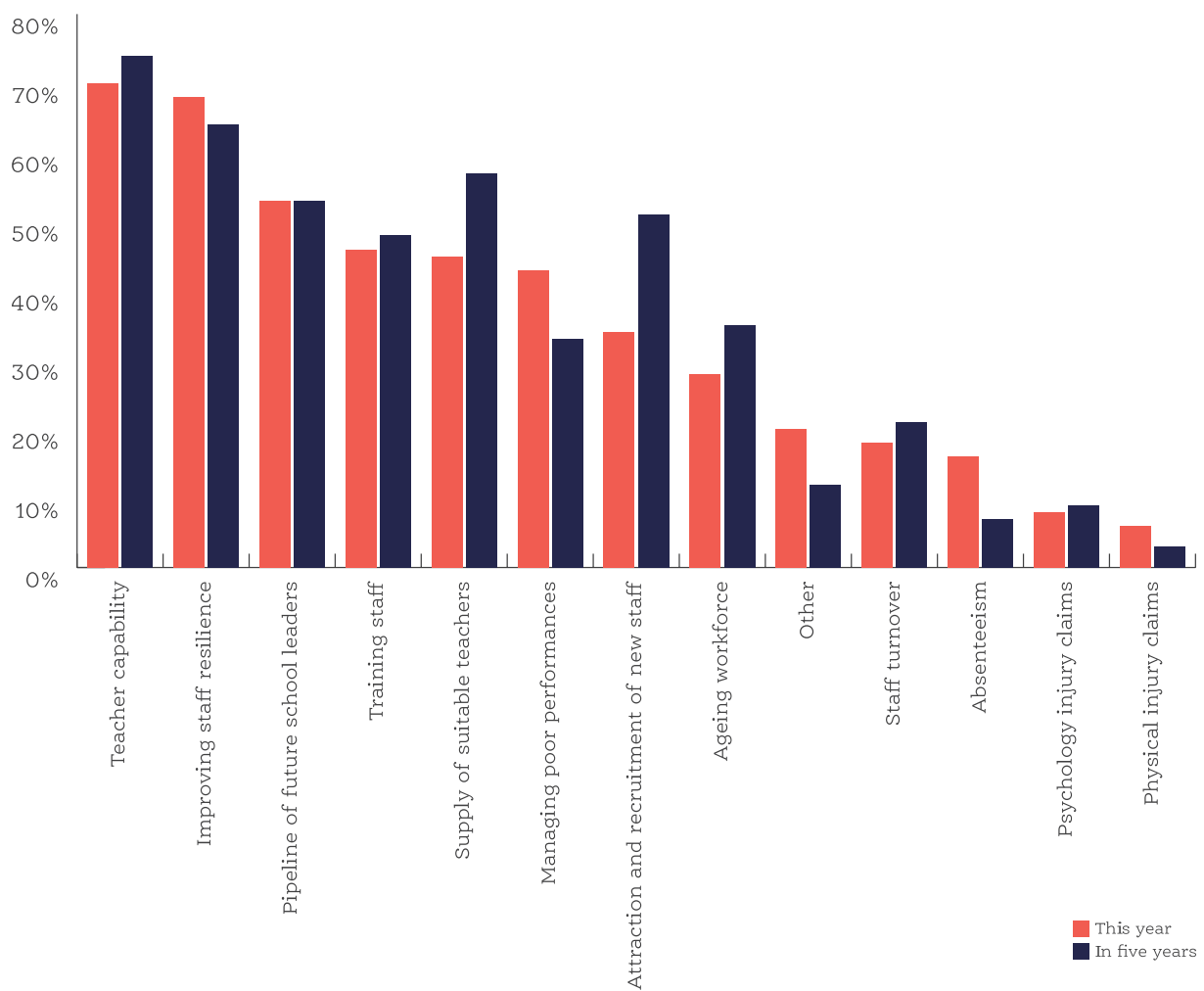


Figure 2.5

What are/what will be your greatest **workforce** challenges?



KEY TAKEAWAYS:

Principal Sentiment

- Principals in our sample reported overwhelmingly optimistic sentiments, though this is expected to decrease slightly over the next five years, particularly in regional and remote areas.
- Managing student and staff wellbeing; leading pedagogical changes; and managing parent relationships were front-of-mind when principals thought about their greatest leadership issues now, and they are expected to remain a challenge in five years' time.
- Teacher capability and improving staff resilience are the top workforce challenges facing principals today and are expected to remain major challenges in five years. Principals are also expecting that challenges to do with attracting and retaining new staff and the supply of suitable new teachers will become more prevalent in five years' time.

SECTION 3

Workforce Diversity

An emerging area of enquiry.

Much has been written and debated about the demography of the school workforce over recent decades. This discussion has tended to focus on the decreasing number of male teachers in the workforce⁴, despite evidence for the important role of other forms of diversity in schools⁵. We asked principals several questions about workforce diversity in order to explore the issue from alternative angles.

