

INQUIRY INTO THE RECRUITMENT AND TRAINING OF TEACHERS

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Theme:

Summary

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The Director,
Standing Committee on Social Issues,
Legislative Council,
Parliament House,
Macquarie Street,
Sydney NSW 2000

Inquiry into the Recruitment and Training of Teachers

The attached submission addresses the issues relating to the entry to the profession of overseas trained teachers in NSW. It discusses both government and non-government schools since issues cut across systems.

The submission is based on my professional experience and research. I have been involved with issues relating to overseas trained teachers since the early 1980s. I was responsible for a retraining program for 45 overseas trained teachers in 1984 funded by the Commonwealth Employment Program. In 1992 I researched and wrote a report on the needs of overseas trained teachers *The Skills in Question* for the Ethnic Communities Council of NSW. From 1997- 2002 I developed and co-ordinated alternate mode programs at the University of Sydney from which 110 overseas trained teachers gained Australian accreditation. I have also been involved in teacher training through the Community Schools Board and was appointed to the original Board by the then Minister of Education. I would be more than happy to discuss this submission with the Standing Committee if required.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'Ken Cruickshank'.

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Inquiry into the Recruitment and Training of Teachers

Summary

A major source of teachers in Australia and one that has received relatively little attention from universities and education systems are teachers with overseas training and accreditation. There were an estimated 14, 500 overseas-trained teachers in Australia who were unable to get back into teaching according to the last available figures in 1991 (Inglis & Philips, 1995). The figure for 2004 would with doubt be much higher in light of the continued professional migration and the oversupply of teachers in the 1990s. This submission gives a profile of overseas trained teachers and discusses why there is such a large pool who are not in the teaching profession. It then examines past and present programs and initiatives catering for this group and finally makes recommendations on how pathways into teaching could be established. The submission argues that there is a tremendous wastage of skills and that the provision of access for overseas trained teachers should be a priority.

Who are the teachers?

Only eight percent of teachers in Australian schools are overseas-born, a figure well below the percentage of overseas-born in the general population and the lowest rate of overseas-born amongst all the professions (Baker, Robertson & Sloan, 1993). In NSW only 13% of teachers are from non-English speaking backgrounds (including Australian- and overseas-born) compared with 23% of students (DET, 2000; Inglis & Philips, 1995). Estimates of overseas trained teachers who have not gained access to the teaching profession in Australia range from 14, 500 to 25, 000. There has been no substantive study of this group. A recent small-scale survey of applicants to bridging programs at Sydney University showed the following profile:

- Overseas-trained teachers were from 27 different language/ ethnic backgrounds with the largest groups being Vietnamese, Chinese and Arabic speakers and those from the Indian subcontinent. There were emerging groups from Africa and Russia.
- The teachers had been in Australia between three and thirty one years (average nine years) and had an average age of 40 (range 25 to 65).
- The academic qualifications, on average, for this group were higher than those of local students, a finding confirmed in other studies (Inglis & Philips, 1995).
- At the time of application to the program 32% were unemployed and 27% were in part-time employment. Of those employed full-time, the majority were working in unskilled or semi-skilled occupations.

- Overseas-trained teachers varied in the extent of familiarity with the Australian education system. One third had experience working as teacher's aides, child care workers, school volunteers or community languages teachers in government schools or as teachers in non-government schools. The overall profile was of a diverse group which had in common a high level of skills and education which were not being used in the Australian context.

Why employ immigrant teachers?

This group of teachers is a valuable but wasted resource. Through immigration, Australia has gained more than 15, 000 teachers who have high levels of skills and expertise. The relative costs of tapping into this resource are minimal. In doing so, NSW would be following the examples of other OECD countries which have also been facing teacher shortages.

Overseas-trained teachers also have bilingual/ bicultural skills which are important in the multicultural school contexts (Phillion, 2003; Banks & Banks 1989). It is crucial, for example, to have teachers of Sudanese background working in schools where such refugee students are enrolling. It is equally important for schools of predominantly English-speaking background students to have teachers and role models from non-English speaking backgrounds, thus helping to prepare them for the wider societal context.

The underemployment of immigrant teachers in schools is a major equity issue. It is in teaching, of all professions, that NESB groups are least represented. Little cognisance is given to this group in equity and multicultural policies and strategies by education authorities.

