

AEU National New Educator's Network (NEN) Conference

Kelby Pointon (Woodroffe Primary School), Keeva Spencer-Wright (Bradshaw Primary School) and Sharna Richards (Ti Tree School) share their experiences of the NEN Conference, 2022. We thank Teachers' Health for fully funding one place at this event.



Kelby Pointon,
CT4, Woodroffe Primary School

Since beginning my teaching career in 2019, I have always been a member of the AEU. My first three years were spent teaching in the ACT. I was always a union member there, so naturally I joined up with the NT branch when I relocated. In the ACT, I actively participated in new educator events and regularly attended sub-branch meetings. Attending the NEN Conference really improved my understanding of union work, which was fairly limited even after participating in last year's industrial actions.

I am passionate about public education, but have learnt that without AEU work, an individual's passion is just a ripple in the ocean. Collective union work ensures that individual ripples of passion become waves. We were joined by international delegates from Japan, Samoa and New Zealand and it became evident that regardless of career stage, experience,

and location, we all face similar challenges. The Japanese delegates reported starting work from 7am, often not finishing until 10pm and teaching classes of up to 40 students. Samoan teachers must manage up to 70 students over 10-hour days and in New Zealand, while class sizes are on par with Australia, teachers only earn around \$56,000 AUD as graduates.

The conference also highlighted that one of the biggest challenges for early-career teachers in this country is inconsistency of support. First year teachers can be as young as 21 and are often loaded with unrealistic and unachievable expectations.

Even with additional release granted for graduates under our new agreement*, it remains to be seen whether all will receive it. Most delegates agreed that the pressure to wear so many different hats daily with limited support severely impacts their mental health and work/life balance. It is no wonder qualified educators, particularly those in their first three to five years, are leaving for higher paying roles with less pressure and where they can leave their work at work.

Workshops presented by delegates from across the country were informative and highly relevant. The focus was on educating and developing unionists' skills in advocating as allies for colleagues of all backgrounds, cultures, and identities.

I am excited to see what public education can achieve for Australia and our international neighbours into the future. I am hopeful that all levels of government see the importance of public education and ensure teaching becomes a desired profession that inspires commitment.

**The new EA (2021-2024) includes an additional hour of NCT for graduates and some increases for mentors. We would love to hear from 2023 graduates about the benefits of this win. Email us at aeunt@aeunt.org.au with your story.*

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AEU National New Educator's Network Conference *Continued..*



Keeva Spencer Wright,
CT2, Bradshaw Primary School
(proudly sponsored by Teachers' Health)



Sharna Richards,
CT3, Ti Tree School

By attending the NEN Conference, I learned about how the union fights for the rights of teachers. The AEU supports Indigenous teachers out there and works to improve the health and wellbeing of all educators. Job security, teacher retention, salaries, workloads, and support for teachers were the focus of workshops offered.

It was good to see that the same problems are being looked at around the country. Entitlements for teachers in each state and territory are very different and I noticed that the NT misses out on a lot of rewards for first year teachers when compared to other states.

Remote schools and teachers also need more attention on a national level. The AEU recognised that this is the case for remote settings and acknowledged what remote teachers must deal with in comparison to mainstream. Many delegates were surprised that remote teachers must teach everything, are without specialists or relief and often carry higher workloads with less release.

I was proud to represent the remote NT and to share the many differences between remote and mainstream conditions with those in other states and territories.

The AEU's priorities include improving retention of teachers, lowering workloads, and improving salaries in line with rising costs of living. This conference challenged the boundaries of my comfort zone, my beliefs and made me appreciate my home and school even more.

Thank you for the opportunity.

The New Educators' Conference in Perth was an opportunity to learn about the strategic direction of the wider AEU and the breadth and depth of its position on topical issues. I saw firsthand how committed the AEU is to the upcoming Voice to Parliament referendum. It was extremely powerful to be able to hear directly from the team driving this campaign and how we, as union members, can support it. Significant attrition over the first five years of a teacher's career was a central concern, but the one that resonated most with delegates? Workload!

The nature of university courses, preparedness of teachers, expectations both in and out of the classroom, risk factors for mental ill health, and the difficulties of establishing a healthy work/life balance formed the heart of the conversation.

It was interesting hearing from interstate delegates about support for early career teachers under their enterprise agreements. Some reported being provided with additional release to meet with mentors and additional funding for professional development. These opportunities are not consistent across Australia, and it was enlightening to learn of these disparities and the role the union can play in helping achieve parity.

I feel privileged to have had the opportunity to attend this event and connect with like-minded colleagues. It felt powerful to be in a room full of people discussing issues pertaining directly to my work and life. It was heartening to reflect upon how we can come together to support each other and to bring about change.