



# A NATIONAL TEACHER SHORTAGE

A Solution from the  
Australian Education Union

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Across Australia there is a growing teacher shortage. Unless this issue is addressed now with a comprehensive and national approach, we will have more classrooms without teachers and a decline in the standard of the teaching profession. The solution of looking overseas to recruit is no longer possible as the shortage is a worldwide problem.

The combination of shortsighted government policies and a decline in the status of the teaching profession and support for the teaching profession has meant that fewer young people are choosing teaching as their career. Many experienced teachers have left the job early due to the increased complexity and difficulty of the job, the lack of career progression and the loss of support from employers.

A reduction in federal government funding for universities means that a smaller number of people are being trained, especially in specialist areas such as technology. Within universities, the status accorded to education has diminished dramatically. Governments at both the state and federal levels have significantly reduced the funding for public education over the past decade. This has made teachers' work far more difficult as conditions of work have worsened. Governments have conducted bitter struggles with teacher unions over wages which have left teachers feeling undervalued by their employers. Governments have publicly denigrated the teaching profession. They have introduced policies which take decisions about teaching, learning and standards away from the profession. Instead they have overburdened teachers with administrative busy work.

Real wage value for teachers has declined over these years, leaving teachers paid less than people in professions with similar training requirements. The support for teachers' ongoing professional development and training has gone missing.

With the average age of the teachers across the nation now at 49, we have the most qualified, experienced and committed teaching force in our history.

However, a huge proportion of these teachers will retire in the next ten years.

The shortage is already hitting hard in many states and territories. The worst affected are those areas which are traditionally difficult to staff and those in rural and remote regions where some schools and preschools cannot get teachers for specific subjects and the rate of teacher turnover is very high. The lack of secondary education for all remote Aboriginal students in the Northern Territory will only worsen if the teacher shortage is not addressed.

The chronic shortage of relief teachers is the first sign of the shortage. In many parts of Australia, there are no relief teachers available for replacing teachers who are sick or who take other leave.

Each state and territory is experiencing the problem in slightly different ways. The differences between each place in wages, opportunities for job security and careers has led to an increase in the mobility of teachers across the country in search of the best situation. There is already "poaching" occurring across state and national boundaries with some systems actively recruiting from others. International teacher demand has meant that lucrative packages are being offered to teachers trained in Australia.

Unless there is a concerned and combined effort by state and federal governments we will not have enough qualified teachers for our children in the future. This is a plan by the Australian Education Union which seeks to address this problem now, not when our children face classrooms without teachers, have fewer subject offerings or are taught by unqualified people.

A number of reports and research papers have been written about the problem of teacher shortage over the past five years including the Senate Enquiry into the status of teaching.

Despite these reports there has been a tendency for state, territory and federal governments to deny the problem and little action has occurred arising out of these reports.

The Australian Education Union puts forward the following proposals for action to address the findings of these reports.

## What is required to address the supply problem?

- **National plan to address issues of Teacher Supply**

While there is no national plan to deal with this problem, there will be an increase of poaching between states, leaving smaller and poorer states and rural and remote areas with greater shortages and poorer quality. We call on the federal government to establish a national working party of employers, unions and teacher educators to develop an Australia-wide strategy to address the supply of teachers. This working party should have an ongoing role in monitoring demand projections and planning to meet supply needs in a proactive way.

- **Raise the status and career paths of the teaching profession**

There is an urgent need to increase teacher pay in line with the importance and value of education for our children. Career paths must be created so that teachers can stay in the classroom and receive recognition for high level skills and experience. Beginning teacher salaries need to attract and keep young people in teaching. Employers must abandon models of wage negotiations which are based on productivity trade-offs and asking teachers to sacrifice learning conditions for wage increases. They must recognise the professionalism of teachers by actively involving them in decisions about curriculum and standards.

- **Improve the resourcing to public education**

Teaching can only become more attractive and satisfying if teachers have the necessary resources and tools to do their job well. The current workload problems for teachers are leading to low job satisfaction and teachers leaving the profession. Governments must invest in public education and provide the facilities, equipment and resources needed for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

- **Increase coordination and numbers of teachers being trained at university**

There should be better coordination between universities and employers so that specific areas of shortage are addressed. Increasing the places in teacher education is a priority. Federal funding needs to be increased in order for this to occur.

