

## CASE STUDY – John the woodwork teacher

**John Jones** is secondary school teacher. He has worked at Jonestown Secondary School since 2006 teaching woodwork and humanities with class sizes of 20 to 22.

John is assisted by **Greg Gregson**, a part time teacher who works 3 days a week. When Greg does not work, John needs to teach 6 periods straight. He finds this very difficult.

### 2010

In March 2010 John put a report on the school's OHS system which said:

*"I am a woodwork teacher. Over the last three years at least I have been allotted two, sometimes three, 'six on' days per week.*

*Given my work setting, noise/stress levels and the constant need to be on alert for the possible dangers arising out of equipment use in a busy setting, added to the need to keep all equipment in a safe working order and the need to prepare materials in readiness for my classes etc, I find such an allotment inequitable and more seriously, unsustainable in terms of my health and overall wellbeing.*

*I have been given verbal assurances that the various Principals involved that my situation would be addressed as a matter of urgency. My representative on the Consultative Committee, also the College's OHS rep, has also confirmed that the matter would be addressed before the commencement of Term Two 2010. This has not happened. I currently still teach 2 consecutive 6 on days and in fact my current allotment involves teaching 19 periods straight without any preparation time.*

*I was offered an alternative timetable which split my two 6 on days. But this would have involved starting classes in a way which would further exacerbate the work load issues for me. I am now told that special efforts would be made to fix the issue for Semester two of this year but that nothing could be done for Term 2.*

*As matters stand, this work load issue has already adversely impacted on my physical wellbeing and, though the accumulated stress involved, on my family. My doctor tells me that the matter needs to be addressed now as a matter of urgency."*

Judith, the principal met with John as a result of the report but did not think him to be highly stressed. John did not provide any medical evidence to Judith at that meeting. She told him that to address his concerns, he would need to change the allotment of classes and pick up some humanities subjects. John was given leave for a term and when he returned, he taught a history class and his woodwork class load was reduced.

### 2013

In 2013, a new Industrial Agreement came into effect which required a 38 hour week, including a maximum of 20 face to face teaching hours, 10 hours for preparation and other work directly related to teaching and 8 hours for other activities. Class sizes were increased to a maximum of 25.

In order to deal with a projected budget deficit in 2014, class numbers were increased in line with that maximum and John was provided with an extra period for class planning, reducing his face to face hours.

In November 2013, Edna, a teacher at the school and member of the OHS representative set a memo to Judith about the impact of the change.

*"As the staff OH&S Rep I am very concerned that a technology class can be deemed the same as a normal class, this is clearly a huge risk to the staff's health & welfare & the students safety and welfare in classes that have a high level of activity, with materials and equipment that need constant supervision and monitoring.*

*This is not a program where students can stay in their seats or quietly work unaided on a laptop computer. Any extra students will create both physical and emotional strains on the staff.*

*Having class sizes capped at 22 is a responsible approach to guarding against accidents, staff stress, workplace hazards."*

**2014**

In 2014 Greg retired and John's class sizes increased to 25 and he picked up 2 challenge classes which compressed 3 periods into 2 and involved special projects.

In October 2014 John visited his GP for the first time in 18 months and on 10 November his GP recorded that he was unable to make it to work due to stress.

In November 2014, Edna sent an email to Judith as follows:

*"As the Technology & Design CAT Leader & OH&S rep, I have been at the forefront of managing the angst, difficult transition and the many hours of meetings involved in working safely in the Technology & Design area this year.*

*I have been on the front line of watching the deterioration of the morale, health and stress levels the faculty has endured over 12mths, including my own increased workload.*

*I cannot understand how you arrive at Technology & Design not being planned on the minimum number as a Practical class. If we look at all these subjects, all of them are Hands-On. There is no down time in a double lesson. Staff are in demand for every aspect of a child's needs whilst a Pac is taking place. The biggest issue is giving each child the adequate time to individually teach a skill or sit with a student to watch their progress, whilst the rest of the class are in need of your attention, but also keeping your eye constantly on the class and what they are doing. This is why classes of Pac were smaller and where tools, electricity, drills, saws, welding, computers, hammers, sewing machines, needles, cooking oil in pan, knives etc...are involved there is always a much higher task. The learning in a Prac class isn't one where you can ask the child to sit and read for a period or do a Maths test or an exercise from a book.*

