



Submission to the New Zealand Royal Commission Covid19 Lessons Learned.

Te Tira Ārai Urutā: Phase Two.

On Behalf Of:

NEW ZEALAND TEACHERS SPEAKING OUT WITH SCIENCE (NZTSOS)

Report: Findings from a Members' Survey April 2025

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Contents

Contents.....	2
1) Introduction	4
2) Methodology.....	8
3) Overview of Survey Participants	10
Who are New Zealand Teachers Speaking Out with Science (NZTSOS)?	10
a) Ethnicity	10
b) Professional Identity of NZTSOS members	11
c) Gender and Age Range of the Participants	12
Graphs 1 & 2.....	12
d) Qualifications and Experience of Participants	13
Graph 3.....	13
Graph 4.....	14
Graph 5.....	15
Graph 6.....	16
Graph 7.....	16
4) Themes from the Narratives	18
a) Theme One: Emotional and Physical harms	18
Exemptions process flawed.....	21
Teachers excluded and ‘stood down’	24
Graph 8.....	36
Graph 9.....	37
Graph 10.....	38
b) Theme Two: Legal and Financial Issues.....	39
Graph 11.....	39
Support from School or Elsewhere	44
Graph 12.....	47
Graph 13.....	49
c) Theme Three: Propaganda and Censorship	50
Graph 14.....	55
c) Theme Four: Role models, student relationships and impact on others.....	56
d) Theme Five: Wasted expertise.....	58
Graph 15.....	61

e) Theme Six: Unprofessional behaviour	62
f) Theme Seven: Resilience in Adversity.....	67
5) Conclusions	70
a) Summary of NZTSOS Submission	71
b) NZTSOS Key Recommendations	72
Appendix 1: Survey questions.....	74
Appendix 2: Research Ethics Approval.....	79
Disclaimer:	80
References.....	81

1) Introduction

New Zealand Teachers Speaking Out with Science (NZTSOS) welcomes this opportunity to make this submission to the Royal Commission of Inquiry (RCOI) into COVID-19 Lessons Learned *Te Tira Ārai Urutā* - Phase Two.

The RCOI Commissioners have valuable, wide-ranging expertise in legal matters, public health and policy. We share the RCOI's aspiration to uncover a full picture of what occurred during the covid era, and in seeking an acknowledgement of the lived experiences of New Zealanders, specifically teachers (and their students), who were negatively impacted by the decisions Government made during the covid era. Our submission contributes valuable knowledge that can help the RCOI provide positive outcomes that address these harms and ensure they do not happen again. We recognise and respect the time needed to read through this submission and welcome any questions.

Our submission, in the form of this report, presents results from a recent online survey of our members. The NZTSOS is an incorporated society, run entirely by volunteers, for more about us, see [Section 3](#) below. The survey is described more fully in the [Methodology](#) section below. Survey outcomes revealed evidence of the physical, professional and emotional impact of the covid era, including the months before and during the vaccination mandates on teachers during the period **February 2021 and October 2022**. Some of these harms are ongoing, four years later.

The teachers who participated in this survey are committed to *Te Tiriti o Waitangi* Partnership, professional learning, and building professional relationships with learners, whanau, colleagues and communities. We strive to create learning focused cultures that deliver meaningful and engaging learning experiences for everyone, using effective teaching strategies, assessment practices, and feedback to support our students' progress. As professional educators, we typically plan lessons by applying differentiation to meet the needs of diverse learners, teach, assess, report, manage classrooms, collaborate with other professionals, engage with whanau, participate in ongoing professional development, and contribute to all aspects of school life.

The narrative analysis of the responses led the researchers to identify seven broad themes that were recurrent within the participants' responses. These have been drawn upon within this report, under the following headings:

- 1. Emotional and Physical harms**
- 2. Legal and Financial Issues**
- 3. Propaganda and Censorship**
- 4. Role Models, Student Relationships and Impact on others,**
- 5. Wasted Expertise**
- 6. Unprofessional Behaviour**
- 7. Resilience in Adversity**

Before the narrative analysis, the report begins with an overview of the participants ethnicity, location, age, gender and other aspects of their lives, which we believe to be representative of the teachers impacted by the covid era mandates.

Educators are humble architects and facilitators of society—shaping minds, nurturing potential, and laying the foundation for future generations. Our influence extends far beyond any classroom, whether virtually or *kanohi ki te kanohi*. Every lesson delivered, every conversation held, every word of encouragement given, every belief shown to a learner, sends a ripple across families, communities, and nations. The motive we all have in common is how we never stop wanting the best for our students. In a world navigating rapid change and complex challenges, investing in educators is an act of collective foresight and care for the generations to come.

There has always been a critical need to protect, support, and retain the wealth of wisdom and experience educators can offer. Yet when an estimated 8000 Kiwi educators were removed from our profession due to mandate policies—educators who share the same aspirations, dedication, and care - New Zealand suffered a heavy loss. Our value, experience, and years of committed service were lost to the sector during a time when *tamariki* and *rangitahi* needed stability, guidance, and experience to navigate the physical and emotional trauma that the covid era policy decisions presented. As one young child said to his teacher, “*Where did you go? The*

teachers at school said you were sick and that you wouldn't come back. Why did they lie to us?"

This report provides some background about 'where' those educators went, why those lies were told, how we were impacted and why many of us are still suffering 'those covid years'.



Image by maxim-tolchinskiy on Unsplash [creative commons]

This report ends by stating nine recommendations from NZTSOS for the Commissioners to consider, namely:

1. A formal Government apology is urgently needed for all education staff negatively impacted by the mandates, and full, unconditional re-registration offered, without prejudice.
2. A formal non-discriminatory employment policy could be formalised, to safeguard future risks of staff and student discrimination.
3. A comprehensive, independent review is required of the role of the educational bodies and any future workforce status requirements such as vaccination policy.
4. The MoE, ERO and various research entities could investigate the adverse event reporting from the teachers who received one or more doses of the vaccine.

5. A confirmation of the respect of informed consent protocols when aiming to communicate any health interventions within the workforce.
6. The rights of teachers to freedom of thought, speech, opinion, conscience and religion regarding vaccinations.
7. A full review of the ethics of interventions via national and international Behavioural Insights Teams, including private consultants.
8. Accountability measures for the failed duty of care towards unvaccinated teachers by regulatory bodies.
9. Accountability for the role of the Ministry of Education in failures to take reasonable steps in accommodating unvaccinated teachers during and after the mandates.

In the next section, [Section 2](#), we explain the Methodology of this research report, before [Section 3](#), where we explain (in Subsections a-d) who the participants of the survey are, and summarise the quantitative findings of the data. In [Section 4](#), we explain, with outcomes from the survey, the qualitative findings, through each of the **seven themes** we listed above from the narratives. Finally, in [Section 5](#), we conclude this report with a summary of the findings and identify **ten recommendations**.

2) Methodology

The online survey that supports the evidence within this report used secure software.¹ The questionnaire is included in [Appendix 1](#). The survey's aim was collecting views and experiences of members of the NZTSOS, mainly for the purposes of informing the group submission for the NZ Covid Inquiry, Phase 2. The results may also provide useful information for future publications and the aims of NZTSOS. Research ethics approval was sought and approved by the *Aotearoa Independent Research Ethics Committee* (Ref: 2024_54 attached in [Appendix 2](#)). A sensitive, ethical approach was always adhered to. Because of the sensitive nature of the data and the trust built-up within the group, appropriate sources of emotional support were provided within the survey and whenever necessary, through internal networks, and/or more formal counselling entities.

The self-reported statistical data used in this survey was with the liaison and agreement of the NZTSOS Committee, its members and qualified academic researchers. Responses were received from 140 teachers (not all participants answered every question) gathered via responses to publicly available social media channels during March 2025. The survey included multiple-choice options as well as an option for some free-text responses. Additional responses were also received via a private email.

The qualitative, mixed-methods survey is framed as 'insider research' as it is formed, developed and analysed, with results subsequently presented by individuals who have a shared culture and lived experience of the situation under investigation.² The researchers are qualified and experienced and volunteered to undertake this project without funding or other advantage. This is because trust is a crucial element of sensitive research of this kind, which seeks to bring authentic insights from a group who have suffered discrimination, hostility and alienation from

¹ Optimum Consulting, 'Tandem'.

² Charon, *Symbolic Interactionism: An Introduction, an Interpretation, an Interrogation*.

society over a prolonged period.³ The participants articulated extremely personal, emotional situations in their responses to the survey questions. Understanding the intense concerns from participants who wanted to maintain their anonymity and privacy, all identifying factors within the raw data were redacted prior to analysis, to avoid any possibility of linking data with individuals. Other potential identifiable aspects of the data (e.g. locations) have also been redacted. The quotes used throughout this report were genuine responses within the survey.

The presence of ‘teacher’ in the name NZTSOS is intended as a broad term and not limited to schoolteachers. The words ‘teacher’ and ‘educator’ are used interchangeably in this report to denote school leaders, teachers, teacher aides, tutors, educational consultants and educational administrators. It should also be noted that although most teachers’ roles we refer to were paid, this submission also includes experiences of volunteers, unpaid elements of paid jobs and a variety of other flexible roles, all of which the NZ education system relies upon to maintain its functionality, especially during the covid era under investigation.

Using a narrative analysis of the raw data, a thematic approach was used to tease-out the repeated concerns, experiences and aspirations from the participants’ responses.⁴ For reading clarity, any typographical or grammatical errors or omissions, abbreviations or jargon have been corrected or amended to improve the comprehension and flow of the report. No major revisions to the data have been made and we welcome any questions from the Commissioners regarding specific issues raised.

The online survey and the analysis of the results has been carried out in good faith and remains the intellectual property of the authors. Note the Disclaimer at the end of this report. Please contact the NZTSOS in advance for permissions to republish or represent any aspect of this report.

³ Biesta, ‘From Learning Cultures to Educational Cultures: Values and Judgements in Educational Research and Educational Improvement.’

⁴ Bathmaker and Harnett, *Exploring Learning, Identity and Power through Life History and Narrative Research*.

3) Overview of Survey Participants

Who are New Zealand Teachers Speaking Out with Science (NZTSOS)?

NZTSOS started as an informal group of concerned education staff who came together via social media and face-to-face during the covid era. The widespread censorship presented significant challenges for the group to stay connected. NZTSOS was formed and became an incorporated society in October 2021. It represented over 1,200 education employees who were adversely impacted by the Labour Government's Education Workers Vaccination Mandate Order. Nearly four years after the group's formation, many members remain closely connected and share ongoing difficulties and help each other with finding solutions. Members of NZTSOS were invited to participate in this survey via a personal email from the group's database and also via public and private social media channels.

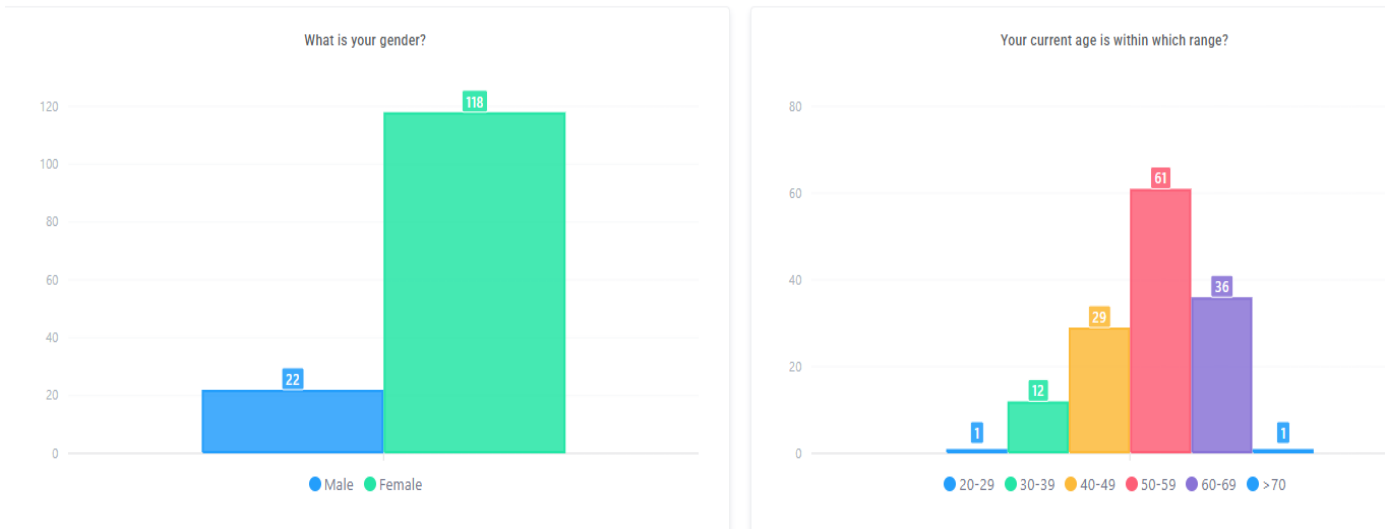
a) Ethnicity

Participants had a free-text space to type how they self-identified their ethnicity. This is the word-cloud to show the diversity of responses to the question "How would you describe your ethnicity?"



c) Gender and Age Range of the Participants

Graphs 1 & 2



The above two graphs (1 & 2) illustrate that (as expected) most of the participants of the survey were female (84%) and between the age range of 50-59 (43%). This profile matches the inter/national literature in terms of the gender of the profession as a whole.⁵ The age range of those who did not comply with the covid era policies such as vaccination mandates also corresponds with existing international research in this area.⁶ Reasons for this are outside the scope of this report.

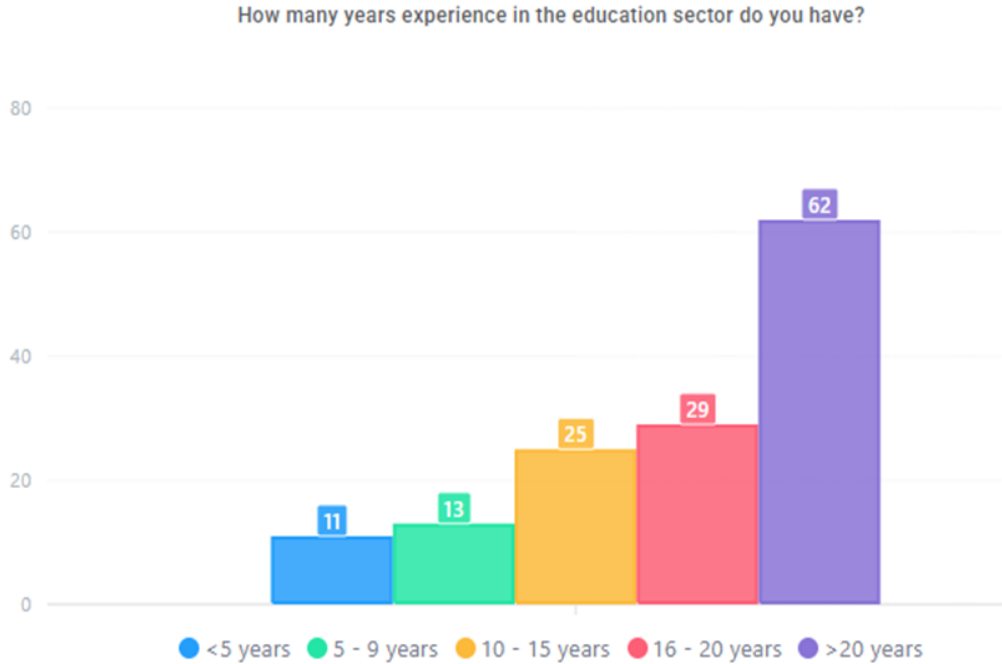
It is interesting to note that there was a larger than expected representation of male teachers (15%) and that the 60-69 age range of the respondents was the next largest cohort, representing 25% of participants. Again, this is reflected and adds weight to the confidence of the other responses in the survey, where the majority of participants reported high levels of qualifications, many years' experience and senior, full-time positions within their school or other institution. (Details in [Theme Five](#)).

⁵ Butler, *Undoing Gender*.

⁶ Kleitman et al., 'To Comply or Not Comply? A Latent Profile Analysis of Behaviours and Attitudes during the COVID-19 Pandemic'.

