



Meeting with purpose. It's about time.

Words **Michael de Wall**

Meetings have been part of human activity for tens of thousands of years, though Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander meeting traditions have historically involved cultural authority, relationships, listening and consensus rather than a union meeting's authority of the chair, agenda, time limits and collective decision making.

Sadly, neither traditional yarning structures nor union democracy have managed to influence the weekly meeting culture across our public school system.

Anecdotally, excessive, inefficient, didactic and at times irrelevant meetings have been a frustration of members for many years. The matter has been raised regularly in the democratic forums of the union, including school Federation meetings, Associations, Council and Annual Conference — meetings that teachers attend voluntarily as union members and elected delegates.

Meetings also appeared among the many concerns of teachers in the 2017 workload survey that attracted more than 17,000 responses and provided the raw data for the report *Understanding Work In Schools: The foundation for teaching and learning* (McGrath-Champ et al, 2018).

In the More Than Thanks campaign that identified uncompetitive salaries and unsustainable workloads as central to the chronic teacher shortages, the frequency, duration, structure and effectiveness of meetings was regularly in the mix of issues raised by members on the campaign trail.

In short, a major reset was required.

THE DEMOCRATIC AND INDUSTRIAL PROCESSES BEHIND THE REFORM

In 2024, a comprehensive recommendation from Federation's Executive was put to Annual Conference that included the proposition that "the maximum requirements of before or after school meetings" was to be "no greater than one hour duration per week, inclusive of all meetings" (*Teachers' Work, Health and Safety decision*). The recommendation was debated, amended and voted on by more than 500 elected delegates representing teacher Associations from across NSW.

That decision informed industrial negotiations between the Department of Education (as the employer) and Federation (as the union) later in 2024 as part of finalising an Award and related terms of settlement. The issue of meetings became a feature of the terms of settlement between the Department and Federation.

Prior to signing the terms of settlement, Federation organised mass meetings of members in more than 200 venues where thousands of members heard reports from Senior Officers and then had the opportunity to debate and vote on an Executive recommendation. Included in the many achievements negotiated by the union was the proposition: "**Maximum of one hour** regular staff meetings per week to occur outside of school operating hours, inclusive of school, staff, stage, KLA and professional learning."

About 98 per cent of members voted in favour of the recommendation.

The release of *Determination 1 2026*, the corresponding, dual-badged *Attendance and Student Supervision Factsheet* and the *Consultation Framework for Schools* was hardly a surprise, but rather the result of a long democratic and industrial relations process.

RETHINKING THE STRUCTURE AND EFFECTIVENESS OF SCHOOL MEETINGS

Through these sound democratic and industrial processes, the frequency and duration of meetings is a settled matter. In addition to the opportunities for meeting, collaboration and professional learning provided by eight school development days (four system and school-led and four teacher-determined), schools have 40 hours for planned meetings outside of operational hours across the school year.

Now, the challenge is to rethink the structure and effectiveness of meeting and communication practices in every school community.

For routine staff and faculty/stage meetings, the union way offers some important tools for the task at hand: a chair, an agenda, time limits for reports and speakers, a period of discussion and questions, and collective decision making. Such meeting practices also provide a means of facilitating effective consultation as required by the new consultation framework and existing health and safety provisions.

ADDITIONAL TWO HOURS PREPARATION EQUALS MORE TIME FOR COLLABORATION

The Better and Fairer Schools Agreement (2025-2034) and Federation's More Than Thanks — It's Time campaign will also provide opportunities into the future.

An additional two hours of preparation time for all teachers requires an expansion of school staffing entitlements. In addition to all the other important work teachers will be able to do in that time, increased school funding, staffing entitlement and preparation time will ensure schools have the stability of more staffing with the flexibility of additional preparation time to facilitate a whole range of collaborative professional activities between teachers within the school day.

It is all about time. You can show your support for the campaign by going to: More Than Thanks, It's Time.