

Staffing an empty schoolhouse:

attracting and retaining teachers in rural,
remote and isolated communities

Eric Pearson Study Report

by Phil Roberts

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Foreword

Eric Pearson was President of the NSW Teachers Federation from 1974 to 1975. He was also President of the Australian Teachers Federation. He commenced his teaching career in small country schools as a two year trained teacher prior to active service in New Guinea and Borneo during World War 2. He subsequently returned to teaching and further study, and received a PHD from London University. He had a distinguished teaching and lecturing career, and was head of the department of education at Sydney Teachers College. He died on June 8, 1977.

Originally called the Eric Pearson Memorial Travel Grant, the Eric Pearson Study Grant was established as a fitting tribute to his outstanding contribution as a scholar and unionist.

The first award was made in 1980 to Gus Plater, a teacher and activist from Armidale Teachers Association who investigated the social impact of microprocessor technology and its impact on schools and unions.

Areas of investigation since then have covered the range of issues affecting teachers and the role of the union. Examples include the study by Jim Gallagher (1981) of teacher education programs to meet the need of indigenous people in Canada and the United States. Ross Rinehart (1983) examined methods of control of teacher stress in the United States and Canada. Richard Walsham (1984) studied peace education in Europe. Sally Edsall (1986) tackled the role of teacher-librar-

ians and function of school libraries in the United States. Phil O'Neill (1987) looked at the privatisation of public education in western Europe. Gary Rogers (1988) covered rural education issues in the United States. Viv White (1993) considered the restructuring of education and its implications for teachers' work. Patricia Simpson (1994) looked at devolution, schools and collective bargaining. Mary Fogarty (1995) studied the impact of the national curriculum, assessment and testing on teachers' work in Australia, the United States and the United Kingdom. Frank Barnes (1997) surveyed issues affecting lesbian, gay and bisexual teachers and students in western Europe, the United Kingdom and the United States. John Dixon (1998) studied how technology could enhance union campaigning and Gary Zadkovich (1999) developed strategies for union organising. In 2004 we published *Redefining Activism: Gender Perspectives in Union Participation* by Sui-Linn White.

The investigations arising from the Eric Pearson Study Grant have contributed significantly to the work and ongoing development of the NSW Teachers Federation.

I thank Phil Roberts for his contribution.

Barry Johnson
General Secretary

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This report would not have been possible without the NSW Teachers Federation Eric Pearson Study Grant. I extend my thanks to the NSW Teachers Federation for initiating the grant and to the grant committee for giving me the opportunity to undertake this study. However, I would never have applied without the support and encouragement of Dorothee Lean and all the other teachers I have worked with in rural NSW.

Receiving the grant is one thing but completing it is another. I am extremely grateful to the various teacher unions throughout Australia who invariably extended me great hospitality and support on my visits. Your readiness to share allowed this project to succeed. Similarly, the education departments I visited throughout Australia were open and forthcoming in helping me collect information for this report. Collecting information also involved an online survey which

would not have been possible without the assistance of John Dixon at the NSW Teachers Federation and all the people in the various institutions who promoted it. Of course a survey is only as useful as the people who take the time to complete it; thank you and I hope I have done your voices justice. There are many other faces from my travels throughout Australia that come to mind for which I have no names. To all of you my sincere thanks for our openness and friendliness.

This report has only come about thanks to the patience and support of Dennis Long and his editing team at the NSW Teachers Federation. Dorothee Lean has also been instrumental in providing advice and editing various drafts. Finally, my wife Tessa without whose constant support and encouragement none of the above would have happened.

Introduction

There are clearly many issues affecting the quality of education received by students in rural and remote communities, however, this research contends that the most significant factor in education quality is the provision of appropriate, quality, stable staff.

While the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC) inquiry into rural and remote education and the Vinson inquiry have highlighted many areas of concern and suggested solutions, they are still only a scratch on the surface of a greater problem. It must also be noted that many of the issues raised mask deeper concerns and that a number of the suggested solutions will only succeed if accompanied by further improvements.

This research intends to explore a range of issues associated with the attraction and retention of teachers to rural and remote schools and aims to suggest appropriate improvements. It can be taken for granted that a number of suggestions of the HREOC inquiry will be espoused, however, in many instances greater detail is required. It is the detail of a number of the suggestions, such as what exactly are incentives to offset the cost of living, which this research and the report aims to provide. Similarly, it is issues embedded within some of the concerns raised, such as a sense of professional isolation, that need to be explored.

An extensive literature review of available research related to the staffing of rural and remote schools has been conducted. This literature review uncovered a range of associated issues and considered possible solutions to these concerns.

While academic research has its place, there is also a considerable amount of knowledge to be gained from studying the policies and practices of the education departments throughout Australia to staffing their rural and remote schools. However, education bureaucracies are often limited by the amount of government funding they can apply to the issue of staffing.

To help inform this research about the present situation

around Australia, an analysis of the rural and remote area staffing policies of the various state and territory public education unions was conducted. This provides a comprehensive view of what is currently available and more importantly, the success or otherwise of these approaches. It is hoped that such an analysis will provide a bank of ideas to be pursued by other public education unions as well as suggesting approaches that are to be avoided because they have been found to be unsuccessful.

To complement the study of policies and literature review, a survey of teachers in rural and remote areas was conducted. The survey explored issues affecting the attraction and retention of teachers in rural and remote schools throughout Australia. These survey results provide evidence of what teachers working in rural and remote schools believe will assist in providing and retaining staff in their schools for an appropriate period of time. The survey results have been correlated against the staffing policies in each state and territory to support a proposed model of successful staffing policies and to identify unsuccessful initiatives.

The report ties together the themes from the literature review, state and territory staffing policies and the survey to propose a model of a successful staffing program for rural and remote schools. If the living and working conditions of teachers in these communities continue to compare negatively to their metropolitan colleagues there is no hope of attracting them to or retaining them in these communities. There is, therefore, a strong industrial argument, as well as a human rights argument, for improving the conditions experienced in these communities. It is in no way suggested that this proposed model would solve the raft of problems facing rural and remote communities. However, if education is a path which may help break the cycle of disadvantage and dislocation experienced by many of these communities, then ensuring that the schoolhouse is not empty is certainly a major step to achieving such an outcome.

The Empty Schoolhouse

“In all States and the Northern Territory one consistent theme was that rural and remote schools are difficult to staff.”

HREOC, "Emerging themes," National Inquiry into Rural and Remote Education (Canberra, 2000)

According to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights “everyone has a right to education”. The surest way to provide this right is to ensure that all schools are staffed adequately with appropriate, qualified, experienced teachers and support staff. In this report it will be noted that rural and remote communities face many issues of disadvantage. A major step in overcoming this disadvantage is education, and this requires the provision of appropriate, qualified, experienced teachers in classrooms. There is little point in building state of the art facilities or providing buckets of money for special programs if there are no teachers to use them.

Currently, the education sector is facing the complex problem of rural decline and governments’ determination to shift a considerable component of the cost of education from the public to the private sector by, initially, strongly subsidising the private sector. In the age of economic rationalism the decline of some areas and the growth of others may be seen as a natural phenomenon. However, Australia’s national image is strongly rooted in a mythology of the bush and we claim to have a proud history of giving everybody, regardless of location and social circumstance, a fair go. Such mythology could be successfully challenged by anyone of indigenous background and by someone who lives on the other side of “the sandstone curtain” or a significant distance from major population centres.

A range of social and structural factors limits access to quality education. Structural factors include town size, distance to the nearest high school, the quality of roads and curriculum breadth due to school size. Equally important are social factors which generally see the rural students’ retention rate below the state average, their performance generally lagging behind that of metropolitan students and far fewer going on to further education. A further factor is that in many parts of Australia, indigenous communities have become alienated from the school system, resulting in participation, attendance, retention and achievement far below the national average. While access is theoretically possible through provisions such as distance education and boarding school, a range of economic

factors limits their effectiveness as solutions. The main economic limitations are the cost of boarding school, the availability of parents’ time out of the labour force and the level of expertise to tutor distance education students. Put in the context of a general rural decline, the provision of education has also contracted due to a limiting of the economic benefits of gaining an education. When a town is in decline, with employment reducing and social problems multiplying, there is little motivation and support for students to endure these hardships and break the cycle.

The Senate Inquiry into poverty in Australia noted the links between educational attainment, poverty and other forms of disadvantage. This report described the concentric circles of disadvantage where poverty at home feeds a lack of connection with school, leading to lack of learning and increased behavioural difficulties, as well as a limited capacity of the school to raise extra funds for resources. This is combined with a federal education policy which encourages the shift to private education for students from better off families who are encouraged to leave the local school for a better resourced private school with less behavioural problems. The “flight of the well off white” makes these rural and remote schools undesirable places for teachers to work and results in them becoming ‘hard to staff’ schools. Considering that many rural communities have been identified as having significant social and economic disadvantage compared to many metropolitan centres, the educational opportunities of rural communities are further limited and compound their pre-existing disadvantage.

Education is a human right and linked to personal and political power, and recognised for its ability to break the cycle of disadvantage and disempowerment. According to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, “Everyone has a right to Education.” The Convention on the Rights of the Child leaves no doubt that every child has the right to education without discrimination including discrimination on the ground of race or disability. Education is also fundamental to the full enjoyment of most other human rights and to the exercise of social responsibilities (including respect for human rights). The United Nations’ Committee on

Economic, Social and Cultural Rights has stated: "An empowerment right, education is the primary vehicle by which economically and socially marginalized adults and children can lift themselves out of poverty and obtain the means to participate fully in their communities." In Australia and New Zealand this view has been adopted by the Ministerial Council for Employment Education Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) in the *Adelaide Declaration on the National Goals for Schooling in the Twenty-First Century*. This declaration stated that education contributes to "a socially cohesive and culturally rich society".

The Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC) inquiry into rural and remote education conducted in 1999/2000 "confirmed the disadvantage experienced by rural and remote school students on nearly every indicator of education including availability, accessibility, affordability and acceptability". The reports of the inquiry explored these issues in depth and detailed 73 recommendations aimed at improving school education in rural and remote Australia. Of these 73 recommendations, seven relate specifically to the provision of teachers and support staff. These recommendations include issues of incentives to attract and retain teachers, offsetting the additional costs faced by teachers in rural and remote schools, travel time, housing, teacher training, professional development and the provision of indigenous staff.

While the HREOC report considers these issues in the context of the disadvantages of rural and remote education it is the premise of this research that the provision of appropriate, quality staff is of primary importance. New schools can be opened and staffing formulas changed to meet the limitations of access to the curriculum, but without an appropriate qualified teacher in the room they will not redress the disadvantage. For rural and remote schools to succeed in delivering the human right to education they need appropriate, quality, stable and experienced staff. The provision of teachers, reduced teacher turnover and the personal and professional happiness of teachers directly relates to the quality of the education delivered in schools.

A focus on the staffing of rural and remote schools, however, does not focus solely on getting a teacher into the classroom, it also covers issues such as incentives to attract and retain teachers, access to professional development, the provision of indigenous teachers, housing and facilities, pre-service education and issues of social and professional satisfaction and happiness. The successful interplay of these factors combine to attract teachers to rural and remote schools and to retain them there for a reasonable period of time. Without one, the success of the other is diminished, and without a successful resolution to these issues, system changes and physical buildings are pointless. For this reason the scope of this research project expanded beyond a traditional 'attraction and retention incentive' analysis.

Rural decline

Why does a human rights watchdog decide to conduct an inquiry? One would assume that the pre-requisite would be a perceived denial of human rights. The

National Inquiry into Rural and Remote Education was initiated by the HREOC in response to the Commission's Bush Talks consultations on the human rights concerns of regional, rural and remote Australians. The initiation of the Bush Talks consultations recognised the extent of the problems facing regional, rural and remote Australia and the impact these problems have on the quality of life of Australians who live in those areas.

The challenges facing regional, rural and remote communities outlined in Bush Talks form an important background to this study. Teachers form part of these communities and in many ways the factors affecting these communities are the factors that discourage teachers from accepting appointments, or limit the time they remain in those appointments. The major concern uncovered in the consultations was the provision of basic health services (especially in rural and remote communities, from hospital cuts, reduction in numbers of and the cost of GPs), Aboriginal health and the cost of accessing other services in larger locations. The next issue of most concern was fair access to education, which encompasses issues of school retention and completion, quality, accessibility, cost and indigenous education.

Combined with health and education concerns there is also the general backdrop of rural towns progressively losing key services and government assistance. Bush Talks found these towns have "declining populations, declining incomes, declining services and a declining quality of life" which has resulted in the infrastructure and community of many rural, regional and remote towns gradually eroding. There's also been an escalation of decline due to drought. The social and economic problems outlined in Bush Talks include the unavailability of employment, bank closures, unreliable telecommunications, lack of public transport, shortages in quality affordable housing, and the cost and quality of water. Such problems diminish the future prospects of these communities and create despair within the youth in these communities leading to, among other symptoms, depression, negative youth involvement with the police, high suicide rates and alcoholism. Many of the problems experienced throughout regional, rural and remote Australia are exacerbated among the indigenous community.

The crisis facing rural and remote Australia as uncovered by Bush Talks has been exacerbated by the restructuring of the global and national economies and the influence of economic rationalism and neo-liberalism upon communities. The relative importance of agriculture in the national economy began to decline in the 1970s and the industrialisation of agriculture meant fewer people were involved in farm production. As a result of this, farms amalgamated and workers were replaced by technology and a more casual, migratory workforce. The maintenance of a positive discourse around country Australia was under threat, so much so that the Country Party re-positioned itself as the National Party and followed policies of economic efficiency. The economic rationalist view of development saw the distribution of resources determined by market forces and aimed to diminish government control as it interfered with the natural workings of the market.

In this view the role of government is seen as one of maintaining suitable conditions for economic efficiency and production and that those affected negatively are provided with the opportunities to become involved. As these policies took hold the big losers were rural communities that were “restructured” out of work and in many cases almost out of existence. This neo-liberalist view of change sees the human impact of economic change as the responsibility of those affected and that to survive these communities need to develop new economic opportunities for themselves.

Major demographic shifts have resulted from the changes in rural sectors over the past 30 years. Of particular importance is the fact that the majority of people leaving declining country towns are aged

between 15 and 35 years. Many in this age group are leaving due to the lack of employment and education opportunities, and to pursue a more favourable lifestyle available in bigger urban centres. The loss of this cohort of people has

a significant impact on rural communities as it takes away a large sector of the potential workforce and customer base for local businesses and diminishes the social fabric of the community. Those who leave rural communities rarely return and thus the potential school age population of a community reduces which in turn has a negative impact on the curriculum in the local school. The loss of a significant sector of the community has led to a distorted age profile in many rural communities, especially as many retirees choose to stay or move to larger rural areas due to the relatively lower cost of living. These factors limit the prospects for young people living in rural communities.

Traditionally, Australian governments saw it as their responsibility to support and maintain the development of public services and infrastructure in rural areas. This concern may have been motivated by economic development goals, but also encompassed social equity issues. In this way schools, hospitals, police and other government services were provided or otherwise subsidised to reduce the impact of distance and isolation. However, the rise of neo-liberal policies in Australia in the 1980s saw a number of changes in the public sector which aimed to reduce taxes and public spending, break up uncompetitive monopolies and reduce government subsidies. Governments looked for market led solutions to decide how best to allocate limited resources for public services and infrastructure in the face of hardening social attitudes to the redistribution of public money. Such policies have led to the deterioration in the quality of public infrastructure and the provision of other services on a user pays basis to the detriment of rural communities. The irony of this development is that governments claim to be pursuing greater social equity to justify economic rationalism in the distribution of public money. Clearly the old idea of equity has been replaced with a dominant economic, rather than social, paradigm.

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The privatisation of public infrastructure and the subsequent market led allocation of resources has resulted in the withdrawal of public services from rural communities in decline. As a result of this economic restructuring, a reduction or rationalisation in a few public services has had a flow on effect on the other social services in the town. In addition to the loss of local employment, the closure or reduction of public services, particularly schools and hospitals, can have a significant psychological impact on rural communities and signal the death of a town.

If communities are going to be helped to maintain and develop quality educational experiences, and rural youth of this nation provided with meaningful opportunities for employment, the current approach to the provision of public education needs to change. Apart from enhancements to attract and retain teachers, the way staff are allocated to schools needs to change. While the decline of rural communities is not going to stop just by providing teachers in schools, the local school has a significant impact on the psychology of the town and can give the town, and its youth, hope of a better future and a possibility of breaking the cycle of disadvantage.

If we are to have teachers in these communities to break the cycles of disadvantage and dislocation, governments need to fund provisions and implement policies that overcome the hardships of working in such communities. The inherent risk of such an approach is that it may appear inequitable to the broader Australian society and to teachers in more favourable, easy to staff areas, but short of a major national economic restructure, it is necessary if the rural sector is to receive a ‘fair go’. Clearly other public services such as health and police need similar provisions.

A human rights inquiry

The HREOC inquiry into rural and remote education aimed to empower rural and remote communities by giving them an opportunity to voice issues in a nationally recognised forum. The terms of reference of the inquiry directed HREOC to examine the provision of education for children in rural and remote Australia with reference to the availability and accessibility of both primary and secondary education and the quality of these educational services. The inquiry also investigated whether the education available to indigenous children, those with disabilities and other cultural, religious and linguistic backgrounds complied with their human rights.

From these terms of reference a number of implications for school staffing arose. Those of particular importance are the appropriateness of staffing formulas and the conditions under which teachers choose appointments to rural and remote schools. Similarly the provision of culturally appropriate training for those teachers and the promotion of the employment of indigenous teachers are also significant issues. The focus on these issues is not meant to detract from the significance of other factors. Similarly, the further narrowing of the focus to issues of attraction and retention of staff is not intended to undermine the argument for a general change to staffing formulas. Indeed, it is anticipated that a theme of changing

staffing formulas will be a constant undercurrent in this discussion. However, the focus on staffing in this discussion is deliberately associated with industrial improvements as a way of ensuring appropriate staffing of rural and remote schools. To enhance the staffing of rural and remote schools, the provision of culturally appropriate indigenous teachers has been included in this report. Indigenous teachers are under represented in the teaching service even though the presence of indigenous teachers assists schools to connect with their community and the ability of all teachers to succeed in their work.

The HREOC inquiry into rural and remote education acknowledged that rural and remote schools are difficult to staff and outlined disincentives affecting the recruitment and retention of teachers. Disincentives such as isolation, the cost of travel, lack of professional development, feeling out of touch with the latest teaching issues and decreased contact and networking with teachers in the same subject area are some of the issues mentioned in the inquiry. Importantly, the inquiry states that “staff retention rates can be an important determinant of the quality of the education being delivered to rural and remote children” and a number of recommendations of the inquiry focus on issues affecting the attraction and retention of teachers in rural and remote communities.

Nationally, between one-quarter and one-third of students attend school in rural and remote areas. However, because country schools are generally smaller than metropolitan schools, a higher proportion of schools are situated in rural areas. In NSW, for example, 48 per cent of government schools are in non-metropolitan areas with only 34 per cent of students. This trend does not apply to staff numbers in NSW. There are about 46,763 full time teaching staff and only 7934, or 17 per cent, in rural districts (defined as those not adjacent to the coast). It is important to note that the definition of rurality differs around Australia, taking into account factors such as isolation from large centres. In this way, coastal North Queensland or Western Australia are regarded as remote, whereas coastal NSW is not remote from other large centres but is in many ways isolated from the state capital. Using the figures mentioned above, this report is looking at the working conditions and entitlements of about one-fifth of the teaching service.

However, filling this fifth of teaching service positions in NSW is not an easy task. As the inquiry noted:

“In all States and Territories one consistent theme was that rural and remote schools are difficult to staff. Disincentives affecting both recruitment and retention of teachers in rural and remote schools include isolation and the cost of travel, the cost of living including higher telephone, food and power costs, poor quality and often expensive housing and limited opportunities to participate in professional development with resulting impacts on promotional opportunities.”

These disincentives manifest themselves in both personal and professional ways. Teachers identified personal costs as very significant and also reported lack of access to professional development as a real disincentive. Teachers reported that they had been unable or found it difficult to continue with further

tertiary study due to their remote location. Others felt out of touch with the latest teaching issues because of decreased opportunities for outside examination marking at senior levels or because of decreased contact and networking with teachers in the same subject area from other schools. Furthermore, training and development opportunities are limited by the cost and lack of availability of casual teachers. Valuable opportunities such as HSC marking are limited for teachers in these locations. To help overcome some of these difficulties the inquiry noted the potential of technology for reducing rural and remote isolation and the lack of access to information.

Access to in-service training for staff is often limited by the prohibitive cost of bringing quality presenters from the state capital or by teachers having to travel long distances to participate in extra-curricula activities. Teachers noted that in many ways they are further isolated by the poor condition of roads in many rural and remote areas. Isolation also affects teachers in a personal way through limiting social and cultural contacts, especially when the road to the closest major centre becomes virtually inaccessible in wet weather. Living conditions are generally poor with private rentals usually not available and government housing generally in need of maintenance and improved security. There are also concerns relating to the cost of housing relative to the community in which they were living.

Teacher turnover was another significant factor noted by the HREOC inquiry. It stated that rural and remote schools have a higher staff turnover rate than metropolitan schools and that staff retention rates can be an important determinant of the quality of the education being delivered to rural and remote children. High turnover of predominantly inexperienced teachers also has other costs with rural and remote schools providing the training ground for large numbers of young teachers who then relocate to coastal areas, leaving rural and remote schools with the financial burden of training the next intake. Reasonable stability in the staffing of rural and remote schools is necessary as both teachers and students benefit from stability and continuity in program delivery. Schools where staff constantly change lack a sense of community whereas stability in staffing can result in an overall feeling in the school of a common purpose and belonging.

The inquiry noted that teachers are learners who thrive in a stable environment and develop skills through a continuum of experiences. If teachers constantly move from one school to another the continuity of their development as teachers is interrupted. Teachers who move from school to school are disadvantaged in terms of career development and promotion as continued breaks in continuity of employment results in an interruption of skill acquisition. High staff turnover also creates particular difficulties in maintaining the continuity of programs in schools and thus frustrates remaining teachers and students, as nothing seems to get done. Instead, they keep going around in circles.

As one student respondent to the HREOC inquiry noted “the situation is that first year out teachers come [here] as their first appointment. [For] A lot of the teachers here [this] is their only experience. Last year we got three new executive.” This raises

issues of quality and questions around how so many newly appointed teachers are supported in an isolated environment. Similarly, the experience of the school executive is an issue of concern when, for example, NSW's Moree district is regarded as the NIDA district as many in executive positions are acting positions and other executives are in their first appointment at the executive level. Mentoring and support of newly appointed staff also relates to support of newly appointed executives.

Recruitment and retention difficulties mean that a disproportionate number of country teachers are inexperienced with English as a Second Language and difficult to staff subjects such as mathematics, science and information technology often experiencing shortages. Rural schools have also always had a problem with finding, and then keeping, specialist staff such as counsellors and teachers for students with special needs. Also, a great deal of specialists' time is taken up with travelling between rural and remote schools, rather than working with students.

Even when schools were adequately staffed a number of issues emerged relating to teacher professionalism and the quality of education provided. These issues include the restricted range of subjects available, reduced face-to-face teaching hours to compensate for covering a wider range of subjects on a standard teacher establishment, the suitability of distance education subjects and the availability of teachers qualified in a range of subjects. These factors also limit the number of teachers willing to remain in these communities to educate their own children. This highlights why the need for differential staffing in rural and remote schools as a means of improving equitable access to quality education should be considered.

To help overcome the issues outlined above, the inquiry recommended that government education departments offer varying incentives and compensations to teachers willing to move to the country. It suggested that incentives include additional 'points' earned

towards preferential transfers, additional days of annual leave, a locality allowance and subsidised housing. However, the inquiry also noted that many rural and remote teaching staff also believe the existing strategies only partially mitigate

the conditions under which they operate. The views of such teachers, explored through an online survey, will form a major component of this report.

According to the HREOC inquiry, the current incentives in South Australia that reward the teachers who want to be in the country have had little impact on increasing the number of applicants for country positions — both teaching and leadership. It was also found that the current incentive scheme in NSW may attract people to rural areas but once they are there, the incentive is to leave rather than remain, even for just an extra year or so. Recognition that there are a

number of problems with a reliance on incentives to staff rural and remote schools is significant, as this has historically been the favoured solution of education departments. The HREOC inquiry has suggested that incentives may need to include free housing, access to a car, significant pay differences and access to free tertiary study. Overall, it is essential that incentives are adequate to overcome the identified disincentives and are effective in retaining teachers for an appropriate period of time to reduce the negative effect of high teacher turnover.

A significant factor in addressing the attraction and retention of teachers to rural and remote areas is the appropriateness of teacher training. While incentives are important, many studies have demonstrated that the most effective approach is to recruit trainee professionals from rural and remote areas. The HREOC inquiry has suggested that this can be done by providing community-based training and targeting local mature-age students. Similarly, it is important for teacher training institutions to include components on teaching and living in rural and remote communities as part of their course. Such courses allow local community members, especially indigenous teachers, to study in their local community, using distance education, technology and local teacher mentors. Similarly, undergraduate programs that encourage student teachers to undertake their practicum at schools in rural and remote areas are seen as an important component. Such schemes enable student teachers to gain first-hand experience of teaching in small schools as well as the opportunity to develop an understanding of living and working in rural and remote communities.

The HREOC inquiry made a number of recommendations to help overcome the problems facing rural and remote communities. In relation to relevant staffing matters the inquiry recommended that allowances and incentives should be enhanced; there be greater provision of safe and affordable housing; teacher training institutions should provide students with an understanding of rural and remote schools as well as a pre-service practicum in rural and remote locations; greater recruitment of students from rural and remote communities, especially prospective indigenous teachers; and the development of more accessible professional development for teachers.

The Vinson inquiry

The Vinson Inquiry into the Provision of Public Education in NSW raised a number of issues related to those identified by the HREOC inquiry. While the Vinson inquiry explored the wide range of educational barriers experienced by rural communities in NSW, those directly related to the staffing of rural schools are most relevant to this report. A number of the issues raised by the Vinson inquiry point to the general need of governments to change staffing formulas and provide differential funding based on isolation and rurality.

Relevant concerns explored by the Vinson inquiry include the general shortage of casual teachers in rural and remote locations and problems with attracting and retaining teachers. Similarly, housing problems, teacher preparation for rural and remote areas, the

Many studies have demonstrated that the most effective approach is to recruit trainee professionals from rural and remote areas.

educational needs of Aboriginal communities and the staffing criteria for small schools were raised. The major issue for the Vinson inquiry relating to rural and remote schools was the difficulties faced by country teachers in accessing professional development. To help overcome this the inquiry recommended an increase in professional development funding for rural and remote schools.

Effective advertising

“Most teacher training does not adequately equip new recruits with the skills and knowledge needed for teaching in rural and remote Australia.”

HREOC, "Emerging themes," in National Inquiry into Rural and Remote Education (Canberra, 2000).

To adequately staff our rural schools, prospective teachers should consider rural service to be an enjoyable and valuable experience. The primary motivation for entering the teaching profession, or any other career, should be the prospect of an enjoyable and rewarding career. It therefore follows that teaching authorities should build on this initial motivation and endeavour to ensure that the barriers impeding this are reduced.

It is essential that teacher training courses adequately prepare trainee teachers for the many professional and social challenges of rural and remote service. Such a need becomes more urgent in the context of the rural teacher shortage, the professional demographic of impending large scale retirement and a climate in which significant numbers of newly appointed teachers leave the profession in their first five years of service. Teacher shortages, high resignation rates and the high teacher turnover in rural and remote schools combine to ensure that a significant number of our graduate teachers will begin their careers in rural and remote schools. Unfortunately, many of these graduate teachers have a negative perception of teaching in such environments, even though these perceptions are often based on little first hand experience. In order to adequately staff rural and remote schools we need to ensure that perceptions regarding them are demystified and that the prospects of a successful and rewarding career are enhanced.