Barriers to employment: Why immigrant teachers are not working in the system

I was a primary teacher in Turkey for five years before I migrated to Australia in 1979. Here my qualifications were not recognised because, even though my degree was three years long, I had started it in Year 11 of high school. I ended up teaching in community schools on the weekend and working in factories during the week. When my English got better I got a job as teacher's aide in a school and then community liaison officer. After a few years I worked my way up to being manager of school-community liaison in the Department of Education. All this time I was teaching in the Saturday Schools. During all this time I wanted to go back to teaching but couldn't get into a course, until I found this one (Ayse, presently working as ESL teacher in state school)

Access to Information

A major difficulty for overseas trained teachers has been obtaining accurate information about the assessment and recognition of their qualifications, the procedures involved in gaining recognition and the availability of employment. There has also been a lack of appropriate counselling services. There is evidence that many qualified teachers do not even bother applying because they have heard that it is too difficult a process (Inglis & Philips, 1995).

Many teachers have their qualifications assessed by the National Office of Overseas Skills Recognition (NOOSR) at a cost of more than \$200. They then realise that this assessment is not recognised by any state government or non-government education system, which all have different requirements. To be recognised as a teacher in Australia, teachers would need to apply to at least two bodies in every state and territory, because of the lack of a national body. In NSW teachers would to apply to DET, TAFE, Adult Migrant Education Service, Catholic Education Office at Diocesan level or to independent schools directly. The DET and CEO both have effective assessment procedures, although the DET is grossly underfunded and assessments can take up to eight months.

Although applicants receive notification of assessment in writing, there is little understanding of what steps to take. There is general confusion between preservice Graduate Diplomas in Education and inservice Graduate Diplomas and Masters degrees. Many overseas trained teachers complete tertiary degrees that do not qualify them for teaching. There is next to no provision of advising and counselling.

English Language Ability

The second hurdle for overseas-trained teachers is gaining the requisite level of English for teaching in Australian schools. Again, there is no single standard across systems. Many government and non-government systems accepted scores on standardised English proficiency tests such as IELTS level 7. Some also accept the completion of an Australian qualification or assess applicants through interview. The NSW DET requires all teachers with overseas training to sit for the Professional English Assessment Test (PEAT), which was based on level 7 IELTS. There have been several criticisms of PEAT.

- Firstly, there has been no validation study of PEAT or any other English proficiency test in terms of classroom teaching. It is not known whether those who pass PEAT succeed in the classroom or whether those who fail would succeed. One problem in NSW is the blanket reliance on a test score alone.
- PEAT uses listening, speaking and written tasks from Australian classrooms, thus making it difficult for teachers who have not taken preparation courses or who have not already worked in Australian

schools. Several TESOL experts have commented that the level of difficulty of the test is such that many native speakers of English who are already teaching would not pass.

- The test is outsourced to UNSWIL and costs applicants \$160. There have been criticisms of the lack of feedback, of the marking of the test and of the lack of preparation courses for the test.

The problem lies not in PEAT, but in the use of PEAT as the gateway into teaching. The gaining of English language proficiency is a long process that can take new arrivals several years. There is no counselling and there are insufficient courses which develop English for teaching purposes.

There is no flexibility in the PEAT. Classroom communication and teaching skills are not sufficiently taken into account: many teachers in subjects that rely less on language could be successful. On the other hand, cultural adaptation issues to the Australian context tend to be lumped under the 'language problem'. An example of this is teachers from the Indian subcontinent who have passed PEAT but have been criticised in schools for their 'English'. In such cases the problems include issues of intonation, classroom management and also often lack of support in difficult schools.

Upgrading qualifications

Many overseas-trained teachers need to upgrade their qualifications to gain local accreditation. The most common scenarios would be the following:

- secondary teachers who have a recognised undergraduate degree but insufficient preservice teacher education;
- primary teachers whose teacher education began in high school and who are recognised in Australia as having the equivalent of one or two years post-year 12 teacher training.

Such teachers face enormous problems. Gaining advanced standing into Bachelor of Education degrees is almost impossible. Most overseas-trained teachers find it difficult to undertake full-time study because of family and financial issues. There is at present no teacher education course in NSW which caters for this group.

Bridging programs

The DET has developed a range of excellent bridging programs for overseas trained teachers whom they are employing. These courses, however, are not available to all overseas trained teachers. The process of adaptation to the Australian context can also be a longer one than recognised in such short courses.

Gaining employment

The percentage of overseas-trained teachers in Australian schools fell during the 1990s. In times of oversupply, immigrant teachers must compete with locals who have the advantage of local knowledge and experience. There is evidence that employers equate overseas trained teachers as 'problems'; there is a feeling that such teachers are too traditional and have problems with classroom management. Many teachers have reported encountering prejudice and racism in schools.

