

## Project Update

We hope that this newsletter finds you well! Thank you again for participating in the FIT-Choice project, to help us study why people choose teaching careers, why they choose to leave teaching, or how they develop in the profession, and what supports and sustains them. We really value the time you have taken to respond to our questionnaires in the past. All of your time has been worth it. This is the only study in the world that has been able to obtain information from this number of beginning teachers, across several continents, and over this period of time.

Many countries worldwide are having difficulties attracting and retaining teachers, especially in the areas of mathematics, science and foreign languages, and in rural or remote geographic areas. It is important to determine what factors motivate individuals to teach, which increase the likelihood of staying in the teaching profession, those conditions which are needed to sustain teacher wellbeing, and the different pathways out of teaching and into other fields.

FIT-Choice is contributing to practical and policy debate for issues including teacher recruitment, retention, effectiveness, wellbeing, work conditions, and hard-to-staff schools. You can access our publications, media articles and interviews from the FIT-Choice website. This is one of the ways we can have a visible impact on community attitudes and policy and represent your voices. We welcome your comments anytime.

## Can You Help Us?

We have been working hard to recontact all the previous participants in the study, however, there are still some with whom we have lost contact.

If you are still in contact with others who started out in your teacher education program who would have participated in the FIT-Choice project, or if you have a way of reaching them, would you be willing to ask them to get in touch with us, so that we can also invite them to continue in the research?

**We value and respect the privacy of all participants; we are not asking for you to send us the contact details of any individual directly. Any help you can provide in helping us to reach "lost" participants will be greatly appreciated.**

The success of the FIT-Choice project depends on maintaining contact with participants over the long term, if they would be willing to call us on (+61 3) 9905 2129 or email name and contact details to: [fitchoice@education.monash.edu](mailto:fitchoice@education.monash.edu)

## Locally Grown, Internationally Renowned

FIT-Choice started in the first Australian University in 2002 and has since grown to include three others, and international participant samples from the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany and Turkey. As you know, we have followed preservice teachers (you), from the beginning through to completion of your teaching qualification (for those who completed). We are now following up all participants – whether teaching, or those who took another path – to find out how you are doing, and what you are doing now.

The cross-cultural comparisons provide wonderful "natural experiments", to contrast the impact of salient cultural features. As two topical examples, teachers in Germany are better paid; and, there is an over-supply of applicants to teacher education programs in Turkey. We will be able to explore how salary impacts decisions about teaching in Germany vs. Australia, and why teaching seems to be a more attractive career in Turkey.



Collaborators from Cambridge U.K., Ahi Evran Turkey, and Michigan USA

FIT-Choice is the only research project of its kind. Other researchers from around the world have also contacted us for permission to conduct research in their contexts using our approach – we now have collaborators from Canada, Belgium, China, Malaysia, Ireland, Estonia, the Netherlands, West-Indies, India, Kenya, New Zealand, the Philippines, and Croatia!

## Take Us With You!

The ongoing success of this project depends on us being able to keep in touch with you. For this reason we have produced a fridge magnet so you can "take us with you" when you move. Please contact us if you move so we can keep in touch.



Dr Helen Watt and Dr Paul Richardson, FIT-Choice Chief Investigators

## Our Contact Details

[www.fitchoice.org](http://www.fitchoice.org)  
[fitchoice@education.monash.edu](mailto:fitchoice@education.monash.edu)  
ph (+61 3) 9905 2129 | fax (+61 3) 9905 2779

Faculty of Education, Monash University  
Clayton Campus, Wellington Road  
Melbourne, VIC 3800 Australia

Dr Helen Watt  
Dr Paul Richardson

[helen.watt@monash.edu](mailto:helen.watt@monash.edu)  
[paul.richardson@monash.edu](mailto:paul.richardson@monash.edu)

## Phase III Progress

From the latest online Phase III survey, we have responses back from 553 of the 1651 participants who initially commenced their teaching degrees. **We have been working hard to increase this response rate, and are asking for your help if you are still in contact with others who undertook teacher education studies with you, whether they completed or not.** The statistics below are based on the 553 responses we have so far.