Teacher supply

It is now accepted wisdom that we are in the midst of a teacher supply crisis and that the shortage of teachers will get worse before it gets better. What is also accepted is that those areas that are deemed less desirable will be the first and hardest hit in a time of shortage. This is because, as Barbara Preston puts it, “Schools in a weaker competitive position have chronic difficulty finding teachers, while schools in a strong position are little affected by overall shortages.” A major report on attracting, developing and retaining effective teachers prepared for the Commonwealth Government for an OECD project in 2003 noted: “Staffing ... rural and remote schools ... has been a longstanding challenge for Australian authorities.”

These challenging prospects are reinforced by both NSW Teachers Federation and Australian Education Union claims that regional and remote areas are already

experiencing supply problems. A survey in 2003 of 437 principals found that 54 per cent had experienced teacher supply problems over the previous year, with 57 per cent stating that the problem has got worse over the previous year. A similar survey of rural and remote schools by the NSW Primary Principals Association in 2002 found that 92 per cent of respondents were experiencing difficulty finding casual teachers.

The average age of Australian teachers is now approximately 49 years of age, with 24.5 per cent of public primary and 28 per cent of public secondary teachers over 50. A further 35 per cent of teachers are aged between 40–49 years. This means that 27 per cent of the teaching workforce is eligible to retire by 2007 and a further 50,000 teachers eligible for retirement between 2007 and 2012. With about 7500 to 8500 graduates going into teaching each year this leaves an immediate potential of 20,000–30,000 teacher shortfall after 2007. It is also stated that “a recent study of the supply chain in one state estimates that only some 15 per cent of those applying for teacher education courses ended up teaching several years later”. (Silbeck and Connell)

Compounding these supply problems is the data alluded to above that significant numbers of teachers who enter the profession leave after a few years. According to Ewing and Smith, “it is well established in countries in the western world that between 25 per cent and 40 per cent of all newly-recruited teachers resign or burnout in their first three to five years of teaching.” A Watson and Hatton survey of mid career teachers in NSW found that after 16 years of service, 50 per cent of secondary teachers and 33 per cent of primary teachers had resigned. Similarly, it is stated that 20 per cent of Queensland teachers leave within the first five years of teaching, while 50 per cent of Victorian teachers do not think they will be in the profession longer than 10 years.

For rural and remote schools these high attrition rates, combined with teacher shortage, mean two things: they have difficulty attracting staff and the majority of staff they do attract will be new graduates. A survey of 18 schools by the NSW Teachers Federation found that most schools surveyed in rural and remote areas had, on average, four beginning teachers. Indeed, figures for Western Australia indicate that in 1993, 90 per cent of graduates were appointed to rural and remote

centres. Similar figures for Queensland indicate that 87 per cent of teachers are appointed to country schools in their first two years of teaching. Rural and remote schools therefore bear a disproportionate burden of preparing teachers not just for their own contexts, but for the profession as a whole.

As a large proportion of graduates are going to begin their career in rural and remote settings it is important that teacher training institutes adequately prepare students, as inadequately prepared teachers leave the profession sooner, exacerbating the teacher shortage. Teachers also need to be adequately prepared for working in disadvantaged schools (which most rural and remote schools are, as evidenced by socio-economic statistics for the communities they serve) as the attrition rate for teachers in these settings is almost a third higher than that of non disadvantaged areas. Teacher training is an important first step as it could mean that newly appointed teachers are prepared to begin their career in rural and remote settings, have a rewarding and enjoyable experience and therefore don't become another attrition statistic.

The rural and remote teaching context is clearly different from the urban or metropolitan teaching context. All initial teacher education programs need to provide content and practical experiences to prepare graduates professionally and personally to teach in rural and remote schools. There is a responsibility, therefore, on teacher training institutions to ensure that students both understand this context and are familiar with it. Identified ways to achieve this are:

- ❑ specific courses relating to working (and living) in rural and remote settings,
- ❑ providing and supporting practicums and internships in rural and remote settings,
- ❑ recruiting trainee teachers from rural and remote settings, and
- ❑ bonded teacher training scholarships.

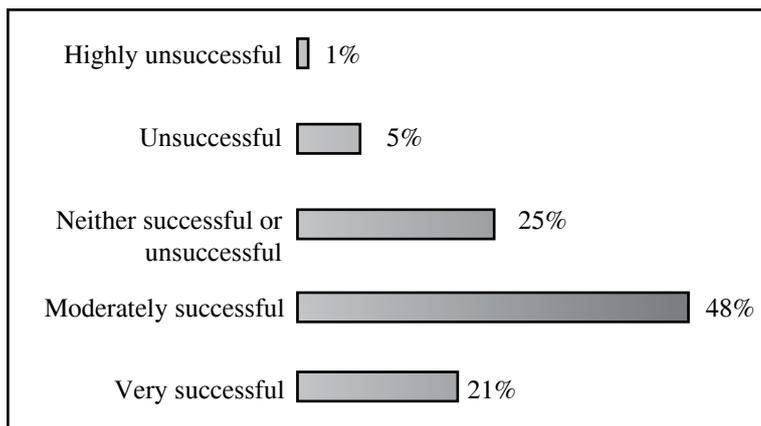
Training for the rural context

The rural context can present many challenges and opportunities for teachers. The experience involves both the educational challenges associated with disadvantage and remoteness and the opportunities of small classes and a strong community atmosphere. Rural teachers have the opportunity to experience the rewards of being valued members of a community and can benefit from the strong involvement many rural communities have in their school. Conversely, these attributes of rural contexts can also be seen as negatives by many potential teachers. Others may focus on the challenges of isolation and the limited resources of many small country schools. (Somewhere between these two poles of experience exists the reality of working in rural and remote schools. Both views, however, highlight the need for governments to ensure that conditions and resources in these schools are good enough to overcome the negative perceptions.)

As noted in the chapter "The empty schoolhouse" and by the Vinson inquiry, schools play an important role in rural and remote communities. They are in many ways the glue that binds communities together or better still the "heart of the community". Their role is both social and economic. The local school provides a number of jobs and also develops the skill base of present and future workers in the community, helping to ensure its economic viability. Socially, the local school can keep the community united as well as providing considerable expertise in local sporting and social organisations.

As is illustrated in figure 9 the idea of specific pre-service teacher education was considered an extremely successful component of attracting teachers to rural and remote teaching. Considering the vast majority of trainee teachers grew up in large metropolitan settings, such initiatives would go a long way to demystifying rural schools and countering the negative perceptions many prospective teachers have of rural service. Furthermore, these programs could equip students with the necessary pedagogical skills to succeed in these settings. It is clear from a number of studies that pre-service teacher education does have a significant impact on beginning teachers' pedagogical skills and teaching philosophies.

Figure 9: How successful would specific pre-service teacher education be in attracting teachers to rural and remote schools?



According to Boylan there have been a number of Australian federal and state government reports that indicate the need for pre-service training courses to explore the "range of social, cultural, geographical, historical, political and service access issues that define the difference in working and living in rural contexts compared to other locations". Similarly, a report conducted in South Australia in 2001 into the experiences of first year graduate teachers in rural and remote schools recommended that rural teaching needs to be *realistically* (my emphasis) promoted and programs designed to prepare graduates for living and working in rural areas.

To help improve the effectiveness of teacher training, the role of schools in rural NSW is part of an ongoing study that is investigating the relationship between teacher education, rural schooling and communities. The Rural Teacher Education Project (RTEP), funded by an Australian Research Council (ARC) grant, is being conducted by Charles Sturt University in partnership with the University of New England and the NSW Department of Education and Training (DET). It brings together DET's 11 school districts located west of the Great Divide, an area representing 84 per cent of NSW's land mass and more than 500 schools.

The RTEP recognises the view that globalisation and social and technological change affect rural communities in different ways to their metropolitan counterparts. To help counter these forces the project aims to redress what is termed the "metrocentricism" of school reform. Considering that research indicates that schools are crucial aspects of community life and economic development in country towns, this project could have significant social implications. According to project coordinator Professor Green: "We are dealing with a major equity issue ... as well as improving

educational outcomes for students at rural schools, our project will make recommendations for teacher education, as this clearly impacts on the issues facing rural and remote communities.”

The RTEP aims to identify a set of approaches including preparing student teachers more effectively for the rural context and geographic isolation through new teaching and learning strategies. To achieve this, the RTEP will bring together rural communities, schools and other government agencies to find solutions to their shared challenges such as attracting and retaining quality teachers and professional and geographical isolation. It is anticipated that as a result of this study strategies that create both positive teaching environments for students and support beginning and early career teachers in rural schools can be developed. The project will also be looking at issues of staffing and quality teaching, as well as how schools can establish good relationships with their communities. By better understanding the dynamics of rural schools the project should be able to suggest a number of initiatives for preparing student teachers more effectively for life in rural communities.

“Ramsey expresses the view that secondary teachers are less well prepared pedagogically and consequently have a higher exit rate from the profession.”

The research which indicates that teacher satisfaction is directly linked to them remaining in the profession could have important implications for teacher training, the proposed Institute of Teachers and the NSW

Government’s plans to release a set of requirements for pre-service teacher education studies. Ramsey supports the view that pedagogical preparation has an impact on resignation rates and uses this proposition to account for the greater number of secondary teachers than primary teachers that leave within the first few years. He expresses the view that secondary teachers are less well prepared pedagogically and consequently have a higher exit rate from the profession.

McConaghy and Burnett report the RTEP aims to address the issues of high teacher turnover in difficult to staff rural schools as issues of pedagogy by providing new quality teaching and learning strategies which it believes will provide incentives for teachers to live and work in rural NSW. It is believed that strategies for quality pedagogy will assist industrial reforms and other financial incentives in retaining teachers. Knowledge from studying successful programs and approaches in the 11 western NSW districts will “be used to reflect on better ways to equip teachers for rural schools, both in terms of pre-service and in-service teacher education”.

There is an underpinning belief that location affects pedagogy, which in turn affects teacher turnover. While this may be a reasonable assumption, it is questionable whether improving pedagogy (and thus professional self worth) alone, will overcome the problems associated with staffing these schools. Some research has suggested that factors such as lower class sizes, team teaching and other system supports have a positive effect on pedagogy, and therefore increase professional satisfaction. There would be an inherent fear that this philosophy could lead to something like the Queensland “productive pedagogies” agenda which has been supported by the “New Basics”. This model suggests that schools need to restructure their curriculum and organisation to meet the new social

and economic times. While this is a noble aim, and all practicing professions would agree that community contextual learning is important, it does not address the issues of first attracting and then retaining teachers to these areas. McConaghy and Burnett concede “the Queensland model has an important contribution to make to schooling in rural NSW”, however, they do go on to point out that “there are significant limitations”. For this reason the approaches in rural communities, including the special school-community links, are being isolated to better prepare teacher graduates for appointments to these locations.

Working in rural and remote communities is unique due to the close nature of the community, however, small communities can also be more isolating as social and cultural divisions become more personal. While professional practice is not carried out in isolation, it is related to the quality of life and emotional well-being of the teachers. Enjoying the unique social, cultural and ecological environment of small rural schools has not been enough in the past to attract and retain them in these areas.

The inclusion of subjects focusing on rural issues during pre-service training is seen as essential if we are to prepare prospective teachers for these communities. While the above examples may add some new ideas for future programs there are presently only a few such courses in operation. The most notable present example is the James Cook University Rural Education Research and Development Centre. This school offers courses directly related to rural and remote education issues and actively conducts research into rural and remote education. Unfortunately, most aspects of this course are targeted to their Rural Area Teacher Education Project (RATEP) which is an online course offered to students from remote areas.

In NSW, only one university, Charles Sturt University, has a compulsory rural education component in its pre-service course. Apart from this, the only other occurrence of a rural subject offering is an elective option for students finishing their secondary program at Southern Cross University. The University of Southern Queensland is the only other institution noted for preparing teachers for rural communities. This university has a mandatory course on “teaching in small rural communities”. However, like many courses of this type, it is a brief look at rural conditions rather than an in-depth analysis of rural dynamics and pedagogical processes. Apart from the examples outlined above no-one interviewed for this report around Australia was able to point to any other examples of rural pre-service teacher education subject offerings by tertiary institutions with education facilities.

Clearly, if universities believe they are covering this area, but students don’t believe they are being taught it, and a systematic study of course offerings illustrates there is a big gap in their offerings, there is a fundamental problem possibly of perception, more likely one of effectiveness and depth. What remains clear is the absence of a consistent, focused and structured course on working in rural and remote contexts.

Specific pre-service courses about living and working in rural and remote communities have been suggested as a means to not only help attract teachers to rural and remote areas as illustrated in figure 9 but as a strategy to help reduce the high rate of resignation of beginning teachers. The HREOC inquiry into rural

and remote education recommended that all teacher training institutions should require students to study courses about rural and remote schools focusing upon assisting students with minimal support and indigenous issues. This recommendation came about due to a finding that most teacher training does not adequately equip new recruits with the skills and knowledge needed for teaching in rural and remote Australia. There is commonly a lack of local knowledge among the teaching staff. In addition, teacher training fails to prepare new graduates adequately for inclusive teaching of children with special needs and culturally appropriate teaching of indigenous children. On a brighter note for the future, however, the HREOC report did note that most education departments have begun discussions about the need for specific rural recruitment strategies and the need to include information about rural and remote schools in teacher training qualifications.

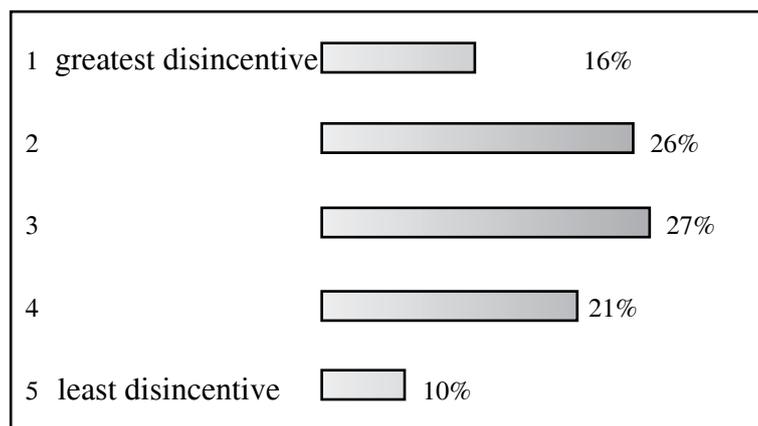
To initiate such courses is going to take more than the benign interest of teacher training institutions or education departments. In a study in 1993, Gibson concluded that there was then little attention given to preparing students for rural service. He went on to suggest, as many earlier papers that he cited had, that both institutions and education departments should work together on developing specialised preparation programs for rural teaching. To date, no great ground has been made in this regard.

Teacher unions need to ensure that discussion leads to real changes in pre-service training. There are examples of successful courses in Australia and overseas, as well as plenty of research presently being conducted into rural education, which can help inform such courses. In NSW there is a good opportunity to press for such course inclusions when the proposed Institute of Teachers is formed and begins accrediting pre-service training courses. While the Institute is developing draft standards for professional practice it would be worthwhile for them to consider differential standards to take into account the range of unique contexts of Australian and NSW schools. It would be remiss of such an authority not to mandate such courses when a significant proportion of their graduates are likely to begin their career in rural schools. Failure to do so only reinforces a lack of commitment to rural areas and creates a stereotype that an appointment in such a location is temporary.

It is also imperative that such courses include significant indigenous content and ensure that students are aware of and sensitive to the cultural differences of rural communities as well as an awareness of the extent of community involvement in the school. These cultural differences and sensitivities include factors such as living in a small community, but more importantly relate to living and working in communities with significant Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander populations. When it is considered that the majority of teachers come from urban environments and non-indigenous cultural backgrounds there manifests itself a general unfamiliarity with the social, cultural and historical forces working in indigenous communities.

This unfamiliarity can create significant chal-

Figure 10: How great are the disincentives of the cultural challenges associated with living in Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander communities?



lenges and limit the appropriateness of the pedagogy the teacher brings to their new community. As figure 10 illustrates, many teachers still find the prospect of living in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities challenging. Similarly, results in indigenous education also indicate that there is significant work to be done in raising the education attainment of these groups. To this end it is encouraging to see the NSW Department of Education and Training consultation draft on “Preservice teacher education studies required for employment in NSW government schools” list Aboriginal education as one of the six mandatory areas. Such an inclusion recognises the importance of an inclusive curriculum, cultural awareness and knowledge of appropriate pedagogy for succeeding in such settings. It is clear from such concerns that any courses on rural schools should go further than a generic Aboriginal education requirement and ensure that there is a genuine empathy for, and recognition of, indigenous issues.

The inclusion of Aboriginal education in pre-service training is important because as Heslop points out, teachers in rural and remote Aboriginal communities are generally non Aboriginal, young and living away from friends and family for the first time. They are in their first teaching appointment and have no experience of living in rural or remote locations. They are also inexperienced in working with indigenous people but are keen to do so even though they have little understanding of the protocols for behaving in a cross-cultural setting.

The requirement for a specific rural and remote education course and an indigenous issues course are not just common sense suggestions about making it easier for beginning teachers — they go to the heart of the philosophy of equity of access and equity of outcomes. Such a philosophy was derided by Kevin Donnelly in his recent conservative polemic funded by the Menzies Research Centre *Why our schools are failing* where he applauds the “equality of opportunity” philosophy as the founding principle of a quality education system but derides the idea of equality of outcomes as a sinister left wing teacher union plot at social engineering. What is clear is that the conservative resurgence of the past 10 years is having a significant impact on our schools in terms of funding, perceptions of values and standards and advocacy in favour of performance based pay scales with major political parties, state and federally advocating such policies. However, it is a matter of universal human rights that rural and remote students not only have an equality of opportunity, but also have equality of access to an

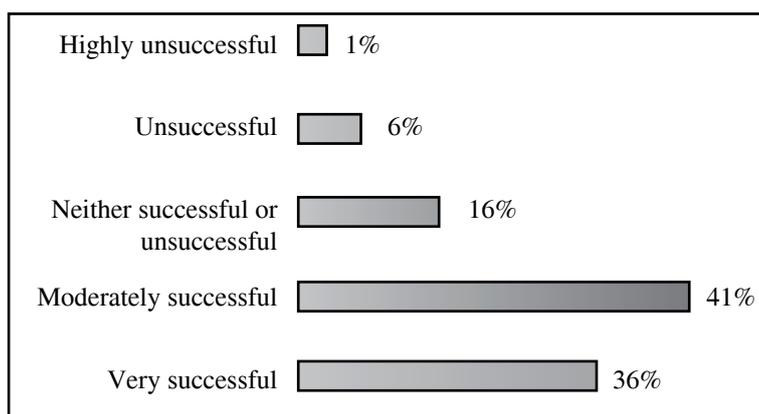
appropriate quality education and can achieve the same outcomes as their metropolitan counterparts. If this means training teachers differently to work in these areas as one way to overcome some of the disadvantages caused by high teacher turnover and high numbers of beginning teachers then this is an obligation on any modern state — not an economic inconvenience.

Practicum and internships

Preparing teachers, theoretically, for rural and remote teaching alone is not enough. The development of courses addressing rural and remote contextual issues needs to be dovetailed into practicum and internship experiences. In this way, prospective teachers, the majority of whom come from urban backgrounds, can experience living and working conditions in rural and remote settings. Such an experience could encourage graduates to take up such an appointment or dissuade them from making a mistake (for them, by taking up an appointment which they are ill prepared to be fully successful, and, ultimately, the students they will be imposed upon). It is believed that by making an informed decision, newly appointed teachers will bring a positive attitude and flourish in their new appointment.

The importance of giving students first hand experience in rural and remote settings was recognised by the HREOC inquiry into rural and remote education. The inquiry recommended that teacher training institutions should offer all students an option to undertake a fully-funded practicum in a rural or remote school and that the Commonwealth should ensure adequate funding to help achieve this. Such experiences would give students an opportunity to develop an awareness of cultural sensitivities and community involvement in rural schools. Socially, such an experience would allow pre-service teachers to experience the social dynamic of rural and remote communities and help overcome any negative stereotypes which may prevail.

Figure 11: How successful is pre-service practicum experience in attracting teachers to rural and remote schools?



It's clear from a number of studies that student teachers' attitudes to a rural or remote appointment improved as a result of completing a rural or remote practicum. This finding was reinforced by the respondents to the survey, 77 per cent of which overwhelmingly supported this approach in helping attract teachers to rural and remote schools. Consistent support by teachers working in these settings, and research findings that these approaches have a positive impact on attracting staff, are strong justification for pre-service training institutions to offer such an experience, and for governments to provide the funds to support it. Attraction is not, however, the only benefit of this approach. There is

also evidence that teachers who are informed about rural and remote living before taking up a rural or remote appointment are more likely to stay.

There are already some examples occurring around Australia which give some direction to how such a universal strategy may be implemented, impediments which need to be overcome and illustrative examples of why this strategy is successful. After beginning as an initiative of teachers in Moree in NSW to deconstruct the negative stereotypes of rural teaching and attract graduate teachers, the Beyond the Line program has developed into a statewide initiative supported by the Department of Education and Training (DET). While this expansion has exposed more trainee teachers to rural contexts, its ad hoc dramatic expansion and lack of personal approach may threaten its viability.

The Beyond the Line program offers student teachers the opportunity to spend a week looking at schools in some of the rural districts of NSW. The aim is to expose these prospective teachers to the people, communities and students in rural communities in the hope that they will see rural teaching as a viable future employment option. However, this only amounts to a promotional tour rather than any practical experience. Many teachers talk of their time working "in the bush" as some of the most enjoyable times of their career. It was in this light that the Moree teachers developed the idea for Beyond the Line. Initially, practicing teachers would volunteer to have a trainee teacher spend a few days living with them and spending time with them in their classes. In the evenings they would socialise with these same teachers and really experience living and working in a rural community. Unfortunately, the sudden appropriation of the program by the NSW DET has seen some of these more personable aspects overlooked and it has instead become a mass program imposed on schools with a bit of sightseeing thrown in. There is evidence that the program is having some positive impact on recruiting teachers to rural areas, however, much of this evidence pre-dates the expansion of the program.

Unfortunately, this NSW program is only a 'taster' of rural teaching. While it does allow trainee teachers to consider a rural practicum in NSW this needs to be organised independently if attending one of the large metropolitan universities. What is needed is a program to support large numbers of trainee-teachers experiencing an extended rural practicum. Currently, the rural based teacher training institutions, whose students already have such an experience, have many of their students come from rural backgrounds. This experience of attending a rurally based training institution and having a rural practice teaching experience has been linked to accepting and remaining in rural appointments — a goal that needs to be achieved by many more institutions. Unfortunately, only a minority of institutions are in this category, and their experiences often do not extend to the remote and isolated schools.

It is possible to successfully recruit for rural and remote teaching from urban based universities. A useful example is highlighted in the HREOC inquiry in which the Queensland University of Technology (QUT) and Isolated Children's Parents Association (ICPA) have developed a partnership program which assists student teachers to undertake a practicum at schools in rural and remote areas of Queensland. This program enables student teachers to gain first-hand experience teaching in small schools, along with the opportunity to develop an understanding of living and working

in rural/isolated communities. One of the significant outcomes of this program has been that many of the students (the majority of whom are from the city) have applied for and accepted teaching appointments to schools in rural and remote communities.

Similarly highlighted in the HREOC inquiry is an example from Western Australia where a combined community, business and tertiary initiative gives prospective teachers an opportunity to sample country teaching. The aim of the program is again to assist in developing knowledge and skills relevant to country locations and to encourage trainee teachers to choose to teach in country schools.

However, both these examples are voluntary initiatives. It could reasonably be assumed that those taking up the initiative are already open to the idea of rural teaching if not pre-disposed to it. Further, the percentage of trainee teachers involved in them is minimal. If the suggestion from the NSW Beyond the Line program is accurate, about 80 per cent of participants will consider a rural appointment after only a week visiting schools, then there is certainly a likelihood of similar success if significant numbers of students experience a rural practicum.

Considering that a significant proportion of newly appointed teachers are likely to begin their career in rural and remote settings there is then an argument to make a rural or remote practicum a mandatory component of pre-service training. Such an approach has apparently proved successful for the University of Southern Queensland which requires all final year Bachelor of Education graduates to complete their final practicum in a small rural school and offers further experience in these settings for interested students.

The benefits of extended practicums in rural and remote locations has been supported by a number of studies such as South Australia's investigation into first year teachers' experiences in rural and remote schools, the Tomlinson report on schooling in rural Western Australia and the Lunn Report into attracting staff to rural and remote Queensland schools. All of these major reports, which in some way deal with the issue of attracting and retaining staff in rural and remote schools, see practical experience as an essential element to ensuring that these schools are staffed with appropriate quality, stable staff.

In addition to the university initiated programs there are promising programs in operation in Western Australia and South Australia which have had some success. In these states the education department covers the cost of travel and accommodation for a small number of student teachers to complete a practicum in a rural or remote location. These programs have proved to be very successful, with most participants subsequently taking up and being retained in rural or remote appointments

There are factors limiting the ability of trainee teachers to participate in these initiatives. The introduction of and recent increases in HECS fees for university courses and the limited amount of Austudy payments mean that most undergraduate students are involved in some form of part time work to support them through their studies. Ironically, it is the students from rural areas, who are most likely to become successful rural teachers, who are significantly affected by this situation. These teachers, and many of their urban counterparts, are unable to take extended periods of time from their casual jobs. 50 per cent of 200 third year trainee teachers surveyed at Flinders University in 2003 rated the cost of a country practicum as a

significant disincentive, citing the pressures of part time jobs and the costs of short term accommodation in country towns as the main problems. In this way they are economically excluded from a potentially valuable experience due to nature of casual work, a user pays philosophy of education and a social welfare system which doesn't adequately support those undertaking essential social-building education.

Teacher unions and everyone else interested in sustaining rural communities need to campaign for an increase in Austudy so that more teachers are able to access these opportunities. It is also important for education departments to extend support programs for pre-service teachers to undertake rural practicums as the evidence appears to suggest that they have a positive effect on attracting and retaining teachers to rural and remote communities. Furthermore, the costs involved in supporting these students would be significantly less than the recurring cost of moving teachers due to a lack of retention.

Besides the recruitment benefits of practicum exposure in rural and remote schools there are also the added professional benefits of internships and mentoring programs for beginning teachers. As these relate more to the experiences of beginning teachers they will be discussed in the chapter "No applicants". As a generalisation though, it is relevant to point out that any pre-service experience gained in rural schools will certainly mentally and pedagogically prepare graduate teachers for the unique circumstances of rural schools. The more extensive the experiences in these settings the better professionally prepared these teachers will be, consequently culminating in an increased rate of retention.

Recruiting from rural and remote settings

A number of research articles, anecdotal evidence and the observation of those interviewed for this research suggest a significant correlation between teacher background and their recruitment to and retention in rural and remote settings. This area was not investigated in the survey as it only came to light following the design of the survey, however, any subsequent work will need to incorporate a statistical investigation of this relationship.

A 1998 investigation by Boylan and McSwan into the profile of long staying rural teachers found that the largest variable in the retention of teachers in rural areas was biographical. Both the literature reviewed for the study and the study itself supported the fact that long staying rural teachers had a rural upbringing themselves and attended a rural teacher education institution. In fact 72.3 per cent of identified long staying rural teachers in the Boylan and McSwan study had a rural upbringing, while some 60 per cent attended a rural teacher education institution. It is conceivable that a majority of students attending a rural teacher education institution themselves had a rural upbringing and are therefore also more likely to take up positions in rural and remote areas. The recruitment of teachers from rural areas and the training of teachers in these areas is a major positive factor in the attraction and retention of teachers in rural and remote schools.