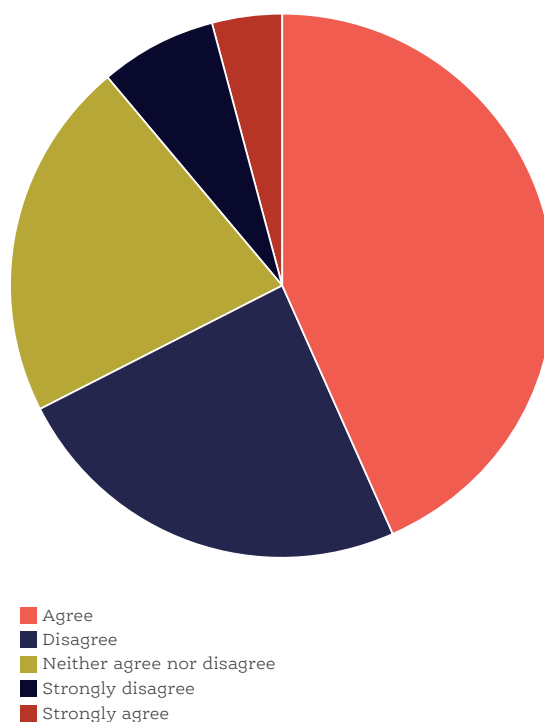
Examining the different dimensions of workforce diversity shows that on only one variable, age diversity, did a majority of principals rate their school's workforce as "moderately diverse", "very diverse" or "extremely diverse", as shown in the chart overleaf.

Based on participants' responses, school workforces appeared most homogenous in terms of their ethnic/cultural backgrounds, with a majority (66%) indicating either "not at all diverse" or "a little diverse". This was followed by professional diversity (e.g. proportion of the workforce with experience or qualifications outside education) for which 61% of principals indicated that their workforces were either "not at all diverse" or "a little diverse".

In spite of the mixed levels of current diversity, a strong majority of principals reported the importance of incorporating each of the four dimensions of diversity into their workforce, as shown overleaf.

Figure 3.1

Overall, the diversity of my school's **workforce** reflects the diversity of the school **community**:



⁴McGrath, K. F., & Van Bergen, P. (2017). Are male teachers headed for extinction? The 50-year decline of male teachers in Australia. *Economics of Education Review*, 60, 159-167

⁵Villegas, A. M., & Lucas, T. F. (2004). Diversifying the teacher workforce: A retrospective and prospective analysis. *Yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education*, 103(1), 70-104.

Figure 3.2

Please rate your workforce's **current level** of diversity on the following dimensions:

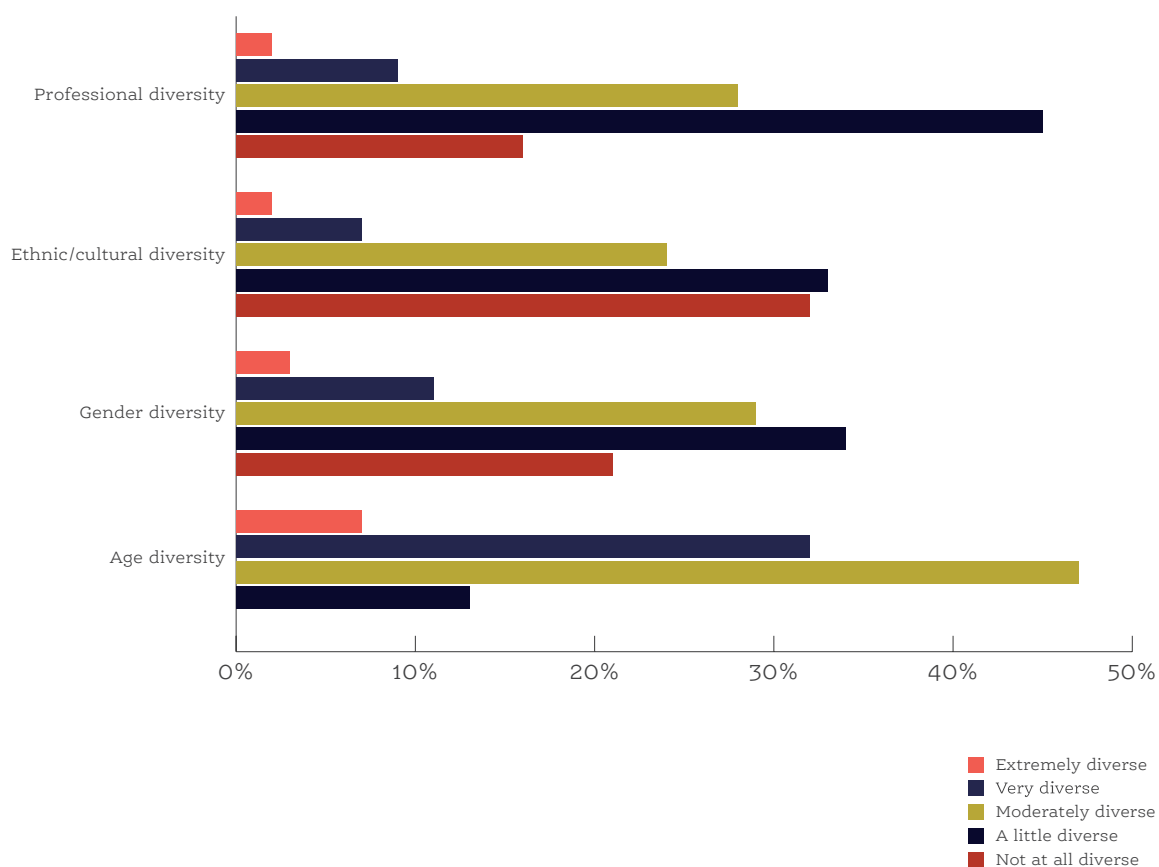
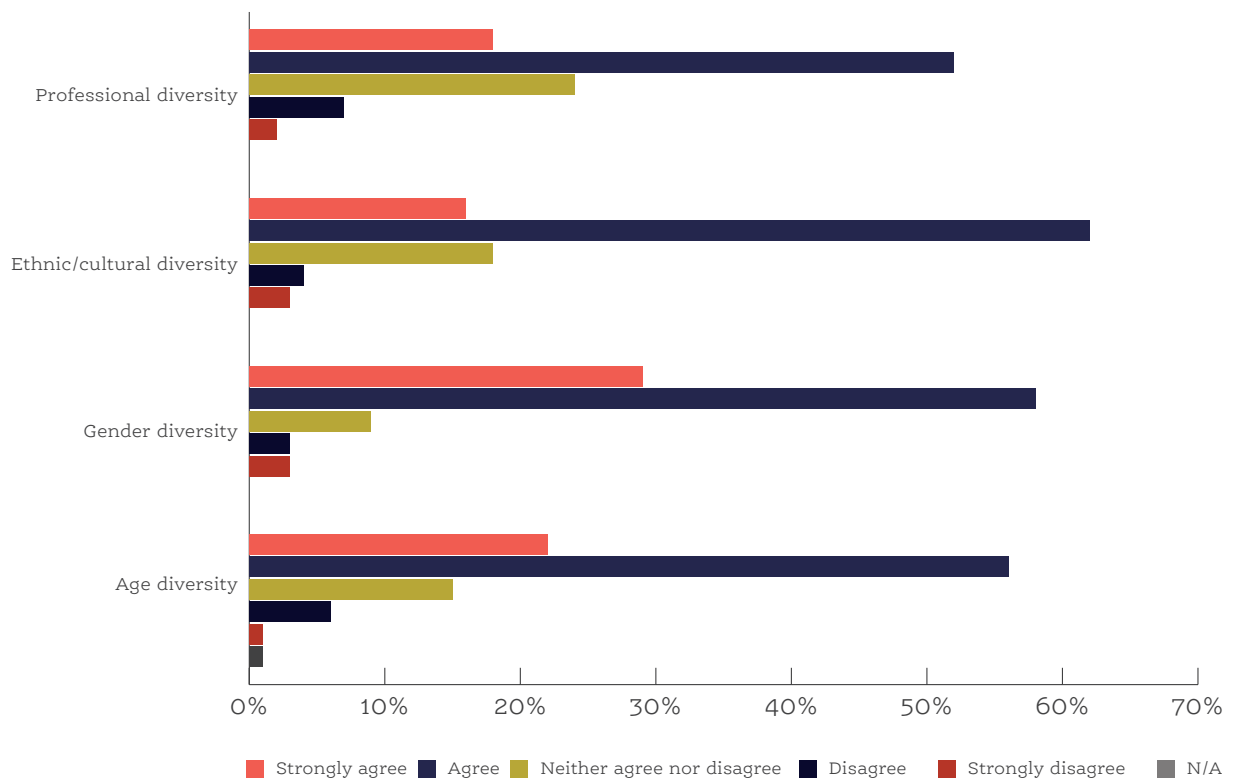