Most are currently teaching, followed by lower proportions who are on a temporary break from teaching, left the teaching profession, qualified but never taught, or did not qualify to teach.

Of those who are teachers, 60% are secondary, 37% primary, and 3% early childhood teachers; there are 80% women and 20% men.

Those who undertook a graduate-entry teaching qualification were far more likely to complete it (95%) than those who studied undergraduate teacher education (72%). We think this is because of the different degree timeframes: the typically 4-5 years undergraduate teaching degree timeframe is a large investment of time and energy, if people have decided teaching is not the career for them.

Those who left teaching are mainly in careers such as school counsellors, in the medical profession (physiotherapist, nurse, pharmaceuticals), scientists, and various university positions (e.g., teaching, librarian). Interestingly, while not teaching in schools, many of these professions share characteristics of teaching, such as helping others and working with young people.

People who did not complete their teaching qualification, usually stated reasons such as health, financial difficulties, being unsuited to teaching, birth of a child, and interest in other fields.



Teaching pathway percentages

## Why Does Teacher Wellbeing Matter?

Teacher wellbeing is central to effectiveness, productivity and satisfaction at work. When teachers are motivated, they positively impact their students' achievement, learning, and engagement. They are also more likely to participate in extracurricular activities, are more satisfied with their career, and more committed to the teaching profession.

Teaching young people is complex and responsible work. It is very rewarding, but also challenging. You need to maintain your own wellbeing in order to work effectively and support your students; having a significant adult (you) can be an important resilience factor for adolescents who are at risk. Promoting wellbeing in your school culture must include looking after yourself and your colleagues.

Within the first 5 years of teaching, many teachers will leave the profession. There are no reliable statistics concerning the exact numbers, which is one of the areas the FIT-Choice project aims to address. Teacher attrition has been largely attributed to low work-related wellbeing and engagement (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2005), due to factors such as workload and overload, a target-driven culture, pupils' behaviour and discipline. Having unrealistic expectations of yourself can also lead to high levels of stress and disappointment.

Teaching is one of the most stressful professions: 41% of teachers report high levels of occupational stress; this compares with 31% in nursing, 29% in managerial jobs, 27% in professional and support management. Burnout is a significant problem for teachers; it is a state of physical, emotional and mental exhaustion from chronic work pressure and stress.

"We all feel stressed from time to time in our jobs; the problem comes when we have great difficulty in balancing whatever resources we have with our ability to cope when the stressors begin to chip away at those resources (our personal, social and emotional / psychological resources, our skills, our level of health)." (Rogers, 1992).

## Wellbeing Resources for Teachers

- GP / Health service
- Counselling service
- [www.lifeline.org.au/](http://www.lifeline.org.au/) Tel: 13 11 14
- [www.beyondblue.org.au](http://www.beyondblue.org.au) Tel: 1300 22 4636
- Department of Education and Training Employee assistance:
  - DET NSW Employee Assistance Programs: IPS Worldwide Tel: 1300 366 789 or Davidson Trahaire Corpsych Tel: 1300 360 364
  - DEECD VIC Employee Assistance Program: Tel: 1800 337 068 <http://www.eduweb.vic.gov.au/hrweb/safetyhw/default.htm>

## Tips for Work-Life Balance

**1. Prioritise your time:** Make a balance plan of how much time you want to dedicate to your personal life and to your work activities each day, week or month. Make sure they are balanced; remember (like a budget), stick to your plan!

**2. Learn to say "NO!":** When you have your plan, learn to say "no" to things that aren't a priority. If important things pop up, make sure you put the time back into the activity you dismissed later on.

**3. Use stress management techniques:** Unfortunately, work stress and personal stress are often unavoidable, so learn how to cope with them effectively. Understand more about stress: what are the sources, how it affects you. Work out what helps you to relax, such as exercising, meditation, listening to music, talking to family, friends or spending time with your pets. Make time for it in your balance plan too.

Recognise and accept your own feelings: express them and be aware of past experiences. Take time to reflect: reassess values, review goals. Use a systematic problem solving approach: define, break it down, one step at a time, develop evaluate and execute a plan of action.