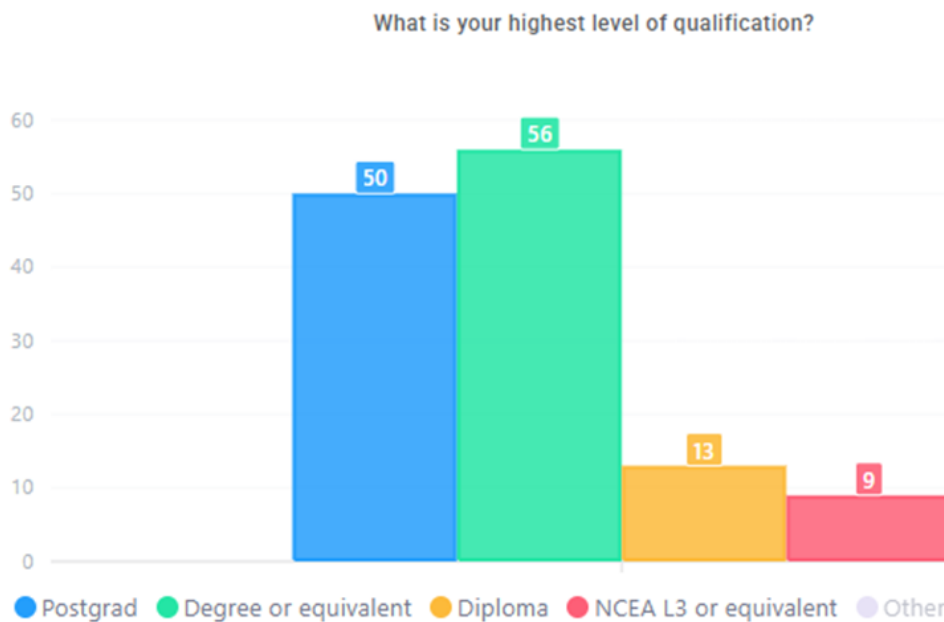
d) Qualifications and Experience of Participants

Graph 3



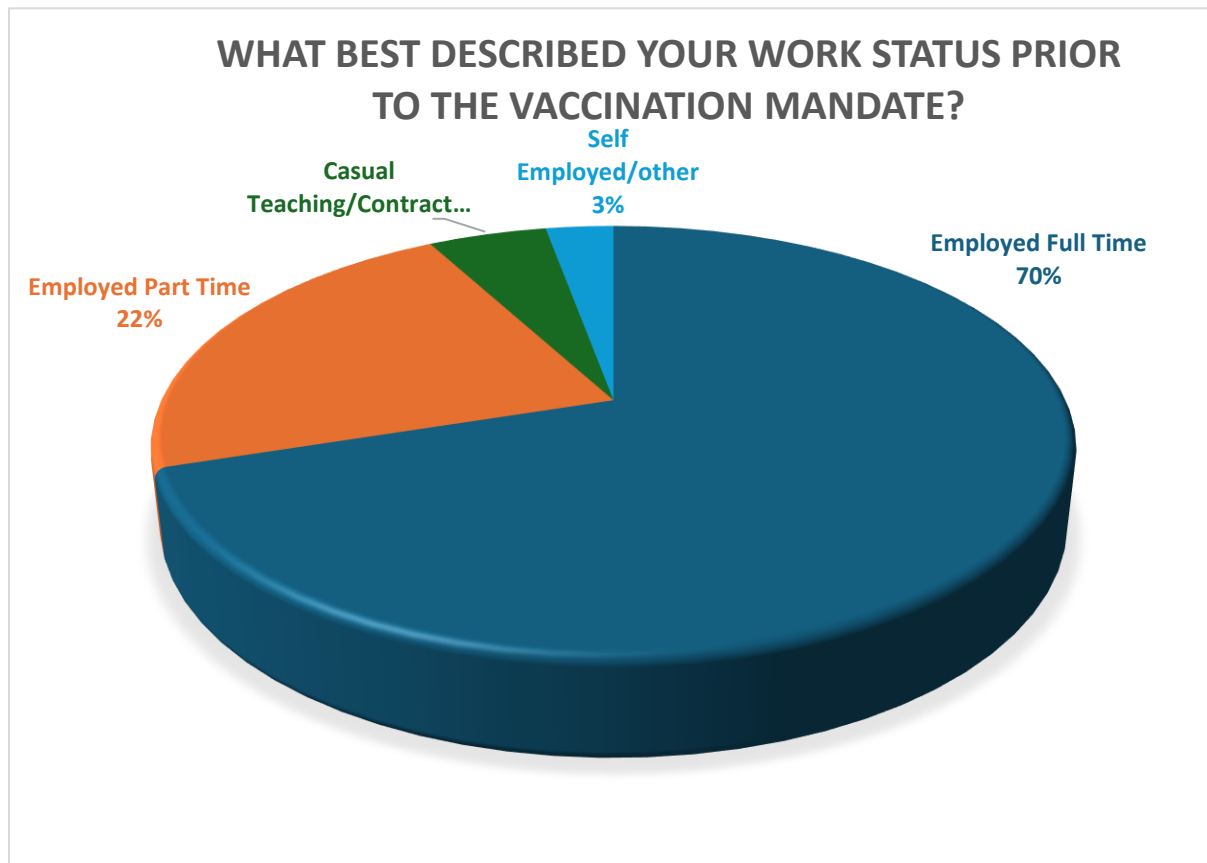
Note the evidence from Graph 3 above, which shows the lengths of service within the participant group. We can see that most respondents (44%, n=62) had **over 20 years of experience in teaching and learning**. Indeed, 20% also had between 16-20 years' experience. Within the NZTSOS sample illustrated within this survey's results, a total of **at least 2,024 years** of teaching experience – wiped out of New Zealand's schools because of the covid era mandates – at a time when students and colleagues needed them most. As we will see from the sections which follow, for complex reasons, many of these staff have not returned to their previous positions. There are further possibilities of insights into these important issues with future research.

Graph 4



Note the colour-coded key of the above, graph 4, where we can see that the vast majority (83%) of respondents were qualified teachers to degree level or above (+2 from emails) (n=108). The data did not capture all the different teaching qualifications (eg vocational) however this data provides a good overview of the high levels of expertise in our schools, terminated during the covid era mandates. Again, further research could be useful to obtain insights into what quals and experiences this group of teachers shared.

Graph 5

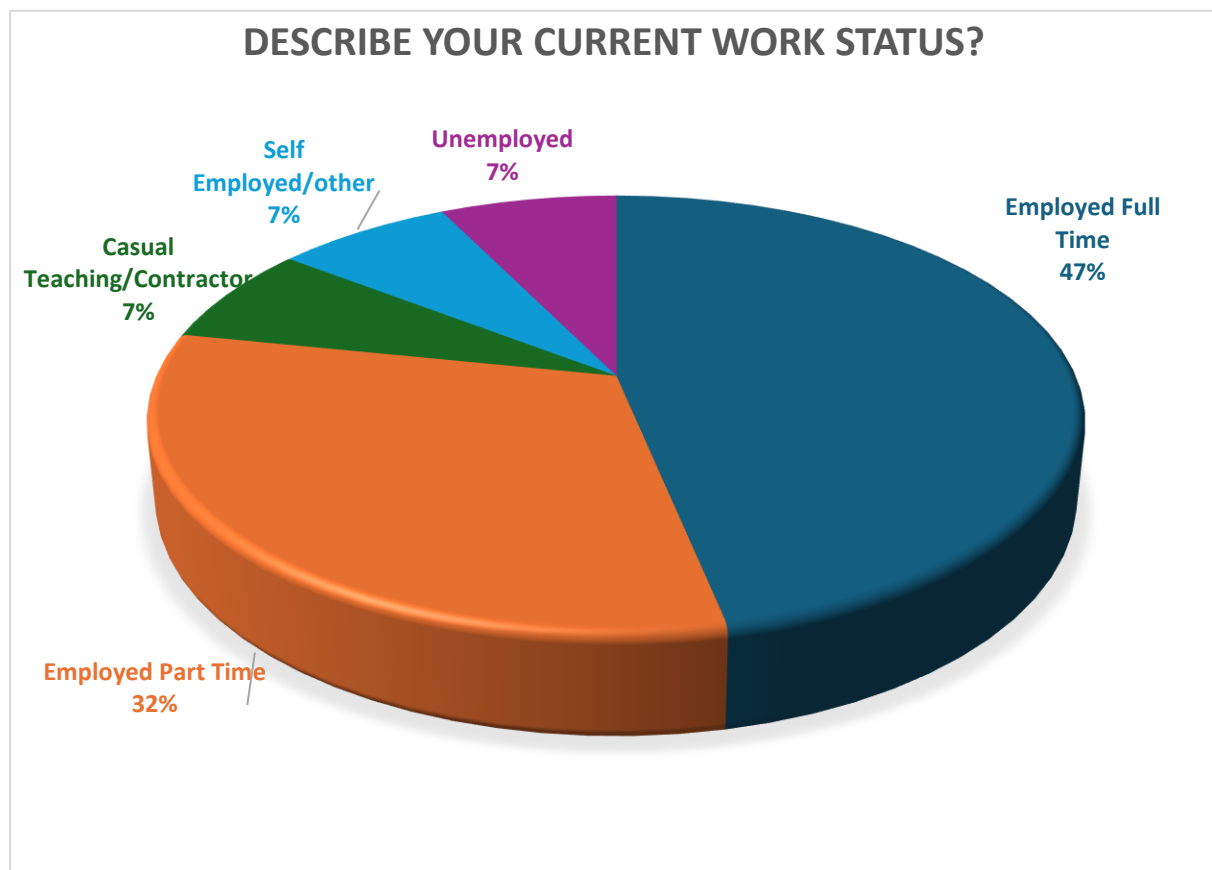


The above Graph 5, the data adds weight to the previous quantitative findings and confirms how most of the respondents (70%, n=98) **were working full-time in education at the point of the vaccination mandates**. These were teachers, principals and other educationalists, using their high-quality skills, qualifications and experience, not only in teaching their students but also in managing and mentoring their staff and/or colleagues for the benefit of the New Zealand education system.

The next pie chart, (Graph 6, below) shows the stark reality of the impact of the vaccination mandates on our school system, where even today, five years after the beginning of the covid era, **and three years after the lifting of the vaccination order**, there has been a **reduction from 70% to 47% of these participants' engagement in full time employment**. 7% of respondents indicated they were voluntarily unemployed, actively looking for work or have been unable to

work because of medical reasons. This will be discussed in more detail in the themes that follow.

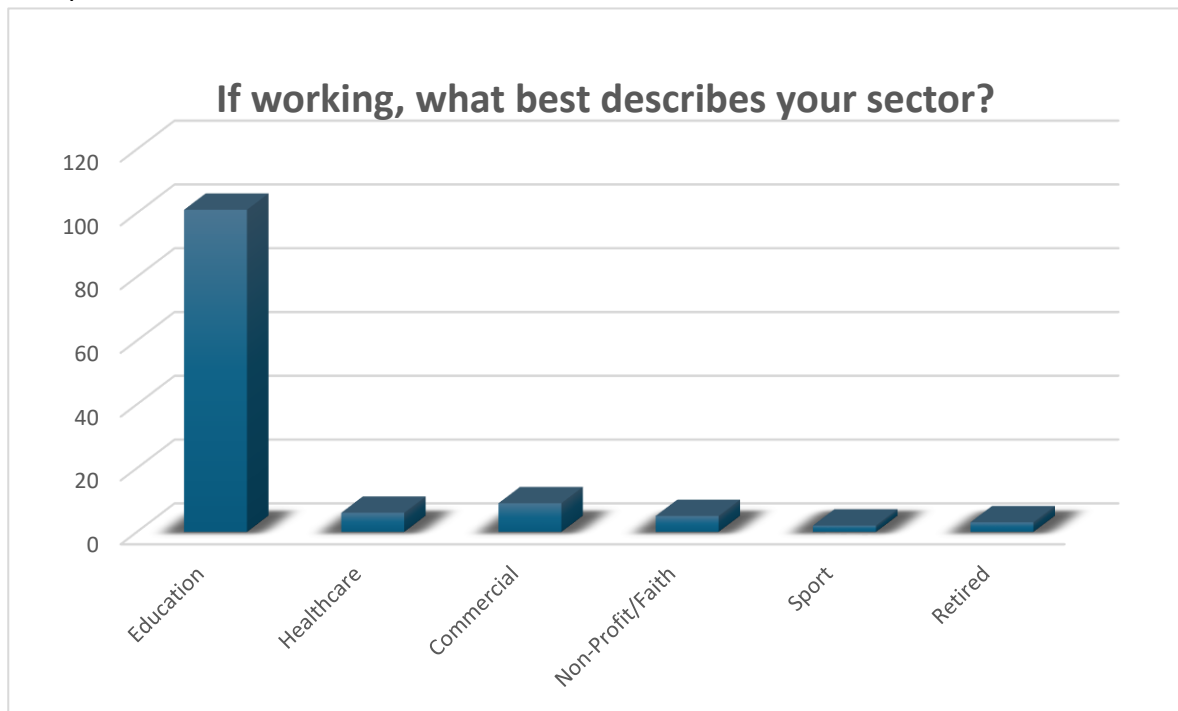
Graph 6



Graph 7

Reflecting our members' passion for the education sector, most of those respondents who reported working, in whatever role, are within the education sector today. However, the graph below (consolidated to protect participants' confidentiality) illustrates the mix of other professions, which include retail and sport, that may reflect the compromises made by those teachers and other educators who were mandated out of their roles during the vaccination order and still unable (or unwilling) to return. Reasons for this will also be explained in the themes and evidence which follow.

{Graph 7}



Having illustrated above in this Overview of the Survey Participants, including the main demographic and employment data that were part of the findings from the survey, we now turn to the main themes from the narratives, alongside some of the quantitative data that correlates our findings. The seven main themes, as explained in the introduction are:

- 1. Emotional and Physical harms**
- 2. Legal and Financial Issues**
- 3. Propaganda and Censorship**
- 4. Role Models, Student Relationships and Impact on others,**
- 5. Wasted Expertise**
- 6. Unprofessional Behaviour**
- 7. Resilience in Adversity**

4) Themes from the Narratives

a) Theme One: Emotional and Physical harms



Image by engin akyurt on Unsplash [creative commons]

This section focuses on the physical, emotional, social, and health and wellbeing of the responses from the participants to the survey. In particular, there are links here to the professional identities of the teachers (see for example [Themes Four and Five](#)), who suffered significantly because of the covid era mandates.

At the heart of a truly inclusive and respectful society lies the right to make informed decisions about one's own body—free from coercion, discrimination, or consequence. For educators, as

with all individuals, this includes the freedom to choose what is right for their health and wellbeing, whether that decision is grounded in personal, religious, cultural, or medical core values—or for reasons they need not justify at all. Early in the pandemic, Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern assured the nation that mandates would not be enforced, stating she was an advocate of personal choice. For many, that promise formed the foundation of trust in leadership and in the values of autonomy and consent. We now recognise this strategy could have been part of an effective behavioural science ‘nudge’, as we explain in [Theme Three](#). Hence, when the Government’s position reversed, those who made a different choice found themselves facing professional consequences that extended far beyond policy.

This moment invites us all to reflect deeply on *what consent truly means*—not just in theory, but in practice—and to consider how we protect the rights of all individuals, especially when the choices they make differ from our own. Can a choice be valid—even “right”—if it goes against the mainstream, especially when it is made with care, reflection, and integrity?

In a profession grounded in critical thinking and ethical responsibility, can we recognise groupthink? Should we strive to allow space for diverse viewpoints—even when they appear to be unpopular? If we believe in kindness, compassion, and respect as core educational values, how do we extend those same values to our colleagues in times of disagreement? How might history view those who questioned or stepped away—not out of defiance, but out of alignment with deeply held values? Can we sit with the discomfort of someone else’s choice and still honour their right to make it?

And yet, despite our training and experience, educators who made a different health choice were met with a level of persecution few could have imagined. The very sector that teaches respect, ethics, dignity, and compassion became, for some, a place of hostility, judgement, and exclusion. Now, years later, there is still a deafening silence. Conversations about what occurred remain largely off-limits—too uncomfortable, too confronting—and many would rather pretend it never happened than face the complexity of what unfolded. Reasons for this will be explored

in [Theme Three](#). But true healing cannot take place in silence. Reconciliation begins by opening the door to dialogue, by creating space for those who were non-compliant to be heard, truly listened to, and acknowledged without prejudice. That is what motivates us to spend time researching, analysing and presenting this evidence to the Commissioners of this phase of the Covid Inquiry. Our shared experiences, pain, and perspectives matter. Until we find the courage to have these conversations, we cannot claim to be a profession rooted in justice, compassion, or integrity.



