

INQUIRY INTO THE RECRUITMENT AND TRAINING OF TEACHERS

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Theme:

Summary

COUNTRY WOMEN'S ASSOCIATION OF NEW SOUTH WALES



SUBMISSION TO THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL ISSUES ON THE INQUIRY INTO THE RECRUITMENT AND TRAINING OF TEACHERS

TO: The Director,
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1. The best means of attracting quality teachers into NSW public schools and meeting the needs of schools communities.

There are several important issues we feel need addressing if we are to recruit the best quality teachers to the public school system.

- Status

If we want to recruit the best people, we must treat them as the best people. Politicians seem to be particularly fond of denigrating teachers (especially at wage negotiation time). Too often the government and the media devalue the role of teachers – and the short hours, long holidays furry needs to be knocked on the head. There seems to be no awareness in the community at large that teaching is not only about face to face hours, but also about preparation, programming, assessing and reporting – not to mention professional development. It is ironic that while teachers are being derided and criticised for society's shortfalls, they are also expected to not only teach but act as counsellors and social workers and to remediate all society's ills. For example, drug problems in NSW – put in a drug education program: bike accidents – put a bike safety course in – and then complain that teachers are not spending enough time on tables, spelling etc.

- Respect for their role.

A teacher is not and should not be considered to be a social worker. Teachers should not be responsible for the remediation of society's ills; this is surely the responsibility of the community at large and communities should be aware that if they demand teachers to spend time on education on areas that are more properly the responsibility of parents, they risk depriving teachers of time to teach the three R's.

- Remuneration

If we, as a society, value education as we should, we should be hoping for the top echelon of students to enter the teaching profession. We can only achieve this by making pay, status and conditions, when they graduate, equal to those of other professions and with a career path that will continue to remunerate them well.

- Excellence in training

Teaching students must be engaged in rigorous and demanding training that reflects world's best practice, and an integral part of this training must be the necessary knowledge and skills of living in/dealing with the gamut of sociological environs that the average teacher faces in a career.

- Involvement in curriculum development and implementation.

It is ironic that although teachers are responsible for implementing curriculum changes, they are often not given any input into what these changes should be or given time and resources with which to absorb and implement these changes most efficiently. This must change and teachers, as the people closest to the coalface where these changes will be implemented, must be included in the process of change.

2. Effectiveness and efficiency of current means of recruiting teachers to NSW public schools, including recent graduates and career change teachers.

- Efficiency.

It would seem to us that there are two main issues influencing the efficiency of the current means of recruiting teachers to NSW public schools. They are the slowness of the whole process and its inflexibility.

We feel that the process of recruitment that that Education NSW uses works far too slowly and thus the Department loses many of the most able graduates to the private education systems; and even to those of other states. For example, we understand that the top seven graduates from CSU – Riverina were lost to the ACT system, because of the speed at which they were given jobs in this system. Students at CSU who finish their courses in June/July are told by the NSW Department to expect their numbers in September/October. Understandably most graduates are keen to start earning money as soon as possible and end up employed and settled in the private sector before their teaching numbers have even been allocated. Thus they too are lost to the public school system.

When students get nominated as a targeted graduate, the Department insists that they are required to take up a position in the following year, whatever their wishes are. Many students at the end of their university years wish to travel or work overseas for one or two years. We feel that the department of education should be adaptable to this and say that any “Supergrad” must take up their option of a permanent position within two years of their graduation. Often these students have spent these post graduate years teaching overseas – invaluable experience for them, which would enable them to go into our schools already experienced and motivated. Too often, at the moment they cannot get jobs in the state system and so go – again - to the more flexible non governmental systems.

- Effectiveness

To be most effective, the recruitment process should include some form of interview to assess both the student's motivation and verbal ability. This interview process should be used, together with their subject choice at school and university, to ascertain their best fit for a career path. Also there must be included in the training process large amounts of practice teaching, so that the student herself can assess her suitability for the job early rather than later. There must be an extension of the targeted graduate program; especially, as mentioned before because many of these graduates seem to end up in other education systems and states.