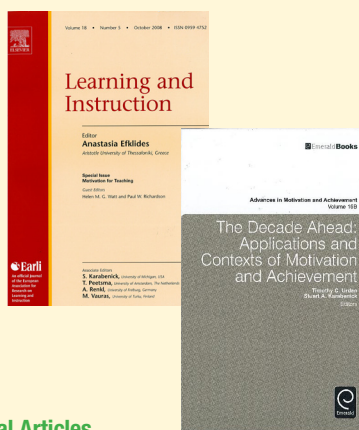
**4. Talk to your friends and family:** Sometimes the best way to deal with work and personal life conflict, is to make your feelings known to your family or friends. They can offer great advice and support. Establish and use a social support network. Ask for and accept help, cultivate good relationships, talk.

**5. Talk to your boss and work colleagues:** Making your difficulties known at work can help you to obtain support from the people who can do something directly about the problem or issue. If nobody knows you are feeling pressured and stressed, then no-one can help you.

**6. Decide what works for you:** Some people find that separating work from personal life is best (e.g., don't check your work emails at home); others find that integrating the two domains helps, depending on your lifestyle (e.g., socialising with work colleagues). Decide which option best suits your individual balance plan. We are all different, after all.

## FIT-Choice Publications

All downloadable at [www.fitchoice.org](http://www.fitchoice.org)



## Helpful Coping Strategies

DON'T:

- bottle it up,
- work longer hours,
- take work home,
- be a perfectionist,
- procrastinate and avoid,
- squeeze out hobbies.

DO:

- delegate,
- say "no",
- take breaks,
- talk about it.

## A Healthy Lifestyle

A healthy lifestyle is important to everyone's wellbeing. Exercise releases muscle tension and accumulated adrenalin, is a relaxant, good for circulation, and lowers blood pressure. Endorphins that are released through the body are natural anti-depressants. Exercise clears the mind, improves mood, self image, appearance and weight control. Ideally, aim to exercise 20-30 minutes for 2-3 times per week; choosing activities that combine suppleness, stamina and strength, such as swimming, cycling and walking.

Diet is fuel for our bodies; good eating improves performance, strengthens our immune system, and enables us to cope. High fibre foods are good, but avoid too many saturated fats, and cut down on "mood foods": salt, sugar, alcohol and caffeine. Sit down and enjoy your food: 3 meals / 3 snacks / no more than 3 hours between. Recommended weekly alcohol intake is 21 units for men, 14 for women. Enjoy everything in moderation!

## Journal Articles

Watt, H. M. G. & Richardson, P. W. (Guest Eds.). (2008). 'Motivation for Teaching'. *Learning and Instruction*, 18(5).

Watt, H. M. G. & Richardson, P. W. (2008). Motivations, perceptions, and aspirations concerning teaching as a career for different types of beginning teachers. *Learning and Instruction*, 18, 408-428.

Watt, H. M. G. & Richardson, P. W. (2008). Guest editorial: Motivation for teaching. *Learning and Instruction*, 18, 405-407.

Richardson, P. W. & Watt, H. M. G. (2008). Career change? *Monash Business Review*, 4(3), 7 & 9.

Watt, H. M. G. & Richardson, P. W. (2007). Motivational factors influencing teaching as a career choice: Development and validation of the FIT-Choice Scale. *Journal of Experimental Education*, 75(3), 167-202.

Richardson, P. W. & Watt, H. M. G. (2006). Who chooses teaching and why? Profiling characteristics and motivations across three Australian universities. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education*, 34(1), 27-56.

Richardson, P. W. & Watt, H. M. G. (2005). "I've decided to become a teacher": Influences on career change. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 21, 475-489.



## Juliette Spearman: Middle Years Engagement in Science & Maths

Master of Psychology (Education & Development),  
graduating 2011

Juliette conducts interviews with FIT-Choice participants, whether they are teachers or in other career fields, and she finds it very interesting learning from their unique experiences at work. Juliette's research is about students' perceptions of their classroom environments, and how these affect motivation and engagement in science and mathematics. Juliette was born and bred in New Zealand but "jumped the ditch" to undertake her Master of Psychology. She aims to practice as an educational psychologist, and is grateful for the insight her role in the FIT-Choice team has given her concerning teachers' experiences.