Figure 3.3

Incorporating the following types of diversity is important for my school's workforce:



KEY TAKEAWAYS:**Workforce Diversity**

While a majority of principals note the importance of workforce diversity across several different dimensions, this is not well-reflected in the make-up of the current workforce. This represents an area of potential focus for principals as they plan the future of their school workforce.

SECTION 4

Performance and Professional Development

Performance Measurement.

Performance measurement is often a challenge in environments like education where the extraneous variables are complex outcomes are difficult to quantify. Nonetheless, a consistent and rigorous approach to performance measurement remains necessary for continuous improvement, and to ensure that a school is driving the best possible outcomes for its students.

When we asked principals which performance measurement approaches, they used at their school, qualitative methods (formal qualitative feedback and ad-hoc feedback) predominated, with less than a third of respondents reporting the use of formal quantitative methods.

Among respondents who left comments, the most common other methods cited were: self-assessment against a professional development plan; peer observation; student feedback; and video review of classroom practice.

When asked specifically about the effectiveness of the performance measurement approaches in place at their schools, responses were mixed. While it was most common for principals to agree to the statements overleaf, a considerable minority (ranging from 17%-40%) neither agreed nor disagreed, while a considerable number disagreed (15%-26%).

Principals were least confident in their use of ad-hoc feedback; this is unsurprising given that it is the least rigorous of the methods listed.

Figure 4.1

Performance measurement approaches in use:

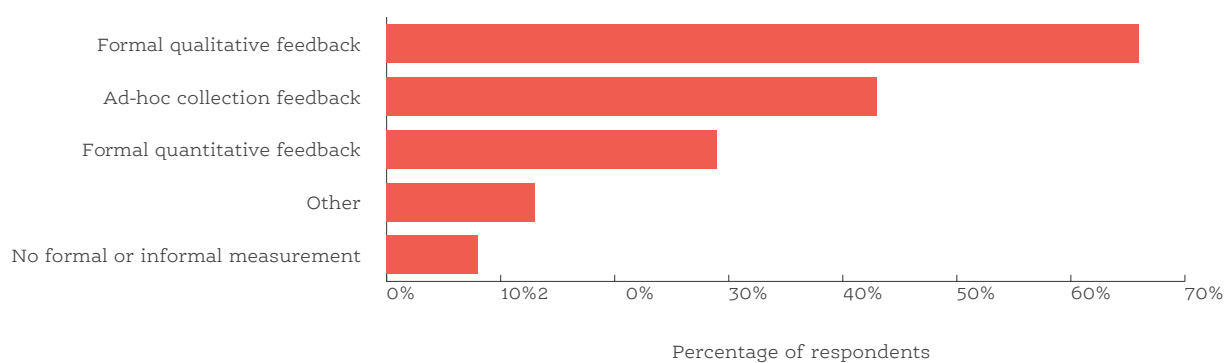
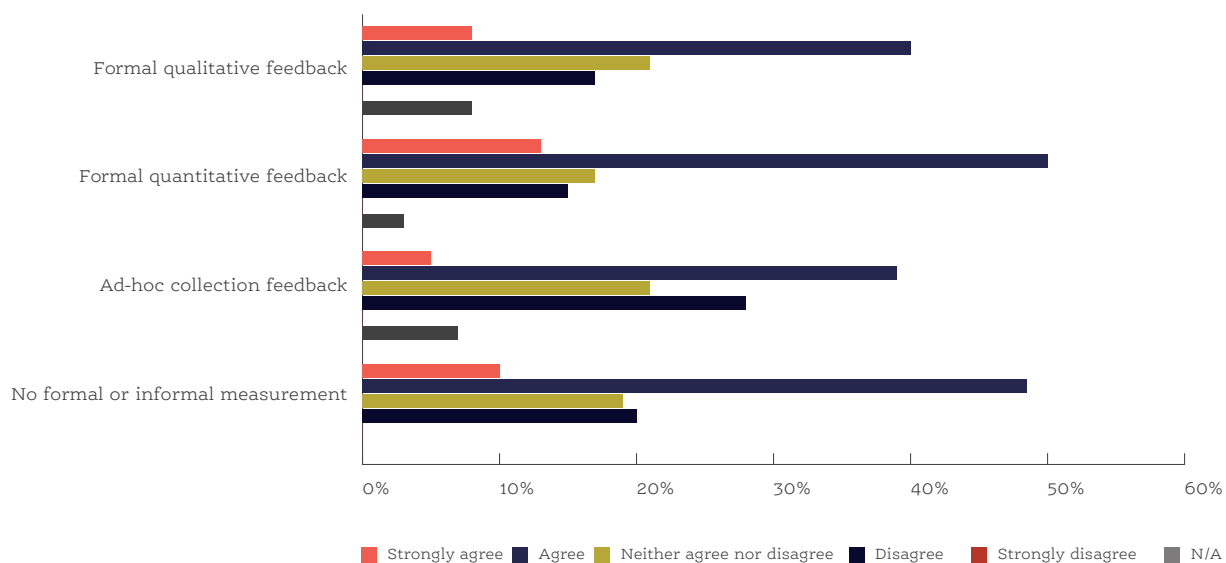


Figure 4.2

I believe my school's use of the following performance measurement approaches is effective:



Developing the School Workforce.

In an environment which is changing as rapidly as education, the continuous improvement of workforce capability becomes all the more vital. We asked principals a number of questions about the vehicles offered for professional development. As shown in the chart overleaf, in service sessions, peer supervision, formal training outside school, and conferences were all used by a considerable majority of principals.

Among respondents who selected the “other” category, the most common professional development approaches listed were: co-teaching; mentoring and coaching; and seeking external specialist advice.

When we asked principals about the effectiveness of these professional development methods, a majority indicated either agreement or strong agreement with the statement below in all cases, except when it came to the use of conferences.

While few principals registered disagreement with these statements, a considerable minority indicated ambivalence regarding the effectiveness of conferences and formal training outside school (23% and 21%, respectively).

For most schools, staffing simultaneously represents the most valuable asset and the largest recurrent expense. As a result, staffing decisions carry very real consequences for the effectiveness of the school enterprise, and it is important to know the value staffing investments in order to make prudent decisions and assess their return.

Based on principals’ best estimates, most currently spend less than 20% of their staffing budget on professional development, with the bulk of these (41% of respondents) spending less than 10%. A small number of principals (3%) indicated that they were unaware of their professional development spend and would not be able to calculate it.

Figure 4.3

Professional development approaches in use:

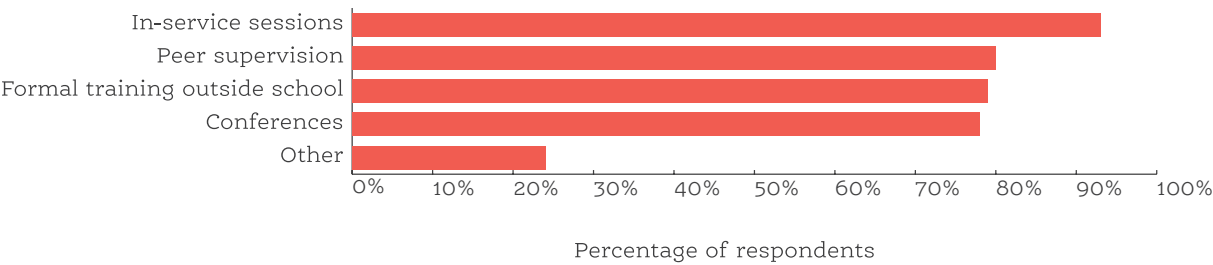


Figure 4.4

I believe my school's use of the following **professional development** initiatives is effective:

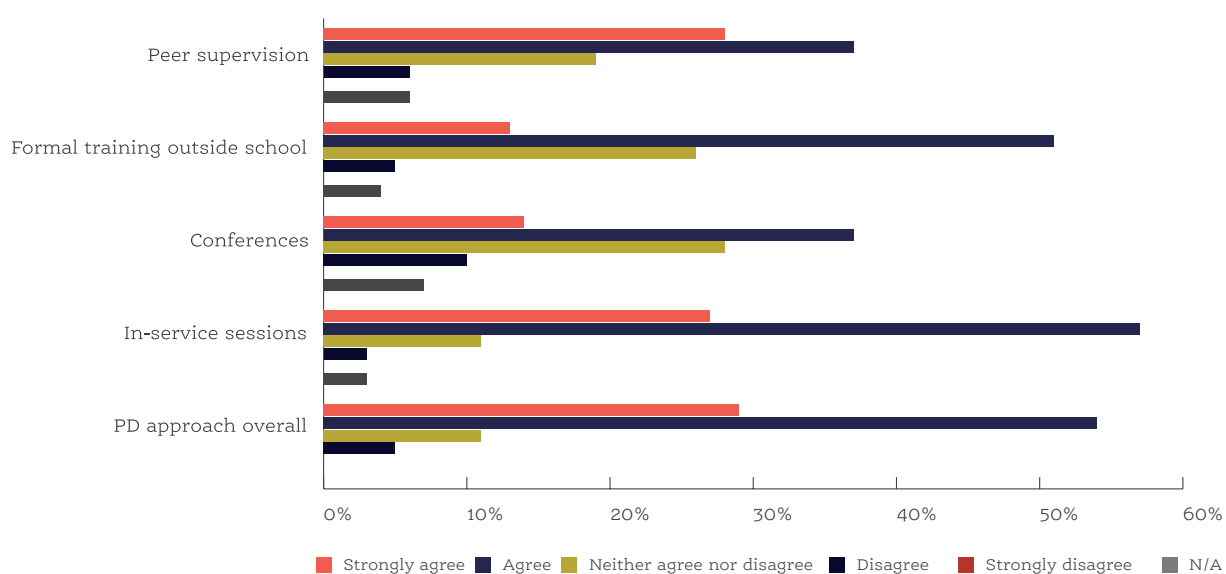
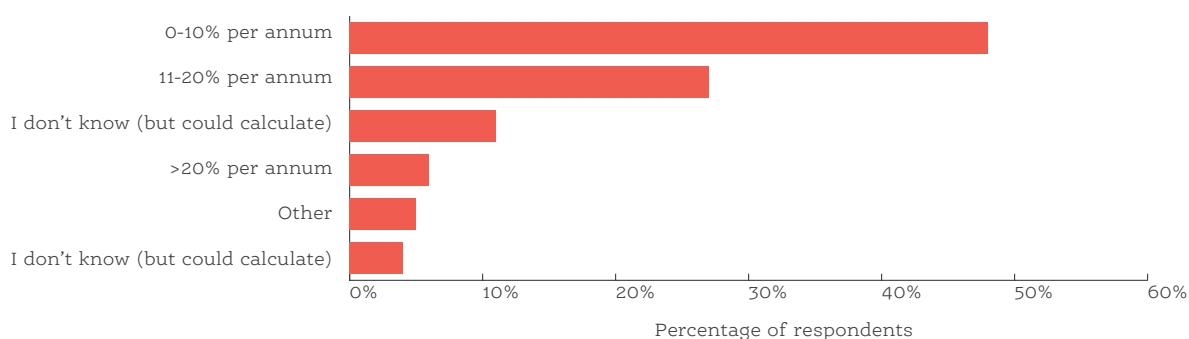


Figure 4.5

Proportion of **annual staffing budget** spent on professional development:



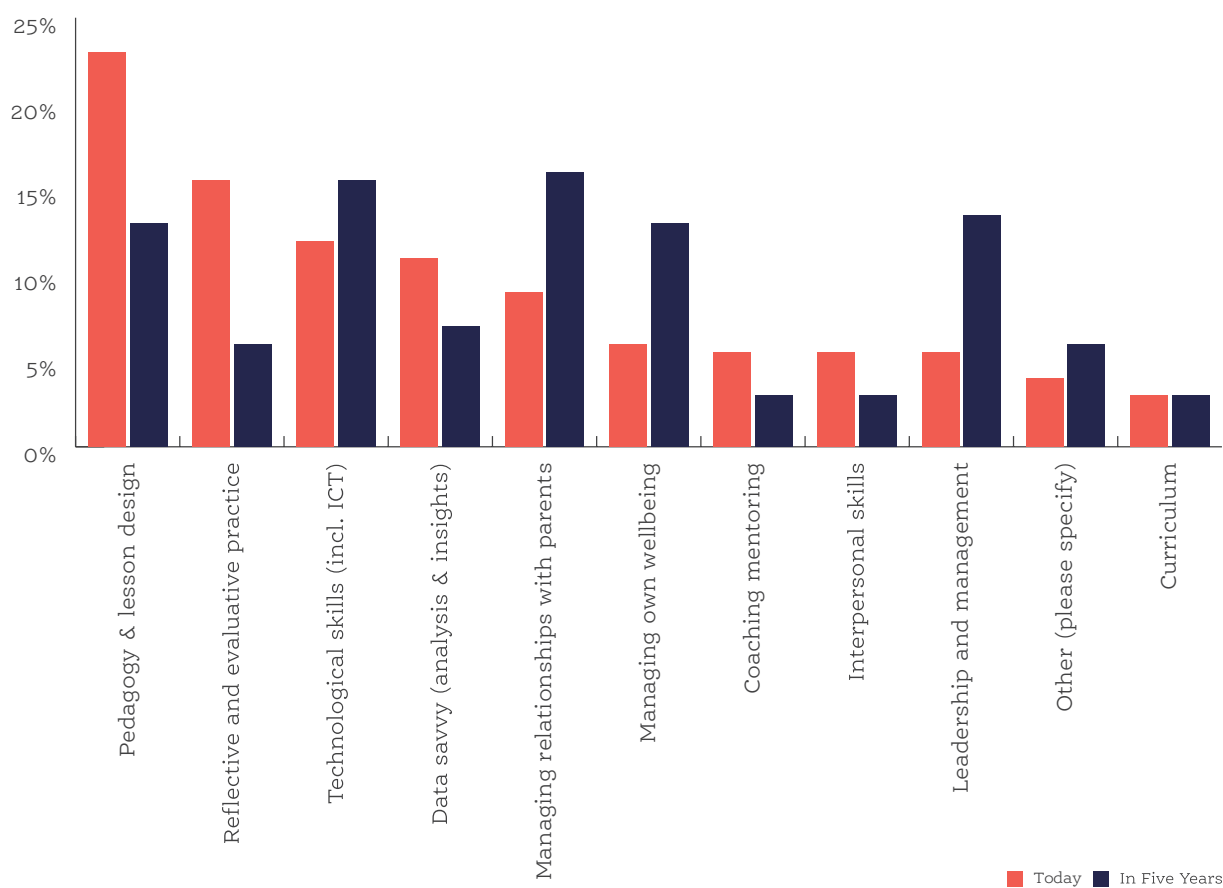
Capability Gaps.