James Cook University Rural Research and Development Centre director Dr David McSwan went further in a submission to the HREOC inquiry into rural and remote education when he pointed out that many Australian and overseas studies have shown that the

most effective way to staff rural and remote schools is to recruit trainee teachers from rural and remote locations. He also advocated that there should be adequate funding for training institutions to conduct community-based training for mature age entrants to teaching. The success of one such an initiative has been shown through the Rural Area Teacher Education Project (RATEP) run by James Cook University.

The issue of recruiting teachers from rural areas is similarly bound up with the principle of providing appropriate teachers for indigenous communities and consequently addressing indigenous educational disadvantage. According to the HREOC inquiry into rural and remote education:

“Improved education attainment of indigenous students in rural and remote schools will not occur without increased indigenous participation in schools as teachers, education workers, administrators and other student support workers. There are insufficient trained indigenous teachers and education workers. Some potential trainees are unable to access teacher training because there are no local courses and they are not realistically able to relocate for family, cultural, cost or other reasons.

“Training in the community by distance mode, with short residential on-campus programs, is the preferred option for many rural and remote trainees. It is cost-effective and avoids family and community disruption. Other benefits include a commitment to work-

ing in the local community on the part of the trainee which means enhanced stability of staffing in rural and remote schools and the opportunity for local children to be taught by community members.”

In support of this the HREOC inquiry argued that all teachers need to be adequately prepared to work in rural areas, and that one of the most effective ways to achieve this is through recruiting from rural areas and enabling them to undertake most of their training in their own communities. The inquiry again cited the RATEP and the Community-based Indigenous Teacher Education Program (CITEP) in NSW as leading examples of this in action.

The Ramsey review in NSW found that between 1994 and 2000 on average only 27 Aboriginal teachers were newly appointed each year — on average 1.05 per cent of newly appointed teachers each year. This data of low numbers of indigenous teachers is supported by the NSW Teachers Federation which has only 259 (0.5 per cent) identified Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander members (as at June 30, 2002), while Australia-wide there are only 644 (0.41 per cent) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander members of the Australian Education Union. As these figures suggest and the *Koori Mail* pointed out in January 2004: “students have virtually no chance of being taught by indigenous teachers (or educators who have received training in indigenous history and culture).” The percentage of indigenous teachers is significantly below that of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in our schools, which is approximately 3.7 per cent for public schools in NSW.

Combined with the concerns raised earlier regarding Aboriginal education, there is certainly a crisis of indigenous education in this country. The lack of Aboriginal teachers limits the opportunities for students to receive a culturally appropriate education and consequently

affects students’ engagement with education. There is also a lingering mistrust of educational authorities in a number of indigenous communities. One way to begin to address this problem and the associated Aboriginal educational disadvantage is through the involvement of indigenous adults in education — both in their community school and in culturally appropriate teacher training. A similar argument can also be used in relation to other social problems, such as the emerging problem in boys’ education due to the lack of male primary teachers. It is therefore important that governments put strategies in place to attract and retain teachers, especially in rural and remote schools, to ensure staff profiles in all our schools more accurately reflect their communities.

The issue of indigenous teachers relates to the staffing of rural and remote schools because studies suggest that indigenous teachers generally return to their communities and assist in providing culturally appropriate education. This presence potentially, in turn, assists non indigenous teachers in their work in the same way that the presence of Aboriginal education assistants does. As a result there is a potential for increased professional satisfaction which is an important indicator of retention.

It should be noted that the idea that indigenous teachers uniformly return to and remain in their communities is a contentious one. There are also issues related to teachers coming from the appropriate family group or having difficulty dealing with the increased community pressure associated with their presence. There is certainly scope for further investigation into the experiences of newly appointed indigenous teachers. While there are clearly different cultural and community pressures impacting on indigenous teachers there is certainly a strong education equity and pragmatic staffing argument for recruiting and retaining greater numbers of them in the profession.

One such program that has been successful in this regard is the Queensland Remote Area Teacher Education Program (RATEP), which is an initiative of the Rural Education Research and Development Centre at James Cook University. The program recognises the finding of many studies that a key factor in the attraction and retention of teachers in rural and remote areas is the recruitment of trainees from these areas, including the recruitment of indigenous staff. It is currently common for teachers to experience a range of cultural challenges working in communities with high Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander populations (figure 10). Having teachers from these indigenous communities in schools and ensuring all graduate teachers are versed in culturally appropriate education would be strategies to address these issues.

Through the RATEP, indigenous students access teacher education courses in their communities through CD-ROMs and the internet, supported by teleconferences and web based discussion groups. The program involves students undertaking a two year TAFE course and subsequently a three year degree to obtain a Bachelor of Education degree. Students are also supported by a practicing classroom teacher who acts as a supervisor/tutor employed by Queensland Education in a position dedicated to the RATEP. The program has graduated 72 qualified teachers, more than three quarters of the indigenous teachers in Queensland. It has a completion rate higher than most other indigenous education programs, approximately 85 per cent. The success of the program can also be measured by the fact that most RATEP graduates work in community

“Students have virtually no chance of being taught by indigenous teachers.”

schools and in schools in remote locations, overcoming significant impediments to attracting and retaining teachers to these locations.

Similar programs are being run in most, but not all, states and territories in Australia. Batchelor Institute in the Northern Territory, Notre Dame University in Western Australia, and the Catholic University and the University of Western Sydney in NSW all offer forms of part residential/part community based teacher education programs. Unfortunately, none of these seem to have the same level of university and departmental support as the RATEP. They are, however, positive programs which need to be adopted in all states and territories and expanded in their size.

While not just providing a successful example of indigenous teacher education, this program is also an example of how university education can be delivered on site in areas where it was previously unavailable. There is no reason why such a model could not be expanded to non-indigenous rural people interested in taking up teaching as a career, especially mature age students. There is a trend to teaching becoming a profession of mature graduates with many newly appointed teachers over 35 years successfully taking up rural appointments. These mature graduates appear to be more at ease with the decision to move to rural areas and don't have the same desire to migrate to the big city as many younger graduates. While the cultural and social pressures to not leave family may not be as significant for non-indigenous Australians, the impediment of relocating for study and leaving support networks is still a real barrier to studying. Allowing these aspiring teachers to study in their communities will certainly increase the likelihood of them remaining for longer periods as teachers in their home community, thus providing greater stability and continuity for rural and remote schools. Opening up such opportunities may even see greater demand for places in such a course for people who feel they cannot leave their family to study.

Advances in technology and expertise have seen learning on the internet become a viable mode of study. Learning on the internet can be beneficial to rural students as it traverses cultural, distance and inter-institutional barriers as well as allowing students to interact with other students with whom they would otherwise not have contact. Students studying in remote locations do not have access to conventional sources of information such as libraries and there are long delays in lending by mail. Being on the internet provides an immediate access to information.

Research studies have reported that tertiary students learn effectively through interactive multimedia, internet and teleconferencing, with the only major limiting factor being motivation. The provision of a mentor helps overcome this and there is still an important role for the occasional residential school. However, it is clear that through the use of online technologies, effective educational programs can be developed and the barriers of distance reduced. The provision of online learning also opens up a range of previously unavailable possibilities to rural communities. However, a recent report for the Australian National Training Authority on online learning pointed out a number of negative aspects of this approach. These include emotional isolation; the increased time it takes to study on line; lack of motivation; lack of technical skills to use the technology; and delayed response time from tutors. However, the biggest impediment cited was the reliability and speed of technology available in many rural and remote locations.

The objective of this report is to outline opportunities to improve the staffing of rural and remote schools in Australia. Expanding the opportunities for rurally based people to undertake teacher training online in their own communities would be extremely beneficial given all the evidence that teachers with a rural background tend to remain in rural communities in their career. The potential for online learning outweighs the impediments — and these impediments will become less as technology develops.

Bonded teacher training scholarships

Various recruitment strategies for rural and remote schools have been suggested in the preceding sections of this report. These strategies rely upon established trends of:

- teachers who grew up in rural communities returning to work in similar communities;
- indigenous teachers returning to rural communities;
- the positive influence of adequate preparation and practice teaching experience in rural schools.

One tested method of the past which was overwhelmingly supported by respondents to the survey was the reintroduction of bonded teacher training scholarships. In fact, 79 per cent of respondents regarded bonded teacher training scholarships as being either very or moderately successful in attracting teachers to rural and remote schools.

The bonded teacher training scholarship was extensively used in the past and was one successful method of staffing difficult to staff schools. Unfortunately, the bonded scholarship does not address the issue of teacher retention in rural and remote schools, nor does it guarantee the appropriateness of teachers for rural and remote service.

“Rural and remote schools should be a professionally challenging and enjoyable career move rather than a necessary purgatory.”

Because someone is bonded to a rural area for a few years does not mean that they want to be there, as the scholarship may have only been sought to guarantee employment. Such scholarships would need to be targeted and offered to students coming from a rural background or those who have developed a genuine interest and commitment to these schools throughout their training. Rural and remote schools should be a professionally challenging and enjoyable career move rather than a necessary purgatory to achieving a teaching appointment or before appointment to a “desirable” school.

Teacher training scholarships generally operate in a uniform way offering money for a guaranteed period of service. In South Australia, for example, students are offered a scholarship of \$2500 a year for four years and are guaranteed an appointment in a country school for two years and permanent employment. Similarly, in Victoria students are offered \$3000 and a two year bond to a hard to staff school. Unfortunately, scholarships are not always taken up as many students don't see it as a big enough incentive to go to a difficult or isolated location. Thus, any scholarship needs to part of a wider program of improved conditions to be successful.

Combined with pre-service subjects on working in rural communities and practical experience in these

settings, bonded scholarships may help to overcome retention issues rather than attraction alone. These scholarships are making a return in a number of states, with NSW, for example, offering 150 scholarships a year. These scholarships generally only cover the cost of HECS payments and an amount of between \$1000 and \$2500 per annum, depending on the state or territory, in return for appointment for at least three years in a difficult to staff school. Unfortunately, the scholarship offered is not enough to enable someone to forgo part time work to allow them to undertake a rural practicum and these scholarships are also not the sole preserve of rural or remote areas either, as most capital cities have difficult to staff metropolitan locations. To help address the issue of low representation of indigenous teachers, a number of these scholarships are also reserved for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

In addition to bonded training scholarships there are examples around Australia of final year scholarships linked to service in rural and remote schools. As these scholarships are for people completing their training rather than entering training, they are aimed at attracting teachers to these schools in their early career. As such, they will be discussed in the following chapter.

The HREOC inquiry into rural and remote education recommended that universities and education departments develop recruitment strategies for rural and remote teaching. It recommended the use of practicum experience and subjects about teaching in rural and remote schools. Supporting this professional focus, the Vinson Inquiry into the Provision of Public Education in NSW recommended that in relation to Aboriginal education, teacher training faculties should identify trainee teachers who have a commitment to Aboriginal education. Such identified trainee teachers should then undertake a practicum with an Aboriginal studies teacher, be appointed to a school with a high number of Aboriginal students and then be inducted into that community. As a gross generalisation this would see a large proportion of these well prepared teachers being appointed to rural and remote schools. Unfortunately, the Vinson report did not look at the preparation of teachers for rural and remote areas in any systematic way. However, the inquiry did suggest extended practicum and internships as well as courses exploring the social settings of schools.

These measures would go some way to addressing the problem of inadequately prepared teachers leaving teaching sooner and thus exacerbating the teach shortage. Barbara Preston writes: “there must be effective strategies to ensure that teachers are willing and competent to teach in rural and remote schools, and especially in schools in indigenous communities. This is important for the quality of education and equity at all times.”

No applicants

“The current incentives...have had little impact on increasing the number of applicants for country positions — both teaching and leadership.”

HREOC, "Emerging themes."

The previous chapter firmly established that we are entering an impending teacher shortage across Australia. It is accepted wisdom supported by the Federal inquiry “Australia’s Teachers: Australia’s Future” that these shortages are already impacting upon, and will become worse, in rural and remote locations. With the teacher shortage resulting in greater opportunities opening up in more desirable locations, the challenge of attracting teachers to rural and remote schools can only become more extreme.

This chapter focuses specifically on getting teachers initially into schools in rural and remote areas. In some ways it will contradict the focus on retention previously highlighted and to be explored in the chapter “The revolving door”. In other ways, it hints at prospects for retention, as a successful introduction and initial experience should lead to greater satisfaction and subsequent retention. Indeed, many of the issues looked at here are also looked at in the chapter, “The revolving door”, with a slightly different focus. What is

certain, though, is that we cannot retain teachers who are not there in the first place.

In looking at ways to attract teachers to rural and remote areas for at least a minimum

service period this chapter will consider:

- approaches to help teachers get there initially
- the role of final year scholarships (as opposed to full course scholarships)
- the crucial role of beginning teacher and mentoring programs
- providing housing
- reasonable leave provisions
- a guaranteed transfer on the completion of a minimum service period.

Care has been taken to not look at this issue as a deficit model of school staffing. While the survey explicitly asked respondents to comment on a range of disincentives to teaching in rural and remote areas, the purpose was to allow for the construction of positive incentives to overcome them. In this way the suggestions made are about improving conditions, which must, by definition, work to overcome any disincentives.

The experience of Queensland provides us with a lesson that care must be taken to balance any initiatives to attract teachers to rural and remote schools with the needs of other areas. It is not desirable to create the situation which has arisen in Queensland where the incentives to the most isolated areas encouraged applicants for these schools ahead of schools in the middle regions which do not have similar incentives. This situation creates an artificial demand for work placement in the most isolated schools and subsequently creates another hard to staff area in the regions between the larger centres and these isolated schools.

Getting them there

One thing that came across in all the interviews conducted for this report was the role of a permanent job in attracting teachers to take up positions in rural and remote areas. There was a general proposition that someone eventually would accept such a position as it was their ‘foot in the door’. However, this has not necessarily proved successful, with staffing departments often needing to call many names on the list before someone accepts the appointment. Similarly, in states without centralised appointment of new staff or for promotion positions, many schools often need to advertise positions a number of times or receive only one applicant for positions.

Making an informed decision

There is an inherent disadvantage in current staffing systems, as most offers of initial employment require the recipient to make an almost immediate decision. It is unrealistic to expect someone who has either just finished study or with a family to decide within a very short time frame to relocate for at least two to three years. However, the problems related to such a requirement could be overcome by teachers having had previous experiences in such areas as described in the chapter “Effective advertising”, by allowing people time to decide, making staffing appointments earlier in the year in areas of known vacancies and financially supporting the person to visit the community before making such a significant decision.

It would seem only fair to allow people access to a range of information about the school and community before making this decision. 67 per cent of respondents to the survey considered the provision of a referral or liaison service about community services very to

“Most principals could be expected to positively sell their school and community.”

moderately successful in attracting teachers to rural or remote schools. The provision of such a service would allow people when receiving a job offer, or when considering any other move, to find out about key community services such as health services or recreational activities, which may affect their decision. While allowing people to make informed decisions, such a service may also help attract teachers when they discover that service provision is not as bad as may have been thought.

While applicants can easily contact the school principal to find out about the school, there is a potential conflict of interest in this approach. Most principals could be expected to positively sell their school and community and may indeed be in a position where they urgently need to have a position filled and the teacher in the classroom. This could, however, be counterproductive as teachers who arrive and find these limitations too difficult to live with are much more likely to resign.

In some ways the current merit selection procedures used by most states and territories overcomes this problem in promotions positions by requiring the applicant to attend the school for an interview. The applicant can at least get a small feel for both the community and the school before committing for a number of years service. Ironically the NSW manual *Induction of Beginning Teachers* suggests that schools “prepare a package of materials for beginning teachers that provides information on the local area, services and facilities”. It would make greater sense to have access to this information prior to accepting an appointment. Also, this service should be centralised to ensure that all locations have this information available.

Permanency

Nationwide, the desire for a permanent job appears to be relied upon as the central factor in staffing rural and remote schools. Indeed, permanency and the availability of a job were the main reasons given for taking up a position in a South Australian study of first year teachers in rural and remote schools. This method, unfortunately, relies upon people's desperation for employment rather than a desire to work in these locations. Many of the employment practices used are aimed at encouraging people into these positions with the promises of economic benefits and then a move to another location as a ‘reward’ for enduring the appointment. In many ways this is a deficit model of school staffing as it attracts people by being the pathway into permanent employment and then promising a way out rather than positively promoting the career and a rural placement. The only people who actively choose a rural or remote appointment are those who themselves come from such locations, already live there or those with an interest in indigenous education.

Many states use graduate employment programs as a way of encouraging new graduates to take up positions in rural and remote schools. In NSW the targeted graduate program aims to place up to 1000 new graduates each year into permanent positions. Under an agreement with the NSW Teachers Federation these graduates are to be placed in rural, remote and other difficult to staff areas of the state. As difficult to staff schools include areas of western Sydney, a number of graduate teachers are appointed to these areas. However, the most significant numbers are appointed to rural and remote areas. Graduate teachers who are not successful in gaining a targeted recruitment position join others on a waiting list for employment. As a result

of the transfer system the majority of new vacancies again open up in rural and remote and other difficult to staff areas. To help encourage teachers to take up these positions the incentive of a priority transfer to an area of their choice after a minimum service period is used. While new graduates are generally not appointed to desirable areas of the state, a large number eventually move to such areas after using their priority transfer.

In Western Australia most vacancies also occur in the country and other difficult to staff areas. New teachers are initially appointed as temporary teachers on two or three year contracts, which are subsequently converted to permanent positions after two years of successful teaching. However, this strategy is not sufficiently effective as many young teachers do not take these positions as there is no guarantee of a return to Perth. Due to Western Australia's high population concentration in the south-east corner of the state, the transfer system is locked up by people staying in favourable locations. This is the reason older teachers don't apply for promotions positions in country schools. Without supportive policy and centralised administration to overcome the prospect of being trapped in a rural school, the historical path to achieving permanency via a rural appointment is not likely to remain a successful strategy for staffing rural schools.

In Western Australia, a new entity, the Remote Teaching Service, was created in 1996-7 under a conservative government which was trying to reduce the influence of teacher unions and as a strategy to staff difficult to staff schools. In this instance the Coalition government packaged a number of initiatives (that the State School Teachers Union of Western Australia [SSTUWA] had been campaigning for for years) as a workplace agreement and then took the difficult to staff schools out of the enterprise bargaining agreement. This entity employed teachers on individual contracts and successfully eroded the working conditions of teachers on these contracts over a number of years. This was divisive, with some teachers already in these schools refusing to sign up and subsequently being discriminated against, and temporary teachers being displaced by teachers on individual contracts. After a sustained campaign by the union and consistent membership activity highlighting the inequities between the new agreement and old enterprise agreement, the outgoing conservative government allowed the Remote Teaching Service schools back into the enterprise agreement. However, they are still a separate section within the Western Australian award. An increase in union membership coverage and a sustained campaign to fight the injustices of the award conditions of the individual contracts helped defeat the agenda, as union members, teachers employed under Remote Teaching Service contracts and the public began to see that individual contracts did not live up to what they were promised to be.

There are 39 remote schools in Western Australia covered by the Remote Teaching Service. These schools are in areas without other government services, few houses, generator power and with an Aboriginal enrolment of at least 80 per cent. The education department argues that packaging a range of conditions has worked as they are getting more applicants. This is positive as teachers are choosing to take up these positions which should result in better quality staff for schools, and improve student outcomes. However, there is potentially another explanation for the increased number of

applicants, as it also guarantees them an opportunity to move back to a more desirable location. In addition to the Remote Teaching Service, Western Australia has a Difficult to Staff category which generally applies to schools without significant Aboriginal enrolments but high turnover due to less infrastructure and services. In both categories of rural and remote schools there doesn't need to be a clear vacancy as a teacher can be appointed to fill a number of temporary vacancies. This helps teachers access permanency which is again the major motivating factor.

“It appears that a number of jurisdictions actually discourage mature age beginning teachers from taking up such positions.”

The previous West Australian government also attempted a similar anti union tactic with school administrators. In this instance it separated administrators from teachers, offering them unique conditions and an extra five per cent to sign non unionised workplace agreements. While these administrators' workplace agreements are also now reabsorbed into the general enterprise agreement it was only the result of union policy not to support those teachers who took up their individual contracts and exploiting inconsistencies between the workplace agreements and the union negotiated enterprise agreements.

The experience of Western Australia shows that rural and remote schools can effectively be covered as separate sections of general teacher awards and that there may be some benefit in having separate sections to give these schools a separate identity in differentiated awards. Such an approach would allow a clear package of incentives and general working conditions to be presented to help attract teachers and overcome any systematic ambiguity in relation to the specific working conditions in rural and remote schools. In order to maintain support, unions need to be aware of the range of issues and situations faced by the membership and be flexible in the support they offer to specific sections of the workforce. While there was initially a fragmentation of membership due to these changes the SSTUWA managed to bring the groups back in by working to represent the specific interests of different groups of its members and negating the temptation for individual workplace agreements.

Despite the large number of openings for initial permanent appointments in rural and remote areas, it appears that a number of jurisdictions actually discourage mature age beginning teachers from taking up such positions. As mature age teachers are generally secure and established in their homes and lives, governments appear not to be interested in moving them to rural areas, especially as figures in Western Australia suggest that it can cost up to \$10,000 to move established teachers to and from rural areas. If incentives are structured to *encourage* movement in and out of rural areas this is understandable. However, if the intent were to *attract* people and *retain* them, mature age graduates may actually be a great potential long term resource if they choose to settle with their families in non metropolitan areas.

The Northern Territory arguably has the nation's most isolated schools. Only a few schools outside Darwin and Alice Springs are accessible by sealed road, with the majority only accessible by dirt road. Furthermore, in the northern half of the territory it is not possible to drive anywhere in the wet season.

There are approximately 200,000 people living in the Northern Territory with Alice Springs and Darwin accounting for more than 115,000 of these. Education is the biggest sector of the public service with a workforce of about 2300.

The Northern Territory has many homeland and outstation schools in remote indigenous communities. These schools work on the basis of a teacher visiting approximately once a week and an often unqualified homeland teacher staffing the school the rest of the time. As communities often move around their land the school moves around with them. For this reason it is difficult to provide a purpose built centre or even leave resources, with some schools being nothing more than bush shelters. The teacher is appointed to a group (called a 'hub' by the Northern Territory department) of schools with indigenous assistant teachers responsible for the day to day activity at each individual school. The teacher helps develop programs and holds formal lessons when he/she visits. Visits depend on weather and road conditions, with teachers travelling in government owned vehicles. Some teachers are even flown into a centre for a period of time and then operate out of that centre. Teachers at one stage were given quad bikes for transport. With these unique conditions it certainly takes a special type of person to want to work there. These homeland schools are generally located in communities which have moved back to the land to live a more traditional lifestyle. Some have opted for small schools that have resources and permanent structures, however, others have left these permanent community abodes. In other areas of the Northern Territory, with more sedentary communities which don't have homeland schools, there is often a group school which has a principal who is on the road visiting a number of 1–3 teacher schools, which are nominally run by a senior teacher. Support teachers are then appointed to this group school and they travel between the various school locations as well.

Due to their small size, isolation and unique community circumstances, teaching in these schools is often not seen as a rewarding career as teachers are often also expected to be experts in all fields. There is also a tendency to get involved in and distracted by other community issues which can impact upon their ability to be effective teachers. There are no secondary schools outside urban centres, with secondary age children enrolled at isolated schools being called post primary. There is occasionally a secondary teacher in larger schools, however, the schools are classed and staffed as primary schools. Consequently, most secondary education is accessed through 'open education' by a range of delivery modes.

Achieving permanency in the Northern Territory used to be subject to completing a time on probation. However, in recognition of the difficulty in attracting staff, teachers are appointed permanently upon arrival at their new school. The Northern Territory education department will usually take a gamble when there is a short term vacancy and place a teacher temporarily in the vacancy while giving them permanent employment status. Once the current vacancy is again filled by a substantive appointee on their return to service the 'temporary' permanent teacher then takes up a further in-school permanent vacancy. Due to the high rate of transfer and resignations, this approach has generally proved successful.

After examining the situation in the Northern Territory it seems strange to think of some Victorian schools as remote and difficult to staff. However,

urbanisation of populations in Australia does create areas of Victoria to which it is difficult to attract teachers. As with Western Australia, employment practices under a former conservative government affected Victoria as well. Teachers were moved from tenured appointments to contract positions, with teachers being forced to sign contracts if they wished to continue employment. However, to attract teachers to positions in difficult to staff locations the offer of ongoing employment rather than a contract was the incentive. A change of government has resulted in a return to permanent positions and reliance on applications for these jobs in difficult to staff schools as an entry into employment. Rural schools in Victoria do receive additional funding in their global budget, however, there are no specific guidelines to define how this money must be spent. Due to the lack of rigorous accountability this funding can be used to employ more teachers or to offer incentives rather than educational measures for overcoming the costs of isolation and associated educational disadvantage for which the money is intended.

Relaxed accountability requirements mean that schools are able to divert funds not spent on education programs or resources and can either save for major programs or even offer special inducements to staff. This is clearly against the principle of an equitable education and the purpose for which the money is provided — that is, overcoming the educational disadvantages of the present cohort of students. Similarly, schools in more affluent areas with a capacity to raise extra funds are able to offer inducements including higher salaries and accommodation to attract teachers.

In South Australia, permanency is also the biggest incentive to take up a position in rural and remote areas. An independent review of the incentive system designed to promote retention found that people wanted the cash up front rather than after staying a period of time, and a more flexible approach to which incentives they could choose. Many graduates, prior to appointment, stated they did not intend remaining in these areas more than five years and certainly not for the seven required to access a range of incentives. This lack of long term commitment without having worked in these areas can also be interpreted as an argument about negative stereotypes of rural teaching which need to be overcome by some form of pre-service familiarity; this reinforces the argument that teaching conditions need to improve in these schools if teachers are to be attracted and retained.

Offers of permanent appointments are used in South Australia to fill vacancies of at least a year as it is not seen as worthwhile to relocate people for less than a year and have them leave after a short term contract expires and there are always going to be other vacancies in which to place the person. To help attract people to rural and remote schools a sliding pay scale applies to teachers in these schools and they move up two increments a year rather than one.

In South Australia, the department appoints staff to areas where a vacancy exists in late term 1 and term 2 where vacancies are known to be coming up. Final year trainees list areas where they are willing to teach and graduates are placed accordingly. Graduates can specifically apply for these positions and choose from a number of schools with such vacancies, mainly in rural areas. In 2002, 48 offers were made with 23 to specific schools and the other 25 to areas. In term 3 other vacancies are advertised for which teachers already employed or others deemed employable can

apply. Teachers access permanency in metropolitan areas via the country, with most metropolitan vacancies filled by people with country service.

A similar principle also applies in Tasmania where permanency and a later move to a desirable location are the main attractants used to fill vacancies in less desirable areas. Teachers and eligible graduates in Tasmania apply for vacancies when they begin their career, and as is often the case, most vacancies occur in less desirable areas — in Tasmania this is the west coast. This means that new teachers are appointed and achieve permanency by filling vacancies for which others didn't apply. In time they are able to access a transfer and incentives which are aimed to make the decision to accept a position a little easier. Deregulation in the early 1990s in Tasmania resulted in about 24 per cent of staff being temporary. This reduced the attractiveness of rural and remote service, which relied on transfer incentives for permanent staff as a major way of attracting teachers. Under the present Labor government only 13 per cent of teachers are on temporary appointments, perhaps partly as a response to the difficulty of attracting staff to isolated schools.

