

## IN THE FAIR WORK COMMISSION

**Matter no:** AM2018/9

**Applicant:** Independent Education Union of Australia

*Fair Work Act 2009 s 158 – Application to Vary a Modern Award*

### STATEMENT OF CLINTON FOSTER

I, Clinton Foster, of [REDACTED], in the state of Victoria say:

1. I work as a teacher at Bayview College. Bayview College is an independent coeducational Secondary school in Portland Victoria. I am a classroom teacher, teaching Physics, Mathematics and Chemistry. I teach classes across year 7 to year 12. I hold a Bachelor of Science and Diploma of Education through Deakin University (1997).
2. I began at Bayview College in 1998 and worked there for four years. I then entered the government sector in a Leading Teacher role at Heywood & District Secondary College. I occupied the role of Leading Teacher - Director of Teaching & Learning for 5 years plus another 3 years as an Expert Teacher from 2002 to 2009. In 2010 I returned to Bayview College and have been teaching there until present.

#### Teaching Rurally

3. I began my career teaching Chemistry and Mathematics, and have continued to teach those subjects throughout my career. Approximately three years ago I began teaching Physics due to a shortage of Physics teachers, in a hard to staff remote rural school. In the absence of an available Physics teacher the Principal at the time asked

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me to teach Physics. Since that time I have cemented my place as the Physics teacher at Bayview College. It was challenging to start teaching Physics after 20 years. I had not done any Physics since the second year of my University Degree in 1994. While I had a strong Mathematics background, I had to go to the Physics conference and spend a significant amount of work in non-term time dedicated to learning the Physics course. Learning the content involves identifying two or three textbooks and spending time going through them to ensure my thorough understanding. I was lucky to also engage in mentoring with another Physics teacher (ex-colleague) who had recently retired. I was provided with assistance in identifying and using resources. The practical elements of teaching Physics, and Science subjects generally, can take years to develop and implement efficiently and smoothly. Depending on the demands of the school in a rural setting, as a teacher I cannot simply say no. If I am the best person or the most qualified for the job, then I am expected to pick up subjects outside of my teaching area. In my experience rural teachers just accept this, and it forms part of what we do.

### **Technology**

4. Technology introduction into school settings have had a significant impact on teaching in a multitude of ways. In 2018 I cannot attend class without my laptop. When email became more common i, there developed an expectation to check emails at the start, middle and end of the day. This has increased over the last decade; now there is an expectation that I should always be checking my emails. This changes the way I perform teaching work and makes it more difficult, as I now have to monitor emails through the course of a lesson. Technology has made me increasingly contactable all the time to parents through email. Parents contact me personally on my school email and I am expected to respond within 24 hours. In previous years I was not accessible to parents.
5. For example, I have a year 11 student studying Chemistry. That student has a few mental health issues that prevent her from attending school on occasion. Her parents would often send me an email and request that I send through the work. I

would have to send some detailing exactly what happened during the class, and any other resources like worksheets and handouts would be attached and often required scanning before being attached. This is a great way to ensure her learning can continue without attending classes, however it has significant further complications. I have to assess her capability to do the work, and ensure that I am not overburdening her in the context of her health concerns. The level of access through email to me as her teacher, creates this a new and extra form of work which is becoming more commonplace and further escalating teacher workload.

6. Most children now have a smart phone and my school has taken the view of being a 'phone friendly' school for students – in other words, they are allowed to have their phones with them while they are at school. While the students are not meant to be using their phones in their classes, it is a continual battle. The previous Minister for Education proposed the banning of mobile phones in schools (following the model of some European countries). For me this would be a very positive thing. While our school is very good on managing behavioural issues, when students have phones, it makes it challenging to manage behaviour as they have the ability to communicate between each other. The students really value having a phone and it is an important part of their life, and I can understand that. However, I often have to tell students to put their phones on the front desk, and say to students that if I see them with their phone in class, I will have to take it. There is a battle within staffing ranks with consistency of expectations towards phone use not to mention the growing difficulty among the students with screen addiction and associated mental health concerns.