Addressing capability gaps, which emerged as a relatively persistent theme in principals' comments regarding their greatest workforce challenges, will be key to the development of the school workforce. To explore this issue further we asked principals to select the single greatest capability gap in their school workforce now, and their expected single greatest gap in five years. The results suggest a stark shift over the next five years; the current most common gap – pedagogy and lesson design – is anticipated to be overtaken by three other skill areas: managing relationships with parents; technological skills (incl. ICT); and leadership and management.

In addition to these areas, managing own wellbeing; curriculum; and other skills were also expected to become more important over the next five years, while a total of six skill gaps were expected to decrease in relative importance: pedagogy and lesson design; reflective and evaluative practice; data savvy; coaching & mentoring; and interpersonal skills.

Figure 4.6

What is/what will be your school's greatest **capability gap**?



KEY TAKEAWAYS:

Performance and Professional Development

- Formal qualitative feedback was the most common method of performance measurement, and was considered the most effective.
- Ad-hoc feedback was the second most commonly-used method despite being considered the least effective.
- A large majority of respondents spent less than 20% of their staffing budget on professional development, and the bulk of these spent less than 10%.
- In-service sessions were almost ubiquitous as a method of professional development, though peer supervision, formal training outside school and conferences were also very widely used. Of these methods, principals were least confident in the effectiveness of conferences as a means of professional development.
- When asked about their workforce's single greatest capability gap, responses were mixed. Pedagogy and lesson design was the most commonly cited current gap, though it was expected to be overtaken by managing relationships with parents, technological skills, and leadership and management over the next five years.

SECTION 5

The Talent Pipeline

Workforce Supply: Teacher Quantity.

The workforce planning challenges in schools have been well-documented, particularly with regard to the number of graduate teachers entering the employment market⁷, and the high proportion of these who choose to leave the sector early in their careers⁸. With limited candidates to cover the needs of schools, and a large portion of the sector's workforce approaching retirement age, the supply of teachers is a key consideration for principals planning the future of their schools.

When we asked principals about how teacher supply affected their schools, the picture was again mixed. The figure below presents principals' responses colour-coded for frequency; the darker the shading, the more common the response to that statement.

The figure shows genuine diversity when it comes to the "hot spots" for teacher supply. The quantity of available teachers in the market best meets schools' needs in the areas of:

- Primary education — a majority of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that the supply of K-2 and Year 3-6 teachers met their schools' needs
- Year 7-10 teachers
- Humanities/Social Science teachers
- English teachers.

The areas of least reliable teacher quantity all related to secondary teaching, specifically:

- Maths and Physical Sciences
- Vocational Education & Training (VET)
- Senior years teaching.

⁷ Henebery, B (2019). What's behind Australia's teacher shortage? The Educator Australia.

⁸ Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (2016). Spotlight: What do we know about early career attrition rates in Australia?

Figure 5.1

Overall, the **quantity** of suitable candidates in the labour market for the following positions meets my school's needs.

Response	Year K-2	Year 3-6	Year 7-10	Year 11-12	English	Maths	Physical Sciences	Health & PE	Humanities/ Soc. Sci.	VET	Other
Strongly Disagree	7%	8%	2%	8%	5%	12%	11%	3%	6%	6%	18%
Disagree	12%	12%	24%	32%	11%	37%	43%	11%	9%	22%	34%
Neither Agree Nor Disagree	12%	10%	17%	23%	28%	29%	28%	10%	19%	37%	24%
Agree	46%	51%	44%	28%	41%	19%	15%	48%	52%	26%	12%
Strongly Agree	22%	19%	12%	8%	13%	3%	2%	27%	13%	7%	10%

Note 1: Dark = most common response

Note 2: N/A responses were excluded from the percentage calculations for these questions; these ranged from 11%-46%, so removing these reduced the sample size considerably.