Image by rineshkumar on Unsplash [creative commons]

The survey responses paint an unsettling picture of what unfolded within school communities once the mandate was enforced. The comments reveal a stark and dramatic breakdown in collegial respect, as mandate policies drove a wedge between staff members and fractured previously supportive professional relationships. Teachers who had long been regarded as responsible, reliable, compassionate, and deeply committed to their students and schools, were considered valued members of their school communities one day—and outcasts the next. Their

exclusion was not the result of misconduct or professional failure, but a personal health decision that redefined their place in the profession overnight. Many had chosen teaching as a lifelong, rewarding vocation, believing it to be a secure, respected career, protected by strong union advocacy and underpinned by principles of fairness and inclusion. For these educators, teaching was never just a job; it was a calling. The sudden loss of their positions, without meaningful dialogue or defence, was a shock so profound it left many struggling to comprehend how quickly trust and belonging could be withdrawn. The emotional toll of this change in status was profound, leaving many feeling betrayed, humiliated, and abandoned by the very communities they had served with dedication.



Image by eric-ward on Unsplash [creative commons]

Exemptions process flawed

Clause 12a (4) a (i & ii) of the Vaccination Order stated that from a Health and Safety perspective, a staff member could be exempted from the Order, either if there was a risk of 'Significant Service Disruption' (SSD) (a staff member's skills were such that they could not (easily) be replaced by anyone else) or if there were personal medical reasons. There was no provision for those with faith or religious beliefs to be exempted. Despite SSD exemptions, many

survey respondents were refused exemptions, bringing into sharp focus the lack of informed consent. There was widespread and understandable confusion from staff and their managers about personal medical reasons that should allow an exemption under the usual ethical considerations of '*first do no harm*'. Disconcertingly, these ethics were dismissed. For example, see the extract below from the NZTSOS Court Case Affidavit where these exemptions were discussed:⁷

24. The following people are not medically exempt:
- 24.1 People who had a negative experience with other vaccines in the past.
- 24.2 Disabled people once adequate resources are available to support safe delivery. People with disabilities are generally at higher risk from COVID-19 and are therefore a priority for vaccination.
- 24.3 Pregnant people. Pregnancy is associated with a higher risk from COVID-19 compared to the general population and therefore this group are a priority for vaccination. They are advised to seek advice from their Lead Maternity Carer.
- 24.4 In the pre-January 2022 versions, vaccination could be reasonably deferred for individuals with some acute major

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

8

medical conditions, such as undergoing major surgery or hospital admission for a serious illness.

Teachers who were pregnant or breast-feeding were not granted an exemption, neither were those who had pre-existing medical conditions; obviously these individual circumstances ordinarily demanded extreme caution. Tragically, some teachers who felt forced to take the

⁷ 'CIV-2021-485-584 [2021] NZHC 3064'.

vaccine to keep their jobs, were instructed ‘report to the Emergency Dept and prepare to be resuscitated if needed’.

Two panels were established by the Ministry of Health to oversee each of the exemption processes in respect of affected employees. The Terms of Reference of the Temporary Medical Exemptions Panel were approved by the Director-General of Health on 5 November 2021. Retrospective Official Information Requests (e.g. Ref H2022009529) reveal that thousands of public sector workers impacted by the mandates applied for a temporary exemption (six months) under the law at that time.

Applying for an exemption took bravery because of the bureaucracy and lack of privacy involved, and also because of the stigma and abusive treatment mandated teachers were subjected to from their employers, colleagues and the general public. Reasons for this stigma are explained [in Section 4c, Theme Three](#). Requests for an exemption were systematically refused by teachers’ managers. Applications were also later rejected by ‘the Panel’ we described above. It’s clear that senior leadership teams did not fully grasp the consequences of losing so many highly qualified and experienced staff.

Almost all of the ~8,000 exemptions which *were* granted were for healthcare professionals. For unknown reasons, disproportionate numbers of exemptions were awarded to those who worked in the private healthcare sector.⁸ Within a few days, the option to apply for an exemption was revoked, leaving many staff members with no option but to comply, resign, or have their employment contract unfairly terminated.

Despite the reality of the situation, the ongoing narrative continues that only a few teachers were impacted. Neither the Government, the Ministry of Education nor the Teachers’ Unions have made any effort to correct these false statements, and so the self-censorship and divisive

⁸ Edgington, ‘Revolving Doors of Power: Commercial NZ Health Group Obtains 30% of All Granted Applications for “Vaccine” Mandate Exemptions - 2 Months Later a Senior Government Manager Is Appointed Their CEO’.

‘vaccinated vs unvaccinated debate’ continues. Tension at education institutions remains nationwide, with teachers, students, parents and governors confused and divided.

Teachers excluded and ‘stood down’

The stand-down process itself for teachers was abrupt, dehumanising, and deeply unjust. One day, we were fully engaged in our roles—teaching, leading, contributing as valued professionals—and the next, on November 16th, 2021, we were no longer permitted onsite. This sudden absence was jarring—no farewell, no opportunity to prepare, process or explain, just an immediate removal that left a gaping silence. That silence spoke volumes. It invited speculation, stirred discomfort, and became a symbol of something far more painful: quiet condemnation. Without a word spoken, labels like *selfish*, *non-compliant*, *dangerous*, and even *criminal* were subtly and sometimes openly attached to their names. Spurred on by powerful and divisive media messaging, the right to keep personal beliefs, health status, and values private and confidential was stripped away and replaced with a web of shame and stigma.

Powerful but concealed forces ensured truth was suppressed. For instance, a teacher who posted a *British Medical Journal* article on social media about a Pfizer whistleblower led to an instant ban.⁹ There was no space for discussion or voices of mandated staff. Colleagues supportive of the Government’s policy effectively enforced it, encouraging coercion. Conversations were shut down in an atmosphere of silence and fear. Rather than solidarity during a time of perceived emergency, those teachers who were mandated out of their jobs faced isolation and discrimination.

Part of the shock experienced by teachers was because by our nature and professionalism, we are largely apolitical within school environments. We do not share personal political views and rarely speak openly about deeply held beliefs—especially when it comes to contentious social issues. As a result, students, families, and even colleagues were often unaware of any educator’s position until the moment they failed to return. Their unexpected absence became a

⁹ Godlee and Abbasi, ‘Covid-19: Researcher Blows the Whistle on Data Integrity Issues in Pfizer’s Vaccine Trial. Open Letter from The BMJ to Mark Zuckerberg’.

public declaration of something usually kept private—creating confusion, discomfort, and in some cases, unwarranted judgement from those who, perhaps through no fault of their own, did not understand the complexity behind the decisions made.

To further compound the stress and distress, government-issued warnings stated that any uncompliant teachers caught onsite would face police involvement. This seemed like an irrational, extreme and intimidating threat toward professionals whose lifelong role had been one of care, trust, and contribution. The irony of this was not lost on the many educators who were also parents: allowed to enter school grounds in their capacity as a parent but forbidden from stepping foot onsite as a teacher. The message was clear—they were no longer welcome in the role that had once defined them.

This process created confusion, anguish, and disruption throughout school communities—none more glaringly obvious than for the children. Students were left wondering, *“Where is my teacher?”* or *“Why did they leave without saying goodbye?”* For many young learners, the sudden loss of a trusted adult brought feelings of abandonment, anxiety, and sadness—emotions they couldn’t easily process.

Participants reported how they and their colleagues, were instructed by senior management not to discuss any aspect of the mandates. This enforced silence around sudden departures left a gap not only in staffing, but in trust, connection, and emotional safety for the very people schools are meant to protect and value most.

The stand down process itself has left many wounds—some visible, many unspoken. As time passes, the urgency of mandates may fade, but the emotional and relational impact remains. If we are to rebuild trust, restore dignity, and truly learn from this experience, we must be willing to reflect—honestly and bravely. Reflection isn’t about blame; it’s about understanding. It’s about creating space to sit with the discomfort, to ask ourselves hard questions, and to commit to doing better for one another in the future.

What would it have looked like to support public health measures *and* uphold respect for individual choice and privacy?

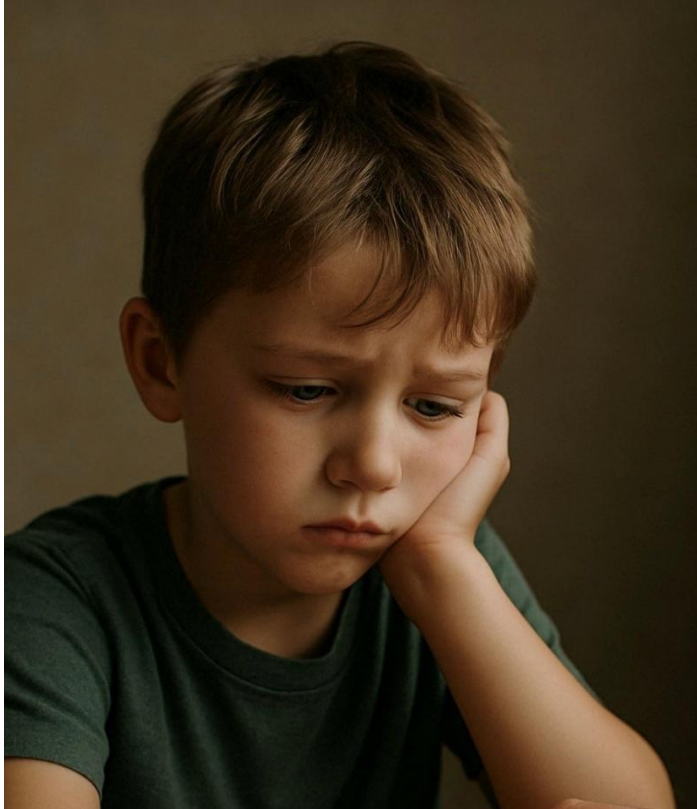


Image by Sylian Baduel on Unsplash [creative commons]

Is it possible that, amongst the fear and perceived urgency to protect, we stopped listening to those who simply needed space to make a different choice? Now time has passed, how do we reconcile the values we teach—like inclusion, empathy, and critical thinking—with the way some colleagues were treated? If a teacher had chosen differently for personal, cultural, health, or spiritual reasons, does that make them any less dedicated to their students or profession?

Some of the questions that non-mandated teachers could ask themselves may include: Were we too quick to judge, without knowing the full story of each person's decision? Looking back now, could we have demonstrated compassion and understanding, rather than encouraging fear and division? And importantly, how can we begin to repair professional relationships fractured during this time—and what needs to be acknowledged for that to happen? Overall, how might we all work together to create school cultures that consistently allow for respectful disagreement, without punishment or exclusion?

Many respondents captured the depth of this traumatic experience:

"I was ignored by the majority of staff once they realised my position. I was not farewelled but left with a bunch of crying students (and me) to say some goodbyes. All but two staff members never spoke to me again. Overall, it broke me."

"It was not only ludicrous, but also very upsetting to be told I was fit to work one day but too dangerous to be at school the next day because that was the day Jacinda, and her team decided I had to be injected if I wanted to work in the education sector. The resulting ostracism and isolation were hugely traumatic for me. I have still not fully recovered from the emotional and mental harm resulting from the mandates. I'm still angry that the government had the audacity to implement the mandates and that they encouraged so much division and separatism in our communities."

"I was in a deep state of depression most days leading up to the final day of work. I would go home and lock myself in my room, crying myself to sleep. I lost the majority of my friends, and few colleagues understood my reasoning. Some tried to borderline coerce me into getting the jab. I fell out with my brother, who fully believed I was a terrible person for not getting vaccinated. It was all just horrible."

"I was treated like a leper, one staff member told the rest of the staff that I wasn't vaccinated, we had morning tea in the school atrium, every single staff member stood by the food table and waited for me to sit down, then everyone sat on the opposite side of the hall to me. Also, another staff member who always worked with me after lunch to put the reading books away, stopped and no longer came in to help me. I also had to remove my daughter from the school she was attending as the teachers at her school were making the students raise their hands if they weren't vaccinated, her friends started to question her about her status too."

"Lost some friends. Had a teacher loudly mock me about not getting vaccinated, nothing was done or said to her by others/management, to stop her, including on Facebook. She

had children's whanau on her fb page and stated I was a teacher at her centre. No apology. I couldn't cope and was sent home because I was so upset."

*"I experienced discrimination and no longer have contact with a lot of former colleagues. **I was so traumatised by the experience** that for nearly a year I cried every time I drove past a school, and to this day I have not been back on any school premises. That is **after more than 40 years of being in schools every working day**. The mandate seriously impacted my life negatively, mainly because my work in schools was a calling and painfully difficult to walk away from. I am still hurting that I couldn't say goodbye to my students and their families."*

"After 6 years teaching at a local school, all teachers blocked me in this community and (I) was blacklisted from teaching. Extreme discrimination and isolated. Deeply depressed, the dark night of the soul."

*"**Shunned by colleagues. Wider family did not want contact** [with me] ... Family was stressed. Outcast by society... All around a terrible time."*

*"I was medically retired in the end, but to this day not a single colleague talks to me, I was dropped from all social media by them all and have been **treated as an outcast since**. Head office handled the matter very professionally, but my centre colleagues were rude, obnoxious, mean, hurtful and united in their disdain for my views, and decision. They also tainted the relationships I had built up with parents which was VERY unprofessional."*

*"I lost friends and colleagues due to my stance. It was appalling. I was accused of being akin to a **murderer**."*

"I experienced from the school I worked at discrimination, and they thought I was a health and safety violation being near them. My rights were violated, and it was disgusting how they all treated me."

"I wrote to my principal asking for free counselling support to help deal with the vitriol and was able to get two sessions. As Principal's Nominee during the busy November exam period, I felt obligated to continue work right up to the last day and not put extra pressure on others. My principal wrote a letter to the Government asking (if I could) get a work exemption but as far as I know he never got a response. I broke down in front of my students when I told them I could no longer teach them because I was considered toxic and unsafe. One day I was healthy; the next I was unsafe to be around. I lost close friends and family relationships during this time. My sister told her children in front of me that "your auntie wants to die."



A recurring theme voiced by many was that after dedicating years of loyal service to their schools or the sector in general, not being able to farewell their students, staff or families was genuinely heartbreaking. The timing of the mandate occurring at the end of the year added another layer of distress, when teachers and staff were unable to attend graduations, end of year prizegiving and celebrations, having taught and supported their students, classes and schools for the entire year:

Image by amir-maleky on Unsplash [creative commons]

*"I was called into the principal's office and given my options get vaccinated by 15 December or I was going to be fired. I told them I was not going to be vaccinated. I was told to get all my things and leave by Friday. No one in the school knew I was going; I packed all my things up from the classroom and left...No one said goodbye after being at the school for 8 years."*¹⁰

"School life in the final weeks was stressful and awful. I was not only let go, but my time at the school was not acknowledged as others who leave is, I felt like a leper and just slipped out."

"Worked at the same place for 16 years, as a teacher and as a HOD (Head of Department) and a Dean, and didn't even get a goodbye, either formal or even from most individual staff members. I had worked my arse off for the school and sacrificed time with my children to do it, and they basically threw me away without a glance. The principal was hostile from beginning to end...my mental health was in the toilet for a long time...I did feel like driving into a tree on several occasions."



Image: created by AI/authors

The impact of the mandates on teachers extended far beyond the loss of employment. For many, the consequences deeply affected their personal lives—fracturing relationships, straining family dynamics, and severing longstanding community connections. Teachers who had once felt secure in their professional identity suddenly found themselves alienated not only from their workplaces, but from close friends, extended whānau, and even immediate family. The disintegration of trust, belonging, and social connection left many in a prolonged state of grief and disbelief. The intense pain reported by respondents in this survey was not only emotional but existential; marked by a sense of abandonment, displacement, and identity loss. The psychological and emotional impact of the mandate continues to reverberate for many, resulting in a complex and enduring struggle. The following are examples drawn directly from the narratives shared:

“I lost EVERYTHING. Mental health, 25+ yrs at ECE job, volunteer work, friends and family. Still alone, working for myself.”

“I was stopped from going to my father's funeral by a hostile sister, vaccinated only allowed. This devastated me. Was put on antidepressants...”

“My relationship ended as my partner could not understand why I didn't want to get the jab. Some of my family members couldn't understand my decision and alienated me.”

“I lost all bar one of my friends - most importantly I lost my best friend of over 40 years...”

*“I was on a work visa and [my whole family's right to be in NZ depended on my job. It would have been impossible to get any other sponsorship at that time, and our budget was so tight that if we were deported we would have not been able to pay for the tickets back to our country let alone make a living there as they were in similar conditions....[...]
we were all deeply stigmatised by the vax pass - from getting an ice cream to remaining*

in a school sports team. [...] I teach science, I was given horrible looks and comments when I started suggesting that things were off...Since the pandemic, including the madness of the mandates, I've been depressed, frustrated and full of hate"

*"My husband watched my daughter (also a teacher) and **me cry on an almost daily basis** as I never thought my 40+ year career would end based on a vaccine. My own children had to have 2 shots or their jobs were to be terminated. An awful time! As I didn't have a vaccine passport, I was unable to book into a motel, enter a cafe or partake in my weekly gym sessions. I was so angry, but more than that, I was so very disappointed at how easily those with vaccine passports thought all this was OK."*

"When the mandates were announced I broke down into hysterical tears and my mum immediately called me to make sure I was ok. I felt overwhelmed, disrespected and like I was being raped of my choice. I am a victim of rape, and it brought back all those helpless feelings like saying NO was not enough and that I was going to have to get vaccinated if I wanted to keep the career I had just finished studying and also pay off my TeachNZ scholarship."