- **Special measures to attract people into teacher training**  
Special measures such as secondary student scholarships, HECS exemptions, provision of living allowances and guaranteed employment scholarships should be considered to attract young people including graduates to train as teachers. Support and incentives should also be considered to assist mature age people to take up teaching as a new career.
- **Create alternative pathways for entry into the teaching profession**  
Many highly experienced educational allied staff, support staff and Aboriginal Education Workers could move into teaching through bridging training in combination with recognition of prior learning. This would be particularly useful in remote areas where community members have fulfilled these roles.
- **Special programmes to recruit and support Aboriginal teachers.**  
There is an urgent need to recruit teachers from specific groups which are severely under-represented. There are very few Aboriginal teachers in Australia. In order to provide teachers for specific communities, to provide role models for Aboriginal students and encourage diversity within the profession there needs to be specially targeted programmes to recruit Aboriginal teachers. There is also a need to create special training programmes which are located in remote communities, mentoring programmes and specific support at the beginning of Aboriginal teachers' careers.
- **Increase professional development and re-training programs**  
There needs to be a significant increase in the provision of professional development for teachers so they can keep abreast of new developments in teaching. This adds to the job satisfaction. Current programmes to retain practising teachers in areas of acute shortage should be extended and new programmes established.
- **Coordinate and increase programs for teacher training for professionals in other fields.**  
Programs aimed at training professionals in other fields for teaching should be extended, coordinated and subsidised by employing authorities, particularly in areas of shortage.

- **Improve job security for teachers**

Years of contract and casual work lead to a great sense of dissatisfaction amongst teachers. It is a career which requires time to develop skills in a risk taking environment. The job is difficult and demanding enough without the added concern of job security. In the first years of teaching in particular, casual teachers who see few opportunities for permanent employment in the foreseeable future are lost by public education. Improving the permanence and stability of the teaching service should be a top priority for government employing authorities, in order to attract qualified people to teaching and keep them there.

- **Positively promote teaching and the public education system**

It is difficult to inspire any young person to enter the teaching profession when there is a negative public perception of the job. It is also difficult to inspire an enthusiasm for teaching when, on a daily basis, students and teachers face the reality that resources have been cut and support reduced. Reinvestment in public education will reduce workload and increase job satisfaction. Politicians need to immediately cease the public abuse of the teaching profession and provide the professional support required for such a crucial profession.

- **Addressing the shortage of casual, contract and short term relief teachers.**

The filling of vacancies created by short term leave and illness needs to be urgently addressed through a range of flexible strategies including the employment of permanent relievers in schools or districts, salary loadings and incentives for casual employment and guarantees of on-going work for those who wish to work in this way.

- **Publicly campaigning for new recruits.**

A paid media recruitment campaign should be conducted which focuses on the value of teaching as a career and encourages people to join the teaching profession.

# **A rural teacher supply strategy – the urgent need**

## **Provide special country incentives and appropriate housing and support for country teachers**

Rural and remote regions are already the hardest hit by the teacher shortage and will continue to be so unless there is a specific country strategy which addresses the particular needs of country communities and acknowledges the need for special measures to attract and keep high quality teachers in the country.

Aboriginal and other students living in remote locations are already disadvantaged in their educational options with many being denied access to preschool education and secondary education in their own communities.

In less remote regions, schools are adapting and minimising the subject offering for students because of the lack of availability of specialist teachers. Even where the staffing entitlement for rural students is adequate, schools have been forced to increase class sizes because of the lack of availability of staff.

Although most country teachers are of excellent quality and are committed to their work, the shortage will mean that quality is likely to fall, with unqualified and poorly qualified teachers being used to fill country vacancies. This will create a greater and unfair difference between city and country education.

To attract teachers to the country there needs to be a nationally funded Country Teacher package which includes the provision of:

- Monetary incentives;
- Availability of adequate subsidised housing;
- Paid travel including the provision of vehicles;
- Additional leave entitlements for travel and training;
- Targeted professional development programs for country teachers;
- Promotion opportunities;
- Guaranteed return to metropolitan areas;
- Incentives to remain in rural and remote areas.

Trainee teachers need to be better equipped for the possibility of working in rural and remote areas. Aboriginal Education should be a part of all teacher training courses and student teachers should be supported to do practice teaching in rural and remote regions as part of their training.

There should be special targeted incentive programmes to encourage students from country regions to train as teachers and return to their communities to teach.

In addition there needs to be more creative solutions to encourage teachers to remain in rural schools through such measures as long service bonuses and scholarships for their own children for university entrance. A key to teachers staying in the country is to ensure they are also satisfied with the quality of education being provided to their own children. We must list the resource level and the quality of rural education to encourage teachers to stay once their children have started school.

**The Teacher Shortage is a problem for the nation. If we want a good future for our children we need good teachers. We call on federal and state governments to stop pretending there is no problem and to start addressing it.**