Left to right: Zoe, Chris, Juliette, Nilusha, Annabelle (and Luke).  
Front: Amanda, Candice.

## Candice Pope: Nursing & Wellbeing

Bachelor of Nursing (Mental Health) 2009

Candice has worked for FIT-Choice since 2008 and is completing her graduate nursing year in a private Melbourne hospital. Candice's main roles have been to locate participants who have moved address; she has also transcribed participant interviews. Although nursing and teaching are different professions, through listening to participants' personal experiences about their first years as a teacher, she has found similarities in her own experiences starting out in nursing. Candice is considering postgraduate studies either in theatre or midwifery.

## Nilusha De Alwis: Beginning Teachers & Burnout

Master of Psychology (Education & Development),  
graduating 2011

Nilusha has been involved with FIT-Choice since 2009. Her responsibilities include data analyses and interpretations of the surveys and interviews. Nilusha's research project examines burnout among beginner teachers, and how this impacts persistence in the teaching profession. After her degree, Nilusha aims to work as a psychologist either in a school or in a children's hospital. Working in the FIT-Choice team has provided Nilusha with a great opportunity to extend her research skills, and, to learn more about psychology and teachers.

## Annabelle Fourie: Teacher Perceptions & Engagement

Master of Psychology (Education & Development), graduating 2011

Annabelle also conducts interviews with FIT-Choice participants. Her research explores teachers' perceptions and engagement for different aspects of their work, and their impact on career retention. Having worked as a secondary teacher for a number of years, Annabelle had found that there would be some students in every class whom she didn't quite know how to help. This inspired her to undertake further education in psychology. Her research interests derive from having experienced the pressures of teaching, and observed the high incidence of teachers on stress leave and leaving the profession. She would like to continue working in schools once she qualifies as a psychologist. Ideally, she would work with teachers, in whole-staff approaches, aiming to improve wellbeing, and, to meet the needs of challenging students.

## Chris Pun: Future Social Science Teacher

Bachelor of Arts & Bachelor of Commerce,  
graduating 2012

Chris has worked for FIT-Choice since 2008. He maintains our databases and organises mailouts to participants. Chris plans to qualify to teach secondary level history, politics and economics, and to pursue a leadership role in schools. Working as a Research Assistant in the FIT-Choice project has been a fantastic opportunity for Chris to gain a valuable insight into the experiences and wellbeing of teachers, and to shape his future roles and career path.

## Amanda Bell: Work-Life Balance & Spirituality

Bachelor of Applied Science (Human Resource Management and Psychology), 2003  
Master of Business (by Research), 2010

Amanda works 3 days a week in the FIT-Choice project. Her roles include newsletters development and management of our library of references. As well, she tutors in the preservice teacher education program at Monash University. Amanda's research has focused on the influence of job stress on work-life balance and work-life conflict, and, the buffering role that spirituality can play. Her work with Australian academics indicates that they are increasingly stressed, experiencing difficulties balancing their work and personal lives, and suffering poor psychological health and wellbeing. Consequently, tertiary educators would benefit from better stress management techniques, and for employers to provide stress reducing initiatives in the workplace.

## Zoe Morris: Professional Identity

Bachelor of Applied Science/Social Science 2003, Hons, 2004  
Master of Psychology (Education & Development), 2008

Zoe has been a Research Assistant with FIT-Choice since 2008. Zoe's role in the project is varied and involves data management and analysis, writing up research findings as well as cataloguing our growing international collaborators. She also works as a psychologist in primary and secondary schools, and teaches within the Monash teacher education programs, working with preservice secondary teachers in relation to issues such as bullying, mental health, and special learning needs. Zoe recently commenced her PhD, investigating the development of professional identities among early career professionals, including teachers, psychologists and medical doctors.

## Book Chapters

Richardson, P. W. & Watt, H. M. G. (2010). Current and future directions in teacher motivation research (Ch. 5, pp. 139-173). In T. C. Urdan & S. A. Karabenick (Eds.), *The decade ahead: Applications and contexts of motivation and achievement*; Advances in Motivation and Achievement, Volume 16B. Bingley, U.K.: Emerald.