### **Mental Health and Differentiation**

7. The level of diagnosis of mental health issues in students is much higher in recent times. While I think there has always been these issues within society, and we have simply become more aware of them. This has meant that schools such as ours have had to create a build a strong welfare team and system in place to ensure the mental health of all students. The amount of time schools spend on wellbeing initiatives and problems would be by my estimation about three or four times the amount that was

being engaged in at the beginning of my career 20 years ago. A typical maths class 20 years ago may have had 25-Year 8 students, and I would essentially be asked to teach the Mathematics program. There may have been one or two students with some learning difficulties, hence modified workload/expectation was provided. Whereas now I have a Year 7 class in which there are 7-8 of 20 who have specific learning needs. While there probably has always been students with specific learning needs. The introduction of personalised learning plans, and the expectation and requirement to meet the needs of each individual learning issue is extremely challenging. The growing modifications and differentiation required to meet these learning needs is considerable.

8. For example, I was supervising a Year 9 examination towards the end of 2018 and there were 29 students in the exam room, and 5 in the inclusion room. Each of those 5 students sat their exams under separate conditions. As there was little awareness of these difficulties 10 or 20 years ago, a Year 9 student would not have received these accommodations. While I think these developments are absolutely a positive thing, they do create significant challenges for the teacher. I need to assess each student that is facing a learning difficulty and make an estimation of what they are capable of, create tasks that they can perform at up to their ability, and modify their assessments to meet their ability. I am also documenting each stage in the process, adding to the administrative burden of the task. There is a challenge in squaring the individualised and differentiated nature of teaching in the earlier years with the realities that are faced by students sitting their Year 12 VCAA Examinations which remain quite inflexible. I have to balance the benefits educationally to students in differentiating, while keeping in mind the 'end game' mindful of their need to be best prepared to meet Year 12 VCAA requirements. The days of writing one exam or assessment for a group of students are almost gone.
9. There is an increasing trend to individual learning and differentiation in teaching. For example, the introduction of Math Pathways in Junior Secondary school has seen the need for me as a Mathematics teacher to manage each student on their own individual learning plan. Math Pathways has been introduced in many schools

throughout Victoria and across Australia. 2018 was the second full year of its implementation in our school. Essentially it is a sort of online textbook that is interactive and builds an individual program for each student through the use of adaptive modules. The program is good at diagnosing what the students know and do not know, and while not perfect it has been a very good learning aid. The program again exposes teaching to the challenges of managing student behaviour in front of computers, where certain students are not motivated to do work and are distracted by the other possibilities of being on a computer. It requires me to be across all aspects of content all at one time, whereas in previous times I would be focussed on one element at a time. The introduction of this type of technology into schools has made behavioural management more difficult in many aspects I would argue.

### **Standardised Testing**

10. Our school engages in a series of standardised tests. This includes NAPLAN, adaptive testing, ICAS Mathematics, Science & English competitions as well as PAT (progressive achievement tests). There is an expectation from schools that as a Faculty and individually teachers look at the results of these tests, analyse them, identify issues and create plans to address them. Teachers are made very aware that it is advantageous to the school for improved NAPLAN results to be achieved. As it will result in benefits to the school through increased enrolments, as the public will be able to access them. This level of analysis of results was not present in teaching 20 years ago. With the improvements in data analysing available there is a vastly increased drive to pursue better practice. If I as a teacher I have students who fail to achieve to or above their projected results, particularly at Year 12 level, this will prompt goal setting exercises to ensure that issues are identified and addressed. Students are no longer allowed to just fail.

## Extra-Curricular

11. There is a significant number of students from our school involved in ‘interruptions to our standard program’ due to opportunities such as: Future Leaders of Industry, Mental Health Day(s), Football, Netball, Tennis, Athletics, Cross Country, Play rehearsals, Overseas trips to Japan as well as other School Camps. Private schools like our setting do have significant extra-curricular offerings. Independent schools are competing with each other for enrolments by trying to offer extra experiences through their extra-curricular programs. Every time a student is taken out of a school setting there are also significant risk assessments and associated administrative workload that must be met. For those that remain in the school, it becomes much harder to fit the same amount of content in less time. To get through the content of the curriculum becomes harder each year. I think we are offering close to twice the amount of extra-curricular activities to students compared to twenty years ago. These activities are all good to do for the students, we as teachers do it because we accept that however it does increase teacher workload, weather organising the activity on the day or back in the classroom trying to ‘make up’ for time lost.

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CLINT FOSTER