Ability to transfer appears to be a key factor in attracting teachers to rural and remote schools in many states. Queensland has used people's desire for permanency by relocating newly appointed teachers in desirable locations who have not done country service. In Queensland a teacher who has received an initial appointment to a desirable location must be prepared to be moved after one or two years. While it may seem fair to positively discriminate in favour of someone who has completed country service by ensuring vacancies in more favourable areas it is also very disruptive for those affected. Due to this disruption or unwillingness to relocate, many resign and settle for supply work. While rural and remote schools would benefit by having teachers with previous teaching experience, as they are often staffed by relatively inexperienced teachers, these teachers must want to go there to be most effective. It would certainly be better to initially appoint people to rural and remote schools than later force them out there if they want to keep their jobs.

With an impending shortage, reliance on people's desire for permanency will simply not be enough to ensure adequate staffing levels in difficult to staff schools as more and more jobs open up in desirable locations.

It will become simpler for teachers to work as casuals while waiting to receive an offer of a placement to their liking. Indeed, this is already happening in many areas of the country. However, it may be that jobs in preferred locations are taken by experienced teachers transferring or applying from rural and remote areas, so that the only openings for beginning teachers remain in rural and remote areas. While it would be tempting to advocate that mandatory country service should be reintroduced as a staffing policy, such a move would actually be counter to the philosophy of attracting teachers who want to be in these schools and who will consequently make a significant contribution to them. There needs to be a balance between the present systems of transfer points and incentive

“Teacher unions need to be mindful that to increase the rate of pay for casual staff too much will discourage the acceptance of a permanent job in a less desirable location.”

transfers as a means of attracting staff looking for a permanent appointment, with recruitment and staffing policies which aim to attract teachers who see such appointments as desirable in themselves.

There is a critical problem in relation to casual teachers, as most incentives to either attract or retain do not apply to them. With an increased potential for non-permanent teachers to live on casual work in preferred areas at a time of teacher shortage, there will be greater difficulty attracting permanent teachers to rural and remote areas — but even greater problems in attracting casuals. Teacher unions need to be mindful that to increase the rate of pay for casual staff too much will discourage the acceptance of a permanent job in a less desirable location. Such a scenario may also lead to the establishment of contract positions by stealth as increased long service blocks and other short term vacancies in preferred locations are occupied by casual teachers. Structural priority must be given to permanent employment, combined with a statewide transfer and staffing system to ensure equity for rural and remote areas. Just as some jurisdictions permanently appoint teachers in a rural or remote area to cover long service leave position, surely a teacher can be transferred from a rural or remote area to cover similar vacancies in desirable locations.

Costs

Being appointed to rural and remote communities brings significant economical disadvantages for beginning teachers. The costs of relocating, transport and setting up living arrangements prior to entering on duty can prove prohibitive. To help overcome the initial costs, some form of accelerated payment or allowance should be considered. In addition to initial costs, living in isolated communities can have other negative financial effects because of the higher costs of goods, fuel and food. Most jurisdictions recognise this cost issue and have introduced monetary incentives to compensate for these increased costs. However, a study into the attraction and retention of professionals to regional areas found that most government allowances do not offset the extra costs of living in these areas.

In many states and territories, initial travel and moving costs are not paid for. Whereas teachers generally receive a professional removalist paid for by the department upon transfer after completing their minimum service period, there is no such allowance for

newly appointed teachers. Instead, they often receive only a minor per-kilometre allowance, as is the case in NSW, which barely covers fuel and the hire of a small truck or trailer. Considering that many graduates may live in their own accommodation out of the family home and that there are increased numbers of mature age graduates or long serving casual teachers with their own families and homes, the prospect of paying for their own removal to take up a rural appointment may be prohibitive. The estimate from Western Australia that it can cost up to \$10,000 to move a mature age graduate is one reason why such teachers are discouraged from taking up these initial postings. This is yet another example of economics taking precedence over educational considerations.

Gone are the days when beginning teachers were

young graduates leaving home for the first time. Unlike teachers who are being transferred, newly appointed teachers also do not receive any reimbursement of costs associated with selling and buying a house. These amount to significant economic disincentives that need to be addressed if initial appointments to a rural vacancy are to be considered attractive.

Initial employment wages and conditions do not also take into account other significant economic pressures experienced by beginning teachers, such as the costs related to the purchasing and insuring of an appropriate car and setting up a house. Teachers appointed to metropolitan locations are able to utilise public transport, purchase a cheap second hand car and may even live at home. None of these are applicable for teachers appointed to rural and remote locations. There is no public transport and travelling long distances with the risk of hitting wildlife in a cheap second hand car is not safe. In reality, many rural locations require powerful cars, bull bars and even four wheel drive vehicles for safety — all of which amount to a significant loan for beginning teachers to repay on top of their HECS debt. The only states that recognised the need for appropriate vehicles as an issue were South Australia (which cited it as a reason for providing monetary incentives) and the Northern Territory (which provides departmental vehicles in some locations).

In addition to transportation costs there are expenses associated with setting up a home. Fortunately, in most states some furnished accommodation is provided to help allay this need. In these instances accommodation with refrigerator, table and chairs, lounge, washing facilities and basic beds are available. However, teachers generally need to provide other utilities such as pots and pans, cutlery, crockery, bedding, microwave and television. Queensland responds to this in many locations by providing a central store of pots, pans and so on, to help new teachers in the early months.

As previously mentioned, most states and territories have a professional isolation allowance that recognises the isolation factor. In the Northern Territory a \$3000 a year bonus was tried as an incentive to attract staff to isolated schools. However, this only had a marginal effect, as people didn't consider it or the standard \$600 a year allowance enough compensation to consider such an appointment.

In South Australia, incentives to attract teachers to rural and remote schools are looked at as measures to overcome disadvantage. These measures comprise travel time, compensating for the increased cost of living and accelerated car depreciation. The state is divided into five zones with each attracting a different remote allowance. These were accessible on an application basis but are now automated, based on school location and paid fortnightly. Basing payments on location means that short term contract teachers also receive the benefit. Unlike most other states, incentives in South Australia increase each year in line with the Consumer Price Index. As this stops the comparative eroding of benefits, it is certainly an approach for other jurisdictions to consider. The new South Australian scheme also includes a \$600 payment to assist teachers setting up on appointment, as well as paid removals. This benefit is also extended to one year contract positions which would certainly help people to consider such appointments favourably.

Incentive payments in Tasmania kick in when teachers take up an appointment and improve with retention. Along with permanency this allowance is

“Queensland responds to this in many locations by providing a central store of pots, pans and so on, to help new teachers in the early months.”

seen as an incentive to take up such a position. To help newly appointed teachers, removal costs are paid and accommodation subsidised. The economic position of many graduates is also recognised in Queensland where teachers appointed to rural and remote schools have their travel and removal costs paid. Some are even flown to more remote settlements or islands at departmental expense.

In both NSW and Victoria, teachers also receive some form of remote allowance to compensate for the increased cost of living in isolated areas. However, as income increases so does the rate of HECS repayments so they are not such a great benefit to graduate appointments. The payment by the department of HECS for teachers accepting positions in schools that attract significant allowances would overcome this anomaly. There is also a problem relating to the tax on allowances under fringe benefit legislation. To take advantage of this scenario some private schools are classed as rebate-able employers, whereas public schools are classed as public and not for profit. As a result, where there are remote communities served by private schools, their teachers can get better tax rebates than public schools teachers in the same town.

School leadership

Particular difficulty is often experienced in attracting suitable executive staff to rural and remote locations. It is quite common for positions to be advertised more than once or for advertised positions to only attract one or two applicants. If a key factor in the retention of teachers is a rewarding professional experience then the provision of effective leadership is essential. Many rural and remote areas are described as "NIDA districts" as most executives are either acting in the position or in their first appointment in that level of position. As the Vinson inquiry noted, experienced staff who are still classroom teachers in their 40s and with dependants are unlikely to accept a transfer to difficult to staff areas (which include rural and remote schools). To encourage them to do so would require some incentives to make it worthwhile and they would need the right of return to their school after a period of time, including removal expenses. Similar incentives are required to make leadership positions in such locations attractive.

To provide effective school leadership many jurisdictions provide principals' packages to attract experienced leaders to their areas. These packages are in addition to the other incentives and retention benefits to be outlined in the remainder of this report. In NSW, the packages can include free housing, increased salaries, a guaranteed transfer and a department vehicle.

In Western Australia the Rural Aspirant Program was devised to attract principals to towns which previously had difficulty attracting them. This program overcomes the fear of not being able to return to their previous locality after accepting such a position. Under this program, a new principal in these areas gets a two-year trial in the position. If, after two years, they enjoy the experience they are appointed to the position substantively, however, their previous position is held for them and they can return to it after the first or second year if the rural appointment was less than satisfying. This program has been successful in seeing positions which previously received no applicants receive many as the risk of being "stuck" has been removed. It is now more difficult to obtain one of these positions, as there is a range of high quality applicants. Under this scheme, 30 principals have been appointed with only one dropping out.

In Victoria, there is a classification of "experienced teacher with responsibility" (ETWR) for which only experienced teachers can apply. The successful applicant for such a position receives an allowance and a number of specific duties in the subject to which the position is allocated. With few applicants for rural appointments and the potential quality implications of this for the schools and students, any method which successfully encourages experienced teachers to apply or which retains others is a benefit that should be considered by other education departments.

Attracting and retaining experienced teachers is also an issue in South Australia. To help overcome the shortage of experienced staff, principals in South Australia may have their rent reimbursed (on a claim basis) after and can apply for study leave. However, South Australian principals are employed on three to seven year contracts and then need to apply for another position. There is no principals' transfer system that would encourage applicants to difficult to staff areas. An obvious problem related to contracts is whether such appointees are enacting real leadership and change or implementing short-term projects to "sell" for their next contract. It is questionable whether such an approach results in long term rural educational development.

In addition to principals, country schools in South Australia with two or more teachers have a 'key teacher' classification. There are generally few applicants for these positions in rural areas and remote schools. Therefore, in more remote areas with a lot of young teachers, a second year teacher can jump straight to this position, remunerated at one step above the top classroom teacher level. This may have quality implications but it is attractive for ambitious young teachers willing to take up such appointments. A similar situation exists in rural and remote Western Australian schools. There is little incentive for experienced teachers to apply for executive positions in these locations resulting in acting positions in which young teachers can gain administrative experience.

The Queensland Remote Area Relieving Placement Scheme was initiated to overcome a lack of experienced teachers and professional role models. Experienced teachers go to the more remote schools for one or two years while their position is retained in their original school. Their removal costs and accommodation are paid for and they receive all the incentive payments that the remote placement attracts. These positions are particularly attractive for teachers looking for a change but not a permanent move, especially before retirement and/or after their children have left home. Added to the financial rewards is the recognition of quality teaching career experience and in the exchange of ideas and mentoring for newly appointed teachers.

Indigenous teachers and staff

Specific measures to attract indigenous teachers are also needed. Many of these initiatives were discussed in the previous chapter but departments need to recognise that attracting trained indigenous teachers into the classroom can be difficult as they are often head hunted by other organisations; trained indigenous teachers are such a valuable resource that other government departments offer more money and better conditions to win their services. To help overcome this, employment conditions need to be improved and clear career paths developed to attract and retain indigenous teachers.

An effective initiative to develop career paths and

help improve outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is the Partners for Success Program in Queensland. This program aims to attract trained and experienced teachers into Aboriginal communities to ensure that communities' cultural needs are being addressed. The program works in conjunction with industry and a whole of government approach that improves a range of services for communities. With a focus on employing indigenous people in schools, it recognises that indigenous workers are important role models for indigenous students. While it was initially trialled in 38 Queensland schools, it has now been extended to all state schools. A program like this is beneficial to the community and in attracting staff. As the educational and social conditions of the school improve it becomes a more attractive appointment.

Due to often high levels of violence in some remote communities, and the general lack of police presence and crime prevention, personal safety can be a significant issue. The Northern Territory zero tolerance of violence towards teachers can result in the whole school staff being moved or even evacuated if there is an incident. This creates unique problems, for while such actions may be necessary, they also undermine the social and educational development of a community. A whole of government approach, as employed in Queensland and also to varying degrees in NSW, is essential. It is essential for community development but also to provide safe environments for school staff.

Any warm body?

A problem experienced in remote West Australian, Queensland and Northern Territory schools, especially in communities with significant Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander populations, is the prevalence of "neophyte missionaries" or teachers who are only there to get the benefit of the incentives. The provision of incentives amplified the expectation that someone will accept the job, if only to have a couple of years' fun and then get the move to where they really want to be. The prospect of good money for a few years fishing in northern Australia before beginning a serious life in a preferred location may indeed be attractive to some. However,

it doesn't meet the educational needs of students and rights of rural and remote communities to quality education. During the interviews conducted for the preparation of this report, there were many instances of problems resulting from people treating

their time in some of these schools as an adventure and not as professional appointments with responsibilities and as examples for the community. There was also significant concern about a number of neophytes in predominantly indigenous communities who see their role as "saving" a culture and somewhat inconsistently "spreading the word of god". This then becomes their primary function rather than educating to a set curriculum. Alcohol free (dry) communities in northern Australia are particularly difficult to staff as many potential recruits are reluctant to accept positions in dry communities due to the limited ability to develop social relationships.

The West Australian model, similar to the NSW Targeted Graduate Program, is a good way to fill rural vacancies with appropriate teachers. Students who exhibit the qualities of quality rural teachers are identified, interviewed and subsequently offered jobs in rural and remote communities. The Vinson Inquiry into the Provision of Public Education in NSW recommended a similar approach in relation to trainee teachers who demonstrate an interest in Aboriginal education. Under this recommendation, these teachers would be identified and offered the opportunity to work with a practicing teacher as their mentor and subsequently take up a position in a school with a high indigenous population.

The importance of the selection of appropriate teachers for rural and remote service has also been recognised by the Northern Territory where all applicants for remote service are interviewed at some stage to ascertain their appropriateness to work in these communities. While the present practices in Western Australia and the Northern Territory may help ascertain teacher appropriateness, there do not appear to be any specific criteria for assessing this appropriateness. Instead, the system relies on an impression given during an interview or even over the phone.

There appears to be no specific selection policies or practices in place to match rural teaching experience, expertise or personality traits to applicants for rural or remote teaching positions. This absence of specific selection criteria appears to indicate a lack of commitment to quality education in rural schools by the various education departments around Australia. Their lack of action in this area makes them complicit in allowing neophyte missionaries and part time teacher adventurers to put personal interest or missionary fervours above educational outcomes. Selection criteria need not be extensive or too difficult a bar to jump, but they should ensure that applicants are committed to education. Everyone should be able to enjoy the special lifestyle features many of these settings offer, such as great fishing, but it cannot be at the expense of the primary purpose for being there.

A successful approach in South Australia in Aboriginal communities is the offering of special packages to encourage older teachers, even near retirement, to work in indigenous schools. This operates in a similar way to the Queensland Partnerships for Success program with the deliberate application and selection of teachers for the job. An advantage of this approach, and one reason attributed to its success, is that people know what they are getting themselves into; they have a better attitude towards the community and its students and can talk to the elders as equals. Both these programs fulfil the dual roles of providing appropriate staff as well as providing educational leadership in these schools. To avoid appointing the "missionary zealots", a selection process involving an interview precedes any appointment.

The trial of a separate entity, the Remote Teaching Service in Western Australia, highlighted problems related to offering individual contracts for positions. It was suggested in the interviews that many of the contracts were not taken up by quality teachers, but by those looking for a job, including a number of recently arrived Asian and Indian teachers who were not used to the context of the Australian school environment, let alone rural communities.

The anecdotal evidence suggests reasons that teachers are attracted to teaching in the remote teaching service include: the money to clear debts; the desire

"There appears to be no specific selection policies or practices in place to match rural teaching experience, expertise or personality traits to applicants for rural or remote teaching positions."

to have some fun and adventure; an interest in teaching Aboriginal students; and teachers near retirement looking to make a few extra dollars. It was suggested in the interviews that the department discouraged the appointment of older teachers due to possible health issues and that they know too much about their employment rights. This would suggest that contracts were aimed at the young and impressionable looking to begin their career and gain experience for future appointments in an area of their choice. Such an agenda accentuates the more negative aspects of human nature where individuals look out for their own self interest and consequently undermine the working conditions of others.

These factors appear also in teachers applying for rural and remote Northern Territory and far north Queensland schools. One big advantage of many of these locations for some people is that there is nothing to spend money on, with dry communities resulting in further savings (as you can't buy alcohol in those communities).

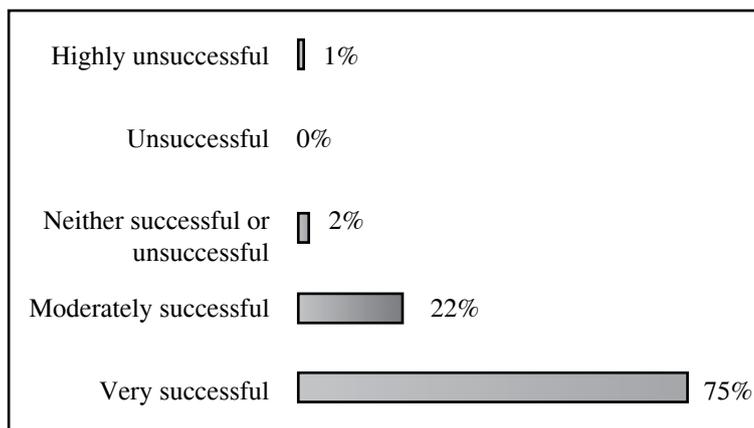
There is a similar concern in Victoria, and undoubtedly other jurisdictions, about the quality of people who accept positions in difficult to staff areas or any other as a path to permanency. This probable appeal to accept a position for the sake of gaining employment is accentuated by systems which operate on a form of contract or initial individual application for permanency and executive appointments. Those applying for a position in a difficult to staff area may not represent quality applicants but instead reflect the lack of interest in positions from quality applicants. A reliance on the market clearly results in a market solution where schools with the most to offer get the most applicants. To overcome this, it is essential that employment practices and conditions be developed that encourage a range of teachers to apply and which ensure that our rural and remote schools are not just temporary stepping stones to preferred positions or locations.

HECS and scholarships

Respondents to the survey considered the reduction in or fully paid HECS as extremely important in attracting people to rural and remote schools. As shown in figure 14, 75 per cent of respondents considered this approach to be very successful while 98 per cent considered it to be a moderately to highly successful approach. Supporting this result, of eight potential incentives, 55 per cent of survey respondents ranked fully paid HECS in their top 3 incentives, while 32 per cent ranked it as their highest potential incentive.

The introduction of HECS and its subsequent expansion has had a significant impact on students choosing some subjects. For example, the recent federal review of teaching and teacher education found that the higher HECS costs associated with science, mathematics and technology units discouraged many students from taking up a teaching career in these subjects. Indeed it can take up to eight years for a newly appointed teacher to pay off their accumulated HECS debt. While this situation has reduced demand for some teaching subjects and had negative economic impacts such as delaying purchasing a home it does create a good opportunity for authorities wishing to recruit teachers to rural and remote areas.

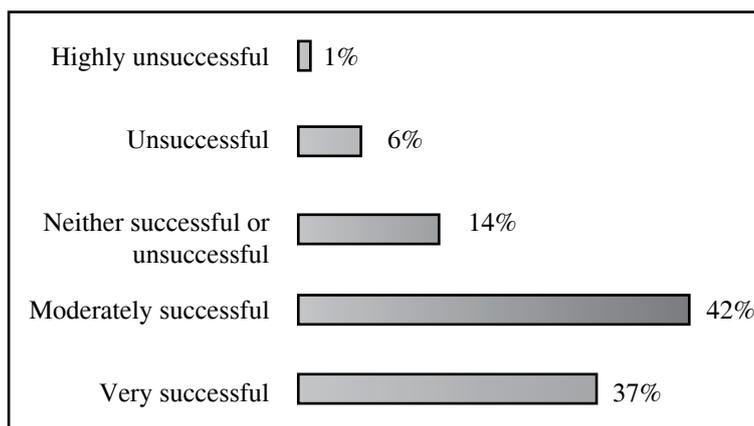
Figure 14: How successful would a reduction in or fully paid HECS be in attracting teachers to rural and remote schools?



One such way to achieve this is to directly pay HECS for a contract of a minimum period, as is successfully done in Western Australia and Queensland. Alternatively, a HECS rebate could be applied for service in rural and remote schools as briefly mentioned by the Vinson inquiry. Potentially, this could involve a rebate for each year of completed service or a rebate upon the completion of a minimum service period, where repayments are suspended until this time is reached.

Bonded teacher training scholarships are having a positive impact in Queensland. As figure 12 shows, bonded teacher training scholarships could have a positive impact in attracting teachers. In the chapter "Effective advertising", these were seen as a method to ensure graduates are aiming for rural areas. The payment of HECS could be included as part of these scholarships. Similarly, final year scholarships could be offered where students are guaranteed a position in a rural and remote school at the completion of their training. This differs from the scholarships offered upon entry to training but they would complement this scheme. It allows staffing authorities to target certain difficult to staff schools and subject areas on a needs basis and works as a beginning service incentive for graduates to take up a position in a rural or remote school. As mentioned previously, targeted programs such as the payment of HECS and scholarships have been more successful if biased to people from these areas as they have a higher probability of increased retention.

Figure 12: How successful are bonded teacher training scholarships in attracting teachers to rural and remote schools?



When discussing issues of HECS it needs to be mentioned that any increase in monetary incentives for teachers to take up positions in rural and remote schools leads to an increase in the HECS repayment threshold. Programs such as that in NSW where teachers receive cash retention bonuses after completing a minimum service period actually mean the teacher pays more of this bonus to HECS. It is therefore important to consider whether any such schemes should be quarantined from HECS repayments.

The payment of HECS could easily be linked to pre-service scholarships or scholarships awarded in the final year of teacher training as a bond for a guaranteed period of service. It is these final year scholarships that are the focus here, as the scholarships discussed in the chapter "Effective advertising" are seen as ways of attracting people into teacher training, not as attractants to rural service. While whole of course scholarships would similarly be linked to bonded service this latter variety provides flexibility and can meet changing demands. The most attractive part of many scholarships does, however, appear to be the opportunity for permanent employment on graduation.

In Tasmania there is an example of a scholarship system that only applies to final year graduates in areas of shortage, and which guarantees a probationary job in an area of shortage with recipients beginning their career one increment higher than those not on a scholarship. There are also similar scholarships offered in Queensland of about \$2000 cash, with fully paid HECS, and recipients beginning on a salary level above the rest in return for being bonded to a school. The recipients cannot, however, nominate a school of their choice.

In Western Australia, there are a number of cadetships offered for Aboriginal teachers, however, this initiative appears to be small. Figures from December 2002 indicate that there were six intern teachers and 10 cadetships, with the program having a high attrition rate. The program is aimed at training Aboriginal teacher aides to be teachers through Curtin University, similar to the Queensland RATEP model discussed in the chapter "Effective advertising". The Curtin University program reduces a four year degree by recognising experience in schools as one-year-equivalent of prior learning and reducing the remaining three years into a two year course to be completed while working as a teacher aide. These trainee teachers do a four week residential and complete the rest of the course online on laptops with some tutorial support. These students have their HECS paid for, and upon completion of this training these Aboriginal teachers are contracted to work in rural and remote schools and achieve permanency with the department after successfully completing a year as an intern.

There is, however, a question as to the quality of this arrangement. Does a two year course and prior learning really equal a four year degree or is this just another example of having lower standards for our rural areas? There has reportedly been some objection from fully trained graduate Aboriginal teachers who don't wish to have their qualifications devalued. If the teachers in this accelerated course provide successful role models it is hoped that this system of training teachers would be expanded.

In addition to offering trainee teacher scholarships there are a few examples of departments retraining people from other industries. This often comes about as a quick fix to a lack of teachers in some subjects. Western Australia, for example, offers packages where

people with a mining background or degree in mining geology are retrained in a one year course, with their HECS paid. These re-trainees get \$10,000–\$12,000 for one year of study and are then bonded for two years to country schools as permanent appointments. As one year doesn't really match a four year teaching degree and these teachers are often placed in small schools without much support, there is a high failure rate. In recognition of this, South Australia doesn't retrain applicants from industry as they regard it as costing too much for a limited return.

Similarly, in NSW the Accelerated Teacher Training program targets people with related qualifications in areas of demand to train as teachers. This program recognises the skills people bring from industry and fast tracks participants in an 18 month program. Participants in this program have all courses and textbooks paid for and are then guaranteed an appointment in difficult to staff locations.

Some scholarships can work against attracting teachers to rural and remote schools, as in the case of a number of mining companies in Western Australian which give scholarships to the children of their employees to attend private boarding schools. This happens with the knowledge and support of the department of mining which is interested in getting mining professions to these areas. Such an occurrence clearly indicates that any approach to improving the staffing of these schools needs to happen with a coordinated, whole of government approach to rural development and public education.

Housing

The provision of appropriate housing which is cost effective for employees is extremely important in attracting teachers to rural and remote communities. Many small communities either have no or a very limited housing rental market. It is for this reason that all education jurisdictions offer some form of housing for teachers in their most isolated locations. However, this accommodation needs to be relatively cheap as many teachers newly appointed to rural and remote locations are teachers just entering the profession at the lower end of the salary range. There is also a need to ensure that accommodation has appropriate security as a number of rural communities have some degree of social and economic dislocation and new teachers will be near the top of the income range in that community and seen as targets for burglars. Appropriate cooling and heating are also required to deal with the climate extremes of many rural and remote areas.

Housing subsidies are extremely important as many rural communities have inflated rental prices, either due to lack of supply or inflated rental costs due to mining company rental subsidies. Market prices, set to compensate for the costs of building accommodation, can result in rental prices above that of the average for the community, or similar to other large and desirable metropolitan centres. The provision of a subsidy is therefore essential, both to reflect the 'real' low rental cost in that community and to act as a real incentive to move there. As the NSW Teacher Housing Authority's annual report states, its mission is "to provide an economic, effective and efficient housing service to teachers in areas where the private rental market does not meet their needs". Respondents overwhelmingly saw housing subsidies as a benefit to attracting teachers. 72 per cent of respondents rated these measures as either highly successful or very successful with only two per cent undecided and none of the opinion

that they would not be successful. Similarly, 37 per cent of respondents rated access to quality housing in their top 3 of 8 potential incentives to attract teachers to rural or remote communities.

In light of these figures, the recent decision by the NSW Government to dramatically increase housing subsidies was a very positive move. This decision saw the standard 20 per cent subsidy increased to 90 per cent for the most isolated schools and 70 per cent for other marginally less isolated locations. These measures were supported by Sui-Linn White's 2000 Anna Stewart Report which found that a number of teachers were concerned about the cost, standard and availability of teacher housing. One respondent was quoted as saying that "some teachers might extend their period of country service if it would improve rather than lessen their financial prospects".

In NSW and Queensland, teacher housing is managed by a separate authority or directorate dedicated to this purpose. The NSW Teacher Housing Authority's handbook states: "the object of the Authority [is] to provide suitable and adequate housing accommodation for government school and TAFE teachers. Our services are directed mainly at areas of the state where there is an inadequate private rental market and housing for teachers must be provided to ensure that schools and TAFE colleges are adequately staffed."

The separate authority approach is more desirable than the Northern Territory or West Australian model where teacher housing is part of the larger housing department. An even less desirable model is the Tasmanian approach where housing is owned and managed by individual schools which results in the particular needs of teachers and rural and remote schools not being taken into consideration. Teacher housing needs to be managed with the contextual needs of teachers and schools in mind, to ensure that adequate housing is available in developing communities and that the living environments of teachers are conducive to working at home and relaxing prior to another stressful day.