"I experienced a great deal of grief following the mandate in that every time I drove past one of my local schools, I felt sick and knew that I was unable to even walk onto the property without the police being called. This was especially hurtful in regard to the Primary school and High school where I had attended growing up - I was no longer able to go where I had been welcomed all my life."

*"I didn't get a chance to talk to my colleagues or my students about it, apart from with a very select few. Many friends and family members were cruel in their comments and actions because of my decision. Someone I would have considered as one of my best friends **shut her door in my face** when she learned I had been mandated."*

“People treated me like something disgusting. Being unable to access premises or shops, hairdressers etc., was humiliating and brought about a whole range of other stress factors. All of the associated build up of stress finally culminated in a SCAD myocardial infarction. The reasons for SCAD are still unclear, but stress a known risk factor.”

“I suffered medically with huge anxiety and panic attacks. This wasn’t just a job I was being dismissed from; it was a career. A career I had built up over a long period of time. There were so many unanswered questions, how long were the mandates going to last, would I ever be able to return to my career, and as an over 50 yr old women, would I be able to find a new job. My future was now totally uncertain. I started each day at work knowing that I was one day closer to termination.”

“I was traumatised; I lost so much - home (renting school home), had to sell belongings, sold my puppy as couldn't find a place to rent that would allow dogs, sold my new car, ended up paying storage only to have to sell or give those items away and since have had to rebuy when I moved recently.”

There were also respondents who, for a range of reasons—some coerced, others willing—chose to receive the vaccine to keep their jobs, support their families, or simply to do what they believed was the right thing. Tragically, a number of these individuals reported experiencing adverse health effects following vaccination.¹¹ These respondents described feelings of betrayal, abandonment, and being silenced after sustaining injuries they believed were the result of complying with the very policy that was intended to protect them. Their stories reflect a different, but equally profound, sense of loss.

¹¹ Medsafe NZ, ‘Overview of Vaccine Reports: Adverse Events Reported 2021-2022’.

Image below: Wellington protest to raise awareness of the mandates. Credit: author



*“I withdrew from the community that surrounds the school I was working at - this includes the staff and the parents and students. The staff mostly were outwardly sympathetic - **I had a reaction to the first jab** [...] Some children called me an antivaxxer to my child - as Year 6 students they're unlikely to know really the connotations. I lost my job as I didn't take the 2nd jab and I never returned to the community, never talked to any staff, parents again.”*

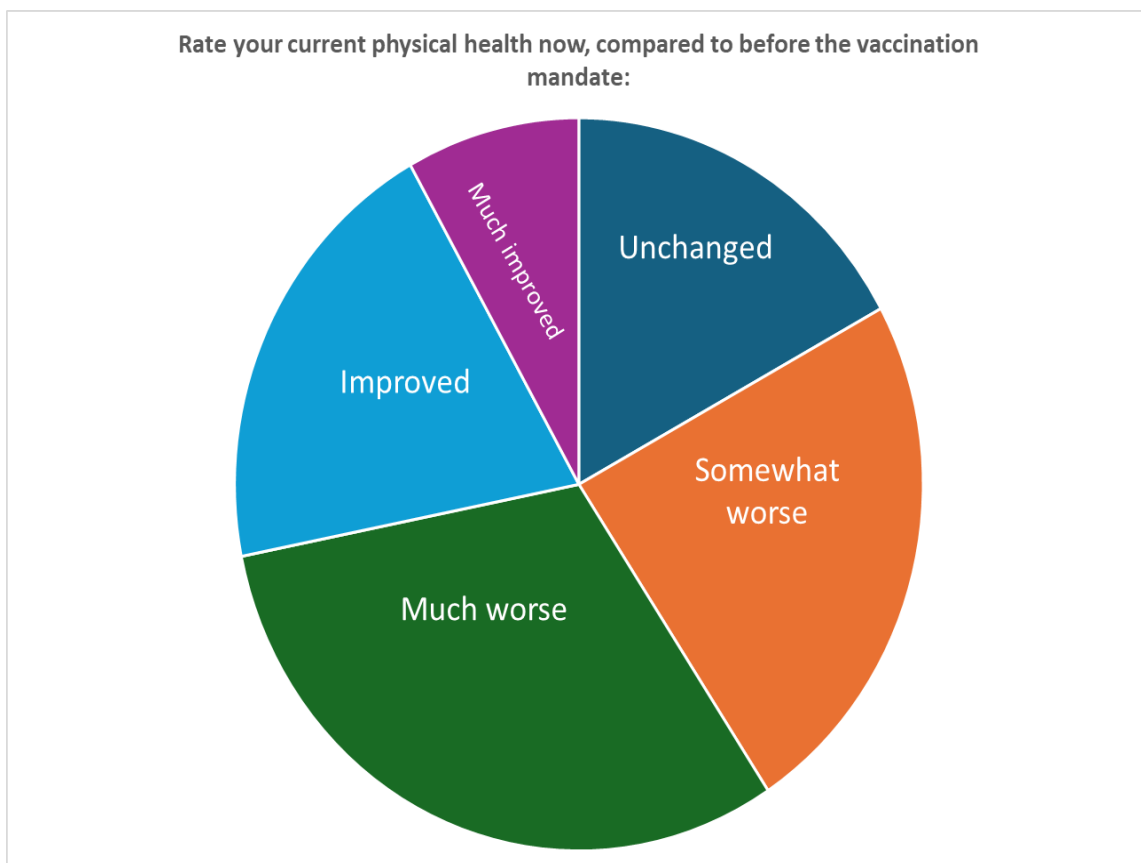
*“Pressured by colleagues, the {school} Board were understanding but I was not allowed onsite until vaccinated. Got vaccinated reluctantly, collapsed 3 or 4 days later and ended up in hospital. Stayed in hospital for 3 days.
[diagnosed with] **myocarditis**. Cardiologist agreed it was the result of the vaccination but went on to advise me to have the second one - it was obvious by his tone and face, he did not agree with the words he was saying.”*

“In October 2021 when we were mandated to take the jabs or else, my visa was linked to my employer. The consequences were to take it or leave the country. Also, at that time

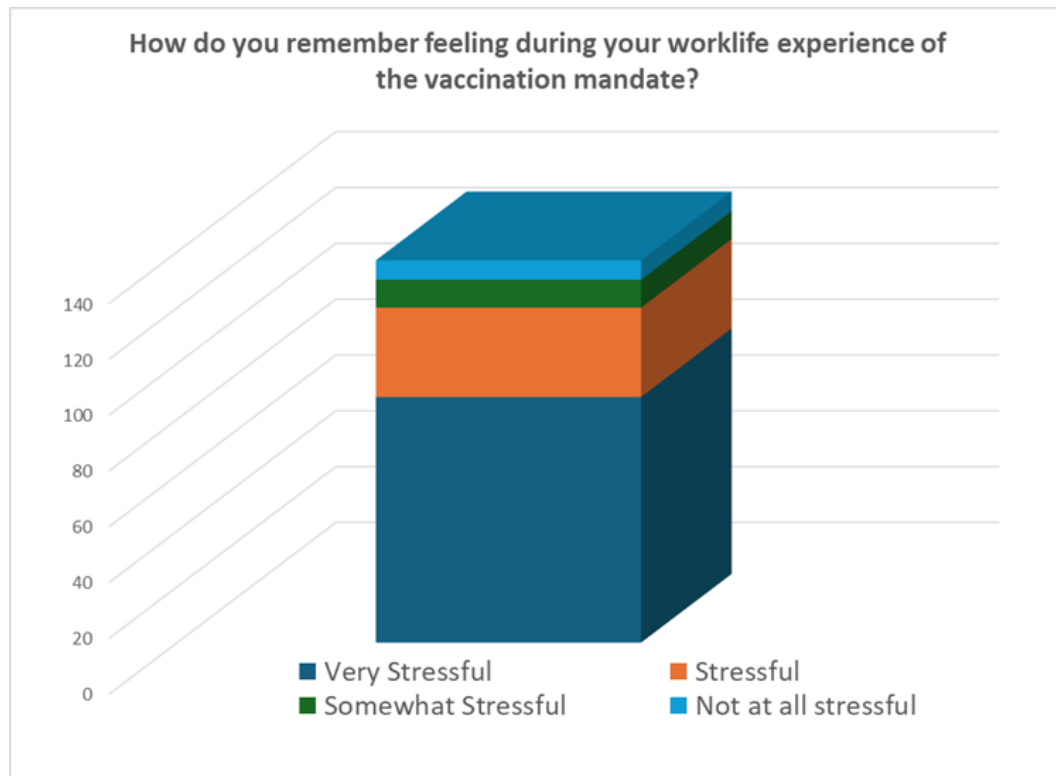
my family was locked out of the country due to the border closure. I was separated from them for 21 months. Having fought so long about visas and MIQ and finally being successful in having a special visa category opened for family of teachers, I capitulated and took 2 doses. I still hate myself for not staying true to my principles. I should have left the country. I experienced "adverse effects" beginning within hours of my second dose. I experienced lethargy, insomnia, tachycardia, arrhythmia and headaches. The headaches lasted two months. When I notified my Principal and School Nurse that I had suffered injury, asking them to make a health and safety note, I was gaslit and told it couldn't possibly be the jab and that I would have to take the 3rd. The mandate ended a week before I was due to take the 3rd. I nearly left the country with my family who had only just arrived in NZ."

Graph 8

Of the respondents (n=135) to this question 'On a scale of 1-5, rate your physical health now, compared to before the vaccination mandate...' the majority of 40% (n= 55) reported that their physical health had got 'worse' or 'much worse' since the vaccination mandates were applied. This adds weight to the previous responses, confirming the mental and physical toll on these teachers, many of whom were sacked from their jobs, because they were unwilling and/or unable to comply with the Vaccination Order. A total of 31% (n=42) reported that their physical health was 'unchanged', and a minority of respondents 28% (n=38) reported that their physical health had either 'improved' or 'much improved'. Suggested reasons for these responses are included in the following themes of this report.



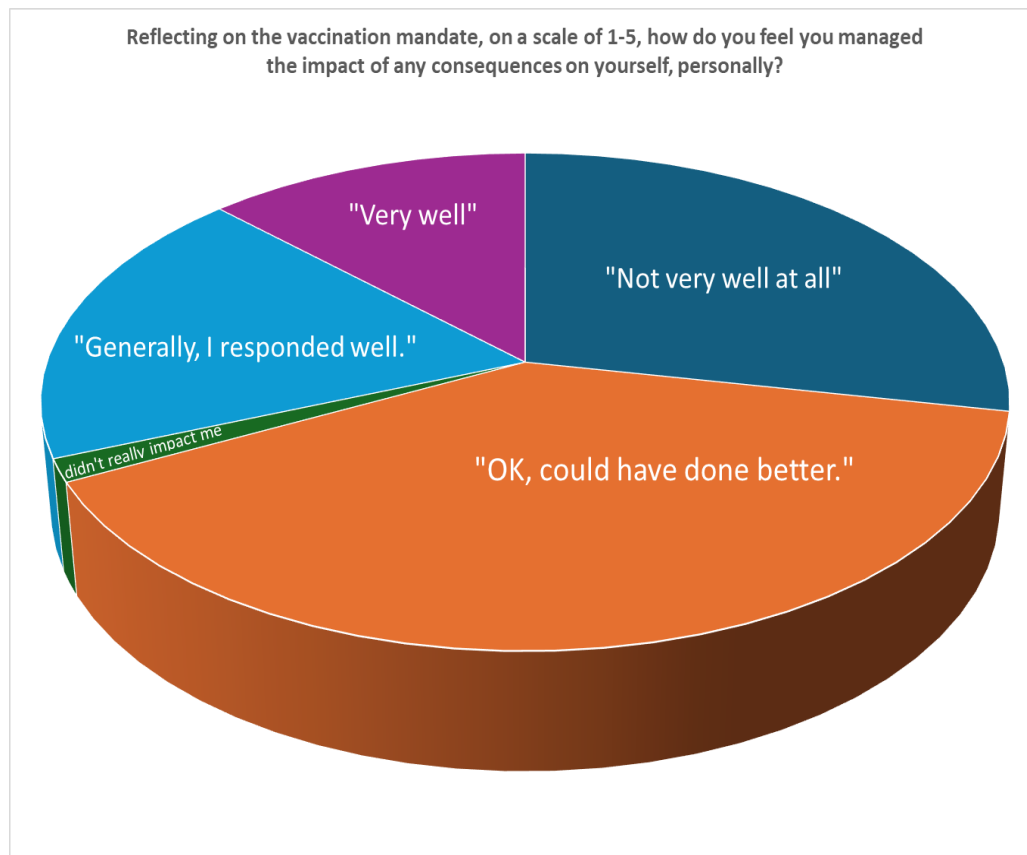
Graph 9



Total respondents to this question: “how do you remember feeling during the mandate?”
n=137. Most participants (n=120, 87.5%) rated their experience of the mandates either stressful (n=32) or, more likely, ‘very stressful’ (n=88). 17 of the respondents (12%) rated their experience either ‘somewhat stressful’ or ‘not stressful at all’. It should be noted that at least one respondent illustrated the potentially counter-intuitive nature of these responses. For instance, because an individual had decided privately not to comply with any potential vaccination mandate, in some ways that made the situation less stressful, because the personal decision had already been firmly made. This left definite pathways of potential consequences (e.g. loss of full-time employment) to consider, rather than the choice per se. As we describe in the final [Theme Seven](#), for a minority of teachers, this was also a time of transformation, as our

knowledge grew within the NZTSOS group, this provided unexpected new connections and opportunities for personal development.

Graph 10



In this question, regarding participants self-perceived management of the impact of the mandates, the majority of respondents were not at the far end of the Likert Scale options, i.e. they rated their personal management of the impact of the consequences from the vaccination order as "OK, could have done better" (n=53, 39%) rather than the more negative option of "Not very well at all" (n=38, 28%). Some respondents were more positive in their self-reflection of their management of the consequences, picking the option "generally, I responded well" (n=25, 18%). Only two (n=2) confirmed the mandates 'didn't really impact me', and reasons for this are discussed in the narrative analysis. A minority of participants, 17 (12%) felt more positive about their experiences, and that they had managed their consequences 'very well'.

b) Theme Two: Legal and Financial Issues

131 participants answered this question. The results show that the majority (72%) viewed their financial situation as 'worse' (n=33) or 'much worse' (n=62) now, compared to prior to the vaccination mandates. This is significant, but perhaps an unsurprising finding, bearing in mind the previous data presented, including the fact that many senior teachers and principals, were mandated out of their relatively well-paid positions as a result of the vaccination order. 16% responded that their financial situation was 'the same' and a minority, 10%, reported that their financial situation was either 'improved' (n=9) or 'much improved' (n=5).