Workforce Supply: Teacher Quality.

When we asked principals about the quality (e.g. level of experience and capability) of the teachers available in the market, an almost identical pattern emerged, with responses suggesting that the most reliable quality candidates were available in the primary, English, Humanities/social Sciences and Health & PE teaching areas, and the least reliable quality in the Maths, Physical Sciences, VET and Senior Years teaching areas.

Figure 5.2

Overall, the **quality** of suitable candidates in the labour market for the following positions meets my school's needs.

Response	Year K-2	Year 3-6	Year 7-10	Year 11-12	English	Maths	Physical Sciences	Health & PE	Humanities/ Soc. Sci.	VET	Other
Strongly Disagree	5%	5%	0%	2%	0%	10%	7%	3%	0%	4%	17%
Disagree	11%	13%	16%	17%	14%	23%	31%	10%	8%	19%	33%
Neither Agree Nor Disagree	13%	11%	18%	31%	17%	34%	28%	13%	22%	36%	19%
Agree	48%	52%	55%	42%	60%	28%	29%	48%	58%	34%	19%
Strongly Agree	22%	18%	11%	8%	9%	3%	3%	27%	12%	4%	11%

Note 1: Dark = most common response

Note 2: N/A responses were excluded from the percentage calculations for these questions; these ranged from 11%-46%, so removing these reduced the sample size considerably.

Forecasting the Impact of Future Change.

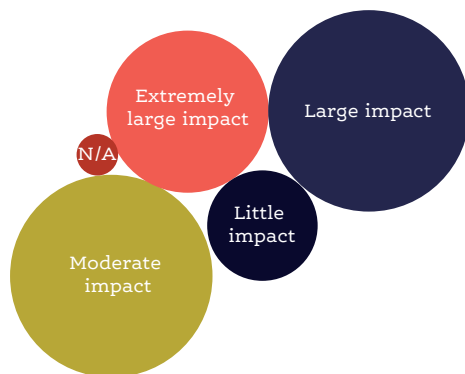
Few sectors have weathered the volume and pace of change that the Education sector has seen over the past two decades, and this is not expected to abate any time soon. We asked principals to consider the impact of a range of anticipated changes on their school's workforce. The figures below present their responses; the larger the circle, the more frequent the response.

For all the changes listed, a majority of respondents anticipated at least a moderate level of impact to the school workforce. The impact of teacher capability was expected to be greatest of all, adding weight to the importance of addressing the capability gaps identified in the previous section.

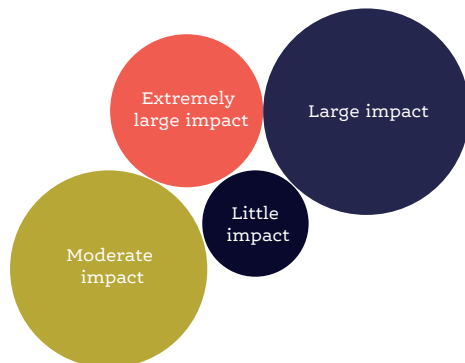
Figure 5.3

How big an impact do you expect the following factors to have on the education workforce?

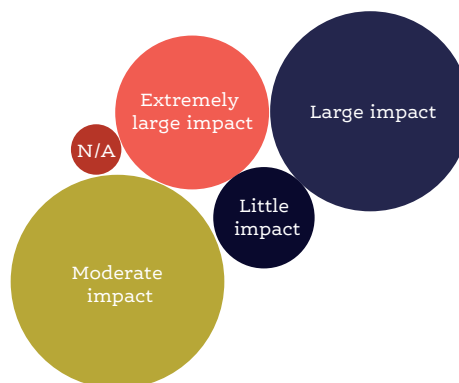
Ageing workforce



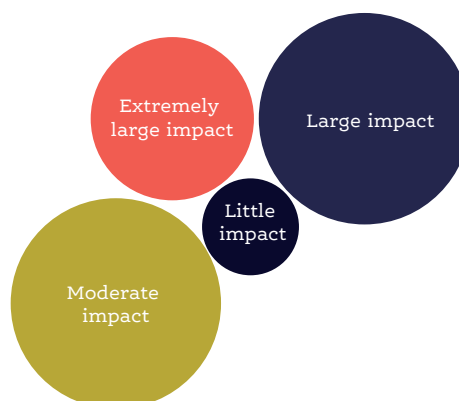
Supply of grad/new teachers



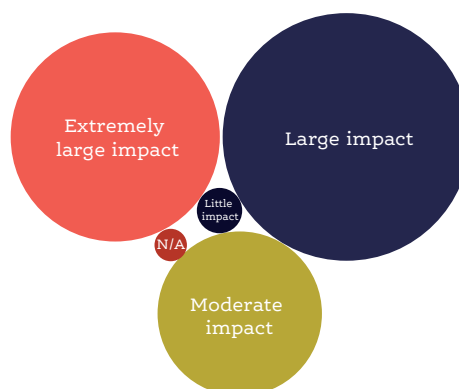
Changes to govt. policy



Technological change



Teacher capability



KEY TAKEAWAYS:**The Talent Pipeline**

- Both the quantity and quality of primary teachers in the market was generally considered sufficient to meet schools' needs.
- In secondary teaching areas, respondents had least concern about the quantity and quality of available teachers in the areas of English, HPE, Humanities/Social Sciences and Year 7-10.
- Respondents had most concern about the quality and quantity of Maths and Physical Science teachers, VET teachers and senior secondary teachers.
- Of a list of factors expected to affect the future of the school workforce, respondents identified teacher capability as having the likely greatest impact.

