

Submission
No 118

INQUIRY INTO TEACHER SHORTAGES IN NEW SOUTH WALES

Organisation: Country Universities Centre

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Submission into the inquiry into teacher shortages in NSW



Portfolio Committee Number 3 – Education

31 July 2022

Summary

The Country Universities Centre (CUC) is providing local teaching graduates to fill positions in regional locations that are hard to staff, without the need for expensive incentive and transfer schemes. The demographic characteristics of these students will be an asset for the future teaching workforce in these locations. This model could be further enhanced by:

- **Ensuring continuity of NSW Government support for the CUC;**
- **Providing CUC students with paid work opportunities in local regional schools during their study years, for example as SLSO's;**
- **Focusing on supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, including lifting indigenous Teaching Student numbers; and**
- **Support pathway programs for regional people considering a career change into teaching to be ready for university study**

Introduction

The CUC welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission into the Committee's Inquiry into the future development of the NSW tertiary education sector. In particular, the CUC wishes to address the following terms of reference of the Inquiry:

- (a) current teacher shortages in NSW schools,*
- (b) future teacher supply and demand; and*
- (n) the impacts of incentives and the transfer point system on regional shortages.*

Background

The Country Universities Centre (CUC) is a not-for-profit organisation which empowers regional, rural and remote communities by increasing access and success in higher education opportunities including in undergraduate and postgraduate teaching degrees.

Each CUC offers dedicated study spaces and wrap around support to any student studying at any Australian University. Students can access high speed internet, computers, printing, quiet study spaces and video conferencing facilities from 7am until midnight seven days a week. Face to face academic, wellbeing, administrative and technology support is available through our Centre Managers and Learning Skills Advisors. Our Centres are located in Broken Hill,

Goulburn, Narrabri, Moree, Griffith, Leeton, Grafton, Cooma, Parkes, Ulladulla, and Kempsey, with two more planned to open in 2023 in Cowra and Mudgee.

In 2022, 1112 regional university students used the CUC, including 187 teaching students. These students studied through 23 Australian Universities.

The evidence is early, but the signals are that the CUC is succeeding in its mission of providing teaching professionals in regional NSW by supporting people to study locally, complete practicum placements locally, and to be the teachers of tomorrow for the location in which they already live. Our 2021 student survey found:

- 91% of CUC students felt that using the CUC helped to improve their academic results.
- 92% are more likely to continue with their studies as a result of the help that they received from the CUC.
- 94% of students believe the CUC has made it easier to stay, study or work in their community.

The CUC provides local training opportunities in locations that are difficult to attract and retain staff, without the need for incentives and transfer schemes

The CUC supports regional people to be successful in their studies without the need to relocate to metropolitan areas to access campus-like facilities or support. Through offering dedicated study facilities and wrap around support to university students in regional areas that are too small for a university campus, we are helping to boost the retention and success of regional students.

In Semester 1 2022 there were 187 student studying education, as shown in Figure 1. This included:

- CUC Far West: 18 teaching students in Broken Hill
- CUC North West: 19 teaching students in Narrabri and Moree
- CUC Clarence Valley: 21 teaching students in Grafton
- CUC Macleay Valley: 24 teaching students in Kempsey
- CUC Parkes: 8 teaching students in Parkes
- CUC Western Riverina 24 teaching students in Griffith and Leeton
- CUC Goulburn: 22 teaching students in Goulburn
- CUC Southern Shoalhaven: 18 teaching students in Ulladulla

- CUC Snowy Monaro: 23 teaching students in Cooma

The CUC encourages students to study through the most appropriate university for them. The factors that influence this decision often include: the highest quality course, schedule of practicums, areas of specialisation, additional support offered by the university, or entry pathways. Through selecting the most suitable university course for an individual student’s circumstances, their chances of succeeding in their degree is increased.