This graph could be read in conjunction with [Theme One](#) regarding the emotional and physical harms the mandates imposed, including the selected narrative responses in that section:

Graph 11

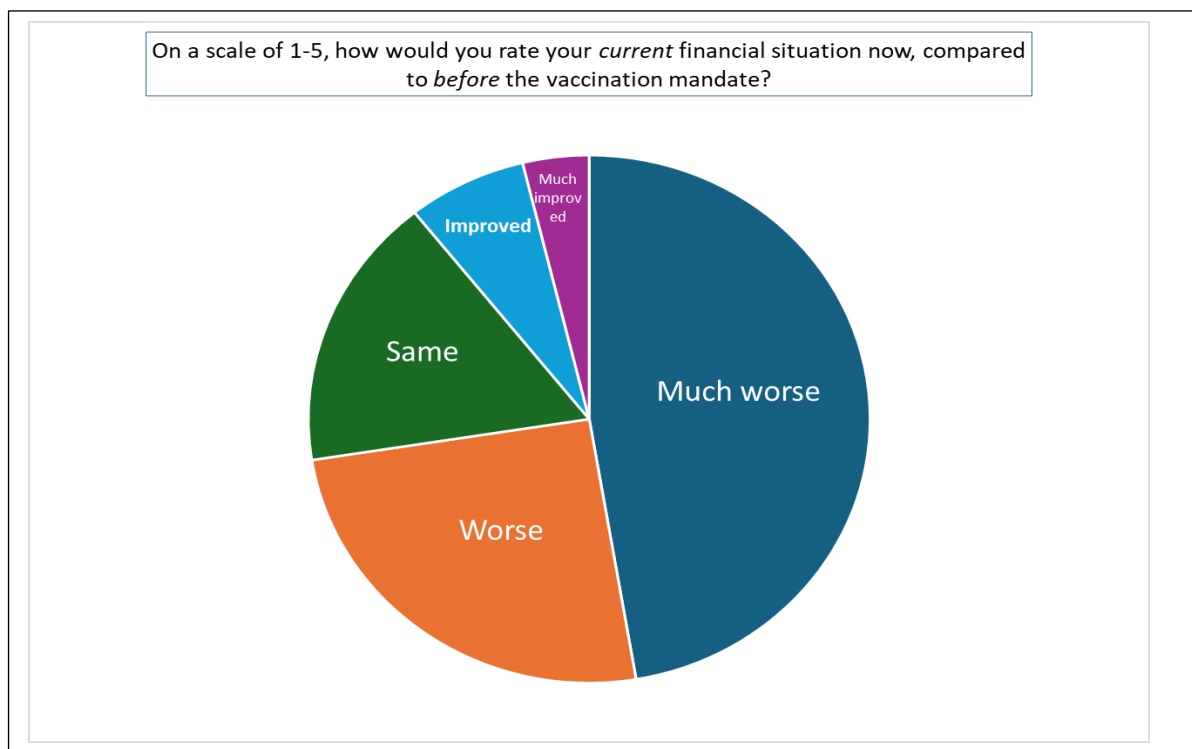


Image below: from one of the many protests during the mandates, which aimed to raise awareness amongst the public who, because of the intense censorship, were largely unaware of the situation. Credit: Anne Williamson



Job loss and subsequent financial hardship can have a significant and often lasting impact on mental health. Beyond the immediate disruption to income and routine, these experiences tend to generate high levels of psychological stress due to a sudden loss of stability, identity, and autonomy. Dr. Gabor Maté, a renowned Canadian physician and expert in addiction, trauma, and the mind-body connection, has extensively researched the effects of chronic stress and adversity on physical and psychological health. Drawing from clinical experience and a deep understanding of psychoneuroimmunology, Maté emphasizes how prolonged exposure to stressful conditions can undermine both emotional resilience and immune function. As he explains, “The research literature has identified three factors that universally lead to stress: uncertainty, the lack of information and the loss of control.”¹²

¹² Maté, *When the Body Says No: The Cost of Hidden Stress*, 33.

These conditions are frequently present during periods of unemployment—individuals are uncertain about their future, lack clear information about when or how they might regain financial stability, and often feel powerless in navigating systems of support or re-employment. This was exacerbated for mandated educators who were further discriminated across many sectors when seeking employment due to their unvaccinated status.

Research in the fields of occupational health and social epidemiology consistently link job loss to increased rates of anxiety, depression, social withdrawal, and long-term psychological distress. Without protective factors, such as community connection, emotional processing, or targeted interventions (many of which were unavailable to mandated educators) the stress resulting from financial instability can become deeply entrenched, contributing to poor mental and physical health outcomes.

It is clear to see how the impact of job termination impacted individuals from the education sector, whereby a number had to sell up, relocate or move to other parts of the country (some overseas) in search of jobs, cheaper accommodation or affordable living:

“The mandate impacted my living, financial, and relationship situations as I lost my job and had to move regions to live with a relative.”

“It impacted my life dramatically. I needed to go on a benefit which wasn't enough to pay my mortgage. Needed to sell my home and move 40 mins out of the city so I could get a freehold house. I had to move away from my family, grandsons, friends, everything. It's 2 yrs down the track and it's still hard...My health really impacted my life to depression and sadness about having to move.”

"At the time the mandate was issued, my husband, and I still had a six-figure mortgage, and I was the major breadwinner. I had to cancel all insurances and learn to grow as much of our own food as possible, in order to become more self-sufficient."

"I was forced to sell my home. The only way I could plan for a future without income (no one knew how long the mandates would be in place), was to buy another home in another region, to be mortgage free. I had never visited this region prior to moving and knew no one there."

"I had to sell my home which included a granny flat out the back for an old friend. Promised to be hers until she passed. She got vaccinated and hated me. At school I was mandated out 3 weeks before the end of the year. Never got to celebrate with my class. The worst thing however was having to leave my family. 24 grandchildren and 6 kids. My home was the hub for all to get together. I had to move right down to the other end of



the country as it was all I could afford. I miss my family more than anyone could ever imagine. Face time is just not doing it. So many grandkids now that I don't really know. Devastating. I only see them now, once a year, not frequently."

Image by towfiqu-barbhuiya on Unsplash [creative commons]

"Because of my age I knew I'd never get another principal job, and we lived on the job seekers benefit for quite some time struggling to meet day to day expenses and pay the mortgage."

"It caused huge stress on my family financially. My lifetime savings were wiped out and I have had to start building my family's financial future from scratch in my fifties. Any chance I had to support my children through their tertiary studies has been destroyed meaning that the impact of these decisions will affect my family's finances for generations to come."

"I was unable to get any employment and was ineligible for government assistance. We had to visit food banks and have never recovered financially as we slid further and further in to crippling debt.... My mental and physical health deteriorated, and I couldn't afford to see a doctor."

"My family of four lived in a caravan for a year and a half after the mandates, due to the mandates."

"As both my wife and I were teaching in NZ, we had to sell everything we had in order to move countries. Huge costs incurred when few jobs were available that allowed for non-vaccination. We are now living below the poverty line as my wife's mental health has not improved and (she) doesn't feel able to work."

"My wife and I both lost our jobs we had to sell our house as we couldn't pay the mortgage, and we moved to the UK with our teenage children leaving all our family behind."

"I lost 2 years of income which has put me in huge debt. I'm unable to keep my head above water financially."

"I am a law-abiding citizen who struggled to work hard to pull my son and I off the poverty line and it felt like all that was being ripped away because I chose bodily autonomy."

Support from School or Elsewhere

During the Vaccination Order and afterwards, many staff expected their Unions or other paid representative to provide support, either in emotional, financial or legal matters. However, NZTSOS are aware that often this was not forthcoming, and in some cases, individuals were subjected to bullying and harassment, coercion and discrimination, which only made matters more traumatic. For instance, the following examples of the narratives from the survey were typical of the experiences:

“A MOE staff member told me I was lucky to be a position to leave my job - absolutely no support offered.”

“It was horrible, no farewell, no real support. The PPTA were just awful. I felt alone and had no support.”

“I do not believe that I received my correct pay, and had no luck in trying to follow this up. As far as I was aware I was supposed to get my holiday pay, and then to get 6 weeks’ notice. However, they put those 2 together. I attempted to get HR and legal support, but no one really knew what to do or how to go about resolving any issues. PPTA, of which I was a paid-up member made it clear that they were not interested in supporting me. Being the main wage earner, it was a stressful time, and I was lucky to have emotional and caring support behind me.”

“As a school principal, I was deeply disturbed by the so-called ‘guidance’ from the Ministry of Education, which directed school leaders and Boards of Trustees to follow processes outlined by the NZSTA (New Zealand School Trustees Association now called Te Whakarōputanga Kaitiaki Kura o Aotearoa). Among the materials sent to me was a template termination letter—something I read with disbelief and a sinking sense of dread, knowing it would eventually be used on me. This, from an organisation that had long promoted the rights of employees and worked to safeguard their positions. In some

ways, I was “lucky” to see it coming—unlike the teachers who were blindsided—but that didn’t make the experience any easier to digest. Even now, I struggle to comprehend how such a cold, impersonal, and unprofessional process was allowed to unfold in our education system.”

This above comment is brought into context when subsequent Official Information Act responses, together with deleted web pages that were archived, expose how Government-funded lawyers sent template letters to entities like school boards, presumably in order to bypass the usual employment law processes, fast-tracking the termination processes for those teachers who did not comply.¹³

“As a member of NZEI I felt betrayed when I sought their help.” and “I received no support from and in fact I was lied to by NZEI.”

The Education Review Office (ERO) was also silent when questioned about the mandates, which would inevitably have an impact on the provision of education when highly qualified, well-experienced teachers were forced to leave. This extract was the only reference found to the mandates, from a recent ERO report:

¹³ Edgington, ‘Lawyers Who Work for Government: How NZ School Boards Fired Unjabbed Teachers’.

Mandatory Vaccinations

ERO spoke with school leaders and trustees as the mandate was being implemented. It was a time of great change for schools and their communities. Most schools commented on the emerging journey their school communities were on. All principals and trustees were steadfast in their commitment to protecting tamariki. Most schools in Auckland see vaccination as a pathway towards normality.

“Our reality has changed. Vaccination is our passport to normality. The impact that multiple lockdowns have on our young people’s mental health is not OK... media says Auckland is fighting this, carrying the burden, it is South Auckland that is feeling the brunt. We have the highest number of essential workers. We need targeted support not just emergency response.”

PRINCIPAL VOICE

While most kaiako supported vaccination targets, a very small number were wary of the mandate and did not want to be vaccinated at the time of this research. While principals were non-negotiable about the government mandate there was a focus on moving forward in a way where mana was protected.

“I’m vaccinated, my whānau made it clear that we vaccinate. Respect our elders.”

TEACHER VOICE

“Mindful that some [teachers] are not vaccinated but I feel for my babies. They might get sick. Mindful of other people too.”

WHĀNAU VOICE

Generally, tumuaki supported the kura as a whole becoming vaccinated – including kaimahi and students aged 12 years and older. Most secondary schools had made good progress towards national targets for vaccination rates. In a majority of secondary schools, they promoted the [IRA.DOT](#) campaign for rangatahi which was a rangatahi-led campaign that encourages people to get ‘dotted’ from COVID-19¹³.

It is confusing that ERO, focused on upholding quality standards in education, would not comment about the sudden loss of highly-qualified and experienced education staff? This was, after all, a pivotal time in New Zealand’s academic year, when online learning expertise was in high demand. Furthermore, it was already established by the NZ Government’s own data, that the risk of infection at school was only 0.1%.¹⁴

The lack of support from entities like ERO, the continuing censorship including self-censorship has led to only short and rare anecdotes appearing in some reports over recent years, such as this one from a Principal reflecting on the unpopular covid era policy of promotion of vaccinations on school sites:

¹⁴ Edgington, ‘NZ Teachers’ “No Jab, No Job” Mandates Unlawful? NZ Government Hid Evidence of Very Low Transmission in Education’.

“Most schools chose to remain neutral in the vaccination debate and did not have vaccination tents onsite. An interesting finding for a few schools was the adverse community reaction to having pop-up vaccination tent on school grounds.”¹⁵

Graph 12

We asked participants what support (if any) they received during or after the vaccination mandate period. It is clear from the findings of the survey that most respondents (>52%) did not ask for support (n=72). Was this because they already felt that support for them would be unavailable or inadequate? We remind the Commissioners of quotes we have used earlier in this report, outlining the trauma and emotional harm caused by the run-up to, and implementation of, the mandates. For instance, from page 30, this quote:

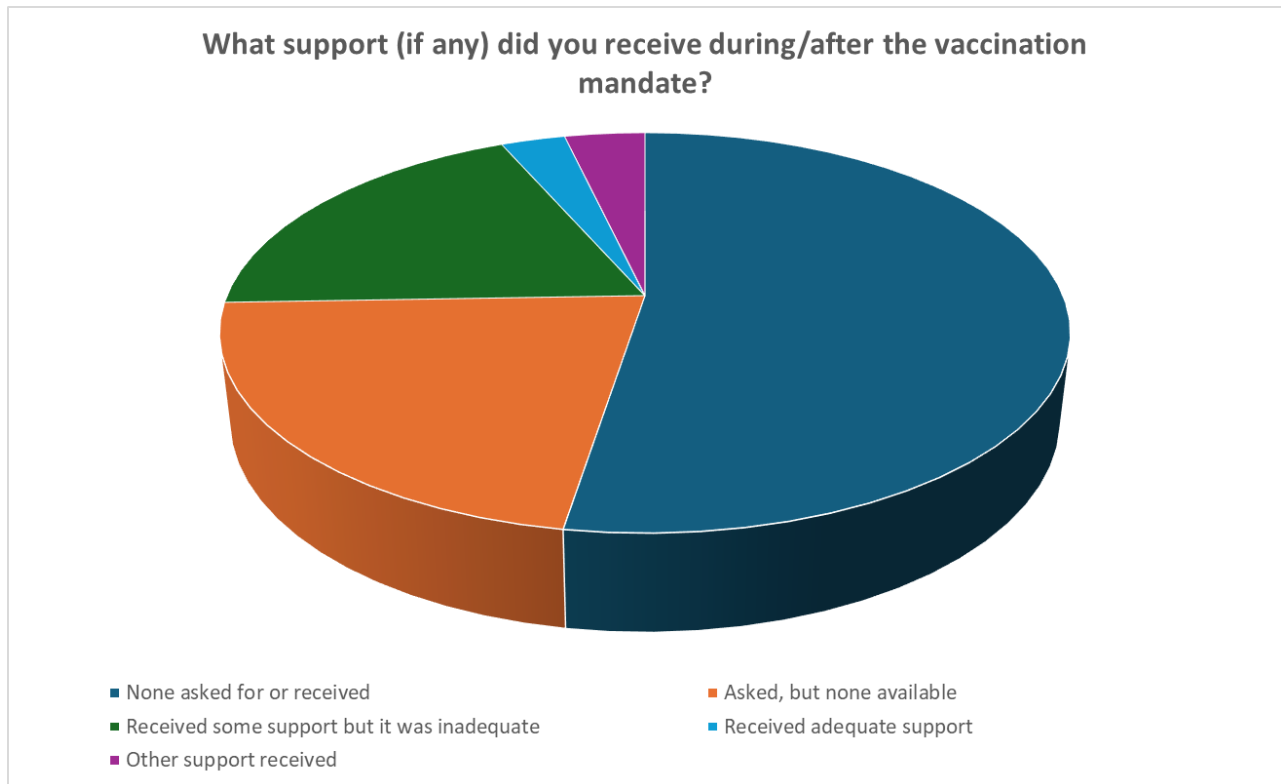
“The principal was hostile from beginning to end...my mental health was in the toilet for a long time...I did feel like driving into a tree on several occasions.”

The censorship and propaganda from many platforms and within many environments during this time, was unrelenting. Inevitably, division of our communities was profound as a result.

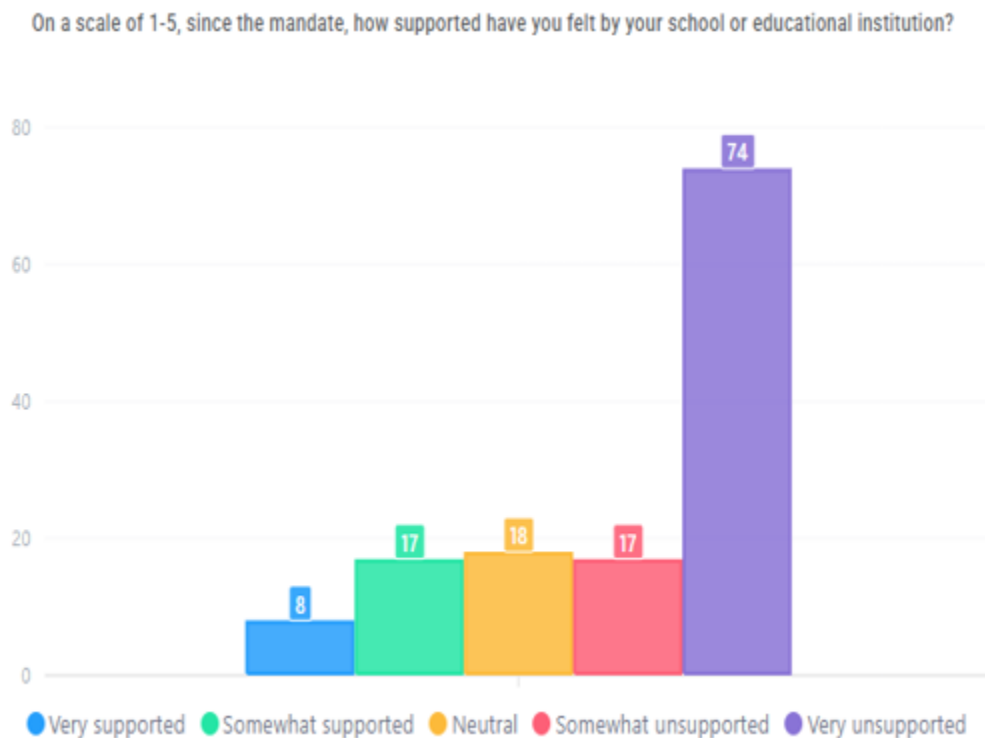
Almost a quarter of all respondents (22%) asked for support but were unable to obtain any (n=30). This is extremely concerning, bearing in mind the urgent issues articulated in the narratives from teachers who had been forced out of their jobs, had been excluded from friendship and family circles and without income were at risk of losing their homes. Almost the same numbers of respondents reported they *did* obtain support, but that sadly this was inadequate (n=26). A small minority (n=9) reported that either they did receive adequate support, or that other support (perhaps with mixed outcomes) was obtained (for instance through a local church group). Overall, more research is needed to establish the mental and physical health needs of this group of professionals severely impacted by the mandates. How many individuals are still struggling today, to cope with genuine distress, alone, given that as we have evidenced, families, colleagues and friendship groups were divided and isolated?

