

Submission
No 115

INQUIRY INTO TEACHER SHORTAGES IN NEW SOUTH WALES

Organisation: Society for the Provision of Education in Rural Australia
(SPERA)

Date Received: 31 July 2022

[SPERA – Submission to the New South Wales Legislative Council’s Inquiry into teacher shortages in New South Wales.](#)

A Rural, Remote and Regional Perspective

SPERA’s Mission, Goals and Aims

The Society for the Provision of Education in Rural Australia (SPERA) commenced in 1984 and has members in every Australian state and territory as well as in other countries around the globe. Our mission is to link people with a diverse range of interests in education and training through the following actions:

- advocating for and supporting the provision of quality education and training in rural contexts;
- promoting a positive view of education in rural areas and encouraging innovation in the provision of rural education services;
- providing a forum for the sharing of concerns, issues and experiences relating to education and training in rural areas; and
- collaborating with universities to support the recruitment and retention of educators for careers in rural education contexts.

SPERA advances the education and training opportunities for all people in rural Australia by:

- encouraging both the collection and sharing of relevant research and information on the provision of education and training in rural areas;
- conducting an annual national conference to exchange ideas and information about education and training in rural education;
- serving as a national advocate representing rural education and training; and
- sponsoring the annual Australian Rural Education Awards which recognise innovative practices.

SPERA publishes the online and open access journal, *Australian and International Journal of Rural Education*. This journal was formerly known as *Education in Rural Australia*.

It is in accordance with our Mission, Aims and Goals that we have much pleasure in making this submission to the New South Wales Legislative Council’s “Inquiry into teacher shortages in New South Wales” and we thank you for inviting us to make this submission.

SPERA’s submission regarding this issue is made through a rural lens and will focus on Terms of Reference (a) current teacher shortage in NSW schools; (b) future teacher supply and demand; (f) initial teacher education; and (o) the approval to teach process in New South Wales.



Terms of Reference Responses

(a) Current teacher shortages in NSW schools

The issue of the attraction and retention of staff in rural schools has been an issue for decades, much longer than it has existed in metropolitan schools. Two prominent researchers in this area are Sharplin (2002) and Roberts (2004), but others include, Lock, Reid, Green, Hastings, Cooper & White (2009); Halsey & Drummond (2013 and 2014); and Kline & Walker-Gibbs (2015). Pertaining

The statistics pertaining to teacher shortage is possibly lower than it is in reality if one considers the number of teachers who are teaching outside of the teaching areas in which they trained and specialised and the number of composite classes. These would have been management decisions made by the principal and leadership team to manage the situation.

Many of the issues contributing to the current teacher shortage in rural and urban areas relate to the profession itself. These include the status of teachers and society's perceptions regarding the contributions of teachers. Other specific contributing factors include workload and wellbeing factors. A recent survey of Australian teachers revealed that just under a half (41%) intended to stay in the profession (Heffernan et al, 2022).

The current teacher shortage affecting metropolitan schools further exacerbates the issue of the attraction and retention of teachers to rural schools.

(b) Future teacher supply and demand

The statistics in the section above are alarming with just 41% of the surveyed Australian teachers, intended to remain in their professions. The current teacher shortage is predicted to worsen with more teachers who are baby boomers, retire, an action which many have delayed due to the pandemic. Added to this is the fact that with the restrictions on international travel, easing, more younger teachers will be tempted to either take extended leave or resign in order to undertake extended international travel.

The demand for teachers, however, will continue to grow.

How then, can the supply be increased to meet this demand? The concluding section of this submission will contain a number of suggestions to combat this situation.



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(f) Initial Teacher Education

Teacher education programs located in regional areas are an important factor in the strategy to staff rural, remote and regional schools. The experience of the University of Wollongong is that pre-service teachers who study in their local community are more likely to remain to teach in those communities. This experience is supported by research conducted by Haynes and Miller (2016) who found that graduates were more likely to teach in the areas which were similar to where they were living while they were attending university. Growing up in a rural community or feeling a personal connection to a rural community were important factors in the decision to teach in a rural school (Hazel & McCallum; Kline & Walker-Gibbs, 2015). This research demonstrates the important role that the Country University Centres play and will continue to play, in enabling rural residents to study teacher education programs and to then remain in the community to teach.

The length of time to complete a graduate Initial Teacher Education program is a contributing factor in the decrease in the number of people entering the teaching profession and therefore the overall teacher shortage. The introduction of the two-year Master of Teaching degree in 2015, to replace the one-year graduate Diploma of Education, created a decrease in the number of graduates undertaking teacher training. This is primarily because of the difficulty in funding two years of full-time study when they have families and other responsibilities to consider. The lure of a salary derived from working in the field of their degree can be strong in such circumstances and must be a consideration.

Specialist teaching areas such as Technology areas of Industrial Technology & Design (formerly known as Industrial Arts or Manual Arts) and Hospitality or Home Economics, are facing a chronic shortage of teachers around the nation and a contributing factor is the fact that many universities no longer provide courses in these fields. However, a number of people with trades qualifications such as chef, mechanic, boiler maker, diesel fitter or carpenter, as well as a Certificate IV in Workplace Training and Assessing, have commenced training in Initial Teacher Education programs but are required to undertake four years study leading to a Bachelor of Education. No recognition or credit appears to be given to the wealth of specific training and their qualifications from their apprenticeships, as well as the industry experience from employment in their trade. Undertaking four years of study is a bit commitment when they may have families and other responsibilities.