The CUC also provides supported postgraduate study opportunities for teachers in regional areas. Too often, teaching careers in regional areas are associated with little opportunity for career progression, and the lack of locally supported postgraduate study opportunities reinforces this perception. The CUC provides these locally supported postgraduate study opportunities in its regional communities, and 29% of the Teaching Students at the CUC are postgraduate. Some examples include: Masters of Inclusive and Special Education in Grafton; and a Masters of Teacher Librarianship in Broken Hill. Four of these postgraduate students are studying PhD’s in Education.

These pathways for further study, accumulation of higher knowledge and postgraduate qualifications assist in breaking down the perception of the “dead end” and lack of opportunities for career development for teachers in regional schools.



Figure 1: Current Teaching Students at the Country Universities Centre by Location – Semester One 2022

Regional communities growing their own workforces

Previous experience of the CUC demonstrates that the vast majority of CUC students intend to work in the same location as they have studied. As an example, in 2021 of 14 students graduating in Broken Hill, 13 of those students (93%) found work in Broken Hill within three months of finishing their degree with the remaining student finding work in that period in the nearby regional town of Mildura. A current survey of 2022 teaching students is indicating that 95% of respondents consider they are likely or very likely to work in a regional area once they graduate.

The CUC provides a stream of graduates into teaching positions in local schools without the need for costly incentive or transfer schemes. The CUC suggests that teachers trained within the local CUC Centres are likely to wish to remain in local teaching jobs in hard to staff regions for longer periods than teachers recruited into those regions from elsewhere. It is common for transferring teachers to only want to stay the minimum period required before transferring back to more popular locations in the city or on the coast.

Feedback from regional students who use the CUC suggest that one way to improve employment outcomes and success during student is by encouraging paid work opportunities in local regional schools for students at the CUC during their study years. For example, if students are provided with further opportunities by the NSW Department of Education to work as School Learning Support Officers (SLSO) then these students may be more familiar with the school environment and be more work ready for future teaching roles upon graduation. These integrated, paid work/study opportunities may be attractive to further people wishing to study teaching.

The student profile of future teachers in the CUC is a strength for the future local workforce

The teaching students supported by the CUC are representative of their regional community demographics, including mature aged students, low SES representation and a high proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders.

In Semester One 2022, 67% of the Teaching Students at the CUC were over 25 years of age. This older student cohort at the CUC has the potential to bring their considerable pre-study life experience into the classroom for the benefit of students.

Approximately 5% of Teaching Students at the CUC identify as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, comparing favourably with a national average of approximately 2% of higher education students identifying as indigenous. It also compares favourably with 2016 census data indicating that only 2.13% of Primary School teachers and 1.75% of Secondary School teachers in Australia are indigenous (ABS, 2016).

Two thirds (66%) of teaching students at the CUC reside in the lowest 25% of postcodes on a socio-economic ranking. A further 33% of teaching students reside in the middle quartiles (25%-75%) of postcodes, and only 0.5% of teaching students reside in postcodes in the top socio-economic quartile. It is suggested that training more teachers from lower socio-economic postcodes will be an asset to the future teaching workforce, and teachers will be trained from areas with demographics reflective of the schools and students being taught by them.

Potential for building workforce pipelines into teaching careers

Teaching is a popular study option for regional people looking to pivot their careers, or to enter study as a second-chance learner. Tertiary preparation (pathway) programs, which can be facilitated locally by the CUC model, can assist in getting these potential students prepared for study. Supporting relevant local face-to-face pathway programs in regional areas may be a way to encourage more regional people to consider, enter and be successful in training to be a teacher.

Conclusion

The CUC is providing local graduates to fill positions in hard to staff regional schools without the need for expensive incentive and transfer schemes. The demographic characteristics of these students will be an asset for the future teaching workforce in these locations. This model could be further enhanced by:

- **Ensuring continuity of NSW Government support for the CUC;**
- **Providing CUC students with paid work opportunities in local regional schools during their study years, for example as SLSO's;**
- **Focussing on supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, including lifting indigenous Teaching Student numbers**
- **Support pathway programs for regional people considering a career change into teaching to be ready for university study**