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## NAPTOSA RESPONSE TO TALIS REPORT

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) has released the results for South Africa of its 2018 Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS).

The theme of the survey was “Teachers and School Leaders as Valued Professionals” and focused on the following issues:

- The value that society places on the teaching profession
- The job satisfaction of teachers and school leaders
- The working conditions, mobility and risk of attrition of teachers
- The professional autonomy that teachers enjoy and the collegiality and co-operation among them
- The success of feedback and appraisal systems.

In assessing the results of the TALIS report it must be kept in mind that-

- all the areas covered are based on views expressed by teachers interviewed for the survey, from both public and private schools
- the target group of the survey was “lower secondary teachers” which in South African terms translate to “senior phase” teachers
- the manner in which questions were framed (which are not reflected in the report) could have had an influence on the responses.

The results are mostly encouraging although some appear ambiguous.

According to the survey results, 61% of teachers believe that the teaching profession is valued in society which compares extremely favourably with the average of only 26% across the other OECD countries. This perception is in sharp contrast with the global view that there is a decline in the status of the profession. It would probably have been of greater value if the survey had in fact elicited the views of society and not the perceptions of teachers as to the perception of society.

While it is heartening that 78% of teachers and 87% of school leaders in South Africa reported that they enjoy job satisfaction, there appears to be an ambiguity when considering that within the same group of respondents –

- one in five teachers regret becoming a teacher; and
- a quarter of teachers under the age of 50 years would like to leave teaching in the next five years

If the latter is true, it could have a serious impact on the membership of NAPTOSA, because on the higher age end there are also a substantial number of members who are reaching retirement age. The matter should equally concern the DBE and measures should be put in place to ensure that there are sufficient numbers on the supply side.

Salary dissatisfaction – only 30% of teachers being satisfied with their salaries - is not surprising. If the survey had been conducted in 2020 this percentage would probably have been even lower in view of the State as employer’s renegeing on the negotiated salary increase for 2020.

As far as working conditions are concerned, high stress levels and administrative overload were highlighted as threats to the attractiveness of the teaching profession. According to the survey the three most prevalent sources of stress are being held responsible for learner achievements, excessive marking requirements and administrative tasks. These findings correspond with NAPTOSA's own views and experiences and is the reason why we have, since 2015, continually been calling for a reduction in assessment demands and a review of curriculum content overload and alignment.

The absence of violence in schools as an identified stressor is disturbing because it could give the education authorities a sense that it is not as big a problem as it is made out to be. Although not mentioned in the report, NAPTOSA will not allow this matter to be swept under the carpet.

An interesting finding on mobility is that 45% of teachers in South Africa (second highest of all the countries that participated in the Talis survey) would like to change to another school. There could obviously be a number of reasons for teachers wanting to change schools. We believe that the DBE should delve further into this matter, because if it has to do with poor school management, steps need to be taken to address the situation.

According to the report a high percentage of teachers indicated that they enjoy substantial autonomy in their classes. As high as 87% indicated that they have control over determining course content in their classes. While this is inspiring, it is hard to believe taking into account the control exercised by the DBE through CAPS, by PED scripted lessons, common tests and even having SBA directed by officials. NAPTOSA calls on the DBE/PED officials to respect the professional autonomy of the teacher and allow teachers to do what they are trained for, because if not, the autonomy referred to by the respondents could refer to self-assumed autonomy "behind the closed doors of classrooms".

That teachers can influence education policy, as 52% of the respondents indicated, is true. The report unfortunately does not clarify that such influence is not at an individual level but through the work of education trade unions and professional bodies. NAPTOSA is proud of its track record in this regard and the respect that the education authorities have for the union's inputs in education policy matters.

One of the most encouraging results of the survey is on teacher feedback where only 1% of teachers reported that they had never received feedback in their schools. Considering that teachers are annually assessed for purposes of pay progression, this figure makes sense. Although there are often question marks on the quality of the feedback, as an instrument of teacher development, it is obviously unfounded, seeing that 93% of respondents reported that the feedback received has had a positive impact on their teaching practice.

NAPTOSA hopes that the research results from TALIS 2018 will assist in reviewing and improving the South African education system.

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