Charles Sturt University is the only university in New South Wales to offer a shortened (two-year) ITE program leading to a Bachelor of Education, for those people who have industry experience, along with their trade qualification. Other universities could consider this option as a means of training future ITD or Hospitality teachers.



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Professional placements or practicums play an important role in the training and development programs for future teachers. The length of time required to undertake a practicum in order to complete a degree varies between universities. Generally a minimum of eighty days is required for an undergraduate degree and a minimum of sixty days is required for the graduate Master of Teaching. Typically there is an unpaid internship as part of the final placement. While preservice teachers value the professional placements and the opportunity to work with experienced classroom practitioners and mentors, the length of time required and the block placements often cause problems in the attraction and retention of aspiring teachers.

In order to undertake the professional experience or practicum, preservice teachers give up paid employment to undertake this required component of their course. Given the fact that the majority of the student work in casual employment, they do not receive holiday pay or a leave loading which would enable them to receive payment while they are on placement.

Research has demonstrated that those preservice teachers who experience a placement in a rural school are more likely to return to teach in a rural community. However, this can be a financial burden on the preservice teacher. Not only would this person have to give up the opportunity to earn an income, but also continue to pay accommodation costs at the location where they are studying, and pay accommodation costs at the place where the practicum is located.

Bursaries, allowances or paid practicums and internships could relieve this financial pressure.

(o) The approval to teach process in New South Wales

The majority of the states in Australia have introduced a "Permission to Teach" or "Approval to Teach" licence or process as a means of relieving the pressure provided by the shortage of teachers. Initially this was strictly controlled and the applicant had to be in the final year of their degree but the shortage of teachers has meant that greater flexibility has crept into the process and the Permission to Teach teachers may have completed only one year of their degree. In some cases, a PTT teacher may be teaching in a secondary school, less than two years of completing their own secondary education and sometimes in the same school.

This process can give rise to grave concerns because of the lack of their preparation, the quality of the support provided in the school, the pressure to complete their degree studies along with the pressure of commencing their teaching careers.



An additional problem is that the PTT teacher has to take leave in order to undertake a professional experience at another school, leaving the employing school with the problem of finding a replacement teacher when the reason they were able to obtain a PTT teacher in the first place was because of the unavailability of a suitably qualified teacher.

This requirement to undertake the practicum does not consider the breadth and depth of the PTT teacher's experiences. They may have had to plan all units for the year, teach a full timetable, plan the internal assessment, be involved in marking and moderation processes and report to parents. These activities are far greater than what they would experience on the practicum.

Provided that the PTT teacher has undertaken a practicum at, at least one other school, would it not be logical to have the principal, another principal, the mentor and a representative from the university to observe some lessons and examine the planning in order to sign off on the experience and the subject. It would be called "Recognition of Current Practice."

The note of caution in regards to the widespread use of this practice is the worry that the pressures may turn the PTT teacher away from teaching and cause them not to complete their degrees. This will cause a further decrease in the supply of teachers in the future.

Conclusion and Suggestions

Thank you for the opportunity to provide our thoughts on this complex issue. Please see below our thoughts on some possible solutions to this challenge:

- The introduction of scholarships, bursaries, loans or paid internships to relieve the financial pressures incurred by either two years of full time study (Master of Teaching) and or the practicum placements which mean that the preservice teacher has to give up the opportunity for casual paid employment.
- The introduction by all universities of a shortened Initial Teacher Education program (2 year Bachelor of Education) which recognises trade qualifications and experience.
- Consideration of the implementation of "Recognition of Current Practice" as a means of crediting those teachers who are operating under a "Permission to Teach" or "Approval to Teach" licence, with their daily operations in terms of planning, pedagogical processes and reporting.
- Introduction of a rigorous process to monitor the support given to those teachers operating under a "Permission to Teach" licence in order to prevent the burnout and early departure of the "Permission



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to Teach” teachers from the profession, even before they complete their degrees.

- In order to minimise the pressure on the recruitment of certain senior specialist teachers eg Physics, Chemistry, secondary schools could cluster together with one school specialising in one or more particular subject/s (sciences) or the specialist teacher could be an itinerant one who travel between various schools teaching that particular subject.
- In addition to the comment above, a teacher (eg Physics) in a large urban secondary school could provide online instruction to the students in a small rural secondary or central school. The suggestions in these two dot points would minimise the demand for hard to find teachers of certain specialist subjects.
- Consider the option of teachers who are based overseas (young Australian teachers who are travelling) delivering online subjects to schools back in Australia.
- Consider offering teachers who are approaching retirement, the option of cutting back on their working days without loss of entitlements such as superannuation. This would relieve the stress and exhaustion that they are experiencing and could prolong their working lives.

Thank you for considering our submission. Please do not hesitate in contacting us should you require any additional information or clarification.

Chris Ronan

Samantha Avitaia

President and Advocacy Director;

Vice President and Administration Director;

Susan Ledger

Brian O’Neill

Research Director and Journal Editor;

Immediate Past President



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