"In, Tasmania, in effect, repairing a hot water system competes with the need to buy new textbooks."

When there is no other government housing in these communities there is little attention paid to maintenance and when there is a whole public service approach the needs of teachers are seen as just another competing demand; there is no personal knowledge of the quality and state of the properties. In state housing arrangements, maintenance and development money set aside by governments are thinly spread and money raised from the rent of the properties not dedicated to future teacher housing and maintenance but used across the range of government housing. In NSW, the Teacher Housing Authority applies a debt reduction strategy to the management of its dwellings. This has meant that the authority is disposing of more residences than it is constructing. A similar approach is occurring in other parts of Australia, with housing authorities being forced to sell older stock or stock in supposedly larger towns to help finance the development and maintenance of others. To overcome this reduction of housing stock, governments need to adequately fund housing authorities so that a quality service can be maintained.

In Tasmania, teacher housing is owned and managed by the school with the costs of any maintenance or repairs coming out of the school budget. In effect, repairing a hot water system competes with the need to buy new textbooks.

All states and territories do provide some form of furnished accommodation. Furnished dwellings are predominantly occupied by teachers in their first appointment and casual teachers. Many rural and remote communities are heavily reliant upon these groups of teachers to adequately staff their schools. Therefore, providing basic furniture is important in attracting young teachers who may not have a house full of furniture. Similarly, casual teachers filling a short term vacancy, or teachers who do not wish to move all their furniture, are able to take up positions in these locations.

Not providing basic furniture would make these schools even harder to staff. In recognition of this, the NSW Teachers Federation successfully campaigned to reverse a decision by the Teacher Housing Authority to remove furniture. A survey conducted by the Walgett Teachers Association in 2000, after the plan to remove furniture was announced, found that 65 per cent of respondents said that provision of a furnished unit was important in their willingness to accept a position. It would be unacceptable to think of new teachers turning up in an isolated location to an empty unit. They would have no fridge, no washing machine, no lounge, no table, no chairs, no bed and no desk. Instead these teachers would need to purchase and transport furniture from a capital city or other large centre at their own expense with money they have not yet begun to earn. The Walgett report found this requirement would act as a significant disincentive to accepting a position in these locations. 'Cost effectiveness' has been used to justify not having furniture but the alternative costs of having to find other ways to encourage teachers to these communities would certainly outweigh any potential short term benefit.

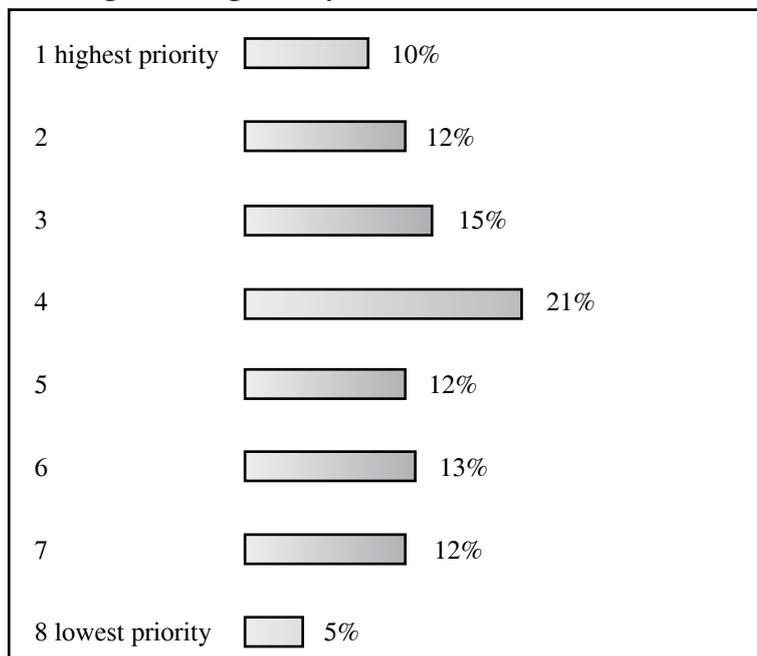
Most jurisdictions have rental subsidies to overcome unrealistic rents and as an incentive to attract people to rural or remote locations. Rather than being seen as an incentive, rental subsidies should be classed as a necessity as the majority of teachers are not going to be long term residents of the community and purchasing a house is an unrealistic expectation. Similarly, the use of permanency with a subsequent move as a lure highlights that employing authorities view these as temporary appointments. Most of the teachers in government housing would not normally choose to live in these locations so it is unreasonable to expect them to wear a cost they would not incur except in their capacity as teachers in a hard to staff location.

It is also unrealistic to expect teachers to purchase property in rural and remote communities as the depressed local economy means there is a limited market for resale. This should not be seen as an argument against incentives that cover stamp duty payments upon buying and selling a house. Most jurisdictions cover stamp duty and other associated legal costs when a person leaves a rural and remote community. This measure recognises that if the teacher was living in a larger centre they may well have purchased a house by this stage in their career. Buying a home in a rural and remote community may indeed encourage some teachers to remain in these communities for a longer period of time. Similarly, teachers who enter relationships and subsequently choose to make these

communities their home should be able to benefit from these incentives. Recent federal and state government changes which uniformly reduce stamp duties to first home buyers render this incentive obsolete. However, for previous home owners, such as teachers who sell their home after taking up promotions positions in another location, it is still a valuable and necessary measure. The provision of low-interest loans to buy a house in such an area would encourage teachers to purchase their own home and subsequently remain in the community for longer and such a measure would also free up accommodation for casual teachers.

The NSW rental subsidies are based upon the degree of isolation. The provision of these subsidies is important as there is considerable scepticism about market rents determined by the Australian Valuation Office. The rents in mining communities are artificially inflated by the subsidies mining companies provide and assessing rent in a small village as equal to that of the nearby regional centre is equally problematic. The extent of teacher housing subsidies in Australia is variable, with some states using a standard subsidy instead of a sliding scale. Along with subsidies for isolation, Queensland has adopted a method of providing subsidies based on the quality of the dwelling as well. Figure 21 shows that the quality of housing is indeed an issue. Therefore, teacher unions need to ensure that a quality and service guarantee is enacted, applied and enforced.

Figure 21: How important would greater access to quality teacher housing, including security, be, as an incentive to attract teachers?



In Queensland, rent is determined by the isolation of the school and the quality of the house. In developing this new model the Queensland Teachers Union started with the value of the rent collection and then worked on formulas to give equitable and worthwhile rebates, careful to ensure that the value of rent income remained the same. Accommodation was assessed to six standard levels and a rent value applied to each as though they were situated in a desirable location. In this way the same standard of house would theoretically attract the same rent in all locations. Following this, a locality rebate which increased with isolation was developed. For example, the rent for a top quality four bedroom house in a desirable location is \$234 while the same

quality of house in the most isolated location is \$24. However, the rent for a poor quality four bedroom house in the same desirable location is \$140 and \$14 in the most isolated location. Similarly to other states and territories, the rent for shared accommodation is divided equally among tenants. Unfortunately, in areas where there is not enough teacher housing available, people in private rentals usually miss out on the same level of rental rebates.

Utilities such as electricity and gas are also covered on a statewide basis in Queensland with the exception of families who pay their own costs. With a total utility bill of \$500,000 a year it was worked out that this averages out to \$20 a fortnight per non family resident. This statewide coverage ensures that teachers renting in more isolated locations, where gas bottles can cost up to six times as much as other locations, are not unfairly disadvantaged. Similarly, heating costs in cooler areas are equated with air conditioning in the tropics. These costs are included in the fortnightly rental and automatically deducted from teachers' pay so there is no concern about budgeting for a quarterly bill. Queensland has recently removed beds from the furniture inventory, however, a number are still stored in locations to help new teachers upon arrival.

Building new housing and upgrading of older stock is a continuing process in Queensland. With growth in many areas such as mining towns and people returning to the Torres Straits, there is a demand for new schools, teachers and houses. Houses built in the 1970s or 1980s have not been upgraded for a long time and now require significant investments to upgrade kitchens, bathrooms and other components.

A number of states have very old housing stocks. The age of these properties and the limited maintenance they receive has adversely affected their quality. Some are also an occupational health and safety risk due to the presence of asbestos. Figure 21 demonstrates that quality is an issue so the state of some accommodation may act as a disincentive to accepting a position in a rural and remote community and certainly affects the retention of teachers. The Queensland model goes some way to helping overcome this, with economic incentives, but there is still a strong case for quality guarantees.

In Western Australia, teacher housing is a component of the Government Employee Housing Authority (GEHA) which provides for all government employees, except nurses, and provides accommodation for 61 government agencies, including education which accounts for 43 per cent of the stock. To help bolster the supply of housing stock without spending much money, the West Australian government is encouraging local councils and private agencies to build housing when they have an interest in attracting staff to their communities. This is an example of public private partnerships, one of the more favoured methods of funding public infrastructure investment recently. The West Australian government is abandoning responsibility for the provision of housing as there is no long term investment benefits as properties in these communities have a low resale value due to poor demand. Private rental properties or those with local authorities avoid the cost of maintaining these properties. The problem with locally provided housing is that it relies upon the market but there is no local economy to provide an incentive to build. There are even reports from Western Australia of long running fights between the GEHA and other government agencies about who will pay for the construction of new properties as

the GEHA is looking for a 10 year commitment for infrastructure works. These issues all work together to limit the availability of teacher housing in difficult to staff areas.

Teachers in the Remote Teaching Service receive free rental and in other remote areas teachers usually live in government housing. In about one third of instances, where there is no government housing available, a private rental is obtained at the market rate, which is paid by the GEHA, and the tenant then paying the normal government rate of about \$122. Rent generally works out at about 20 per cent less than the cost of rent for a medium priced house in Perth.

As with other states and territories, accommodation is often shared, usually with little regard for the age, sex or teaching experience of the co-tenants; in Western Australia, forced sharing even results in couples sharing with a single person. These arrangements do not take into account social and cultural differences. In NSW, single villas in a complex of three or more such villas give people privacy while also creating close networks, so that newly appointed teachers don't become too homesick or socially isolated. Many people also like to share, so there needs to be a greater recognition of age and gender issues and the flexibility to choose with whom they share.

Housing quality is also a significant issue in Western Australia where much government housing is located in old mining towns and consists of demountable homes. Many mine workers fly in and then fly out after a stint at work so their accommodation needs are different to that of teachers. Overcoming this problem may be difficult as in some communities the land is owned by mining companies so it cannot be purchased and houses built. The fly in, fly out of mining labour in many Western Australia, Queensland and South Australian communities has further negative consequences as many workers' families no longer move to these communities and so their children do not attend the local school. This reduces the school size and the resources available to other students as well as having an overall negative impact on the town's economic development.

The unique nature of schooling in the remote

air conditioning, however, limited maintenance can affect their effectiveness.

In the Northern Territory, local recruits don't receive housing in their own community. This could potentially be seen as a racially discriminatory policy as it excludes local Aboriginal teachers or assistants from accessing housing. These recruits will only receive housing if they apply for positions away from their local community. A similar structural discrimination occurs in Queensland where indigenous people returning to their communities to teach are not given the opportunity to access government housing. Such policies only heighten the issue of culturally appropriate teachers as they favour the employment of indigenous teachers from the wrong cultural group and subsequently create more problems than they could potentially solve.

Housing, in many ways, determines staffing in the Northern Territory, with schools only receiving specialist teachers if there is housing available. For example, in 2002, there were 20 new special education teachers trained but schools with a desperate need were left off the list as there was no accommodation. As there is no private rental in many of these areas it shows the result of poor planning and reliance on a market solution.

Housing in the Northern Territory is run by a separate government agency and there are some subsidies which can also include electricity. As with everywhere else, the stock is getting old. In recognition of the difficult environment, sharing accommodation is not required. The Labor government has a \$50 million program to upgrade the existing housing stocks and build 30 new dwellings. Housing standards are variable, hence the upgrading program. Any proposed expansion of housing is problematic as there is a difficulty with purchasing land in many indigenous communities. There are also social problems in the difference in teacher housing compared to that lived in by the local people, especially if the teacher's house is like a fortress with screens on all windows and a 6-foot fence.

In South Australia, housing is also administered by a whole of government agency which creates difficulties relating to accommodation for teachers. When teachers are appointed to country areas they often miss out on good houses to other services which have already appointed staff to the area, such as police. There are furnished units in more remote areas while in other areas furniture can be rented for \$14 a week, with single people often being required to share. In South Australia, rents are also subsidised by \$40-80 a week, including a 25 per cent government subsidy. If the property has no access to electricity a 30 per cent subsidy applies, while some houses attract a 100 per cent subsidy as school equipment is stored in the house. Utility rents are paid for and gas bottle rental is also paid. Rent is based on a market model for that location per room. Remote areas receive a 25 per cent government rental subsidy, small towns with less than 3000 people receive a 20 per cent subsidy while others receive a 15 per cent subsidy.

South Australia has an agreed 1990 housing standard that needs revision. This standard includes things like carpet, air conditioning in the northern area, a carport, paved driveways and a minimum 120 square residence. Many properties were built before these standards were set so do not quite achieve them. South Australia also now has a maintenance guarantee and service standards.

In Tasmania, teacher housing is mainly found on

"In the remote Northern Territory, the romantic notion of the teacher sleeping in swag under a tree is a reality."

Northern Territory, where schools often move around and teachers travel to a number of remote schools in a week, makes it difficult to provide accommodation of the standard expected in other locations. Here, the romantic notion of the teacher sleeping in swag under a tree is a reality. As these communities traditionally move around, the teachers and schools have no option but to move with them.

In the towns and more sedentary communities with fixed structures, air conditioning is obviously an issue. Schools and homes in the north have refrigerated air-conditioning and those in the south have evaporative air conditioning. As is the case all around Australia, there is a problem with areas which receive both humidity and a dry heat. No jurisdiction has adequately solved this problem; there being few products on the market which effectively deal with these climatic conditions and are often too expensive for the authorities to consider. All housing authorities provide heating and

the west coast, the Bass Strait islands and a few other areas. Accommodation is generally mixed with three single teachers often sharing a three-bedroom house. However, the Tasmanian education department states that most teachers occupy separate accommodation. There has recently been a big improvement in quality with the new Labor government injecting \$1 million into housing which has come about due to a campaign by the union.

Housing is owned by the department of education but managed by the principal. This responsibility was devolved in the early 1990s. Schools are responsible for maintenance under \$20,000 which is supposedly part of the school's general resource funding. In effect, this maintenance cost competes with general school maintenance priorities. Prior to devolution there was a travelling maintenance team, however, if the property was not in good order prior to devolution this has had major ramifications. There is now no maintenance team. The school's resource budget covers everything other than permanent teacher salaries, for example, resources, aides, casual relief, maintenance and utilities. The competing demands on these finances sometimes create situations where school based decisions are at odds with head office guarantees on housing quality. A school might remove a fridge from the rental accommodation when according to head office a fridge is supplied. With schools collecting their own rent there are also questions around who sets the rental rate and what are the consequences on educational program funds if schools are forced to reduce rents to attract teachers. This school based ownership approach is ineffective and it is questionable how this relates to principals' core business of managing education programs.

Leave

For many teachers considering accepting a position in a rural or remote school, the distance involved and isolation from friends and family is a significant disincentive. It must also be recognised that the psychological dimension of isolation will have a significant impact on a teacher's decision to remain. In order to attract teachers the goal is to enable them to have a reasonable leave provisions to encourage them to take up a position and then increased leave provisions to encourage them to remain. Leave provisions also need to take into account the limited access to necessary medical services.

To achieve this South Australia has a travel time provision for teachers in rural and remote schools. Considering that many rural and remote schools can be up to two days drive from the capital city, teachers in these schools potentially lose two days vacation travelling to and from their community. To overcome this, rural and remote schools in South Australia start and finish at times which allow teachers to travel. The philosophy behind this is that all teachers should begin their break at the same time, so teachers from rural and remote schools, if travelling, would arrive in the capital at the same time as those working there finish up and similarly leave when those working in the capital are beginning. Travel is therefore seen as work time. A similar system used to be in place in Victoria where teachers in remote areas got an extra travel day. However, this was cut out by the previous conservative government.

Both NSW and Queensland support travel for teachers in rural and remote communities in some ways. A

teacher appointed to one of the designated 'incentive' schools in NSW will be reimbursed for one trip a year to visit family. Queensland used to provide one flight a year to teachers in the most rural and remote schools, however, this has unfortunately changed to a straight cash benefit included with the general incentive payments. Air Fares Out of Isolated Localities (FOILS) are still available for teachers and their families in the Northern Territory. These fares are accompanied by up to three days accommodation and are available at a rate of three fares a year in the most isolated localities and two fares in less isolated locations. Flights are also provided from the remote islands in Tasmania, however, it was not clear how many were available a year. A similar provision of paid summer holiday travel to Perth or Geraldton is available in Western Australia. None of these approaches take into account the travel time involved. In NSW's western division the school year starts a week later than eastern schools, so extra leave is provided — however, this starting date is better associated with unfavourable climatic conditions rather than leave time.

57 per cent of respondents to the survey ranked the provision of extra leave provisions as one of their top 4 incentives to attract teachers to rural and remote schools. It can be difficult to make strong friendships, as can living away from family and friends for 10 weeks at a time while working in a stressful environment. These factors encourage teachers to leave rather than stay. Supporting at least one trip home a year recognises that contact with friends and family is an important social element — however, it is questionable if one visit a year will really achieve the goal. The lack of travel time also encourages dangerous practices. Driving long distances at night after a day's work at the end of a term on roads populated by numerous kangaroos, other wildlife and livestock is a scenario occurring around the country, with teachers heading out on an overnight journey, or else lose a significant part of their break travelling. As many rural and remote communities are small it is unrealistic to expect most teachers to remain throughout each of their breaks.

It is also unrealistic to expect teachers in rural and remote schools to be able to, let alone have to, make all medical appointments during their holidays. Teachers in large centres are generally able to see to all their health needs and those of their family after working hours. This is not an option for teachers in rural and remote communities, many of which don't even have a general practitioner. Extra leave provision to allow teachers in these areas to travel to larger centres for medical appointments is therefore also necessary. Such arrangements are in place in the Northern Territory where teachers receive extra days for medical and family leave.

In South Australia, teachers in rural and remote

“The flexible approach adopted in Tasmania is an unofficial government-wide attitude to encourage young people to see the world.”

schools are able to access a wider range of leave provisions. Teachers in non metropolitan settings are able to access dentists and other specialist medical services with both travel and accommodation paid for to the nearest specialist without having their leave

debited. Similarly, if a family member is in hospital, such as the wife having a baby, teachers are allowed one visit a week with their travel paid for. There is also the ability to access other leave for urgent business such as funerals. While this is generally leave without pay their total annual leave is not affected by such events.

In a totally unique way of viewing their human resources compared to the other states and territories, Tasmania will allow young teachers to take a preferred one-year but up to three years of leave without pay to see the world before returning to their position. This is in the context of a declining state population and an even greater state net loss of young people. The flexible approach adopted in Tasmania is an unofficial government-wide attitude to encourage young people to see the world but then come back to Tasmania to live and work. This is important if Tasmania is to keep young teachers and avoid the impending teacher shortage. This attitude also has a positive spin off, in creating a workforce that feels valued.

Movement

Some of the most effective incentives are those that guarantee teachers a transfer at the end of a minimum service period. Such initiatives exist in varying ways in all states and territories. They are the most important incentive, when combined with permanent employment, in attracting staff. They have clearly been successful, and should be maintained and strengthened where possible. However, these incentives should be combined with initiatives to retain. It is not uncommon for schools to have a 50 per cent staff turnover in any given year. Encouraging these teachers to stay a little longer should be a priority.

The results to the survey clearly indicate that a transfer is both desirable and being taken up in large numbers. Figure 8 showed 54 per cent of respondents do not intend to be teaching in rural or remote schools after five years' service and that nearly one third intend to not be there after two more years. These figures clearly indicate a high level of intended mobility for teachers in these schools. What is clear from figure 24 is that these teachers tend to see the option of relocating to the coast as an attractive incentive to take up an initial appointment in a rural or remote school. Furthermore, figure 25 clearly demonstrates that these teachers overwhelmingly don't intend moving to another rural or remote location. Therefore, a transfer system which enables teachers to move to a more desirable location is an important attraction to taking up a position in the first place.

The Watson and Hatton study of mid career teachers also found a strong teacher preference to work in some geographical areas but not others. They concluded that this creates locations that are difficult to staff which are likely to be found where there are distinct sub-populations such as recent immigrants, concentrations of disadvantaged families, or isolated rural dwellers. As a consequence, students in less favoured areas are frequently taught by the least experienced teachers, who generally stay on for the minimum time. This highlights the vexed nature of incentives which guarantee movement for teachers.

Respondents to the survey overwhelmingly saw a priority transfer to a vacancy in an area of their choice

Figure 8: At most, how many more years could you see yourself teaching in rural and remote schools?

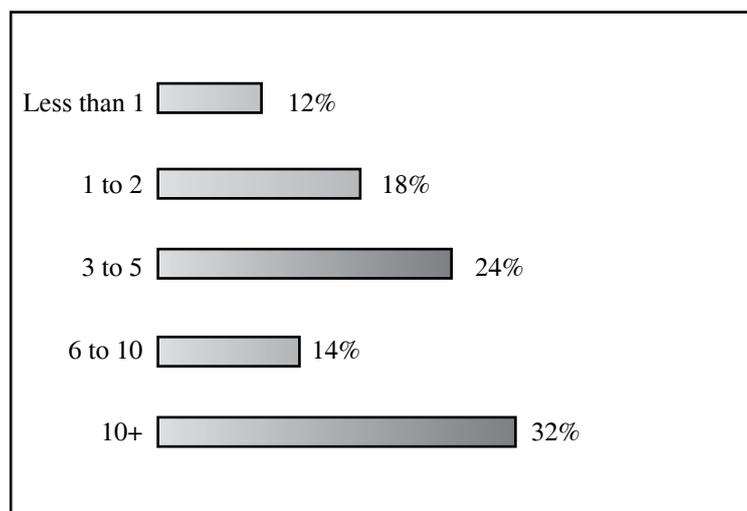


Figure 24: After completing the minimum service period, what priority do you give to applying for a transfer to a school on the coast?

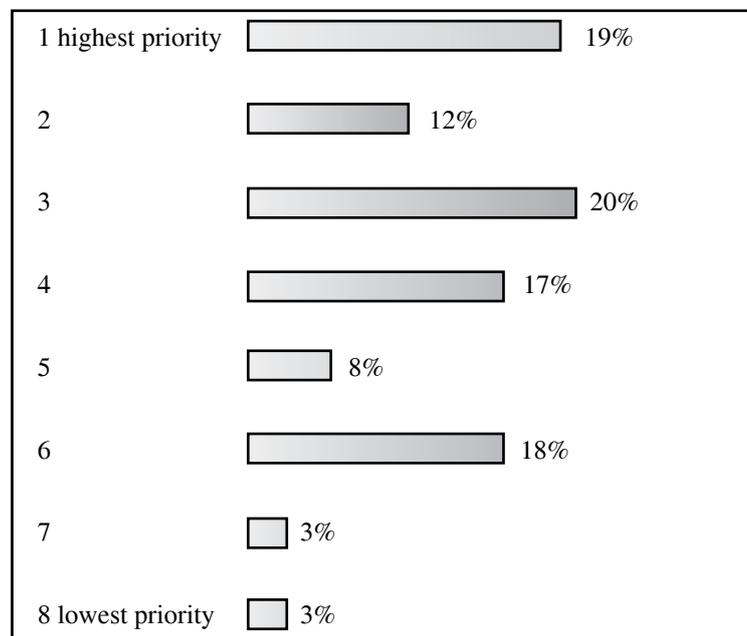
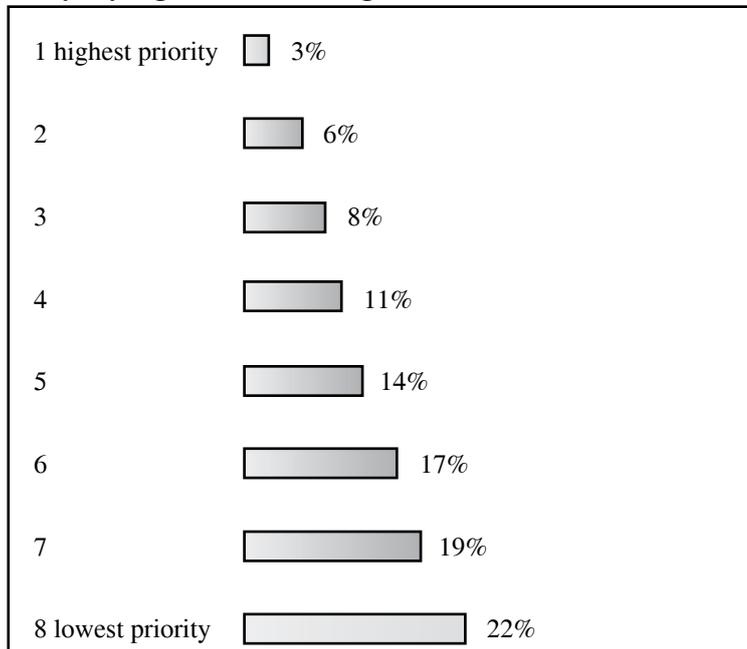


Figure 25: After completing the minimum service period, what priority do you give to transferring to another rural or remote school?



as an important incentive to attract teachers to rural and remote schools. One quarter of all respondents rated this as their top incentive out of eight possible incentives and two thirds of all respondents rated it within their top 4 incentives.

Movement is facilitated by a system of transfer points and priority status because both methods are skewed in favour of teachers who accept positions in rural and remote schools rather than desirable locations. Teachers in rural and remote locations usually receive significantly more transfer points per year than colleagues in more desirable locations. A teacher in a northern Sydney school will receive 1 point a year while a teacher in the most isolated schools in NSW will receive 8 points. Vacancies on the same level are then decided by the number of points a person has, the person with the most points being appointed to the vacancy. A vacancy in a coastal northern NSW town may have numerous applicants with the person with the most points perhaps having 40 transfer points. It would have taken the northern Sydney teacher 40 years to reach this number of transfer points whereas the teacher from the isolated location will have accrued those points in just five years. Priority status is applied when more than one applicant for a vacancy has the same number of transfer points. In this instance in NSW the teacher who worked in a designated rural and remote school and completed a minimum service period is deemed to have priority status. The teacher with priority status would be appointed ahead of an applicant without this status.

Systems based on transfer points and priority status are extremely effective in enabling movement out of rural and remote communities as the ability to leave is an important factor in people's decision to accept appointments in these schools. The ability to accrue extra points may also be a retention benefit as the more points a person accrues, the more it will assist them in being successful in transferring to a school of their choice. These systems only work, however, in a centralised state or territory staffing system. Their effectiveness in helping attract teachers to rural and remote schools is therefore a strong argument against contract based decentralised staffing.

The benefits of a centralised staffing system are demonstrated in Victoria where the centralised staffing system was abolished in 1992. Employment in Victoria is now primarily contract based where teachers apply for positions which schools advertise. With promotions positions, as is often the case with merit selection procedures, the reality of local selection is that about nine out of 10 positions are filled internally. This stifles movement. The only exception is someone declared "in excess" due to falling enrolment or someone on compassionate status. Teachers from hard to staff areas can receive compassionate transfer status and will be placed before other applicants for a position. With contract based employment, this is the only real way to create movement. The move to contracts by the Kennett government cut 8000 jobs or 20 per cent of the workforce. Teachers displaced when this happened were forced to put permanency ahead of other consideration and applied for positions in unfavourable locations. The delayed impacts of these changes are likely to become apparent when these re-employed teachers wish to move from rural and remote schools.