When overseas trained teacher gain employment it is often in schools where there has been high staff turnover and teaching is challenging. Expectations are often too high since these are mature-aged experienced teachers. The problems of adapting to a different system are great and such teachers often lack appropriate support systems.

Many teachers then choose to take unskilled or semiskilled work in preference or they remain on unemployment benefits. It is common to find that teachers have given up ever trying to gain entry to teaching.

Recommendations: What can be done?

The following suggestions are based on my experience as a teacher and tertiary educator. They also relate to a reading of previous reports, but they are not 'costed'; nor are they based on an intimate knowledge of education systems.

1. Provision of information and co-ordination of assessment and advising

There is a need for co-ordination of the provision of information and for some sort of publicity campaign to attract overseas-trained teachers. The establishment of the Institute of Teachers, although not a panacea, is one way in which this could happen. The employment of some project officers through the Institute of Teachers would facilitate the establishment of continuing links between parts of DET, CEO, other education employers and tertiary institutions. In the 1990s similar officers were employed for a fixed term through the Migrant Employment Qualifications Board (MEQB).

Recommendation 1

That project officers be employed through the Institute of Teachers for a period of 12 months with the following tasks:

- To develop information on the pathways into teaching and upgrading of qualifications for overseas trained teachers;
- To train personnel in DET, CEO, Independent schools, tertiary institutions and the Community Schools in the provision of this information;

- To establish a website containing this information accessible to overseas trained teachers and to organise for the continued updating of the website by interested parties;
- To investigate ways in which the provision of information and counselling can be made more effective.

2. Pathways into teaching

The provision of courses and programmes for overseas trained teachers has always been adhoc, dependent on short-term funding to meet specific needs. The DET policy response in the 1990s was excellent; such work needs to be acknowledged. However, the funding to support the work of the Personnel Directorate has been inadequate. There is a need for a co-ordinated pathway which involves education employers and tertiary institutions.

Such a pathway would involve firstly the provision of programs to give overseas trained teachers experience in the Australian context. A semester long orientation program would include some practical school experience along with work on changes in education in Australia and overseas in the past decade. Entry to the course would be based on level 6 IELTS. The course would be based on the present DET Induction Program extended in collaboration with tertiary and other employer bodies. The course would be free of charge and would be run in locations and at times that suited the needs of the target group. It could also be accredited into tertiary upgrading programs. The course could also be linked with the establishments of paid positions as teachers' aides in schools where appropriate. Applicants who are on unemployment benefits could be employed as teacher's aides; part-time work experience programs as teacher's aides could be established for those already in part-time employment. Scholarships should be instituted for those with skills in areas of shortage.

The provision of English language needs could be met through specifically targeted courses. Applicants to the orientation program would be assessed and directed where possible to appropriate courses. Those under level 6 in IELTS would be helped in the development of an English learning plan, including possible coursework or learning outside the classroom in various ways.

Those whose English proficiency is between 5.5/ 6 and 7 on IELTS or equivalent would undertake a competency based English course focusing on English for Teaching, involving some 600 hours face-to-face teaching, delivered through appropriate institutions. The course would also involve observation and some practice teaching in schools.

Those who successfully complete both programs would be eligible for employment in schools. Those who need upgrading of qualifications to meet

Australian standards would then enter alternate mode tertiary programs. These would be two year weekend/ school holiday courses leading to the award of the Bachelor of Education, Bachelor or Master of Teaching as appropriate. Programs would be run through metropolitan universities and would include courses in English for teaching and courses targeting specific knowledge and skills needs of overseas-trained teachers. On completion, graduates would be guaranteed employment.

All of these steps would need to be co-ordinated with government departments such as DSS and also with the Community Schools Board. The community schools operate outside day school hours with community members teaching languages to over 50, 000 students in NSW. A large percentage of those working in these schools are overseas-accredited teachers.