¹⁵ Education Review Office (ERO), ‘He Iho Ruruku - English Medium Perspectives School’ Findings.

Following on from the above discussion, the graph below illustrates our points about the inadequate support, and how the participants rated any support they received from their educational institution:



Graph 13



Many of the themes of this survey's findings overlap with each other. The subject illustrated by the above Bar Graph is highly relevant and reflected in many other themes, including [Theme One](#): emotional and physical health and wellbeing, [Theme Three](#), the Propaganda and Censorship issues, and [Theme Five](#), the wasted expertise evident in the >2000 combined years of qualified experience demonstrated in the survey participants. In this question, we asked our members to rank the level of support they felt from their school or institution. Bearing in mind the responses to many of the previous questions, we can see that many teachers had not only left but had also gone without the opportunity of saying a goodbye, to their colleagues or their students. In fact, many were given 'Trespass Notices' meaning that other staff had to collect their belongings on their behalf – often decades worth of teaching memories, resources, equipment, photos and private items. As we explained in [Theme One](#), this was traumatising, not only for the teacher forced out of school, but also for their colleagues who were left with confusing and illogical messages about the mandates, but also the students, left without a teacher they respected and needed.

c) Theme Three: Propaganda and Censorship



Image above: A Māori woman [name unknown] powerfully and symbolically tapes over her mouth to raise awareness of the intense censorship. Taken at a protest. Credit: unknown/social media.

Many survey respondents emphasised the negative impact of being ‘silenced’ by others during the covid era, and currently. This deliberate silencing takes many forms, including self-censorship after repeatedly being instructed, bullied and humiliated by others. For instance, as we explained in [Theme One](#), in the situations where they returned to teaching, after being excluded (either fired or forced to take unpaid leave) during the mandates, teachers were told by their employers not to talk about ‘anything to do with the pandemic.’ As this submission reports, because many staff were desperate to be back in paid employment, and supporting their students with their complex needs, this silencing, both online and face-to-face, was highly effective.

“I feel that connection and conversations are somewhat superficial, and I no longer share my views about anything I keep my mouth shut because I feel no one wants to hear about or deal with it.”

*“Many friends and family members were cruel in their comments and actions because of my decision. Someone I would have considered as one of my best friends **shut her door in my face** when she learned I had been mandated.”*

Whether teachers were mandated out of their jobs or not, division was still evident. For instance, the stigmatising and shaming of others who did speak out, often made it impossible for others, even if they complied with the policy:

“I ultimately had to take the jab and I was devastated that I had betrayed my own beliefs for my financial stability. I could not talk to anyone at work because another teacher was vocal and was being crucified by everyone else... I could not speak up and be ridiculed in that same manner.”

The negative consequences for teachers’ mental and physical health of this silencing should not be dismissed, along with the potential impact of these costs on our students.

During times of uncertainty or crisis, open and respectful communications are essential. Individuals seek to trust leaders’ instructions during such times, fearful of risks. These instructions can become powerful, especially when designed to influence not just what people do, **but how they feel and think.**

“I can never talk about my opinion at work but colleagues and parents were actually fine but it just is not talked about. A lot of our new families probably don’t know [I didn’t get vaccinated] so I never mention it... but can be awkward sometimes when they ask why I relieve...At the time it got a bit horrible from a couple of teachers.”

During the covid era policies, governments around the world drew heavily on well-established, highly effective behavioural psychology. Strategies were applied through governments' Behavioural Insights Units (BIT), which partnered with various regulators and numbered over 200 worldwide by 2019, including in Wellington, NZ.¹⁶ These tactics could direct public behaviour, using frameworks like *MINDSPACE* (Messenger, Incentives, Norms, Defaults, Salience, Priming, Affect, Commitments, Ego) to “nudge” people toward desired choices.¹⁷ It is inevitable that corporate companies with shareholders' interests front of mind, funded and partnered with BIT. These highly effective, covert marketing strategies based on our emotions are leveraged by almost unlimited funds.¹⁸

On reflection we can see many of these nudge techniques were effective for the covid era policies — yet largely these were invisible to the public, seemingly authentic. This raises important, ethical questions: Were people being informed, or steered? In a healthy democracy, education plays a vital role in helping people recognise the difference between informed consent and coercion. Teachers are therefore key in developing critical thinkers — ensuring individuals know *how* to ask questions, assess evidence, and explore multiple perspectives, irrespective of how these views may be labelled. But what happens when the messaging children (and teachers) receive is one-sided, emotionally charged, or framed in a way that discourages dissent?

“I was expected to continue to carry out duties off the premises, which was almost impossible. I was threatened with trespass. There was the strange situation that I could still enter the premises as a parent, but having been made so unwelcome by my HoD, I did not want to return.”

¹⁶ Cavassini, Cameron, and Gauri, ‘BX2018 Journey 1: Behavioural Insights from Around the World.’

¹⁷ Dolan et al., ‘Mindspace: Influencing Behaviour through Public Policy’.

¹⁸ Hochschild, *The Managed Heart: Commercialisation of Human Feeling*. See also Martin, *Covid Cover-up* (2025)

“The tamariki at school also begged me to get vaccinated as they didn't want me to leave. There was never a farewell to thank me for my 12 years of service, just one day I didn't go to work. It was a very sad and stressful time. However, I was allowed onsite unvaccinated as a parent. The whole ploy ‘get vaccinated to save your whanau’! What a load of bs. It should never have been forced on us, that was a total breach of human rights.”

Edward Bernays, often referred to as the “father of public relations,” demonstrated how emotion, repetition, and trusted voices could rapidly shape public opinion — even when the message presented only one side.¹⁹ Experts in propaganda theory confirm how shaping consent through subtle influence could be more effective than enforcing it outright. In today’s classrooms, we encourage students to recognise and analyse persuasive techniques — but are we also modelling this critical thinking ourselves? During the NZ Government’s covid era response, were educators provided with the time, support, or capacity to examine the messaging directed at them? Once the mandate came into effect, the urgency to comply — combined with fears of job loss, high personal debts and highly emotive, repetitive public narratives — created a climate where many teachers may have felt swept along by the momentum. In such a climate, reflective questioning became harder to sustain, even for those trained to nurture it.

As educators reflect on the impact of the vaccine mandate on the sector — particularly the silencing of qualified professionals who held different views — the moment calls for renewed emphasis on questioning and discernment. Do we want our students (who eventually permeate all sectors of society) to simply trust, or to evaluate? Are we nurturing minds that can decode messaging patterns, weigh alternative perspectives, and understand the psychology behind influence? The aim is not to reject science or public health measures, but to equip learners with the tools to know *how* to think, not *what* to think.²⁰ In a world shaped by carefully crafted

¹⁹ Bernays, *Propaganda*.

²⁰ Hendy, *Silencing Science*.

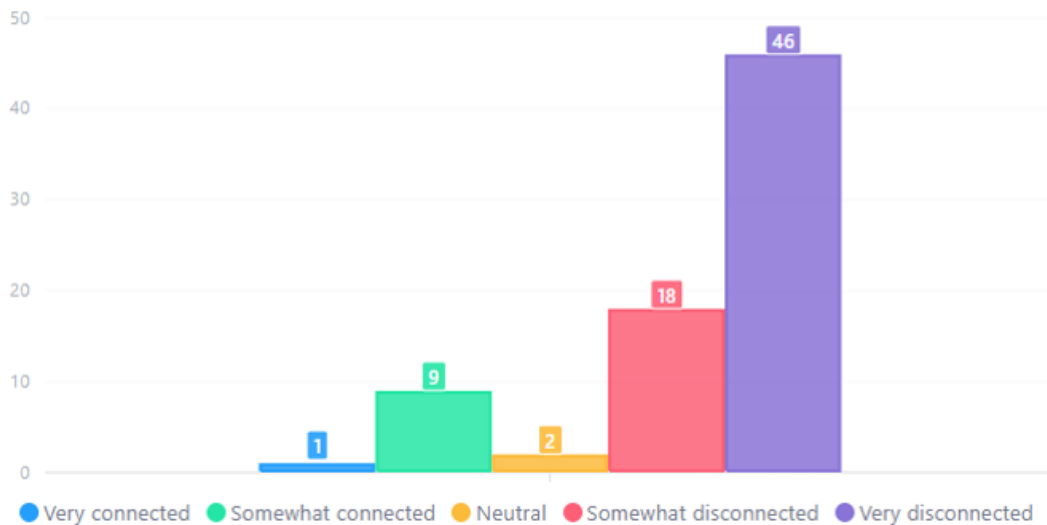
messaging, critical thinking is not just a skill — it's a safeguard. As we see in the following quote from the survey, the sense of shame or guilt from being coerced into taking the vaccine, weighs heavily on individuals' sense of self-worth, and ensures self-censorship:

"I'm remorseful of having caved in, I deeply regret it. And I can't share that with my "blind" colleagues and friends, but neither can I share it with my friends who see the truth because they wouldn't understand that knowing what I knew I still got it [...] I feel so so, so lonely. I don't care I have a decent job (I'm grateful, yes) because it's in the sector that turned their back on me and would do it again."

It is precisely in fast moving situations that we need to encourage slow thinking — the kind of thinking that asks, *Is this the full picture?* or *What voices might be missing here?* During the covid era policies, the ability to critically evaluate messages could have helped prevent the exclusion of informed dissent, reduced fear-based decision-making, and promoted a culture of openness rather than division. When individuals are empowered to ask thoughtful questions, systems are less likely to slide into groupthink, and communities are better equipped to recognise that scientific consensus does not always exist; constructive challenge is always necessary. In education — a space where independent thought should be celebrated — this approach isn't just protective, it's essential. The following quote illustrates the division the policies promoted:

"At a small local protest [against the vaccine mandates] I got spat on and yelled at to go get a job."

If you have continued to work within the education sector, but at a different institution, please indicate on a scale of 1-5, how connected do you currently feel to your PREVIOUS educational community (colleagues, students, etc.)?



Graph 14

In the above Graph we can see that, of those teachers who have returned to work in the education sector since the mandates, but at a different institution or entity, the extent to which they feel connected to their previous educational community. Most respondents (n=46 out of 76 in total) reported feeling 'very disconnected', with 64 (84%) reporting feeling 'somewhat' or 'very' disconnected. This evidence is unsurprising when we consider the division caused by the censorship and propaganda described above. This disconnect between educational staff and their students and institution is unhelpful if the reported worsening of our educational outcomes is to be addressed.

c) Theme Four: Role models, student relationships and impact on others

For many survey respondents, the most profound heartbreak came from the sudden and irreversible severing of relationships with their students. These were bonds built over years of trust, care, and shared growth—connections that formed the base of their professional purpose. Teacher's spoke of the anguish of walking away from tamariki they had nurtured, guided, and advocated for. The abruptness of the separation left many feeling as though a part of their identity had been stolen. For educators who had committed their lives to the wellbeing of young people, the silence that followed their departure was devastating.



Image by taylor-flowe on Unsplash [creative commons]

Following are extracts from the narratives from the survey that report on aspects of this theme:

“When I left the centre, the children I was close to were very confused and upset it was totally heart-breaking [to be forced to leave]. When I walked past one boy in particular, he would cry out for me, so I had to walk another way.”

“Students I would see and had worked with for many years were confused with where I had gone to. I felt like I had abandoned them. This was really hard and probably one of the worst parts. I had all this knowledge to help with speech and language issues and nowhere to use it. I felt chucked aside and very confused.”

“As the Principal of a school serving a vulnerable and impoverished community, I dedicated myself to supporting students facing significant adversity at home or as a result of personal experiences. Over six years of leadership, I applied a trauma-informed approach and built deep, trusting relationships with children who needed consistency, compassion, and someone constant in their lives who understood them. Each morning, I made it a priority to connect with them in their classrooms—ensuring their needs were met and creating the emotional safety required to minimise behavioural challenges throughout the day. They knew I cared, and they, and their whanau trusted me. I was present during moments of crisis, helped them regulate when they were triggered, and advocated regularly for them.”
{mandated Principal}

“The pain and betrayal I feel at the Ministry of Education’s actions are indescribable. To publicly promote inclusive, trauma-informed practice while simultaneously aligning behind the scenes with government policy that forcibly removed experienced, compassionate, trauma-aware educators from schools is not only contradictory—it is devastating. My removal under the mandate severed bonds that had taken years to build. For months afterward, those children visited me in dreams, asking: “Why did you leave me? Who can I trust now?” I felt physically ill knowing my absence meant they had lost their strongest advocate—the one adult they depended on to feel safe and seen in their unpredictable worlds. All of this, because the government revoked the exemption clause, denying

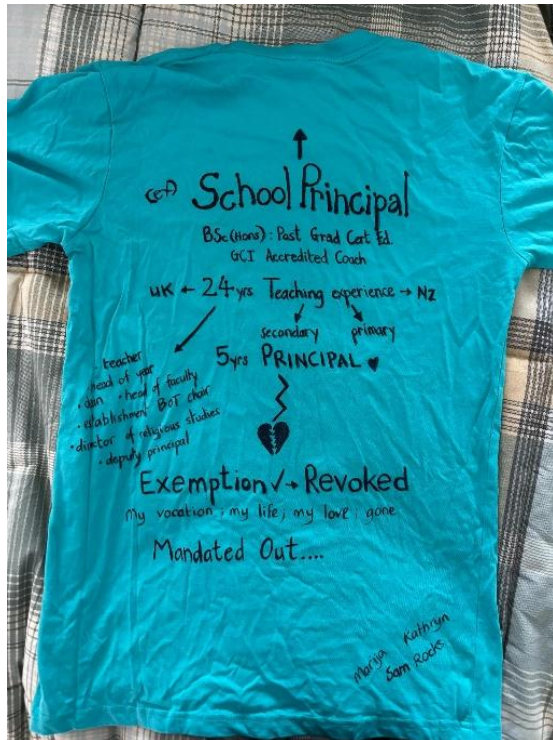
protection for those with medical conditions that made vaccination an unsafe option. What was done to my school, and to the education sector collectively, was a profound betrayal. Even now, four years later, I carry the weight of having to walk away from my most vulnerable students—like a silent exit, with no way to explain the reality to them or their families."

"One wee, troubled boy I taught had been doing really well the year I had him. In November 2021 we had to "not turn up or be arrested". That little boy, one week later punched a hole in the wall. He was so traumatized by his teacher, a safe relationship, being ended suddenly with no goodbyes. I had trouble even recalling his name as it traumatized me feeling I had betrayed him. He was only 7. I hate that it hurt him so much. Some days I wish I'd been brave enough to turn up and get arrested."

d) Theme Five: Wasted expertise

The departure of highly skilled and experienced teachers due to the vaccine mandate marked a profound loss for the education sector. Decades of expertise, dedication, and deep understanding of student needs were abruptly removed from classrooms, leaving a void not easily filled. Though some of the survey respondents have since returned (from the survey outcomes it appears, understandably, these mandated teachers have returned to different schools than the ones they were forced to leave) the experience has left an indelible mark. The circumstances under which they were forced to leave—and the lack of acknowledgment or closure—have deeply affected their sense of belonging, trust, and professional worth. What was once a calling for many now carries the lingering weight of disillusionment and emotional and moral injury.²¹

²¹ Salmond, 'Māori Epistemologies'; Psychology Today, 'Moral Injury'; Shay, 'Moral Injury'; Kelchtermans, 'Teacher Vulnerability: Understanding Its Moral and Political Roots'.



“Once I was mandated, I spent 6 months out of work in my field. I was not entitled to government benefit - not even a community services card. I did manage to find a job from an employer that did not discriminate. Unfortunately, it was in the field of engineering - on the workshop floor - making air conditioning units that were bigger than me! This was extremely hard work & to be honest soul destroying. At this company there were 2 teaching staff, 1 architect, 1 plumber, 1 pilot & sadly 1 surgeon - all of us mandated from our chosen fields. What a complete waste of talents. All this was discrimination of our health rights to say the least.”