The aging profile of the teaching profession is currently having an impact on decreasing mobility, but the changing demographic may eventually assist movement

in approximately 10 years time. Western Australia is a good example of the lack of mobility caused by the aging teaching profession. Here some locations can have up to 90 per cent turnover over three years but teachers are still taking a risk accepting rural and remote positions, as the department cannot guarantee a way back due to a lack of vacancies. Transfer points are doubled in difficult to staff schools in Western Australia after three years service (for example, one year, 2 points; two years, 4 points; three years, 6 points; four years, 12 points; and so forth), however, the system is slowing up due to the lack of positions available in desirable locations. As more teachers in the older age bracket occupy the preferable locations it is more difficult for newer teachers to transfer into these positions from rural areas. As a result there has been an increased movement from the state schools to private schools as a means to affecting a move to a more desirable location.

While the majority of classroom teacher positions in West Australian schools are filled by a centralised staffing system, schools are also able to apply to have positions filled by merit selection. This reduces the number of transfer positions available for teachers from rural and remote schools. Merit selection also disadvantages applicants whose most recent service is in rural and remote schools. This is because the lack of professional development opportunities, and for secondary teachers the limited opportunity to teach large senior classes, makes applicants less competitive. Similarly, rural service is not seen as anything special, educationally, that would be valued by metropolitan schools.

Where a position is filled by transfer it is purely on points as there is no incentive system. Unlike the large range of points (1 to 8) used in NSW, Western Australia uses a scale of 1 to 3.5, with schools in desirable metropolitan locations receiving 1 point a year and schools in the most remote schools attracting 3.5 transfer points a year. Only transfer points for the last 10 years are counted with positions being firstly filled on points and then by the best match if more than one applicant has the same number of points. As is the case in most jurisdictions, teachers need to have a large number of schools selected on their application form to increase their chances of gaining a transfer. Experience from Western Australia indicates that when there is a lack of transfer opportunities young teachers do not mind resigning as they can easily pick up relief work.

School executive positions in Western Australia are all filled by merit selection rather than transfer. This followed a recommendation by the Equal Opportunity Commission in 1997 to drop transfers for executive staff. Transfers for these positions were seen as discriminatory to women as they were considered to be less mobile and less able to go to the country for career advancement. The education department of Western Australia did argue, though, that people have competed successfully for executive jobs and have not been trapped in rural and remote locations.

The Northern Territory operates on a priority transfer to an urban area after two years, if a vacancy in an urban area is available. There is not a statewide staffing system as staffing is more regionalised, however, teachers applying to leave remote schools have a higher priority and are placed first.

In South Australia, teachers in the most isolated areas have a priority transfer after four years while teachers in less isolated rural areas can transfer after five years.

There are two parallel placement schemes similar to Western Australia. The first approach involves school choice where schools advertise a vacancy. The second approach is a centralised placement committee where teachers apply for transfer and are then matched based on agreed criteria. The latter method uses transaction codes which are designed to give teachers with country service an advantage — it is estimated that this system fills about 70 per cent of vacancies. The system of

“Tasmania has the best system for attracting staff to difficult to staff areas, but perhaps the worst system for retention.”

points no longer operates in South Australia, with transaction codes being the preferred method. It was suggested that with South Australia’s relatively small population the former method of school selection has helped teachers from rural and remote schools attain a transfer which was previously difficult due to the limited number of vacancies in desirable locations. South Australian schools generally have seven to 10 year limited tenure, except country schools which do not have a limited tenure. How this tenure operates, if people need to reapply for tenure or if teachers can be moved after their tenure expires to create a vacancy for teachers transferring from rural and remote areas, is unclear.

Tasmania has the best system for attracting staff to difficult to staff areas, but perhaps the worst system for retention. There is a guaranteed move after three years service in rural, remote and hard to staff areas. Teachers only have limited tenure at any school and the department will move teachers who have been in one school for more than five years to guarantee this movement. This is achieved through a statewide staffing system managed by districts which decide what staff are eligible to move and available to be moved. Such a system creates an environment of constant change and reinforces the negative perception that rural areas have high staff turnover. Teachers who have completed

“Education Queensland will move recently appointed teachers without rural service to make a vacancy for someone returning from a rural or remote school.”

their three years in a difficult to staff location choose five schools they would like to transfer to and are then either placed at one of those schools or within 65 kilometres of them. If someone needs to be moved to create a vacancy it is generally the longest serving person, taking into account if they have done country service. This person will then be subsequently moved to another school within a 65 kilometre radius of that school. Movement is certain and people seem to see this system as fair, however, there would be significant reservations about the effect this constant change has on rural and remote schools.

In Queensland, teachers in the most remote areas

get a guaranteed move, often to the most preferable locations in the state. It is the areas between the extremes of desirable locations and the most isolated that become a sort of no man's land as they do not have similar guarantees of movement. Transfer points have only been used in Queensland for the past 10 years with points being decided by socio-economic status data; distance from a major centre, hospital and other services; and population size. Movement is then achieved based upon these points after a minimum service period. While transfers come before new appointments, Education Queensland will move recently appointed teachers without rural service to make a vacancy for someone returning from a rural or remote school.

There are a number of models used around Australia which facilitate movement with varying degrees of success. However, for the long term benefit of rural communities it is important to get a balance between the ease of movement to attract teachers and a desire to improve retention. Systems which use priority status for teachers working in rural and remote schools and with a large range between points are more successful in ensuring these teachers are rewarded than contract based systems of employment (which can unwittingly discriminate against teachers from these areas). There needs to be a clause in contract employment to ensure that rural and remote schools are not disadvantaged, as contracts can discourage teachers from accepting positions in rural and remote areas as they need only wait and apply for contracts in desirable locations. Similarly, an absolute guarantee to a desirable location needs to be carefully weighed against the long term interests of our rural and remote communities and the need to encourage staff retention.

Many of the existing and proposed benefits to attract teachers to rural and remote areas are not nationally transferable. There were attempts in the 1990s to establish a national agreement for the portability of accrued entitlements, however, these have not succeeded due to difficulty in comparing cash benefits and transfer points from different jurisdictions. This lack of transferability limits the ability of teachers to move interstate as they need to begin again on a lower salary level or do further rural and remote service before moving to their desired location. A nationwide system of recognising past service would be of great benefit to further enhance the mobility of teachers and thus attract them to positions in rural and remote communities.

Beginning teachers and mentoring

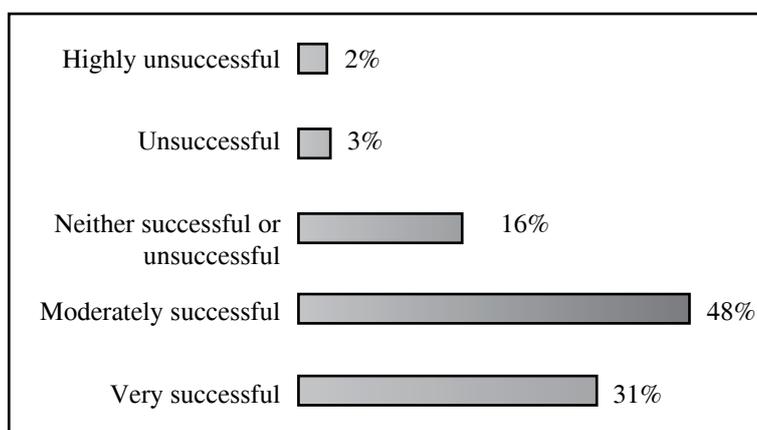
The induction beginning teachers receive into the profession is one of the most important factors in retaining them. Evidence from the survey supports the introduction of programs to support beginning teachers. This initial “induction period is critical for establishing professional competence and reinforcing positive attitudes towards teaching as a personally fulfilling career”(Skilbeck and Connell). While the support of beginning teachers is a general concern for the profession, it becomes more crucial in rural and remote areas due to the high number of beginning teachers and the problems of isolation. In rural and remote areas support programs need to be school based and include adequate time to travel to neighbouring schools to network with colleagues. Whereas beginning teachers in metropolitan areas are able to network

with other beginning teachers in their areas and are often in a larger faculty, beginning teachers in rural and remote areas are often the only teacher in their faculty and any collegial support requires travelling large distances.

As the recent federal review, *Australia's Teachers: Australia's Future*, noted, social concerns are as important as professional ones. The report noted that: "Adapting to the social, cultural and lifestyle challenges of living in rural and isolated communities, particularly at a time when they may also be new to teaching, can be very demanding for the predominantly young teachers who usually staff these schools."

Results from the survey make it clear that any beginning teacher induction programs need to be specifically geared towards living and working in rural and remote communities. As figure 27 shows, 79 per cent of respondents believe such a course would be moderately successful to very successful in attracting teachers to rural and remote schools. For many pre-service teachers the personal and social concerns outweigh professional issues. An effective induction program, and pre-service awareness which focuses on the personal and social aspects of living and working in rural and remote communities, is therefore essential. Such a course would be of benefit by demystifying any negative perceptions as well as ensuring there is an environment of support at the beginning of the teacher's career. Knowing there is assistance available when you arrive in a new environment, in a town where you know no-one else and in a culture which may be unfamiliar, would certainly help reduce any nagging doubts about accepting such an appointment.

Figure 27: How successful are special induction programs about living and working in rural and remote communities in attracting teachers to rural and remote schools?



Most jurisdictions do have some form of induction program but these are often generic beginning teacher courses, with teachers in rural and remote schools having a session on "living in the community". The NSW *Induction of Beginning Teachers* handbook states that for beginning teachers in rural and remote areas, most information about the community will come from colleagues and induction often begins upon arrival. It also states that schools should have someone meet teachers new to the community and provide them with tips on working and living in a small community, the importance of confidentiality, being a professional role model, and how rural cultures may differ from theirs. This list is daunting for beginning teachers to take in, but its inclusion in the manual recognises the importance of these issues. Relying on informal and benign support networks increases the potential of

their failure. Packaging all these related ideas into an effective induction program which is then supported by colleagues would certainly be more effective in easing the transition of beginning teachers into their new setting.

In the Northern Territory there is a three-day orientation for everyone new, or coming back, to the Northern Territory at the beginning of the year, in either Darwin or Alice Springs, as well as some local area initiatives. Similar approaches to beginning teacher induction occur in most jurisdictions but with no specific induction program for rural and remote areas.

The lack of an effective induction program aligns interestingly with the suggestion that there are many practices in place which rely on beginning teachers who don't know their rights. This was a recurring theme in interviews and demonstrates the need for unions to conduct seminars for beginning teachers early in the year. This has been happening successfully in NSW with up to 100 beginning teachers voluntarily attending seminars throughout the state on weekends. While the NSW Department of Education and Training also conducts beginning teacher seminars each year these are more administrative in nature and do not address industrial issues. Specific courses on working conditions and professional issues benefit teacher unions by both recruiting new members, and forging a professional role for unions which many beginning teachers see as desirable. It is especially important to run such courses in rural areas where new teachers are eager to gain permanency and pass their probationary periods and are unaware of the benefits of union membership and their legal entitlements.

Following a successful induction into rural and remote schools, it becomes important to assist beginning teachers to meet the new challenges of their chosen profession. In the mainly small schools in rural and remote areas, beginning teachers can find themselves with a range of extra duties, in one or two teacher faculties or even in two person schools. A beginning teacher is usually their own quasi head teacher as the only person qualified in a subject, or as a primary stage coordinator. To help meet these expectations while still learning how to teach, it is necessary to reduce the initial teaching load. Without reducing the teaching load of beginning teachers, the demands of programming, learning to teach and taking on some administrative duties become overwhelming and contribute to the high rate of early career resignations. In support of this initiative, 53 per cent of respondents to the survey considered the reduction of teaching loads for newly appointed teachers as potentially very successful in attracting teachers to rural and remote schools. Overall, 85 per cent of respondents believed that such a measure would have a positive impact on attracting teachers. These findings are supported in *Australia's Teachers: Australia's Future* which recommended that "beginning teachers receive appropriate support, including thorough-going induction and mentoring, and time to reflect on their practices".

While a similar measure would be useful across all areas, it is particularly important for rural and remote schools that often have large numbers of beginning teachers and high staff turnover. The Vinson inquiry noted:

"No aspect of the recruitment, preparation and induction of new teachers received more comment ... especially in remote areas, than the support and guidance they need in the first years in the profession."

Vinson went on to report that staff in rural and

remote schools repeatedly described their induction in terms of being: “‘Thrown in at the deep end’ and survival depending on their own efforts and fate.” Also, he reported beginning teachers being “isolated professionally and personally” and “succeed or fail alone”.

With positive initial experiences these beginning teachers can avoid becoming another early career resignation statistic and may even remain in their initial posting beyond their minimum service period. Ramsey states improved mentoring and induction, along with improved conditions, would be beneficial in helping retain our beginning teachers. This is especially true in a social and cultural environment that is already new and often challenging for many recruits.

Many states and territories have some degree of support for beginning teachers, however, there is presently no real trend towards differential support for new teachers in rural and remote areas. Support can be provided by reducing beginning teacher teaching loads, as in South Australia and Tasmania, or with additional staffing to support new teachers in Queensland. The failure to provide appropriate support strategies can lead to what is experienced in the Northern Territory, where 40 per cent of teachers resign in the first two years. Most remote schools in the Northern Territory are staffed by beginning teachers who, due to their isolation, receive little to no support. As a result, the average stay in the southern region is six months and teachers need to be recruited to these remote communities from interstate. The money spent on both recruiting and moving teachers would be better spent supporting the teachers when they are appointed.

In South Australia, schools get an additional 0.1 staffing to support beginning teachers in their first year of teaching or 0.2 if they are indigenous teachers. This is in the form of extra support for the school, not a reduction of 0.1 for the teacher. However, this allocation is not received for beginning teachers who are on short term contracts or for casuals — even though they would have equal need of it. Teachers in Tasmania begin their career with a 10 per cent teaching load reduction in their first year. This was initiated recently and is reported to have increased networking between beginning teachers, presumably because they now have the time for it to occur.

A different, albeit unofficial, approach is used in Western Australia where graduate teachers can finish their studies by taking a rural or remote school vacancy during their last semester, if their university considers them capable. They begin on a load 0.2 less than a permanent teacher. This approach may also assist with the attraction and retention of teachers to these schools, because if they enjoy the experience they can take up a position substantively or avoid such an appointment.

A reduction of beginning teacher loads should be implemented in addition to an effective mentoring program. The NSW Teachers Federation policy position on beginning teachers recognises this and in 2003 led the Department of Education and Training to trial 50 mentor positions in schools with a significant number of beginning teachers. Figures 27 to 30 demonstrate these measures are considered extremely important

Figure 28: How successful would a reduction of beginning teacher teaching load be as an incentive to attract teachers to rural and remote schools?

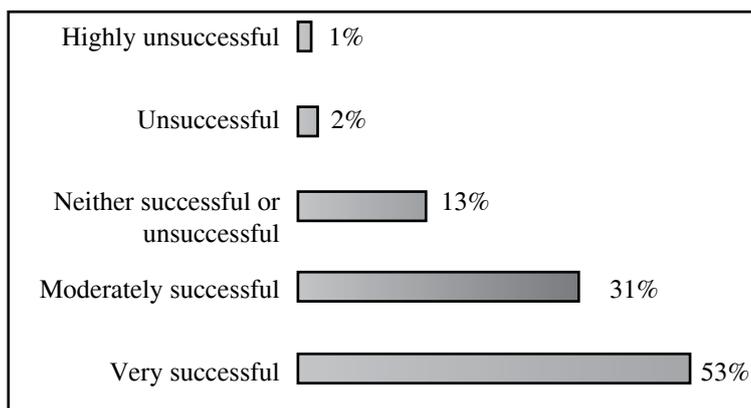


Figure 29: How successful is mentoring beginning teachers as an attraction to rural and remote schools?

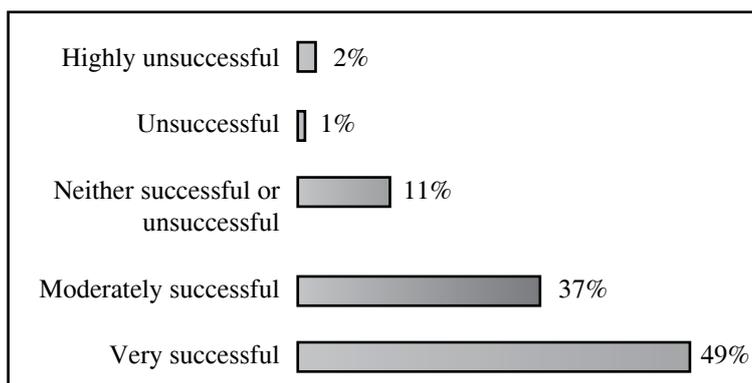
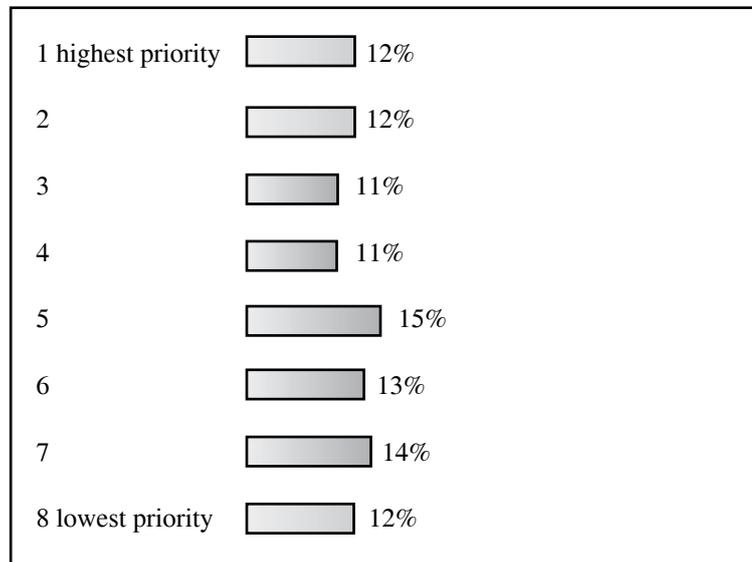


Figure 30: How important is mentoring of beginning teachers and a reduced teaching load as an incentive to attracting teachers?



and therefore need to be expanded.

It is clear from the survey that mentoring of beginning teachers is seen as important to their transition into teaching for all beginning teachers but especially important in rural and remote areas where social and professional demands are amplified. 49 per cent of respondents believe mentoring would be very successful in attracting teachers while 86 per cent rank such an initiative as either very successful or moderately successful. Similarly, 46 per cent of all respondents ranked the mentoring of beginning teachers in their top 4 out of 8 possible incentives to attract and retain teachers in rural and remote areas.

Mentoring and associated approaches like team

teaching are highlighted as methods to support beginning teachers in rural and remote schools in the NSW *Induction of Beginning Teachers* manual. This manual was published prior to the trial of the mentoring initiative in NSW. More than a third of the mentors were appointed to rural and remote schools as they have large numbers of beginning teachers. Mentors were appointed for a period of two years at a salary level of either secondary head teacher or primary assistant principal. It is believed that a review of the program was conducted after the first year but is not yet released. It is anticipated that a full report on the trial will be released near the end of the two year trial period. As these trial positions were appointed to schools with a number of beginning teachers it is hoped that any expansion could include smaller rural schools. The present allocation relies on the number of beginning teachers so only large rural schools received a beginning teacher mentor position. This discriminated against beginning teachers in smaller rural schools who often resign at higher rates. A support program could be achieved through the provision of extra staffing allocation and be designed to meet the specific needs of smaller rural and remote schools.

Most graduate teachers in Western Australia begin their careers in country schools working with relatively inexperienced colleagues and with no formal mentoring. Mentoring is seen as a locally based collegial activity. There is also no real mentoring for beginning teachers in the Northern Territory, except for indigenous teachers who are supported by the Batchelor Institute. This support usually occurs on site through occasional visits or through workshops on areas of need at the cluster centre. Much of the support comes in the "train the trainer" model. The Northern Territory education department recognises that teachers should not be in isolated areas for extended periods and they are encouraged to move after their minimum service period. As it can take time to re-adjust to an urban environment and school, there is a need for mentoring. Mentoring is also important in the Western Australian Aboriginal trainee teacher program, ensuring that the transition to full time work is successful. Mentoring is also needed when these teachers move to the metropolitan areas to ensure that their knowledge and skills can be easily transplanted.

Mentoring is also important in schools on the west coast of Tasmania where there are insufficient experienced role models to work with new teachers. To help overcome this, beginning teachers in Tasmania get two hours a week release which can be stored up to use for day visits. In a study of trainee teachers about their expectations of rural and remote teaching, the lack of mentors and experienced staff, particularly in their subject/specialisation areas, was also found to be a significant concern. Research into teachers in mid career supported this finding with only nine per cent of mid-career teachers located in difficult-to-staff areas.

Considering the large distances between most rural and remote schools, travel time to attend training and development activities or to network with colleagues in other schools is an important aspect of any mentoring program. Throughout the interviews, information technology was often seen as a solution to support beginning and all other teachers. Teachers saw online networks, email, online seminars, online courses and CD-ROM courses as being a way of overcoming isolation.

There is no exemplary model of a holistic, system-wide effective support program for beginning teachers.

There are too many issues to resolve, such as the connections between induction programs and pre-service training; where the line exists between school and system-wide responsibility; and the appropriateness of programs for a variety of beginning teaching contexts. Some of these concerns will be addressed with appropriate and relevant pre-service training and experience in rural and remote communities. The development of an intern system similar to that used for indigenous teachers in Western Australia may help smooth the transition for beginning teachers and ensure the continued involvement of the teacher training institutions in rural education issues. Coordination and development of a system-wide strategy, which takes into consideration the range of school teachers beginning their careers, is certainly the responsibility of the various education departments. The development of standards framework for beginning teachers in NSW provides an excellent opportunity for effective support programs to be developed. A similar recommendation was made by the Queensland Lunn Report which suggested that the Queensland Board of Teacher Registration develop and review guidelines for teaching in rural and remote communities.

Teachers in rural and remote communities need to have the opportunity to enjoy a rewarding career and subsequently remain in the profession. While appropriate pre-service attention to rural teaching, scholarships, selection processes and the promise of a permanent job are aimed to help prospective teachers accept a position in a rural or remote school, the conditions they will experience upon arrival also play a role in attracting them. Similarly, a successful initial experience is essential if our new teachers are not to become another statistic of teachers who leave the profession in their first few years. As Watson and Hatton outline in their study of mid career teachers, the rate of attrition over the 16 years of service has been 50 per cent for secondary teachers and 33 per cent for primary teachers. In light of these findings the importance of a successful introduction to the profession, especially in rural and remote schools, is evident.

"Rural and remote schools play an important role in the renewal of the entire teaching profession."

As is pointed out in the Boylan study of long-staying rural teachers, important variables in teachers choosing to remain in a rural and remote area are work related reasons. In the Boylan study 38.5 per cent of the long staying teachers cited job satisfaction and the teaching environment as influencing their decision to remain. This result supports the view that a successful introduction to rural and remote teaching will also act to retain teachers. It is also important to ensure that methods of induction and mentoring also support new executives, many of whom in rural and remote schools are in their first executive positions. Ensuring new executive teachers are supported will in turn assist newly appointed teachers.

It is important for education bureaucracies to recognise and support the effort a lot of rural and remote schools presently put into the induction and mentoring of beginning teachers. These schools are often the training ground for coastal schools or schools in desirable

locations — they train new teachers who then leave. The time, effort, resources and professional development resources allocated to these schools should be increased for the benefit of the entire teaching service. Rural and remote schools play an important role in the renewal of the entire teaching profession. It is therefore important that they ensure new teachers both remain in the profession, and are excellent teachers. Ways to achieve this, appropriate methodologies and the role of information technologies are all the subject of extensive research and due to the volume of material available on this topic, analysis of these should be the subject of further study.

The revolving door

“The current incentive scheme may attract people to rural areas but once they are there the incentive is to leave rather than remain.”

HREOC, "Emerging themes," in National Inquiry into Rural and Remote Education (Canberra, 2000).

Measures to improve the retention of teachers in rural and remote schools primarily revolve around overcoming disadvantages and increasing professional satisfaction. Indeed, these are linked concepts, as it is anticipated that the reduction of negative influences should allow teachers to fully develop in their chosen career. Unfortunately, in many rural and remote areas, negative social conditions and professional limitations associated with isolation limit many teachers' ability to develop a rewarding career.

To help uncover some of these limitations a number of questions about disincentives were asked in the survey. This enables a profile of the perceived problems to be constructed so that positive initiatives can be developed to overcome them. While there is a fine line between a deficit model and a positive construction, this chapter intends to propose positive strategies to ensure that teachers can experience a rewarding career in rural and remote areas.

While all states and territories around Australia have introduced some measures aimed at increasing the retention of teachers in rural and remote schools, they invariably do not adequately overcome the disadvantages or fully promote professional satisfaction. Many of the measures currently used involve a short term economic gain and the guarantee of a transfer. These short term retention initiatives are historically important and will help reduce the constancy of turnover. They need to be accompanied with a general improvement of the professional conditions in rural and remote schools. Only then will teachers consider these communities as their home, rather than a temporary appointment, and stay beyond the minimum service period. Without a refocusing of the current incentives to attract and retain teachers they will continue to only serve to increase turnover rather than reduce it.

There is often a fine line between an incentive being an attraction or a retention benefit. Many are both, as teachers who make an informed decision about taking up a position in rural and remote communities are predisposed to some of the conditions necessary to be retained. Similarly, the attraction benefits of supporting beginning teachers will also act to retain them as they are more likely to remain in teaching after a rewarding beginning to their career. Due to this fine line between attraction and retention some measures which come into effect before teachers reach their

minimum service period have been included as retention benefits as they hopefully discourage teachers from resigning or transferring. Similarly, the potential to receive further benefits may also encourage teachers interested in teaching in rural and remote to make their decision.

The importance of making an informed decision about accepting a position in rural and remote schools is highlighted by the fact that teachers who themselves come from rural areas are more likely to accept positions in and be retained in these communities. Boylan's study found 72.3 per cent of long staying rural teachers had a rural upbringing themselves and was therefore the largest influence in teachers remaining in rural areas. Of these teachers, 60 per cent had also attended a rural teacher education institution. These teachers are therefore familiar with the social and educational environment of these areas and choose to remain in them. The uncertainty about socialising into a new community is one of the major concerns of pre-service teachers and has been verified as such by numerous studies such as Sharplin, Yarrow and in the Lunn Report. These concerns appear to come to fruition when teachers arrive in rural and remote communities, with teachers in their first year of appointment still citing social issues as significant challenges to their job satisfaction. Measures which help overcome the dislocation from family and friends are then clearly important.

It is hypothesised that the more one begins to enjoy one's career, the less significant the social disincentives will appear. The fact that 66.2 per cent of long staying rural teachers cited their work environment and a high level of job satisfaction as influencing their decision to remain, supports this proposition. This was indeed the second biggest variable in their decision to remain and suggests that factors other than lifestyle are important to teachers' careers. Helping teachers in rural and remote areas achieve this high level of job satisfaction should then help retain them.

Investing greater resources into rural and remote schools to aid retention may be an initially unattractive cost for governments. However, a long term view suggests that such an investment may eventually reduce expenditure by saving money on the costs of high teacher turnover. Some of these costs are transfer expenditures such as removals. However, the far greater

saving will be limiting the costs of a poor education on social security spending and instead reaping the increased economic benefit of higher education standards. Apart from the pragmatic economic benefits, there is the significant human rights argument about the right of all children, regardless of location, to receive the best possible education.

