

Submission to the NSW Legislative Council Inquiry into Teacher Shortages in NSW, July 2022

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It is the prime responsibility of the NSW Government, Ministry of Education and the Department of Education to provide teachers for every student in every school. It is their collective responsibility to ensure that these teachers are trained to teach the appropriate curricula and achieve student outcomes.

International comparisons of student performance are meaningless unless adequate teaching is provided for all students. System comparisons using NAPLAN are invalid unless they report on teacher supply and competence in a way which can be compared. In schools where there are staff shortages and/or Science and Mathematics classes being taught by teachers not trained in these subjects, false results are being used to denigrate school performance and the quality and commitment of the teaching staff and the school leadership.

The Education Department must create a dedicated task force of senior officers with knowledge and experience of the needs of the system and an understanding of the qualities required to be a successful teacher. Such a team could review strategies used in the past and make recommendations for immediate and long term action to improve school staffing and as a result, student performance.

While there has been an emphasis in recent years in recruiting high performing students at the HSC and at graduation, little research is available to show that academic high performers are likely to commit to long term employment in public service and that they are necessarily better performers in the classroom.

Recent reports of the lack of success the Department has had in recruiting teachers from overseas again demonstrates the need for a more targeted approach. In the past, major recruiting campaigns in the northern hemisphere have been most effective when conducted early in the year and had teachers commit before they signed contracts for the following year. If NSW offered employment and payment from the end of the applicants school year, a time when many are not being paid, it would allow them to arrive in time for extensive induction and placement by the start of Term 4, facilitating work force planning for the next school year.

As there are significant delays in approving visas, it might be necessary for the State Government to look for ways to facilitate the process. While it might not be popular and possibly precedent setting, the State Government could offer to fund additional dedicated officers in the Immigration Department to fast track priority staffing in key areas like education and health.

As a radical move, the Department might invite school communities to identify year 12 students with an interest in being teachers. These would not necessarily be the top academic performers but those with emotional intelligence and social skills demonstrated in their commitment to the school through leadership programs and those activities that bring out the best in students. These students could be offered cadetships with financial support and/or reduced HEC's upon entry into the workforce. As a trial, schools in disadvantaged or difficult to staff areas might be given priority. (The armed forces currently do this for selected Year 12 students, with no obligation to serve.)

As the teacher workforce is aging, there will always be a need for effective planning to recruit teachers. There should be targeted approaches to those in the mining and fossil fuel industries so that as their work environment changes, they can already have done preparatory studies and work experience in their holidays and/or weeks off for FIFO. In making a commitment to change career, the Department can

recognize their prior skills and continuity of employment in setting a special entry level and assist in local placements.

The greatest disincentive in solving the teacher employment crisis is an overworked and under recognized set of employees. Students, parents and the community see and hear criticism by Departmental officers, members of Parliament and the media about student results or behaviour or values. If the employer wants to create an effective workforce that attracts others, it needs to review current practice, remove unnecessary work demands and show all the best aspects of working in a school.

Reflections on earlier times

In the period 1955-65, teacher graduates in Mathematics and Science were given incentives to leave for industry. As an alternate pathway to supply Mathematics and Science teachers, Teachers Colleges conducted non graduate teacher training as well as special courses for those who had not completed their university courses. Most of these then went on to graduate while teaching. The University of New England provided distance education, Macquarie in its early years ran Science Education by correspondence and periods of practical work and the Department's Inservice Training Branch funded tutorials for teachers doing university studies to improve the success rate of these programs. In the period 1970-75, about 40% of Mathematics Head Teachers had been trained as primary teachers and then done their degrees in Mathematics.

In about 1978, The Regional Director at Liverpool (Ms Eula Guthrie) was on the Council for Milperra CAE and convinced them to offer in their Primary Teacher Education training program a Science option that would allow their graduates to qualify both as primary teachers and Junior Secondary Science teachers. This enhanced their chances of employment at the time.

When BHP in Newcastle was closing down, the Department ran a recruitment and retraining program which increased the supply of both Science and Industrial Arts teachers.

Professor Eltis was Director of the Teacher Education programme at Macquarie University, Director of Curriculum and Educational Studies in the Department of School Education and while he was Dean of the Faculty of Education at Sydney University from 1994 to 1997, he established the new two year Master of Teaching programme which soon became a national pace setter in the professional preparation and education of future teachers. It was during this time that he set up in The Centre for Continuing Education a program for retraining teachers and conversion courses for recruits from industry.

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