Image above: a T shirt worn at a protest that aimed to raise awareness of the vaccine mandates during the height of the censorship. Credit: Saira Boyle

“My wife used to be an Advanced Skills Teacher, Head of department and as a published teacher she is a loss to the profession- her exam results were brilliant.”

“When the mandates lifted, my ex-school begged me to come back, but unfortunately, I then learned that the new DP had zero responsibilities attached to her position - was getting paid more than I had as DP with a third of the numbers of students in her class! Among other things, this broke me and I developed anxiety brought on by PTSD and had to go on sick leave as my body could not cope with the way in which NO ONE mentioned anything when I returned - NO ONE offered a sorry for what they'd put me through - NOTHING; and that's when the panic attacks started to happen frequently.”

“When the mandate was dropped, I went back to school to teach however I experienced bullying from teachers who I believed were my friends or nice colleagues, yet they

avoided me or didn't talk to me the whole time I was at school. I lasted two terms and then let the principal know I was handing in my notice with no job to go to because I couldn't bear being at school again. I was stressed, felt neglected, avoided, felt like a leper as a staff member."

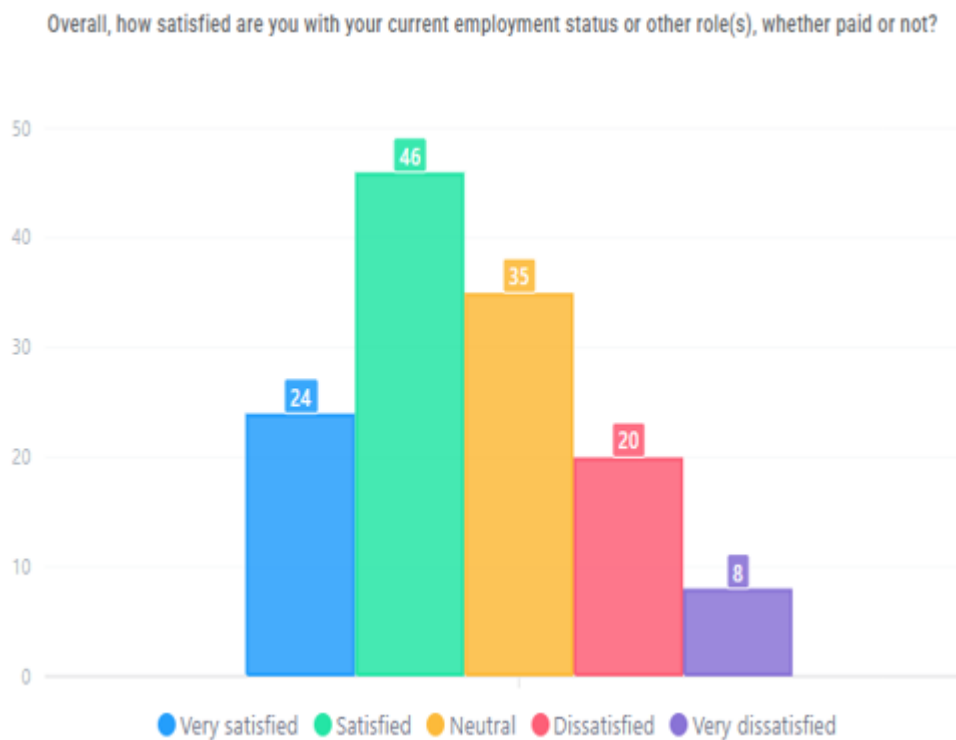
"I was let go from my employment for the duration of the mandate and hired back as soon as it lifted. After a few months i resigned as the hurt was so raw i couldn't continue to work with such poor mental health. While my employer did not want to let me go during the mandate, they did nothing to support or fight it and i was made to feel like I was being an inconvenience. Many staff members would not come near me because I was unvaccinated and may put them at risk. I left ECE and swore to never return. However, one of the parents at my centre who was jabbed but also believed we should have freedom of choice, bought her own centre and asked me to work for her. Now I'm with a better centre, a supportive employer and things are much better. But it has taken years to recover from the mental and financial anguish i was put through."

"I have not been able to progress in my career due to the conflict over the mandate. I didn't want to get vaccinated as we were wanting to do IVF."

"At the time of the mandates, I had my dream teaching job, living in a schoolhouse with great relationships with my colleagues and the community. As a result of the mandates, I was judged and bullied for weeks by my principal and board chair. Despite there being no cases of covid (in my region), I worked from home, then was stood down in January on unpaid leave. My BOT chair resigned in protest to me being given leave as he wanted to fire me. I had to leave my school due to mental stress, and resigned shortly after the mandates were dropped. My principal did not contact me for three days after the announcement of the mandates being dropped, and even then, it was just a text to say 'remember you can't return till your leave ends in June'. The unpaid leave cost me thousands of dollars (no MSD support as I was still legally employed), I lost my home, my

community and my job. I was also not allowed to apply for the principal position I had been being mentored towards for two years, as this was advertised while I was stood down.”

Graph 15



The above graph shows a desperate picture of diverse teachers excluded from their profession and vocations. Some, unable to return to their roles, whether through choice or not, show that satisfaction in a new role is possible. However, as we have seen in previous themes, many of the participants of this survey were highly qualified, experienced teachers, so it is unsurprising that when faced with exclusion on this scale since the mandates, almost 50% report being either 'neutral' or 'dissatisfied' with their current employment or voluntary roles. How can the education system of New Zealand continue to discriminate against these valuable individuals? What cost is this exclusion to the students who desperately need their skills?

e) Theme Six: Unprofessional behaviour



Image by bharath-kumar- on Unsplash [creative commons]

The vaccine mandate not only forced many dedicated educators out of the profession but also volunteers and students. Even school children, undertaking voluntary roles during lunchtime supervision were mandated to take the vaccine. Were they able to provide informed consent? The vaccine mandate revealed a troubling undercurrent within the education sector - one marked by judgement, exclusion, and unprofessional behaviour. For teachers who did not vaccinate, the consequences extended far beyond job loss. Many faced isolation from colleagues, were subject to whispered and explicit criticism, and in some cases, endured overt hostility. These experiences undermined professional relationships, eroded morale, and left lasting emotional scars. What should have been a time for compassion, respectful dialogue, and ethical conduct became, for many, a period defined by division and silence. This has left some

with a deep sense of betrayal, permanently affecting their sense of belonging and belief in the sector's values, while also leaving a quiet but persistent doubt about their place within a profession they once held dear. The following narratives from the survey illustrates these experiences:

"It was a very difficult and emotional time, I had very strong bonds with the students (special needs unit connected to a mainstream school). I also had a wonderful team of colleagues. Unfortunately, I confided in the manager of our unit that I wasn't sure if I would get vaccinated or not, she took this [personal] information and shared it with the principal and was told I would be going on leave without pay, I asked for a meeting and tried to fight for my job and suggested many ways/solutions I could do some of my work remotely however was told no. I felt helpless and that I had lost everything in my life that I had worked hard for and ended up having very poor mental health."

"I was treated very poorly by the principal throughout. It was an incredibly stressful time. He refused to consider our point of view, or health and safety implications, stating that we were a health risk. Some colleagues immediately distanced themselves. The only ones who were prepared to discuss what I was going through were the small group of teachers who did not want to get vaccinated. They all gave in to the pressure ultimately. Others didn't want to know at all and would just say 'it's your choice' or 'you might kill my grandmother' etc. I lost friends of long-standing, had verbal and online abuse from friends and relatives. 'You'll be lying in a hospital bed, choking to death, taking up a bed which should be available for a cancer patient' etc."

*"It was horrific. I felt extremely bullied and coerced to receive the jab. I was called **unhinged** by colleagues. It was bad."*

"My school leader, private school, was not easy to deal with. She told my colleagues via a group text that I would be leaving the job. It was humiliating. It made my feelings of

isolation way worse as it was a very abnormal way to share that kind of announcement. Only one staff member contacted me. I had taught there for 15 years."

"I was treated as subhuman. I had all my rights taken away. My work mates treated me like a pariah. They were nasty on social media towards my situation. I was made to feel like a criminal and this caused huge anxiety and panic attacks. I was told I was not allowed to talk about it, or I would be done for bullying. I was shouted at by the principal in a board meeting when I tried to share the reasons behind my noncompliance. People avoided me. They talked about me and made it sound like I was a granny killer and how I was stupid at putting everyone at risk. To this day I find it difficult to trust anyone as my workmates were my family and then they threw me away like garbage. I find working in education incredibly difficult and to this day I still have staff and students questioning my intelligence because I am an "anti vaxxer." I have been shouted at while doing duty by cars going past for being an anti vaxxer. The person who took my job for a year then spread lots of nasty gossip about me in the small community. I also now have a physical issue where my voice box doesn't work sometimes as I have been under stress and gagged so psychologically, I will lose my voice at times as a result of any stress. The other principals just ignored my existence and going back to work in the same place after being given "leave" was the hardest thing I have faced in my life...including deaths of parents. My work environment still feels like I am walking on eggshells."

"Never saw my boss during the mandate time, she kept away, only sent emails that were threatening and demanding to take vaccine or be terminated. At the beginning of the year, she had said she would never force us to be jabbed. All teachers who did get jab only did to get job under much pressure."

"I was completely ostracized by my colleagues and friends. The only interactions I had were with my Principal and Board Personnel subcommittee. These were all via Zoom or email. One colleague I talked to a year later said staff had been told not to get in touch

with me. I had worked in this school for 36 years and was given 30 minutes (supervised by a BOT member) to clear out my office and collect my personal belongings. I was Deputy Principal in a primary school with a roll of over 800 students, and had been helping on site with students whose parents were essential workers - I had been undergoing weekly testing. I was also supporting my team of 14 teachers with planning, via zoom. Once the mandates were issued, I was not allowed on site, even outside of school hours.”

“I was escorted into the school on a Sunday to collect all my things, given a bar of chocolate and escorted out. It was awful. I made a point of leaving notes and a little gift for all the kids I worked with.”



Image by brooke-cagle on Unsplash [creative commons]

“I heard that my colleagues were told not to contact us, so they didn’t. My students were told I was sick and unable to teach any more. When I did happen to meet up with some students while shopping, they had no idea about the mandate and were surprised I hadn’t been sick. In fact, I have never had covid! All the mandate procedure was done online with no personal contact.”

“Principal was extremely unsympathetic to anyone’s view apart from her own. I told her I wasn't going to get vaccinated, and she removed the contract offer for the following year. I hadn't signed it. Discrimination. All staff who chose not to be vaccinated were informed of their dismissal in an all-staff email - not personally or even as a group. Loss of income until mandates were lifted.”

“In the lead-up to the mandates, I did not speak about my views with colleagues, so I was subjected to hearing comments such as: they (unvaccinated) deserve to die, they are selfish, those camps (isolation/prison) are a good idea, they don't deserve hospital treatment etc.”

*“I went to school one evening to do some work. As the school Principal, I had an agreement with my board to ‘work from home’ during the day, and that I could go onsite outside of school hours when I needed to. [...] I was confused why my key no longer worked to open the block where my office was. I contacted a staff member [...], and they bought me down a key,[...]. When I got inside the building, the alarm went off a few seconds later, because the alarm code had also been changed. Once I sorted that out, I tried to log onto the school server and couldn’t because my computer access had been disconnected. All of this happened without any notification from the school board. They had **erased my existence** while I was STILL Principal. Less than a week later, I was emailed my termination letter from the school chair.”*

“I was a volunteer tutor, not even my expenses were paid, but I loved helping the students with their individual needs. The day I was prevented from coming onto campus I cried my heart out driving home again. Not for me, but for my students. Not a single word have I heard from any of my colleagues or manager since that day. Why? How can this be considered normal, professional behaviour? What has happened to the NZ I loved?”

f) Theme Seven: Resilience in Adversity



Image created by AI/authors

The general topics from this theme are reflected in responses that describe aspects of participants faith, their personal transformation in terms of understandings, self-confidence, values and role in society, and new beginnings, adopting a positive mindset and a changing worldview – overall a shifting paradigm that allow an individual to overcome adversity in times of trauma...

“Fortunately, my life actually changed for the better as a result [of the covid era policies]. I moved north and lived with [family member] briefly, then managed to find a nannying job (on a significantly lower wage). I sold my home in the city and met my current

partner of three years. We have now bought a home in Northland. I got a job back in early childhood education two years ago and have been loving it.”

“Was fired (terminated). Immediate family very supportive, extended family less so and even hostile. Most friends were supportive. [The vaccine] mandate impacted my lifestyle in that I felt marginalised and rejected by society. The term "Untermensch" comes to mind. However, I made new friends of like-minded opinions and carried on. I had intended never to return to teaching, but financial circumstances dictated that I needed to do some work.”

“I have made some new friends that experienced the mandates. They are great and we love getting together when we can. We love how we are able to be open and candid when we're together. I have a new hairdresser as she was mandated out of her job. She is wonderful. I look for the silver lining in the dark surreal landscape of the cold covid era.”

“The best thing about the mandate was meeting like such compassionate non-judgemental people. I have connected with a growing group of people who were appalled at the government’s response to covid, in the region I now live in. We meet monthly, and I love attending those get togethers. I feel valued, connected and respected, like I’ve never experienced before.”

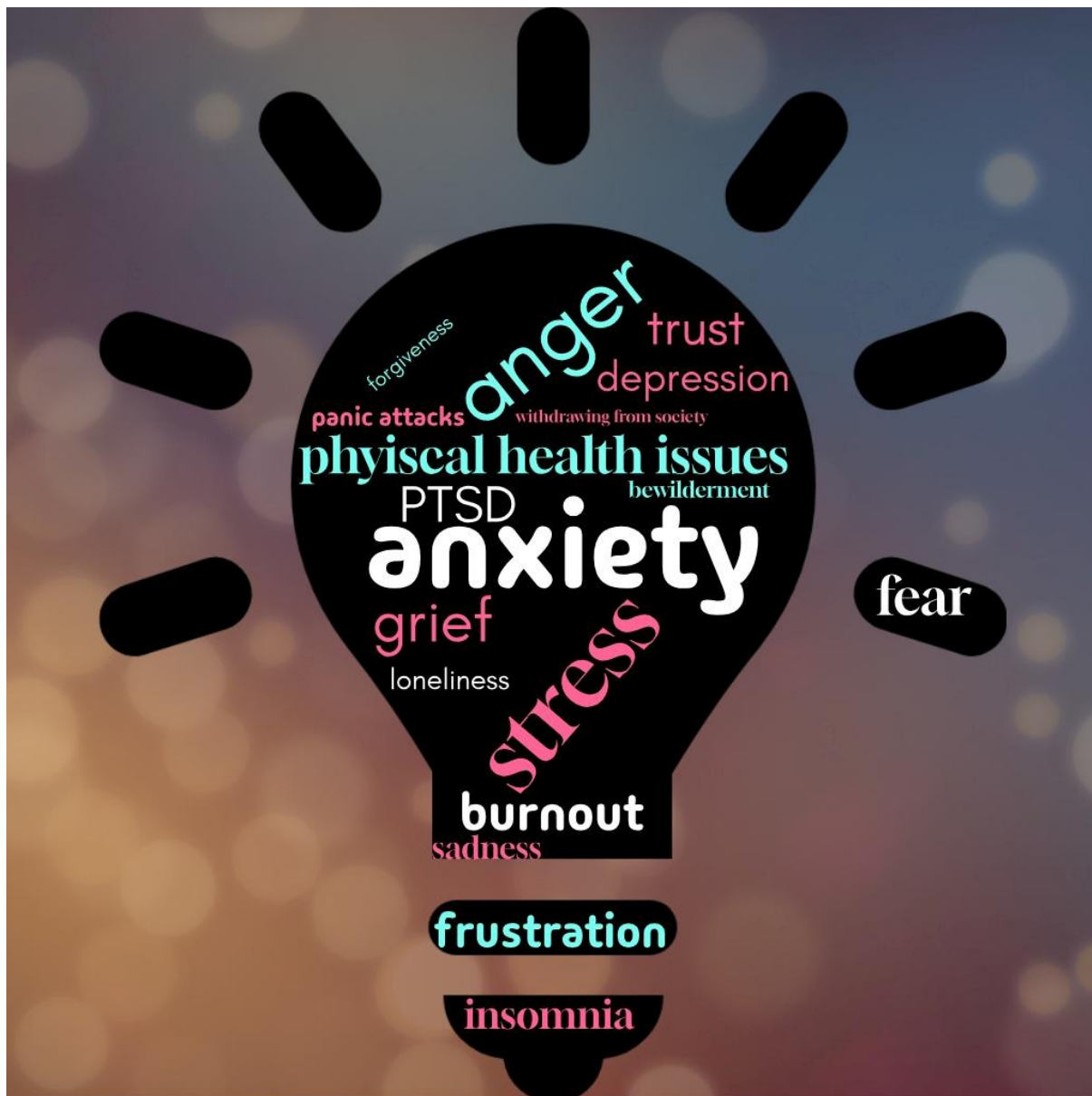


Image by janith-dimanka-on Unsplash [creative commons]

“I have moved regions, and I am training in trauma therapy. I aim to get out of education altogether. I feel somewhat vindicated that the trauma I experienced, has motivated me to find evidenced based solutions to support people going through difficult and traumatic experiences. I am really looking forward to starting my new business where I can help people move past awful experiences like the mandate!”