*Work load has increased 30% and the inequity where a Design & Technology teacher, on a full load of 8 classes will teach 200 students per semester, whilst their colleagues in Maths and English teach 125 students, is totally inequitable.*

*Over the year a Tech teacher will have contact with 400 students. This is excessive. All Phys-Ed or Sport teachers have high contact, but no reports to write(2022) 70 VR 260 at 268for Sport.*

*To increase the Tech & Design teachers work load with no compensation and expect that they can work in the same way and with this level of intensity is unsafe.*

*Further to this is the physical size of the rooms, that were never built for 25. In terms of the Wood facility itself, having 25 in the room puts the teacher at risk in terms of having to constantly avoid physical contact whilst moving around the room with students. There is also the issue of lack of space for storage of the additional tools, materials and models required for those additional students.*

*It was always been acknowledged by previous Principals that because the contact time was intense, the Scaff and their allotments were high, teaching 200 students a week or 175, if having 7 classes, with the need to keep all their equipment and materials in order, along with keeping in mind that there are difficult students that have higher needs in a Prac class, these subjects were kept at class sizes of 22.*

*An alternative to this workload issue and the excessive contact numbers over the year, is to allow every Tech & Design teacher an allotment of 22. This at the very least would address the workload issue, giving every teacher time to keep all materials organised and allow for the further increase in classes for next year.*

*Having an assistant presents its own issues, but this needs to be further explored. I see no difference between Science having an assistant and the needs for Textiles, Horticulture, Wood and Electronics to have an assistant for their work."*

2015

In March 2015 John returned to the doctor reporting stress and anxiety and was prescribed an anti-depressant.

In May 2015, John lodged a further report on the school's OHS system.

*"I am a full time Woodwork teacher. At the commencement of 2014 Technology class sizes were increased from a maximum of 22 students to a maximum of 25 despite the faculty expressing grave OHS concerns regarding this decision and despite the fact that spaces, in my case the Wood room, was designed for a maximum of 22 students. As a result, noise/stress and fatigue levels have risen to an unsustainable level. To make matters worse, the other Wood teacher, who used to share the maintenance tasks such as wood machining, work shop machinery and hand tool maintenance etc has been on leave since the end of 2013 and is unlikely to return and has not been replaced. The situation has become critical for me and according to my doctor, the school is lacking in its duty of care towards me. He believes I show symptoms of sustained stress, such as anxiety, depression, and chronic fatigue. They have completed some noise reduction work which is welcome, however with 25 students in the room at times the noise is still extreme. I have been promised some assistance in the form of a part time maintenance person but so far nothing has been put into place. I have told the College Principal about my and my doctor's concerns. He is sympathetic but so far little has been done. The matter has been raised with our Campus Principal by my faculty head and our OHS rep. We hope to schedule a meeting this week."*

The principal responded by suggesting that John replace half his woodwork classes with humanities subjects. He was insulted and responded by email:

*"Thank you for your suggestion regarding how my OHS issues could be addressed.*

*However it would expose two teachers to the hazards associated with overcrowding, if only for half a full allotment.*

*I have always loved teaching woodwork and I have worked extremely hard to make my courses a success. I intend to continue doing so for as long as I am able.*

*As matters stand, I think it may be best that I modify my Year 7/8 program: more theory, remove some of the more noisy tools such as hammers so that fewer students can use them at once etc. This is a pity as our program as is (sic) very popular with both students and parents.*

*I definitely would not want to lose my Year 9 classes. This innovative elective involves each student designing and building a 3 stringed electric guitar [CBG] incorporating recycled materials with plans to 3D print components on the College's newly acquired 3D printer. By this term's end we should have produced around 50 CBG's. Most of the components for next semester have already been purchased. This is a unique program and is already attracting attention outside of WHS. Maybe you could consider restoring at least my Year 9 class sizes to 22 students. Year 9s are bigger, more physical and move around more i.e. they are noisier and more difficult to manoeuvre around.*

*As you are aware, it may be possible to obtain some assistance on the wood machining, general maintenance and storage side of things. That would certainly be very helpful."*

The principal offered John the assistance a groundsman for two hours each week. That arrangement was not persisted with. John met with the principal in August and John said that he could not cope with 25 students but would tough it out for the rest of the year. He did not want to teach humanities.

In October John left the school and did not return.