De Alwis, N. & Watt, H. M. G. (2010). Entrepreneurial and other career motivations among engineering students (Ch. 15, pp. 267-280). In A. Malach-Pines & M. F. Özbilgin (Eds.), *Handbook of research on high-technology entrepreneurs*. Cheltenham, U.K.: Edward Elgar Publishing.

Watt, H. M. G., Richardson, P. W., & Pietsch, J. (2009). Choosing to teach in the "STEM" disciplines: Characteristics and motivations of science, technology, and mathematics teachers from Australia and the United States (Ch. 13, pp. 285-309). In A. Selkirk & M. Tichenor (Eds.), *Teacher education: Policy, practice and research*. New York: Nova Science Publishers.

Watt, H. M. G., Richardson, P. W., & Tysvaer, N. M. (2007). Profiles of beginning teachers' professional engagement and career development aspirations (Ch. 10, pp. 155-176). In A. Berry, A. Clemans, & A. Kostogriz (Eds.), *Dimensions of professional learning: Professionalism, practice and identity*. Rotterdam, The Netherlands: Sense Publishers.

Richardson, P. W., Watt, H. M. G., & Tysvaer, N. M. (2007). What motivates people to change out of business-related careers into teaching? (Ch. 9, pp. 219-239). In M. F. Özbilgin & A. Malach-Pines (Eds.), *Career choice in management and entrepreneurship - A research companion*. Edward Elgar Press.

## FIT-Choice Postgraduate Thesis Supervisions

Effects of gender and gender role orientation on high school students' teaching perceptions and aspirations in Hong Kong (Wai Shan Ku 2009)

What teachers believe, say and do: A study of the relationship between teacher self-efficacy for student engagement, their engagement practices, and student engagement (Fiona Morrison 2009)

Personality and teachers: A multifaceted approach (Kevin Quin 2008)

Identifying factors that deter engineering students from pursuing a STEM teaching career (Nilusha De Alwis 2008)

Indonesian English teachers' self-efficacy beliefs (Basikin 2008)

Attitudes of university students towards teaching as a career (Amy Brown 2007)

Teachers - the next generation: Issues in teacher recruitment (Amy Young 2007)

## What are Teachers' Main Goals?

The FIT-Choice surveys asked questions about your main goals, and concerns, for those who are (or were) teaching. This section outlines some of the main goals and concerns that you identified.

"Motivate them to learn, and make them, each one of them, achieve the best that they could do at their own level and just prepare them for life."

Your goals as early career teachers were concerned with helping children and adolescents value learning and develop themselves to the best of their abilities. Our research is showing that teachers' goals, feelings of professional autonomy, and enthusiasm for teaching, in turn influence their students' motivations and behaviours.

"I found it satisfying to see the students that I work with do well, and I love organising and developing curriculum and then delivering it. That's where I really got a lot of satisfaction from."

This is a very important link, because central to the work of teachers is creating and striving to attain goals for their students. Teaching is unique in that the goals of others (their students) are core to a teacher's own professional motivations. This is not the case in most other occupations.

What brings satisfaction and a sense of achievement to teachers and makes them want to stay in the job? Your comments focused on students and their development, enjoyment of developing and delivering the curriculum, and the intrinsic intellectual and emotional rewards of the challenges of teaching.

"I find it satisfying if I can build a rapport with a kid who's maybe, not as interested in school."

In interviews, you talked about wanting to "motivate them to learn" and engender "a love of learning", so that students can "achieve the best that they could do at their own level", as well as to have "confidence in themselves and in their ability to be able to learn."

The kinds of goals that were most important to you, are exactly the goals which ought to bring about optimal teaching effectiveness and learner outcomes, to scaffold and promote students' motivation, goals and achievement. Problems arise when teachers are unable to attain their main goals, typically due to situational constraints and competing demands.

## ... and Main Concerns?

While schools have been given a level of self-managing autonomy, teachers and principals are faced more and more with achievement targets, out-of-class administrative duties, and reporting requirements, that have little to do with the relational work with students, which many teachers continue to see as their "real" work.