A stumbling block in the recruitment process would appear to be the requirement that for permanency, a recruit has to agree to teach anywhere in the state. This is not possible or desirable for many teachers, especially those with a partner or family. If we contrast this with the catholic system, many teachers in this system are able to stay in the same school or area, gaining permanency and promotion while doing so – often a far more inviting prospect.

To make teaching a more inviting prospect for a career change teacher, there needs to be proof of improved career opportunities, salary, conditions or all three – and again the flexibility that seems to be lacking at present.

3. Differences and similarities between primary and secondary school recruitment needs.

There are quite different recruitment needs for these two areas in accordance with the developmental stages of children at different ages and thus their learning needs. K-6 children need teachers who are Jack's of all trades – and masters of them all too! In other words they need a talented generalist who is capable of nurturing almost every aspect of a child's development as well as their more formal learning needs. There may be some flexibility in this in that primary schools may have specialist music or PE teachers but overall, the primary school teacher is a generalist. In secondary schools the teacher needs to be a specialist in one or two subject areas and be capable of teaching these across all levels of high school. There should be an absolute minimum of teachers trained in one area but teaching in another in which they are unqualified, eg, English teachers teaching mathematics. This does no justice to the students, or indeed the teachers. If recruiting methods improve, there should be no need for this.

However, in both areas those who are recruited to teach **must** be able to teach; they must have received excellent quality teacher training and be suited to this at times very challenging role.

4. Existing initiatives and programs of the Department of Education and training. These programs are praiseworthy and worth keeping and perhaps expanding. That they are producing less teachers for NSW schools than they should is probably because of issues referred to in sections 1& 2 of this submission.

5. Role of the NSW Institute of Teachers

The charter of the NSW Institute of Teachers is stated to be “To advance the status and standing of the teaching profession”; and later “to give teachers a say in the future of their profession. These would seem to be a praiseworthy ambition.

However we have several reservations about the Institute as it is presently constituted, summarised under the following headings.

- **Composition of Board.**

The board at present is composed of four members.

1. Dr Jim McMorro (Chair). Dr. McMorro has had a distinguished career in education administration and policy development, but, it appears no actual school or even university teaching background.

2. Jenni Neary from the Insurance Australia Group with “expertise in marketing, finance and business strategy” Former teacher – does not say where, when, for how long etc., which could perhaps lead one to believe that the experience was brief and long ago.

3. John Azarias. Senior partner in Deloitte, Touche, Tomatsu. No educational history recorded.

4. Penny Morris Professional company director. No educational history recorded. If we compare this board with that of a similar body, the Nurses Board of the ACT, responsible for the accreditation of nurses there, that contrast is marked. All members of the latter board are qualified nurses, most with qualifications in the different fields of nursing and nursing administration.

We find it difficult to see why the current board of the NSW Institute of teachers would not be regarded as an insult by teachers. Are teachers not highly regarded enough to have a say in the accreditation of their own profession?

- Attitude of teacher industrial associations.

It would appear, from reading their press releases, that both the Teachers Federation and the Independent Education Union gave initially guarded approval to the idea of a professional association. This would appear to have changed, with the Teachers Federation "rejecting any model that is not controlled by teachers" (statement 5/2/05) and the Independent Education Union having, as a pre-condition for even evaluating the Institute, a requirement that classroom teachers from the majority of the board.

It would seem that the government will need to have more discussions with these associations and make the institute more relevant and less insulting to them if it to have any hope of success.

6. Role, distribution and effectiveness of university pre- service education.

University pre-service education is pretty well distributed now with teacher education faculties in country, city, coastal and inland universities. An observation that seemed to be general among teachers and principals interviewed for this submission was that teachers from the old "Teachers college" Universities, such as Charles Sturt (Wagga and Bathurst) and UNE, Armidale, seemed to come out on the whole better prepared for actual classroom teaching than those from the others.

7. Other matters.

When schools, and teachers can be seen by our society as being worthy of respect by politicians and journalists, by students and their families and by the community; when teachers are free from gratuitous violence, psychological, physical and verbal; when governments no longer pay senior students just to turn up, regardless of how negatively they undermine the learning environment; when responsibilities are the equal of rights in education, then this state will be flooded with applications from those who wish to join this profession. It is to be hoped that this Inquiry will go some way to achieving this state of affairs.