Australia's economic and social future depends on a well-educated and well-trained community, as education and training are key drivers to economic growth. Governments should therefore strive to ensure that all citizens have a good education, otherwise they will be unable to contribute to this growth and will in fact take from it. A collapse in the full time labour market for 15 to 19 year olds over the past two decades has reduced the number of unskilled jobs available. Consequently, unskilled people are more likely to be unemployed. Add to this the general economic decline in many rural areas, the prospects for young people in these communities appear less than assured.

The Business Council of Australia points out that many early school leavers come from lower socio economic backgrounds and are located in regional and rural locations, while young indigenous people are potentially at greater risk. To overcome this, it suggests that increasing the current year 12 retention rate of 80 per cent to 90 per cent will have significant economic gains, increasing GDP by \$1.8 billion more than it would normally be in 2020, increasing consumption by 18 per cent and significantly reducing economic welfare.

Considering that the educational participation rate of indigenous Australians is significantly lower than that of non indigenous young people and that rural and remote areas experienced the highest school non completion rates, followed by regional areas, something needs to be done urgently. The first of many steps is to ensure that the teachers in these areas are able to adequately perform their duties. Improving the conditions in which they work, reducing disadvantages caused by isolation and ensuring they are able to experience a rewarding career are essential goals. The provision of quality education is needed to reduce educational disadvantage in low socio-economic status rural communities.

Cash

The higher cost of living in rural and remote areas is often cited as a disincentive for teachers living in these communities. The increased costs of food, fuel and other general goods due to transport costs, and increased telephone costs are commonly cited examples. Similarly, travelling long distances to major centres to shop for a wider range of goods, to access recreational activities, to visit medical services and vacation travel increases the costs of living. It is not surprising then that 51 per cent of respondents ranked this increased cost of living as a significant social disincentive to working in rural and remote communities. Reinforcing this result, 30 per cent of respondents to a survey conducted for the HREOC inquiry into rural and remote education also cited personal costs as a disincentive to remaining in these communities.

During the interviews it was consistently argued that cash incentives seem to be better at retaining teachers than attracting them; however, they are only marginally effective at this. Social and professional conditions are often seen as more important. Supporting this, the review of the Difficult to Staff school initiative in Western Australia found that cash incentives were important but not crucial in retaining teachers.

Cash incentives are also taxed so it is important to allow teachers options on how they collect these benefits as in the Northern Territory and Queensland. Consideration must also be given to the fact that any increase in monetary incentives consequently leads to an increase in the HECS repayment threshold.

While cash is used as an incentive to attract teachers in the form of allowances to compensate for some of the additional costs of living, there are also cash benefits which increase with retention. In this way, teachers are rewarded for remaining beyond their first year and further rewarded for staying beyond their minimum service period. The idea of increased cash payments after a designated period of service was strongly supported in the survey with 52 per cent of respondents rating it in their top 2 of nine potential incentives to help attract and retain teachers. This benefit would be in addition to any existing allowances and could easily be funded by saving the cost of transferring a teacher. Cash benefits after a designated period of service were also strongly supported in a report in 2000 by Sui-Linn White, with respondents to that survey expressing concern that any benefits be real amounts after tax. As existing cash benefits do not totally offset the higher cost of living in rural and remote communities the implementation of this measure should be accompanied by a further general increase of existing cash benefits.

These cash benefits, after a designated period of service, are currently used in NSW, Queensland and Western Australia to varying degrees. In 2002, the NSW Department of Education and Training introduced a trial of a \$5000 retention benefit in 22 difficult to staff rural and remote schools. Teachers who remained in these schools would receive the benefit for a maximum five years after completing their minimum service period, which varies between two and three years depending on the relative isolation of their schools. While no formal analysis of the impact of this initiative has been released there must have been a positive impact as the benefit was extended to apply to a total of 40 schools in 2003. Due to the inferred success and the support for this initiative from survey respondents, a further increase would be appropriate.

A way of increasing the NSW cash benefit could be adopting a scaled approach as used in Western Australia. There, teachers receive an increasing percentage of the relevant locality allowance at the end of each additional year for a maximum of four years beyond their minimum service period. The payments are therefore calculated on the following basis:

Years served beyond minimum service period	Percentage of applicable locality allowance
1	42.5 per cent
2	47.5 per cent
3	52.5 per cent
4	57.5 per cent

This initiative applies to Western Australia's most isolated schools, as covered by the Remote Teaching Service, with the relevant locality allowances for these schools ranging from \$8500 to \$11,500 per annum. A separate schedule of payments is used for less isolated rural schools, covered by what is called the Difficult to Staff Schools initiative. In these schools cash payments are received for each year of continuous service

during the minimum service period, with a flat rate as a bonus for each year thereafter. These payments amount to a total of \$2000 to \$11,000 over three years depending on the degree of isolation. Payments are scaled at 20 per cent for one year's continued service, 35 per cent for two years, and 45 per cent for three years with a flat rate of 30 per cent for each year thereafter. Teachers can elect to receive either part or all of this benefit to directly fund travel and/or the cost of professional development rather than having it paid directly as income.

Queensland teachers in rural and remote locations are eligible for cash benefits after completing their minimum service period plus an additional two school terms. The minimum service period in Queensland is similar to both Western Australia and NSW, with the required time in most rural and remote schools being three years with the exception of the most isolated schools, which have a minimum period of two years. Cash benefits in Queensland are linked to transfer points such that the most isolated locations in the state, which attract a transfer rating of 7, receive the payment in their 3rd, 4th, 5th and 6th years of service. Teachers in less isolated locations attracting a transfer rating of 6, 5, or 4 receive the payments in their 4th, 5th and 6th years of service. The payments are made as follows:

Transfer rating	Cash benefit per annum
7	\$5000
6	\$4000
5	\$3000
4	\$2000

Interestingly, both the Queensland and Western Australian Remote Teaching Service schemes cap payments after six or seven years. This subtly implies that teachers should consider moving on after this length of service. There is no ideal time for a teacher to consider moving, however, these time factors, embedded in the cash benefit system, as well as Tasmania's willingness to move teachers who have been in a school for more than five years, indicate that some degree of movement is encouraged. The validity of this in terms of personal or system benefits is something to be

“Once they have been placed in such a school, respondents are not as dissatisfied with their situation as they had expected to be.”

determined. However, capping payments after a certain period of time discriminates against people who marry into the community or are indeed from that community themselves and could affect staff

morale, with long term teachers being disadvantaged. As a minimum, there should be flat rate for each year after the cap, as with Western Australia's Difficult to Staff schools.

To assist with freeing up limited housing and to encourage teachers to remain in rural and remote locations, respondents to the survey supported the provision of home loan subsidies, with 51 per cent ranking it in their top 4 of nine incentives. Teachers who accept positions in rural and remote schools, and remain beyond the minimum service period, fall a number of years behind their peers in purchasing a home. These teachers also spend more years paying rent rather than paying off a home. A home loan subsidy would help overcome this economic disadvantage.

An alternative to assisting with a housing deposit is the approach commonly used whereby transferred

teachers have stamp duty and associated legal costs paid after a qualifying period. However, any subsidy needs to be increased for first home buyers as recent state and federal law changes have rendered it pointless. A sliding scale of application, similar to that with cash payments in Queensland and Western Australia may also be a way to administer such an initiative. Such a scheme could potentially see a teacher who has remained in a rural or remote school for the minimum service period receive an interest rate reduction of one per cent or cash deposit equal to their gross cash retention benefit. This could potentially increase to a three per cent interest rate reduction or cash deposit equal to their gross cash retention benefit for each year of additional service. Such potential measures would be cost neutral as education departments are already saving stamp duty costs due to the federal assistance for first home buyers and would also save on removal costs.

Movement

The ability to secure a transfer to an area of choice is an important incentive for teachers to take up positions in rural and remote schools. Therefore, this incentive needs to be effective and guarantee movement, as is the case in Tasmania. Systems that clog up such as the West Australian model need to be avoided. A centralised state or territory-wide staffing system is the most effective way of guaranteeing this mobility, as teachers from rural and remote areas are disadvantaged in competing for contracts in desirable locations (see the chapter "No applicants").

It is well established that the majority of teachers do not remain for long in rural and remote schools. These schools, therefore, have a much higher staff turnover than metropolitan schools. The results of the survey clearly indicate that a transfer is desirable and being taken up in large numbers. The survey showed that 54 per cent of respondents do not intend to be teaching in rural or remote schools after five years service and that nearly one third intend not to be there after two more years. These figures are supported by a study of the expectations of rural and remote teaching by pre-service teachers, with 40 per cent expecting to only teach in these schools for one to two years and 33 per cent no more than five years. These figures clearly indicate a high level of intended mobility for teachers in these schools. However, these figures are challenged by 48 per cent of respondents who intend to remain in their present appointment in a rural and remote school beyond their minimum service period. Note that these figures may have been skewed by a large number of executive respondents and long serving rural teachers. Alternatively, once they have been placed in such a school, respondents are not as dissatisfied with their situation as they had expected to be.

Supporting evidence of increased movement is the NSW report on teachers in mid-career. This report is part of a longitudinal study of teachers over 16 years. The teachers are therefore not in the early years of teaching and would be considered as experienced teachers. Notably, only 14 per cent of these live and work in areas that would be regarded as rural or even remote. Boylan's study of long-staying rural teachers defines 'long staying' teachers as those that have "been in their current school for at least six years and not intend moving within 12 months". Add to this the findings from the HREOC inquiry into rural and remote education and a clear picture of high move-

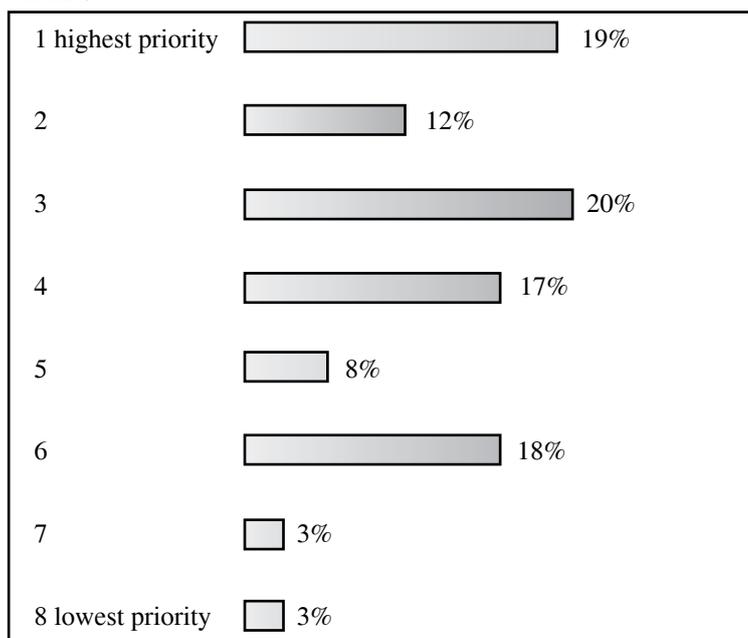
ment is developed. Reducing this high turnover and ensuring there is a higher proportion of long staying, mid-career teachers, should be the goal of all retention benefits.

The incentive to gain a location of preference needs to be effective, but also needs to encourage retention. It should therefore exist, in conjunction with other incentives, to counter the desire to transfer, such as cash bonuses for time after the minimum service period. A possible approach could be increasing the certainty of transfer, with these benefits increasing over time. In some ways, this already exists due to the wide range of transfer points many states use. Transfer points in NSW, for example, range from 8 in the most isolated areas to 1 in desirable locations, while Queensland ranges from 7 to 1. This, in effect, means that the more service a teacher has in remote areas the more likely they are to gain a position in their area of choice. Systems with small ranges, like Western Australia which ranges from 3.5 to 1, should be avoided as they comparatively reduce the benefit of retention.

It may appear a bit of an oxymoron but retention will be improved by increasing the ability of teachers to transfer. It is clear from the survey (figure 26) that a priority transfer to an area of choice is significant for teachers. It is also clear from figure 24 that these teachers see the option of relocating to the coast as much more desirable than moving to another rural or remote location. When asked about where they anticipated their next appointment to be, respondents from the survey of teachers in mid-career also overwhelmingly indicated a desire to move to coastal areas with rural and remote areas at the bottom of their options. These figures support the view that teachers do not want to go to these areas and that their preferred locations are coastal areas. The results therefore suggest that a transfer system which enables teachers to move to a more desirable location is an important incentive.

If transfer rights are what is going to attract and retain teachers then this incentive needs to be increased if the attraction and retention of rural teachers is to improve. One danger of making the incentives in rural and remote areas more attractive is that schools in the middle regions, without the enhanced benefits, may consequently become harder to staff. This occurred in Queensland but can possibly be overcome by the West Australian example of continuous monetary incentives for these middle regions. With a graduated scale of

Figure 24: After completing the minimum service period, what priority do you give to applying for a transfer to a school on the coast?



transfer points, teachers in these middle regions will also be well placed to transfer after only a few more years than their colleagues in isolated schools. Tasmania's example of a guaranteed move would also be helpful, however, this would need to come in at a point later than the three years used in Tasmania. As a number of jurisdictions appear to discourage retention beyond six or seven years this measure would be well placed at this point.

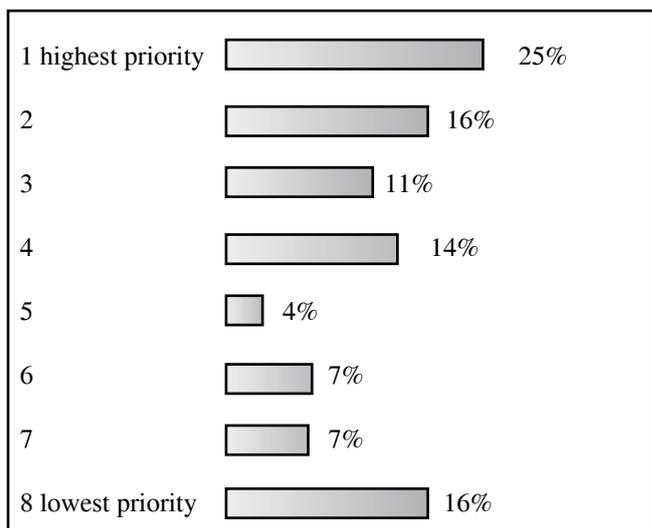
It remains important to avoid a contract based employment model as is used in Western Australia because country service is devalued and teachers lack access to professional development and experience

professional isolation so their ability to compete is diminished. While Western Australia does have a degree of positive discrimination for people looking to return from remote service, its guarantee is at best tenuous. South Australia, at least, has a strong discriminator based on rural service and a mixed system of centralised transfer and direct application.

An important argument against the decentralised contract based approach to staffing in favour of a centralised system comes from Victoria. While Victoria is not synonymous with the image of isolated communities, it is already having major problems getting teachers into some rural schools. There is no need for teachers to move to these locations as they can seek contracts in preferable locations that are advertised or move to the private sector. As there are no centralised staffing systems, schools which have trouble attracting teachers need to find the money to offer their own incentives. This, of course, significantly disadvantages schools in areas with a lower socio economic status. These incentives to attract staff are at the expense of funding for other core educational responsibilities. This is strongly affirmed by the Senate inquiry into the status of the teaching profession which stated that "the trend

"As there are no centralised staffing systems in Victoria, schools which have trouble attracting teachers need to find the money to offer their own incentives."

Figure 26: How important is priority transfer to a vacancy in an area of choice?



to school-based recruitment exacerbates the difficulty of filling positions in hard to staff schools”.

With the aging teaching service, a problem is developing of finding suitable vacancies for teachers returning from rural and remote locations. This is already causing particular problems in a number of areas in Australia, with the exception of Tasmania and the Northern Territory, which guarantee a transfer. Queensland also guarantees a transfer but vacancies are becoming increasingly difficult to find in the desired locations. The NSW report on mid-career teachers confirms the concentration of established teachers in preferred locations. This report points out that the challenge will be to encourage some of the teachers in preferred locations to accept positions in rural and remote schools.

Encouraging established teachers to move may assist with the long term retention of teachers in rural and remote schools by providing experienced role models and leadership for beginning teachers. Incentives to encourage experienced teachers to accept either medium term appointments and/or executive positions in these schools should therefore be explored. There are already a number of potential models in place, as discussed in the chapter "No applicants". It is taken for granted that removal costs are paid with all transfers. Needing to qualify for removals as in South Australia, where only teachers who stay for seven years service, is in fact a disincentive, as it extinguishes flexibility.

In addition to the professional benefits of encouraging experienced teachers to these schools, such initiatives would open up positions for teachers to transfer into more preferred locations. Failing this, the creation of extra positions is a possibility. With an aging teacher service, vacancies due to long service leave will be increasing and there is always a high demand for casual staff. Transferring teachers could therefore have the option of being placed into long service leave positions pending a vacancy. Similarly, placing a number of teachers on reduced loads to work on special programs or initiatives would create further vacancies. There needs to be some creative thinking on a solution to this problem because if there are no vacancies there is no incentive.

While there is difficulty attracting and retaining teachers in rural and remote areas it should be mentioned that many teachers also enjoy the lifestyle these areas provide. The fact that there are a number of teachers still in these communities and intending to remain for a further period of time is evidence of this. Similarly, the survey found that a number of teachers are intending to move to a larger regional centre (figure 35) rather than to a metropolitan area (figure 36). 52 per cent of respondents indicated a preference for a larger regional centre in their top 3 intentions while 57 per cent ranked a move to a metropolitan area in their bottom three intentions.

In Matthews' study of graduate teachers' experiences in their first year of teaching in rural and remote schools, the friendliness of the community and the relaxed lifestyle are strong themes. Teachers in that survey highlighted the friendly and caring community, the closeness of the community, the way they were welcomed by the community and the subsequent

Figure35:Aftercompletingtheminimumserviceperiodwhatareyourintentionsforapplyingforatransfer to a school in a larger regional centre?

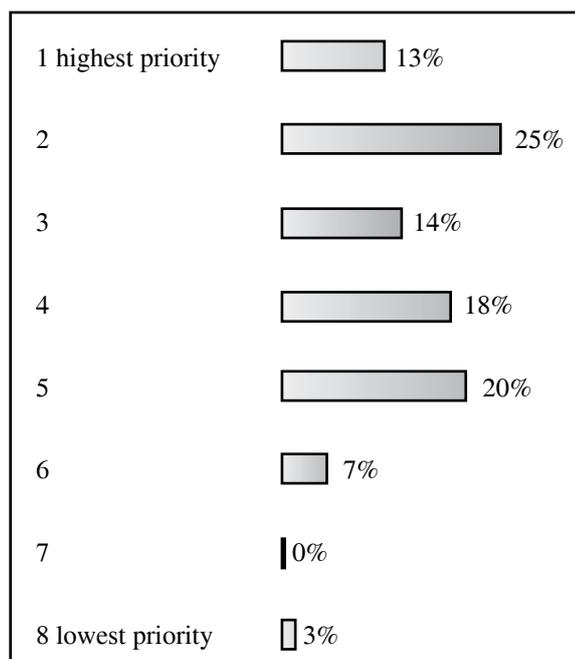
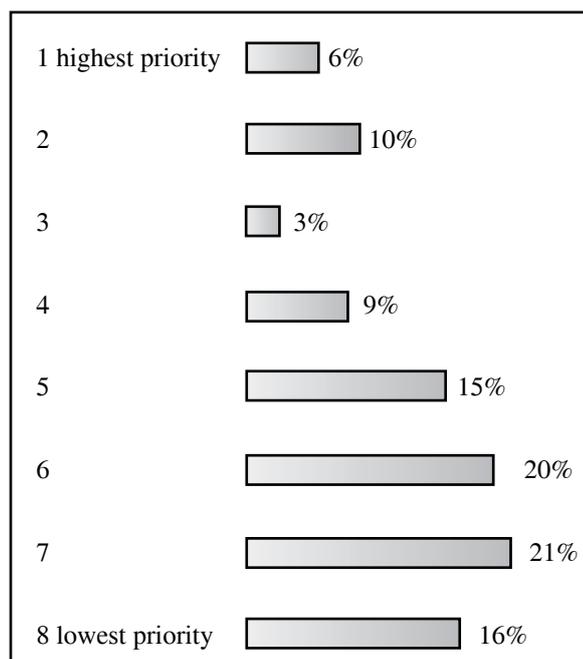


Figure36:Aftercompletingtheminimumserviceperiodwhatareyourintentionsforapplyingforatransfer to a school in a metropolitan area?



lifestyle as being positive experiences in their first year. Similarly, long staying teachers in the Boylan study also cited lifestyle as an important determinant in their decision to remain. Teachers' preference for a larger regional centre over metropolitan areas can then be explained as a desire to maintain a certain lifestyle while reducing the impact of isolation.

Working in rural communities with high staff turnover also affords teachers the ability to gain experience in executive positions. As the HREOC inquiry into rural and remote education pointed out, rural schools often have a predominance of first time executives and many young teachers acting in executive positions. Strategies to attract experienced teachers to these schools have previously been discussed, however, with appropriate support young teachers can quickly develop their

skills and advance their careers in rural and remote areas. A number of teachers see the idea of remaining in their present school to gain promotions experience as an option. 39 per cent of respondents ranked this intention in their top 4 intentions after completing their minimum service period. This motivation then gives them a purpose to remaining rather than the devaluing experience of feeling trapped.

The trend in favour of larger regional centres over metropolitan areas is also seen in figure 38 as a significant number of teachers expressed the intention to seek a promotion in other rural and remote areas. While 44 per cent of respondents expressed this as one of their top 3 intentions, 60 per cent were strongly against seeking a promotion to a metropolitan school (figure 39).

Enhancing quality teaching

The rationale for improving the attraction and retention of staff in rural and remote schools is to enhance the quality of education received by students in these communities. Therefore, all measures to attract and retain teachers can be seen as measures to enhance quality teaching, as the number one priority for this to

Figure 38: After completing the minimum service period what are your intentions for applying for a promotions position in a rural/remote area?

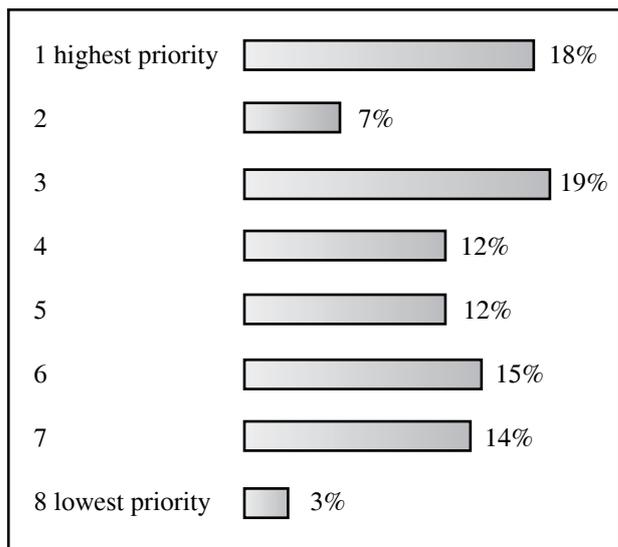
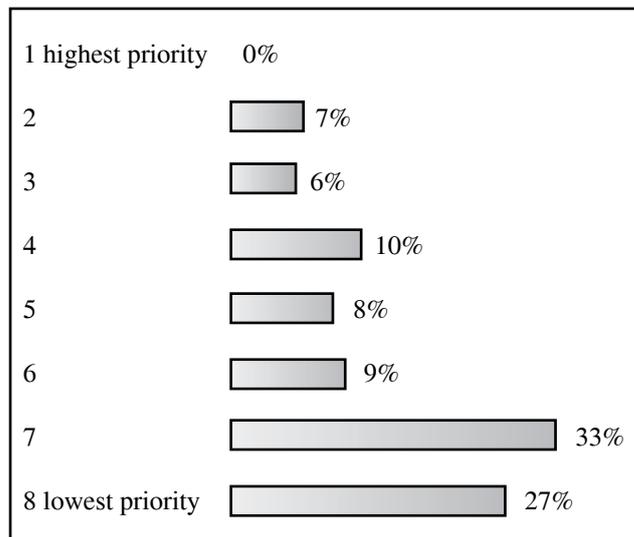


Figure 39: After completing the minimum service period what are your intentions for applying for a promotions position in a metropolitan area?



occur is to have a teacher in the classroom, preferably one who wants to be there. Once in the classroom, the teachers need to be supported to perform their duties to the best of their ability and so to ensure that all students are receiving the quality education they are entitled to, regardless of geographic location.

Quality teaching is a loaded term which often creates images of teacher performance reviews, standards and measurement. However, in this context quality teaching is used to refer to the ability of teachers to effectively perform their duties.

While the appropriateness of applying standards based on various measures of quality teaching to judging the “quality” of individual teachers is not the domain of this report it does need to be highlighted that equitable access to professional learning is essential if teachers, and subsequently students, in rural and remote areas are not going to be significantly disadvantaged. This theme links with the human rights construction of the attraction and retention of staff in relation to an equitable access to the best possible education. The importance of being valued as a professional and the need for ongoing professional growth and development throughout a teacher’s career were also highlighted as important ways to enhance the attractiveness of teaching as a career. An important first step is ensuring that there are teachers available to attract to rural and remote schools.

This chapter is focuses on the need to enable teachers to do their job properly and limit barriers to effective teaching, whatever that may be, in rural schools. In exploring this focus this chapter will look at issues of access to professional development, the effect of limited program continuity, access to casual teachers, professional isolation and teaching outside the subject areas in which teachers are qualified. A number of these areas are the domain of present and ongoing academic research and involve complex modelling and discussion. Some established generalisations about student learning may indeed be used, but the biggest issue here is that these have an impact on teachers’ ability to perform their duties effectively — and that if not addressed must have a negative impact on student learning and teacher morale.

The lack of access to professional development leads to the creation of a sense of isolation from others in the profession. There is a strong sense of isolation faced by many teachers, especially beginning teachers, both in the classroom and as members of a broader profession. Similarly, school structures and cultures can encourage isolation which in turn leads to teachers not being open to new ideas or collaboration. Where teachers are unable to access mentors, critical friends or professional discussions, their growth as professionals is limited. Isolation can also be seen in teachers’ resistance to looking critically at their practice. To overcome this, teachers’ voices, not just those of the powerful bureaucrats, need to be heard to help achieve educational reform. When asked, the respondents to this survey clearly highlighted structural issues rather than pedagogical issues as the biggest professional disincentives to accepting positions in rural and remote schools. These structural concerns were also found to be key issues in the attrition of early career teachers by Manuel who concluded that “the principal issues to emerge from these [early career] teachers’ stories centre on day-to-day working conditions”. Similarly, non-pedagogic issues have been established as the source of major dissatisfaction amongst more established and experienced teachers.

Overcoming the impediments to professional satisfaction are crucial if we are to retain our teachers in rural and remote schools. As has previously been established, the issue of professional satisfaction is the biggest determinant in a teachers' decision to remain in these communities. The lack of contact with other teachers in their subject area was a big concern for first year teachers in the study by Sharplin. This lack of support for beginning teachers was also highlighted as a cause of attrition by Ewing and Smith. From these reports, the survey and anecdotal evidence, it is apparently common for particularly young, enthusiastic teachers to feel as though they have been "thrown in at the deep end" when they begin their careers. This feeling amplifies with distance where geographical isolation compounds professional isolation. This sense of professional isolation was found by the survey to be a significant professional disincentive to working in rural and remote schools with 65 per cent of respondents ranking it in their top 2 on a five point scale (rank in order of priority: 1 largest disincentive – 5 lowest disincentive). All the subsequent issues discussed come under the umbrella of this sense of professional isolation. This is clearly a significant issue for rural and remote schools. Without overcoming it, no amount of money or incentive to move will be as effective as they otherwise could.