SECTION 6

What next?

Why Workforce Analytics?

The final area we chose to explore with principals is one which has been overlooked in much of the Education research, but which is perhaps the most important of all: what impact do the characteristics of the school workforce have on student outcomes?

As the chart on the opposite page shows, a majority of respondents expected that staff wellbeing; leadership style & approach; and type of professional development undertaken would have the greatest impact on student outcomes.

Among the supplementary comments provided, principals also identified an anticipated link between some additional factors and student outcomes. These included:

- School culture, mission and staff commitment to the school's purpose
- Reducing the administrative burden on the teaching workforce
- Positive teacher-student relationships
- Teacher pipeline/availability
- Teacher: student ratios.

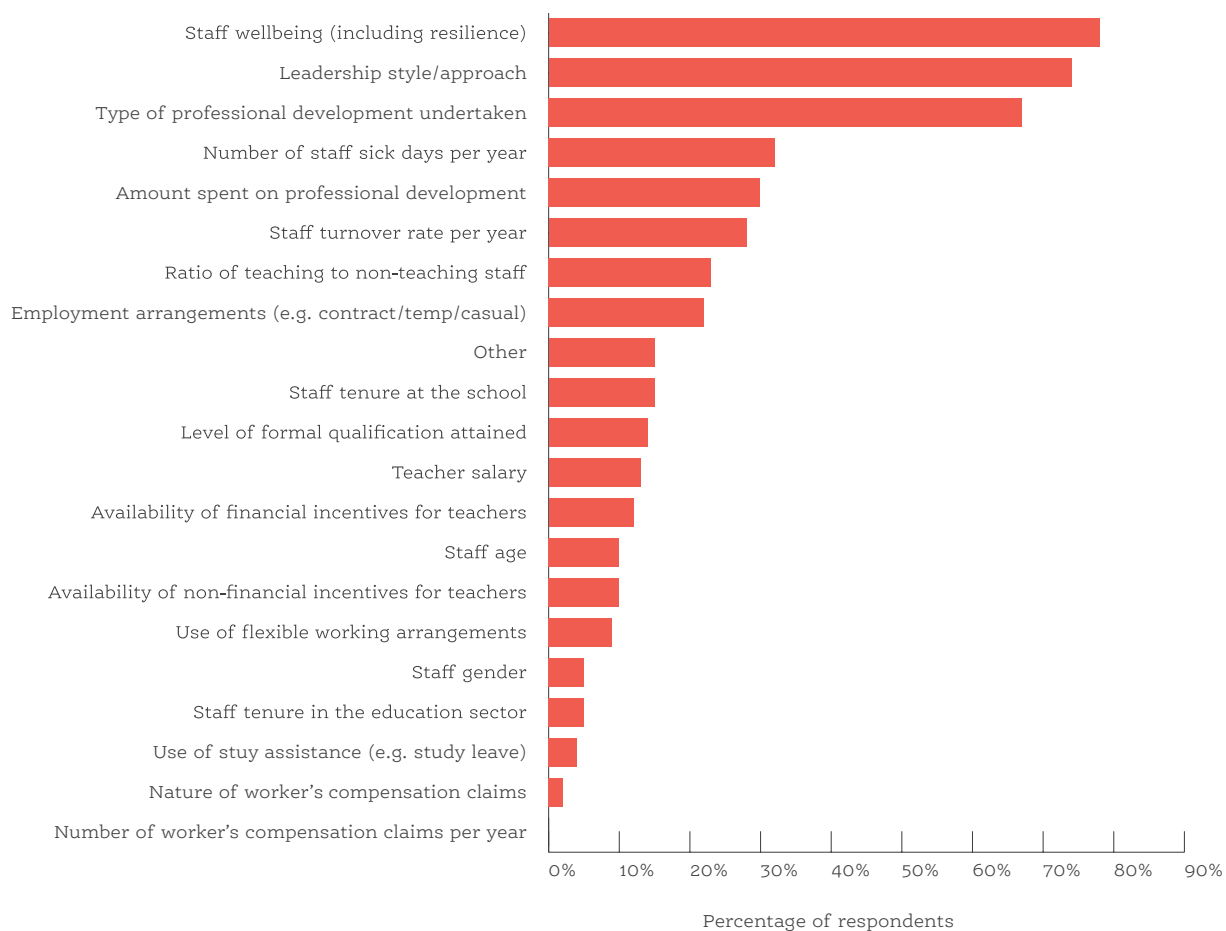
Responses to this question, taken in the context of our other findings from the SoS survey, give us some indication of where principals might focus their attention as they plan for the future of their school workforce. What is missing from that decision-making process, however, is a source of current, rigorously-developed evidence which empirically demonstrates the link between workforce characteristics and practices, and the real-world outcomes for students

It is PeopleBench's mission to conduct research and create tools for school leaders which help address this gap. Our workforce analytics solution provides principals and school system leaders with data analytics and dashboard capabilities, so schools don't need to develop these on their own. If you'd like to be a part of this solution, we'd love to hear from you.

Contact us at hello@peoplebench.com.au to discuss how you can join our community of like-minded schools engaged in collaborative practice around workforce analytics, so that lessons learned will benefit students everywhere.

Figure 6.1

Based on your experience, which of the following workforce factors would you expect to have the greatest impact on **student outcomes**?



SECTION 7

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