Recommendation 2

That the Institute of Teachers co-ordinate the establishment of pathways into teaching with tertiary institutions, NSW DET, CEO, AIS and Community Schools Board. Such a pathway would involve :

- The development and provision of a semester long Orientation to Schools Course based on the present DET Induction Program. Such courses could be run by employer bodies, Community Schools Board, TAFE or tertiary institutions;
- The assessment and counselling of applicants for this course in terms of English and retraining needs;
- The development and delivery of English for Teaching courses;
- The development and provision of bridging programs in tertiary institutions;
- The establishment of a number of teachers' aides positions reserved for overseas-trained teachers wanting to gain entry to teaching in NSW;
- The provision of scholarships for numbers of overseas trained teachers

The funding for the first recommendation would be short-term. The funding for the second recommendation would diminish as initiatives became part of mainstream system provision. There is no need for short-term publicity campaigns or the provision of pamphlets which will never be used. The involvement of the Community Schools where the majority of the overseas trained teachers are teaching their languages outside the days schools (mainly voluntarily) would provide easy access to the target group. The strategies build on existing resources and are similar to those proposed in all previous reports.

Summary

In times of teacher shortage, education systems have traditionally resorted to ad hoc solutions, such as the lowering of teacher education standards and the recruitment of teachers overseas. The targeting of the estimated 15, 000 overseas-trained teachers in Australia would in the long run have many more benefits for the education systems and also be much more cost effective.

Appendix

Bibliography and Review of Studies of Immigrant Teachers

Australian Studies

The underemployment of overseas trained teachers has been a constant theme in the literature since the 1970s. Jean Martin, in her 1978 study *The Migrant Presence*, referred to the non-utilisation of the skills of immigrant teachers as 'an unwarranted waste of resources that could be used in migrant education' (1978: 137).

Since 1978 there have been a plethora of reports which have again deplored the wastage of skills and have recommend flexible approaches to the recruitment and training of immigrant teachers.

- 1979 National Study of teachers undertaken by Australian College of Education (Bassett 1980)
- 1983 – 1992 Reports commissioned by the NSW Ethnic Affairs Commission (Iredale 1988; EAC 1990)
- 1990 Dept of Labour Advisory Committee (DOLAC) Working Party (DOLAC 1990)
- 1990 NSW MEQB report into the training needs of overseas trained teachers (NSWMEQB 1990)
- 1992 Report for Ethnic Communities Council on overseas trained teachers (Cruickshank 1992)
- 1993 Report on the Training of Languages Teachers (Nicholas et al, 1993)
- 1995 study on the impact of immigrant teachers on the labour force (Inglis & Philps 1995)

Programs for overseas trained teachers

Bridging courses for immigrant teachers were first run in 1975 by the Victorian and NSW Departments of Education. The programs were curtailed through lack of funding. Between 1976 and 1979 another bridging program was run by the University of Sydney resulting in the employment of some 60 immigrant teachers. The 1979 report *Participation* recommended the employment of Teachers' Aides (ethnic) as a means for overseas-trained teachers to achieve recognition in NSW. A program was run by the Australian Catholic University in 1991 for teachers in community schools, but unfortunately the course was not accredited by the DET. In 1989 Macarthur CAE was contracted by the NSW DSE to run a retraining program. In 1990 there were NOOSR –funded bridging courses designed for overseas trained teachers at UWS, Flinders and Griffith. Between 1997 to 2002, two-year alternate mode Bachelor of Education and Master of Teaching programs were run at the University of Sydney resulting in the

graduation of some 110 teachers. Most recently the Australian Catholic University, Mount St. Mary Campus, has undertaken to train teachers from the Sudanese community. Some 48 teachers applied to enter the program having heard about it by word of mouth.

Inglis and Philips (1995) attribute the problems with courses to:

- the limited nature of the programs, catering only to small numbers of teachers and designed to meet specific needs;
- the reliance of such programs on external funding and the failure to institutionalise or mainstream them;
- support from education systems to meet specific current needs, such as the lack of Science and Maths teachers;
- the absence of guaranteed employment and the consequent reluctance of overseas-trained teachers to give up other employment.

International Studies of Immigrant Teachers

There is evidence of teacher education programs designed for teachers with overseas training in Canada (Bascia, 1996; Macwhinney & Xu, 1997; Phillion, 2003), the UK (Sutherland & Rees, 1995), the US (Fleagle, 1996; Genzuk & Baca, 1995) and Israel (Court 1999; Geva-May 1998; Weintraub, 1993). With the growing teacher shortages in many countries it is inevitable that efforts will be made to provide pathways for immigrant teachers back into the profession (Coffield & Vignoles, 1997; Carrington & Tomlin, 2000). In the US, in particular, there have been many initiatives aimed at the recruitment and training of ethnic minority teachers. The University of Southern California, for example, has an eight-year Ford Foundation Grant for the research and program development.

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