5) Conclusions

This word-cloud illustrates the emotions described by the survey participants, when asked about feelings related to the vaccination mandates. It should be noted by the Commissioners the high frequency of the use of words like anger, anxiety, stress and grief. These types of negative emotions are not conducive to positive mental and physical health and remain unaddressed and even censored by 'mainstream' media outlets, professional societies and the NZ Government.



a) Summary of NZTSOS Submission

This Submission on behalf of NZTSOS has presented evidence from a survey of members of NZTSOS which we believe provides an accurate snapshot of those teachers impacted by the covid era policy decisions. Whether these are teachers, tutors, assistants, principals, administrators, their families, friends and wider communities, the themes are consistent and disturbing for us all. We are confident that despite the heavy censorship, the RCOI will include evidence that not one segment of NZ society escaped the negative impact of the Government's covid era decisions, statements and policies.

This Submission and the research that supports its evidence, was created, analysed and presented entirely by volunteers, with no funding, advantage or conflicts of interest. The findings confirm there is an urgent need for further comprehensive, in depth, independent investigations into the areas we have presented. To summarise our Submission, we have presented evidence of the following eight key points:

1. Most of the teachers and other education staff who participated in this survey were mid-end career, highly qualified professionals, who were forced to leave their jobs unwillingly because of the mandates.
2. The appalling ways teachers were unfairly discriminated against, shunned, censored, shamed and bullied by their colleagues and others.
3. How informed consent procedures were ignored and the procedures for attempting to obtain an exemption from the mandates were flawed, corrupt or completely absent.
4. A summary of the unethical manipulation and coercion deployed by the Government's 'Nudge Unit', which used behavioural science techniques of propaganda, censorship and subliminal messaging to scare the population and force compliance.
5. Many of the teachers mandated out of their work have still not been able to return to that work. The qualitative and quantitative data presented here have shown this could be because of ill health, continued vaccine policies in some roles, a sense of distrust, shame or fear of a repeat of the traumatic experiences they lived through.

6. The huge personal and professional costs of the Government's covid era policy decisions, where individuals have been bereaved or physically harmed, families divided, colleagues lost valuable expertise and people have suffered trauma that remains unacknowledged and unaddressed.
7. Our education system is in crisis with considerable damage ongoing as a result of the covid era decisions and policies. Indeed, New Zealand society in general remains extremely divided and traumatised because of the unfair, unjust and unethical vaccine mandates.
8. NZTSOS has identified many challenges experienced by member participants as highlighted in this report and despite the themes summarised above. But a spirit of resilience and transformation continues to inspire us to have hope in positive outcomes.

b) NZTSOS Key Recommendations

NZTSOS members are aware of serious problems in our education system that have been exacerbated by the covid era policy decisions, eg staff shortages, recruitment and training. Skills such as critical thinking and research analysis that circumnavigates propaganda and censorship, free speech and open debate are all missing, not only from our students' curriculum, but importantly from our teacher education programmes. Reasons for this are complex and outside the scope of this report. However, structural and systemic change is urgently needed in education. We therefore suggest to the RCOI and regulatory bodies the following nine areas for immediate action, closer analysis, future research and review:

1. A formal Government apology is urgently needed for all education staff negatively impacted by the mandates, and full, unconditional re-registration offered, without prejudice.
2. A formal non-discriminatory employment policy could be formalised, to safeguard future risks of staff and student discrimination.
3. A comprehensive, independent review is required of the role of the educational bodies and any future workforce status requirements such as vaccination policy.

4. The MoE, ERO and various research entities could investigate the adverse event reporting from the teachers who received one or more doses of the vaccine.
5. A confirmation of the respect of informed consent protocols when aiming to communicate any health interventions within the workforce.
6. The rights of teachers to freedom of thought, speech, opinion, conscience and religion regarding vaccinations.
7. A full review of the ethics of interventions via national and international Behavioural Insights Teams, including private consultants.
8. Accountability measures for the failed duty of care towards unvaccinated teachers by regulatory bodies.
9. Accountability for the role of the Ministry of Education in failures to take reasonable steps in accommodating unvaccinated teachers during and after the mandates.

NZTSOS look forward to the outcomes from this Royal Commission of Inquiry (RCOI) into COVID-19 Lessons Learned Te Tira Ārai Urutā - Phase Two. We also look forward to further opportunities to expose what happened during the covid era, as a result of the NZ Government's statements and policy decisions.

Appendix 1: Survey questions

Question Details



Participants' Informed Consent

New Zealand Teachers Speaking Out with Science (NZTSOS) members' experiences of the covid era 'Vaccination Order' mandates: then and now.

Note that this research project has been reviewed and approved by the independent Aotearoa Research Ethics Committee (Ref 2024_54). If you have any concerns about this survey, please contact the researchers via this email: NZTSOSResearch@proton.me

- **This research asks the following question of New Zealand Teachers Speaking Out with Science (NZTSOS) members and affiliates: what were/are your lived experiences of the covid era 'Vaccination Order' mandates, then and in the (over) three years since their application?**

Why is this research important?

We live in an age of intense, international propaganda and censorship. This is evidenced (for example) in the Twitter (now X) Files, the 'Facebook Papers' including Meta's recent admission regarding fake fact-checking entities and new US Executive Orders that attempt to prevent restrictions to free speech. Regulatory capture has eroded the role of entities which were created to protect our rights and freedoms. More than three years on from the covid 'vaccination' order mandates, **this independent study aims to provide a valuable opportunity for NZ teachers to voice their lived experiences and interpretations of that era.** It is crucial to collect, summarise and articulate these lived experiences because many of these individuals have been silenced and/or vilified. Outcomes from this research will potentially provide unique insights into a stigmatized and marginalized group of NZ society, empowering them to speak out and seek support where necessary. Findings will therefore provide important context for policy, law makers, governance and educationalists, now and into the future, when considering the human cost of the impact from the covid era guidance and legislation.

What does being a research participant for this study involve?

You have been invited to take part in a small research project by completing this short, online, anonymous survey about your lived experiences during and since the covid era. If you choose to, afterwards, you could email us to volunteer for a follow-up interview, either face-to-face or online. This will be conducted by one of the researchers, for approximately one hour, at a mutually convenient time. This interview would be an opportunity to expand on any of the topics raised within the survey. Time and funding constraints mean that these follow-up interviews will be limited in time and number. There is no obligation to answer any of the questions, either in the survey or later, if you choose to be interviewed. There will be no disadvantage if you decline to respond to any part of this research project.

Withdrawing from the research study

You can withdraw from the survey at any time during the survey questions by clicking 'exit survey'. Note that it will be difficult, if not impossible, to delete any data you provide to the survey if you decide to withdraw after completing the survey. If you opt to take part in an interview, then you can also withdraw from this at any stage before or after the interview. Again, we will do our best to delete any record of the interview, should you request this, although this will be dependent upon the stage of the analysis and later dissemination.

Your privacy and confidentiality

The survey is being conducted via the online research platform Tandem: please check Tandem's Terms and Conditions for details of their privacy policy. Our survey does not collect your name or any personal details. All data is anonymous, and outcomes are summarised for the researchers with no identifying names or markers.

After the completion of the survey, participants may email us to volunteer for a follow-up interview with a researcher. With your permission, this interview will be recorded, kept securely and transcribed. Your name and any affiliation will be changed and any other identifying information removed or changed to protect your privacy and confidentiality. Efforts will be made to keep the personal information and contents of your interview private and confidential but absolute confidentiality cannot be guaranteed. For example, those who are not intended audiences (e.g., internet hackers) may access forms of communication intended to be private, such as e-mail. If you take part in an interview, you will have an opportunity – if you wish – to review the draft transcript from our interview and make amendments or deletions before the transcript is finalised for research data analysis purposes. Your personal information and the anonymised transcripts will be kept securely by the researchers in hard copy or digital form, for a maximum of seven years.

Publishing of the Research Findings

After the survey has been closed and the results analysed using appropriate research methodologies, the findings will be written into a short report and presented to the NZTSOS Committee and members. Further reports may follow if/when the follow-up interviews with willing participants have been conducted, analysed and written-up. This material could feed into international academic conferences and be submitted for publication in academic peer-reviewed articles and books. It is possible that further research will be undertaken in this area, which builds on findings from this and other relevant projects. We will endeavour to update any participants of these events and publications, as appropriate.

Participant's Consent Form: What do I do next?

If you agree to participate in this research project, please proceed to the short online survey. If you are also interested in participating in a follow-up interview, please email us at NZTSOS@proton.me and we will arrange a suitable time for an interview, if necessary via an online platform like Zoom or Skype. Thank you once again for being interested in our research, we very much appreciate your time and support. Please read through the following and sign where appropriate:

- I have seen and understood this Information Sheet about the project and have had it explained to me, if necessary.
- I understand that it's my choice to take part in this research, and it's also my right to say 'no' to taking part if I don't want to do it.
- If I do start the survey, I know that I can skip and/or stop answering questions at any time, and I can withdraw my participation up to the time of submitting the online survey.
- Likewise, if I volunteer to take part in a follow-up interview, I can also withdraw my participation from that process, until the time of the writing of the report and this will not in any way affect me.
- I have had a chance to ask questions, and I know who to contact if I want to know more about this project and the researchers.
- I have had time to think about whether I want to take part.
- I understand that my name will not appear on any written records.

By continuing to the survey, I consent to voluntary participation in this research project and understand the above terms.

Question Details



Welcome to this short, anonymous survey from the New Zealand Teachers Speaking Out with Science (NZTSOS). It is open to members and non-members. It's over three years since the Vaccination Order was imposed, when so many peoples' lives were changed so dramatically, in different ways. We have created this survey in good faith for the benefit of our members and wider society. Any responses are anonymous and will be treated with respect for participants' privacy and confidentiality.

We remain focused on obtaining acknowledgment and accountability for the complex harms caused by the vaccine mandate - psychological, social, economic and physical. We are therefore interested in learning more about our members' past and current experiences resulting from the 'vaccine' mandate, so we can respond to your needs sensitively and appropriately. We understand that reflecting on these feelings may be traumatic; this survey and its questions are entirely optional. It is important all our voices are heard and recorded. We would therefore like to encourage you to share your personal story on this survey, and additionally, if appropriate, a one-on-one interview would also be welcomed.

Be assured all the data collected in this survey is anonymous and any analysis will be conducted under the expertise of qualified, professional researchers. We welcome any questions regarding this survey at any point. Results from the analysis will be published on our website and disseminated in other appropriate outlets including potentially peer-reviewed academic journal(s).

Close

<p>What is your gender?</p>
<p>Your current age is within which range?</p>
<p>How would you describe your ethnicity?</p>
<p>Are you a current paid-up member of NZTSOS?</p>
<p>If you are currently living in New Zealand, what region are you based?</p>
<p>During the 'vaccination' order mandates, where were you living (if different from where you are currently based)?</p>
<p>What is your highest level of qualification?</p>
<p>How many years experience in the education sector do you have?</p>
<p>What best described your work status PRIOR to the NZ vaccination mandate?</p>
<p>BEFORE the vaccination mandate, please state your job title:</p>
<p>What best describes your CURRENT work status?</p>
<p>If currently working, what best describes your sector?</p>
<p>If CURRENTLY working, please state your job title:</p>
<p>On a scale of 1-5, how would you rate your current financial situation NOW, compared to before the vaccination mandate?</p>
<p>On a scale of 1-5, how stressful was your worklife experience of the vaccination mandate?</p>
<p>Please rate your overall current physical health NOW, compared to BEFORE the vaccination mandate</p>
<p>Please rate your overall current mental health and well-being NOW, compared to BEFORE the vaccination mandate</p>
<p>What support (if any) did you receive during and/or after the vaccination mandate?</p>
<p>Overall, how satisfied are you with your current employment status or other role(s), whether paid or not?</p>
<p>If you are not currently in a role in the education sector, would you consider returning to education in the future? Please explain why/why not.</p>

📄 Would you like to share how the vaccination mandate experience has impacted on your personal life? For instance, how did your students, friends, colleagues or managers react during that time? What kind of interactions did you have? Did the mandate impact your lifestyle and personal relationships, if so in what ways? Did you witness or experience bullying, discrimination, health & safety violations, rights violations? [All answers will be anonymised]

✍ Reflecting on the vaccination mandate, on a scale of 1-5, how well do you feel you managed the impact of any consequences on yourself, personally?

✍ On a scale of 1-5 how would you rate your current attitude to your work and career?

✍ On scale of 1-5 how would you rate your current attitude towards your personal life?

☰ Have you experienced any of the following since the vaccine mandate?

☑ On a scale of 1-5, since the mandate, how supported have you felt by your school or educational institution?

☑ If you have continued to work within the education sector, but at a different institution, please indicate on a scale of 1-5, how connected do you currently feel to your PREVIOUS educational community (colleagues, students, etc.)?

✍ On a scale of 1-5 how connected do you feel with any CURRENT educational community?

📄 Thinking about your networks and social circles, both personally and professionally, what (if any) significant changes have you experienced since the vaccination mandates?

📄 We are keen to learn more from teachers about their experiences during/since the Covid Vaccination Order (mandate). As this survey is anonymous, to protect your identity, please let us know separately if you like us to contact you to make arrangements for a confidential conversation. This may be face-to-face or virtually and at a mutually convenient time. Please email NZTSOSResearch@proton.me NB For general questions about NZTSOS please email: office@nztsos.org.nz

📄 Finally: Thank you very much for completing our short survey about NZTSOS members' experiences of the vaccine mandate. We understand that revisiting these lived experiences of the covid era could be upsetting. There are sources of professional help available, for example: Lifeline 0800 543 354 Samaritans 0800 726 666 Suicide Crisis Helpline 0508 828 865 Betterhelp - betterhelp.com To protect the integrity of this survey, please DO NOT share the link to this survey publicly. However, if you have a trusted family member, friend or colleague who may be interested in completing this survey and/or learning more about NZTSOS, please forward your email invitation to them personally. Alternatively, we suggest they contact NZTSOS directly. Thank you!

Close

Appendix 2: Research Ethics Approval

Aotearoa Research Ethics Committee

TE ROOPU RAPU I TE TIKA

c/o Community House, Floor 1, 43 Princes St, Dunedin Central • www.aotearoaresearchethics.org

APPROVAL LETTER: AREC Application 2024_54

Sunday, 2 February, 2025

Dr Ursula Edgington
[REDACTED]

Tēnā koe Cara.

The Aotearoa Research Ethics Committee has reviewed your application for *New Zealand Teachers Speaking Out with Science (NZTSOS) members' experiences of the covid era 'Vaccination Order' mandates: then and now* and has agreed that the project meets appropriate ethical standards for social research in Aotearoa New Zealand.

The ethos of the AREC is to see ethics review as an ongoing iterative relationship. After the formal ethics review the research questions and the research design often change. We therefore encourage you to return to the Committee at any time if any ethical dilemmas arise in the future.

This approval expires three years after the date of approval.

We wish you every success for your research project.

Mauri ora,



p.p. Lindsey Te Ata o Tū MacDonald

Dr Joy Panoho

AREC Chair

chair@aotearoaresearchethics.org

Disclaimer:

New Zealand Teachers Speaking Out with Science (NZTSOS) is an entirely voluntary initiative and not a formal entity. We do not accept funds from corporate entities, government or non-governmental agencies. We rely on kind donations of funds, resources and time from individuals, as we work together towards raising awareness about the issues impacting teaching and learning in every sector in New Zealand. We do this for the benefit of our students, whānau, communities and the wider society within New Zealand.

Any information published by us, and/or contained in this report is presented in good faith and for educational purposes only, including as a submission to the NZ Royal Commission of Inquiry (RCOI) into the covid response. The authors working voluntarily on behalf of NZTSOS, made every effort to ensure the information in this report was obtained from reliable sources. We are not responsible for any errors, omissions or changes. All information in this report is provided “as is,” with no guarantee expressed or implied, of completeness, accuracy, timeliness, or of the results obtained from the use of this information.

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Nothing in this report can in any way substitute for independent verification.

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