Funding of schools is more and more tied to student achievement outcomes targets, and teachers are inevitably identified with the responsibility of meeting them. Policy measures designed to increase teacher accountability, and provide comparative student achievement data using standardised tests, have brought significant changes to teachers' work.

This has begun to create a disjuncture between why teachers want to teach, and the work they are required to spend their time doing. People who became teachers because they want to work with children and adolescents become less satisfied with their work, if it means they have little time to engage in relational work on a daily basis.

We asked you whether the work of teachers was valued by society. Overwhelmingly, your responses were that while individual teachers are valued by parents and students and receive affirmation from them, the wider society and media representation of teachers grossly undervalues, and often misrepresents their work.

FIT-Choice is working to identify how best to support teachers' goals, and address their concerns, from the important data you have provided. Policymakers and employers are most likely to be persuaded by cross-context, large-scale and longitudinal data, such as we are collecting. Thank you again for your participation, without which none of this work would be possible!

"I think teachers are often the scapegoats ... as to why students don't perform."

Even though many of you enjoyed teaching, you often acknowledged that work pressures were "intense" and "daunting", resulting in being "absolutely exhausted" and "stressed" by the competing demands of a heavy workload, too little time, and not being able to "leave work at work".

Your main concerns clustered around issues which interact to impact on job satisfaction: leadership support, time pressure, relations with parents, and autonomy. A supportive work environment is highly important in decisions about whether to stay, move to another school, or leave teaching altogether.

"I think everyone recognises that it's a valuable, value adding profession but... unless you know a teacher really well or have lived with one, for example, you don't necessarily know the commitment that is required to be a really good teacher."

Some of you spoke about what it means to work in supportive school environments characterised by engaged leadership, collegiality, and a strong sense of community.

Unfortunately, not all schools are supportive. Like other workplaces where there are not good relationships and respect among staff, this can undermine satisfaction and commitment. This then leads to stress, and lowered levels of confidence and perceived competence.

able achieve areas become being best build career children class confidence  
content create develop difference education enjoy enthusiastic environment  
experience feel give goals good happy have help hope I improve inspire job  
knowledge learning life love make my outcomes people  
position positive possible potential provide results satisfaction school science skills  
students subject successful teach understanding

## FIT-Choice Cares About Your Experiences and Wellbeing

If you have not already, and would like to share your thoughts and experiences in an interview (whether you are teaching or not), we are very interested in hearing from you! This 30-40 minute interview allows you to express your views about your goals, concerns, experiences, and workplace culture.

If this is an opportunity that you would like to take, please email your name, ID, and contact number to [fitchoice@education.monash.edu](mailto:fitchoice@education.monash.edu). We hope to hear your valuable information and insights.

## FIT-Choice Acknowledgments

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- Monash University
- University of Western Sydney
- University of Michigan
- Eastern Michigan University

## FIT-Choice In the Media

Thanks to the information that you have provided, FIT-Choice has featured in several newspaper articles and other forms of popular press in the last few years. Below is a list of media articles which can be viewed in detail at [www.fitchoice.org](http://www.fitchoice.org)

- Victorian Institute of Teaching Newsletter, Issue 03 Nov 2009, *Supporting the future of teaching*
- *The Age*: 16 March 2009, *Many teachers use job as career step*
- *The Age*: 10 July 2007, *Life lessons*
- *The Age*: 3 June 2007, p.7, *Sea change in the classroom*
- *The Age*: 3 June 2007, p.14, *Career of education should be a pooled resource*
- *The Age*: 27 Nov 2006, p.2, *Teaching's good life simply a myth* SYN FM "Panorama" interview 6 June 2007
- ABC Radio Adelaide: Bald Brothers Breakfast program, 28 Nov 2006
- Monash University recruitment 2006, *Education*

## FIT-Choice Joins Facebook

You are welcome to add us to your profile if you would like. You can find us at <http://www.facebook.com/fitchoiceproject>. We will use this site to post updates of interesting news and articles, including our own, so you know when it's worth checking the FIT-Choice website for new papers or publicity. We live in interesting times!