Professional learning opportunities

The access to and the provision of appropriate professional development is an ongoing concern. However, it is essential for teachers' professional growth and consequently the education they deliver to rural students that they are not disadvantaged due to geographic isolation. Professional learning opportunities can ensure that the quality of teachers in rural and remote schools is maintained. This is essential, as pointed out by the Tomlinson review of schooling in rural Western Australia which clearly stated that "the quality of staff is a critical element in the equitable treatment of students in rural schools". Unfortunately, the distances involved to access courses and the limited availability of casual relief create a significant barrier to participation for many teachers.

"Teachers strongly identified the lack of professional development opportunities and the cost of accessing courses as professional disincentives to accepting a position in rural and remote schools."

In response to a survey for the HREOC inquiry into rural and remote education 51.5 per cent of teachers identified the lack of access to professional development as a real disincentive. This theme continued throughout the inquiry's investigations with the themes

of distance, the cost of travel and the costs of casual teachers (if they are available) being highlighted as major concerns.

The Vinson Inquiry into the Provision of Public Education in NSW also raised concerns about teachers' access to ongoing professional development being a major issue in rural and remote areas. The concerns raised by the HREOC and Vinson inquiries are overwhelmingly supported by this survey, with teachers strongly identifying the lack of professional development opportunities and the cost of accessing courses as professional disincentives to accepting a

position in rural and remote schools. 57 per cent of respondents ranked the lack of professional development opportunities in the top 2 of a five point scale for disincentives while 68 per cent ranked the cost of accessing courses in the top 2 of the same scale (rank in order of priority: 1 largest disincentive – 5 lowest disincentive). Similarly, the survey of teachers in mid-career found that 50.5 per cent of respondents agreed "a great deal" with the statement that "opportunities for teachers to access professionally relevant knowledge are too limited".

In a survey of areas of concern in rural and remote primary schools for the NSW Primary Principals Association, it was found that the biggest concern, shared by 93 per cent of schools, was the inadequacy of the training and development budget. In the same survey the travelling time to courses was ranked third, with 89 per cent of schools having concerns in this area. The Vinson inquiry also pointed out the inadequacy of the professional development budget in NSW which only gave on average \$24 per teacher when a casual for a day can cost in excess of \$250. This is without taking into account course fees, and travel and accommodation costs for teachers in rural and remote schools. Vinson went on to conclude that: "There can hardly be a more obvious shortcoming within the public education system than the absence of more than token professional development funding for teaching staff."

In 2004 the NSW Government took up Vinson's recommendation for a substantial increase in per capita funding for professional development of \$800 per metropolitan teacher and \$1200 per non metropolitan teacher, in a form. Under the changed funding arrangements schools in metropolitan areas receive \$600 per teacher, with more remote and isolated schools receiving \$1000 per teacher. Schools between these areas receive \$700 per teacher. While this does not go as far as that suggested by the Vinson inquiry it is a significant improvement, especially as the special needs of teachers in rural and remote areas are recognised. However, this recognition should go further as rural and remote schools are often the training ground for schools in more preferable location. Unfortunately, there is no extra funding for the teachers most in need, the beginning teachers. As there was no increase to the budget allocation, the funding for the increases came from significant job losses and a restructuring of the department.

It is generally accepted in Western Australia that rural and remote areas have limited access to professional development. Most professional development occurs centrally, which excludes teachers from these areas due to cost and time. Historically, professional development had been overlooked in favour of transfer and cash bonuses, however, with the advent of contract employment there has been a renewed focus on professional development. In fact, the retention of transfer points for classroom teachers recognises the lack of professional development opportunities and teacher networks which make it difficult for teachers' knowledge of syllabus implementation and pedagogical practice to remain current. This lack of currency has been a significant limitation in rural and remote teachers' ability to win contracts.

“Teachers in the Difficult to Staff schools in Western Australia are able to use their cash incentive in pre-tax dollars to access professional development.”

Teachers in the Difficult to Staff schools in Western Australia are able to use their cash incentive in pre-tax dollars to access professional development. This unfortunately reduces the size of their incentive and also shifts the cost of professional development from the employer to the employee. Professional development is an obligation of employers, especially if they are charged with ensuring rural students are receiving an equitable education. The West Australian department of education appears to have accepted that rural teachers will not be able to access professional development due to a lack of relief to teachers. However, they do concede that “ongoing consideration” needs to be given to improving the access to professional development. The significant increase in information technology funding indicates that this is considered as the solution to providing increased access to professional development. Technology is also seen as a solution in the Northern Territory, where training and development generally occurs onsite or in workshops at the cluster centre. Schools receive a general allocation of two days in-school or cluster-based professional development a year, but are also able to apply for an extra two days as needed.

Flexibility in professional development is a key component in South Australia where teachers are required to undertake 37.5 hours of professional learning each year. These hours can include courses outside school hours or professional reading. While there is no compulsion to complete these hours, teachers who do not need to turn up for work during the last week of term. This last week is generally student free and seen as professional development time for those teachers who have not elected to complete their set hours during the year. Not surprisingly, most teachers take the previous option. While access can be an issue in rural and remote areas, the inclusion of professional reading and an increase in technology funding and courses available online has helped overcome potential discrimination.

While access to professional development is a significant professional disincentive to accepting positions in rural and remote schools throughout Australia, there is not a corresponding desire by teachers to increase such access. When asked in the survey about more accessible professional development as an incentive to attract teachers only 16 per cent ranked it in their top 3 out of eight possible incentives. In fact, more (20 per cent) ranked it as their last incentive. The results in relation to an incentive to retain were not quite as distinct but illustrate a similar trend, with 36 per cent ranking it in their top 3 incentives and only two per cent ranking it last. These statistics illustrate that teachers consider reasonable access to professional development as a significant problem while believing it should be solved separate to incentives to attract and retain them. There appears to be an underlying view that access to professional development is a profes-

sional right and an obligation on the employer.

As an incentive to attract and retain teachers, professional development was ranked behind non professional issues such as the payment of HECS, priority transfer, housing, leave, cash and beginning teacher mentoring. Professional development was also ranked last behind permanency, cash and transfers in a review conducted on the Difficult to Staff schools initiative in Western Australia. The problem is that these issues do not take into account the motivation for leaving, which, as shown by the research, is encouraged by a sense of professional isolation.

An important issue connected to the access to professional development is the quality and type of the courses available. Quality was a significant issue in the NSW Primary Principals Association survey of concerns for rural schools, being ranked 5th with 79 per cent of schools having a concern in this area. The “train the trainer” approach was also looked at by the Vinson inquiry, with many people raising concerns about the transmission of information from the trained “expert”. This will remain a significant issue with the increasing reliance in all states and territories on CD-ROM, online courses and the “train the trainer” approach.

While information technology has great potential to break down barriers caused by isolation, it needs to be accompanied by network meetings, tutorial support and conferences. Otherwise, the reliance on technology will increase the sense of professional isolation experienced by teachers by further reducing their limited “real” contact with colleagues. There also needs to be a time component built into courses and school staffing so that information gained from such courses can be properly disseminated and implemented. Without a time component these methods appear more focussed on cost saving rather than improving quality.

The Vinson inquiry also supported the issue of greater flexibility in professional development, including the payment of HECS, course fees and textbooks, as well as the lack of incentives to engage in further study. These measures were also supported by the federal review, *Australia's Teachers; Australia's Future*, which saw them as important components of the necessary ongoing professional learning of teachers. The payment of HECS fees has already been established as a popular means by which to encourage teachers to rural and remote schools, therefore,

“A system that either rewards or encourages teachers to undertake further study needs to be developed.”

there is no difficulty in expanding that recommendation to established teachers wishing to undertake further study. In conjunction with this, a system that either rewards or encourages teachers to undertake further study needs to be developed. If not remuneration, this could be in the form of time and support to undertake study. While most jurisdictions do provide study leave it is generally without pay. This appears at odds with the desire of improving quality, as students, the school and employer will benefit from upgrading the skills and knowledge of teachers as well as contributing to the ongoing development of knowledge about the core business of teachers. This is especially the case as Manuel quotes: “A 1996 study . . . found that ‘every additional dollar spent on more highly qualified teachers netted greater improvements in student achievement than any other use of school resource’.”

Supporting teachers in their professional learning, be it either department based or further study, should therefore be a priority for any education bureaucracy interested in improving the quality of student outcomes. This support should be structured and ongoing, particularly in the early years of a teacher's career. Unfortunately, most jurisdictions appear to believe that after beginning teachers have completed their first year they will be fine.

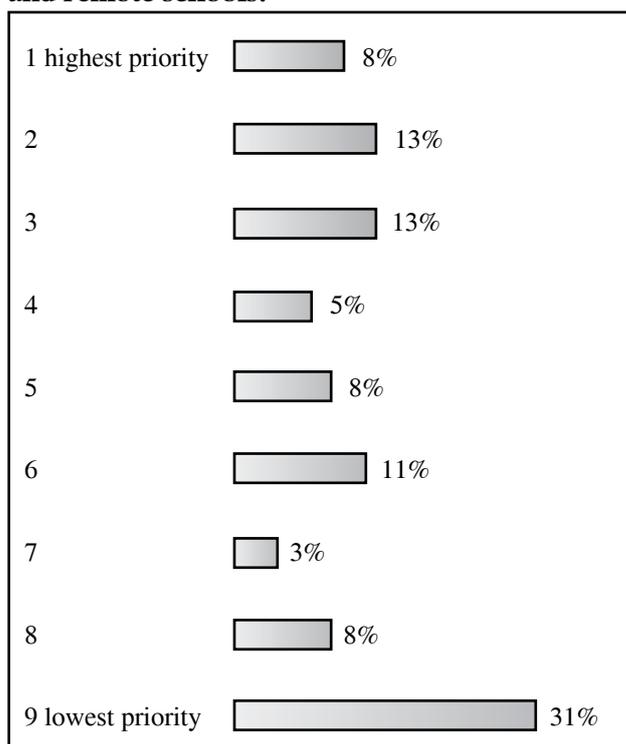
Increased funding and availability of courses will, however, only be as useful as a teacher's ability to access these courses. The biggest barrier to access is the availability of casual teachers. This problem was ranked second as a concern in the Primary Principals Association's survey, with 92 per cent of schools highlighting it as an issue. The availability of casual relief to attend courses was also overwhelmingly ranked as a significant issue in the survey conducted for this report with 42 per cent ranking it at 1 on a scale of 5 (rank in order of priority: 1 largest disincentive – 5 lowest disincentive) and 73 per cent ranking it as either 1 or 2. The significance of the issue is underlined by the fact that only two per cent of respondents ranked it at a 5.

“Any incentives mentioned in this report must equally apply, and be perhaps specifically targeted to, casual teachers.”

The availability of casual teachers was a significant issue, in general, during the interviews conducted for the report. Indeed, it is not a new or unknown issue for staffing authorities or teachers working in

these areas. The significance of the issue in this context, as well as later becoming a deterrent to taking leave, has a cumulative effect undermining teacher satisfaction that cannot be underestimated. Not only does the absence of casual teachers place undue pressure on existing staff needing to take extras or avoiding taking sick leave, it also impacts on the

Figure 47: How important are enhanced promotion opportunities as incentives to retain teachers in rural and remote schools?



continuity of educational programs for students. It is essential, then, that any incentives mentioned in this report must equally apply, and be perhaps specifically targeted to, casual teachers. There could be a strong argument for increasing casual teacher pay rates in more difficult to staff areas to encourage casual teachers to move there.

Staffing formulas need to change to provide extra teachers in schools for relief. This approach is having some positive impact in Western Australia's Remote Teaching Service which has a slightly increased staff allocation to help with relief. Alternatively, extra staff may be appointed to a district to provide short term relief. NSW is presently trialling such a scheme where a number of teachers are appointed to a cluster of schools or a district to provide short term relief. These schemes need to become permanent arrangements as a similar scheme has been successful in South Australia, while a so called "flying squad" of teachers has been successful in Western Australia. This West Australian model literally sees the appointment of a pool of teachers to an area that fly in as needed. However, it takes a special sort of person to fulfil such a role as there is no real professional value and little satisfaction in the role, as the teachers do not have their own class or certainty about what they will be doing from one day to the next. In Western Australia, teachers are only appointed to the flying squad for one year, and receive permanency and large pay bonuses.

While such schemes need to be ongoing, teachers should only be appointed to them for one year while still receiving permanency. Teachers should then be placed in a rural or remote school with the initial year counted as part of their minimum service period. The provision of in-built district relief, which could be realised by extra staffing in schools or a district based relief, was mildly supported by the survey with 29 per cent of teachers ranking it in their top 3 incentives to attract teachers. This result can again be interpreted as teachers regarding this as a basic necessity rather than a special incentive. However, anything that improves conditions should be implemented.

The importance of access to professional development has been seen in relation to enhancing the professional self worth of teachers as well as improving the quality of their work, hopefully reflected in improved student outcomes. However, it is also important to enhance the career prospects of teachers, especially those in contract based employment. It has already been demonstrated in the chapter "No applicants" how a lack of access to professional development has disadvantaged teachers in rural and remote areas in Western Australia gaining contract positions. However, there was not a strong level of support for enhanced promotion opportunities as incentives to retain teachers in rural and remote schools (figure 47). This finding possibly recognises that high staff turnover and lack of demand for positions enables young aspirational teachers to gain promotion more easily compared to colleagues working in large metropolitan areas. The intention, after completing the minimum service period, revealed anecdotally, is that teachers are prepared to consider applying for promotion in rural and remote areas provided their guarantee of movement is maintained.

Results in figure 47 do not undermine the importance of ensuring that experienced teachers are in these schools to provide leadership and act as role models. Programs previously discussed, such as Western Australia's Rural Aspirant Program and Queensland's

Professional Exchange Program, are good models to emulate. These programs have proved extremely successful in staffing, assisting beginning teachers and assisting with the smooth running and achieving quality student outcomes in these schools. Such schemes can only help all teachers in the school perform their duties to the best of their abilities and their replication is advocated.

In the survey, teachers identified a sense of professional isolation as significant. This sense of isolation develops because of a lack of contact with other like-minded professionals and is accentuated by the fact that many rural and remote schools are physically isolated, with a significant number of beginning teachers and/or working in single-teacher faculties or stages. Overcoming this isolation is difficult due to the lack of professional development opportunities and the cost of attending these courses (including travel and accommodation) and lack of casual relief. While some of these factors may be overcome by increasing professional development funds, the general impact of isolation will remain.

“There are a number of programs around Australia which allow teachers to exchange positions with colleagues in other areas to gain experiences teaching in another context.”

To overcome the effects of professional isolation, the provision of an inter-district exchange program could be instituted. There are a number of programs around Australia which allow teachers to exchange positions with colleagues in other areas to gain experiences teaching in another context. Such an initiative, however, was not strongly supported by the survey, however, with only 30 per cent of respondents ranking it in their top 6 of nine incentives to retain. This clearly indicates that permanent transfer rather than temporary exchange is preferred.

Where access to and funding for casual relief are issues, the reorganisation of the school day to provide extra time is a potential solution. This provision is used in both the Northern Territory and Western Australia where schools can modify their teaching weeks to fit in professional development for a day. Here, schools may extend their day, eventually accruing a day's time in lieu of overtime hours. Some schools time their professional learning courses on either side of a weekend and take the staff to a large regional centre or the capital city. There needs to be a delicate trade off here, however, as this is requiring the teachers to work twice – one to accrue the time and secondly on the day of the training course.

This could potentially relate to the issue of working conditions. There was a common theme throughout the interviews that education departments often prefer to employ younger teachers who do not know as much about their rights and are impressionable in difficult to staff schools. They are more likely to accept extras, an unreasonable workload or work effectively double time to access the professional development they are entitled to. This illustrates the importance of teacher unions being active early in teachers' careers to ensure they know their rights and are supported to have those rights recognised. Flexible arrangements, if managed

properly with appropriate tradeoffs of time, can be successful in enabling teachers to work together and reduce the effects of professional isolation.

Supporting quality teaching

There are a number of other issues which need to be addressed by education bureaucracies that either compound the sense of professional isolation or limit teachers' ability to go about their work effectively. The biggest of these issues was the access to resources with 65 per cent ranking this as either a 1 or 2 on a scale of 5 for professional disincentives (rank in order of priority: 1 largest disincentive – 5 lowest disincentive). Indeed, this general lack of resources was the most significant issue for first year teachers in rural and remote schools in a study conducted by Sharplin.

Living and working in isolated areas limits teachers' ability to shop for resources and instead makes them reliant upon school resources. However, as schools are funded by student numbers the comparative value of resources is decreased. Whereas large schools are able to spend a comparatively smaller proportion of resource funding on expensive items this same item would account for most of a small school's budget. Increasing resources available to rural schools based on equitable distribution rather than a formula was advocated by the review of schooling in rural Western Australia (Tomlinson). There are funding programs for rural and remote schools to address this resource inadequacy, however, they are often tied to specific programs for specific time periods. The results of this survey clearly indicate that proportional funding needs to be further increased to ensure equity of access to resources — for teachers and students.

Access to consultants and support staff were also significant issues for respondents in the survey. These issues relate to the

problem of professional isolation, as teachers in rural and remote schools clearly feel they are not supported by specialist staff. In fact, 48 per cent of respondents ranked little support by consultants and 53 per cent ranked limited access to support staff as either 1 or 2 in a scale of five as professional disincentives (rank in order of priority: 1 largest disincentive – 5 lowest disincentive). These problems go directly to the lack of access to professional development and support. The Vinson inquiry suggested professional development needed to travel to regional areas more often. These results also bring into question the decision in NSW to reduce the number of consultants to help fund the increases in the professional development budget. Clearly, there is a need to increase the number of consultants and support staff available in rural and remote areas.

Adding to professional isolation as a negative influence on a teacher's ability to perform their duties is the disruption caused by a lack of program continuity and teaching outside their areas of expertise. Our rural and remote schools have a staff turnover rate significantly higher than metropolitan schools. As the HREOC inquiry points out: “Staff retention rates can be an important determinant of the quality of the education being delivered to rural and remote children. High turnover of predominantly inexperienced teachers also has other costs.”

With the constant change of staff it often appears

“There is a need to increase the number of consultants and support staff available in rural and remote areas.”

that schools are getting nowhere with implementing new ideas or initiatives, with the sense of “re-inventing the wheel” leading to greater frustration among staff. This turnover similarly affects students as they are constantly getting new teachers, often with little experience, so the continuity of their studies is interrupted. For each new teacher that arrives both the teacher and students need to go through a period of relationship building. New teachers need to evaluate what the students have already learnt in order to plan how to progress while students who have just become familiar with one teacher’s approach need to become familiar with another.

Teachers are constantly trialling and modifying their teaching programs. New teachers in schools with high staff turnover are often limited in their ability to do this as they need to progress from the foundations left by their predecessor. Any modifications they begin trialling to meet the changing needs of the students and the schools generally only begin in their second year. With teachers leaving on average every second or third year, this process of constant improvement is very limited in schools with high staff turnover rates.

Teachers work most effectively when part of a learning community. This atmosphere of having a shared purpose and belonging is important in creating an environment in which teachers can flourish. Constant turnover of staff limits the ability of this community to develop within a school, as there is an aura of limited commitment and dedication. The impact of this perception of limited commitment similarly negatively impacts upon students’ ability to develop effective learning relationships with their teachers. Compounding this is the lack of casual teachers to replace staff who are absent because of illness or taking students away on excursions or attending professional learning courses.

The impact of high staff turnover on teacher satisfaction is obvious in results from the survey that show the lack of program continuity due to high staff turnover is a significant professional disincentive for teachers in these schools, with 38 per cent ranking it as a 1 on a scale of five (rank in order of priority: 1 largest disincentive – 5 lowest disincentive). 63 per cent of respondent ranked it as either a 1 or 2.

High staff turnover is of particular consequence in subject areas with a limited supply of qualified teachers. According to HREOC, this has meant that rural and remote schools have difficulty finding English, maths, science, information technology, language and sport staff.

In addition to the impact of high staff turnover on professional satisfaction is the negative impact of teachers having to teach outside their subject area. This occurs because schools are staffed based on student numbers, not curriculum demands. Consequently there are often not enough classes to fill a teacher’s load, resulting in an English teacher, for example, needing to take music. This impacts on both the teacher, who does not feel confident in the subject, and the students who are not receiving expert tuition. As previously mentioned, there is also limited consultancy support to assist teachers teaching outside their area of expertise. Similarly, subject areas with smaller class allocations such as music and languages are often not filled by specialist teachers, effectively denying students equitable access to these subjects.

The rigid application of staffing formulas results in schools losing substantial resources and teachers when student numbers drop below a certain level.

These staffing and resource formulas clearly do not meet the special curriculum and resource needs of many rural and remote schools, for whom the loss of one teacher is much more significant than for a larger school. As pointed out by a report for the Country Areas Program, the scope of curriculum on offer in rural schools and debates around the various merits of offering a broader curriculum with less face to face teaching or a narrower curriculum are significant issues. The anomalies of this system were highlighted in the NSW parliament by Richard Torbay (MP for Northern Tablelands) when he called for a review into the staffing formulas for country schools in November 2002. The education minister, in the lead up to the state election, agreed this request to but to date no review has been announced.

A review is necessary, as a survey of central schools by the NSW Teachers Federation Central Schools Committee in July 2003 found that:

- only two schools were able to offer HSC drama or music
- only one school was able to offer a foreign language
- no schools could offer languages for the School Certificate
- most schools combine classes or reduced the face-to-face teaching time per subject offered in order to offer a range of subjects.

This survey was conducted in the context of looking at the impact on small schools of subsidised travel beyond the nearest public school. The bussing of students past one school to attend a larger school or a private school is having a significant impact on small rural schools within an hour of larger regional centres. The survey found that an average of 46 students per school was bussed to neighbouring towns or cities.

This loss of students results in staff reductions and ultimately the loss of subject offerings for the remaining students. This reduction in subject offerings then impacts on teachers who have to teach outside their areas of expertise. To attempt to compensate for reduced staff numbers, schools reduce the number of face-to-face lessons per subject or executives take extra classes in addition to their responsibilities. The lack of a fully trained teacher for each subject class only encourages further students to leave. The survey found that if these ‘bussed’ students were enrolled in their local schools a further 56 teachers would be employed in rural and remote schools. A similar dynamic occurs when students from rural communities leave for boarding schools. While also affecting the breadth of curriculum on offer, a perception that the local education is inferior also develops.

“Bussing students past their local school not only affects the breadth of curriculum but is also a substantial waste of funding.”

The policy of bussing students past their local school not only affects the breadth of curriculum on offer at that school but is also a substantial waste of funding. The policy sees the government pay three times: existing school resources in small towns are underutilised, extra facilities are required in the larger centres to accommodate the extra students and the government pays the cost of the transport. It was the

view of the Vinson inquiry that the government could save between \$52 million and \$83 million per annum without disadvantaging students. This money could then be spent on attracting and retaining teachers in the very schools that this policy currently disadvantages.

A survey of 72 secondary school principals for the Australian Education Union found that 69.4 per cent of schools had programs that were being taught by teachers who are not fully qualified in the curriculum and teaching areas concerned. An Australian Secondary Principals Association survey found that schools which are unable to staff classes are either culling subjects from the curriculum or having teachers teach subjects for which they have no training. Not surprisingly these problems are exacerbated in rural and remote schools. The findings of both surveys are supported by this survey where 45 per cent of respondents ranked teaching outside their subject area either 1 or 2 on a five point scale as a significant disincentive to working in rural and remote schools (rank in order of priority: 1 largest disincentive – 5 lowest disincentive).

The results of this survey clearly indicate that a lack of program continuity and teaching outside of subject area are significant professional disincentives. These, and other, professional disincentives operate in conflict with the incentives aimed at retaining teachers. While the teaching environment is not satisfying, other incentives will continue to remain relatively ineffective. In addition to the professional implications of this issue there is a high educational cost which significantly and unfairly disadvantages students from rural and remote schools.

Attractive social conditions

The biggest barrier to attracting and retaining teachers in rural and remote schools is geographic isolation. Unfortunately there is no way to reduce physical distance and its associated climatic extremes. Most incentives aim to reduce this “tyranny of distance” by providing cash incentives, subsidising living, enhancing career enjoyment and guaranteeing a transfer. While these are all worthwhile and necessary objectives they are only short term solutions to limiting the effects of geographic isolation. Greater emphasis needs to be put on initiatives which assist in reducing this isolation in an ongoing fashion rather than the short term solutions which prevail. Combined with career enjoyment, cash incentives and an eventual guaranteed transfer, more teachers may be encouraged to remain in rural and remote schools beyond their minimum service period by measures to achieve this above aim. These measures, however, require a significant investment from governments to encourage the development of rural communities and their economies.

The biggest and most difficult social disincentive to overcome is isolation from family and friends. This is a constant theme in discussions with teachers in rural and remote communities, staffing departments and academic research. It is not surprising then that this was identified as the highest single disincentive in the survey with 49 per cent of respondents ranking it number 1. A total of 75 per cent ranked it either one or two on a five point scale of disincentive (rank in order of priority: 1 largest disincentive – 5 lowest disincentive).

Increasing leave provisions will go a long way to overcoming this disincentive. This could take the form of a blanket increase in leave for teachers in rural and remote schools combined with a sliding scale of increased leave for teachers remaining beyond their

minimum service period. Present entitlements to special family leave are grossly inadequate for teachers who live in rural and remote areas. Something as common as attending a funeral can use a teacher's leave entitlement for two years when travel time is considered.

A number of increased leave provisions have been outlined in the chapter “No applicants”. These initiatives included travel time at the beginning and end of each term and increased personal and medical leave, as occurs in South Australia. There is, however, a general need to continue to increase the availability of paid leave available to teachers in rural and remote areas. Any increase in the cost of this leave would certainly be outweighed by the savings in transferring teachers and the associated educational benefits.

NSW has taken a significant step in the right direction by increasing the amount of personal leave available for teachers in rural and remote schools. From the beginning of 2004, teachers in these schools receive, depending on the relative isolation of their school, from two to five days each year to attend to personal matters. This is certainly a step in the right direction in recognising the isolation that these teachers experience.

Interestingly, teachers in the survey did not rank increased leave as highly as other incentives to retain them. While isolation from family and friends was a significant disincentive, extra leave provisions was only ranked 1 or 2 of potential incentives to retain by 12 per cent of respondents. It did come in a significant fourth, however, (after cash payments, home loan subsidy and professional development), increasing to a top 4 incentive for 57 per cent of respondents. The provision of emergent leave which increases with the period of service was even less popular with only 42 per cent of respondents ranking it in their top 6 potential incentives. This is a reversal of a preference identified in a limited, previous survey on incentives to attract and retain teachers in rural and remote schools where emergent leave was ranked second behind cash payments.

These results indicate that teachers in rural and remote schools consider a general increase in leave more important than leave that increases with their period of service. This is understandable in the sense that isolation from family and friends doesn't get worse over time. It is probably worse upon initial appointment and decreases in significance as teachers settle into the community and make new friends.

Another method of overcoming both personal and professional isolation is the provision of paid study or sabbatical leave. This was identified as a potential incentive in Sui-Linn White's 2000 survey where it was ranked 4th for potential incentives. In both Queensland and Western Australia the prospect of three to six months of paid leave has been quite enticing. This not only allows teachers to spend time with family and friends but also enables them to undertake study they previously could not. In some ways this is an advantage over their metropolitan counterparts who cannot access such leave. Such an idea was moderately supported in the survey where 43 per cent of respondents ranked it in their top 4 of nine potential incentives to retain teachers in rural and remote schools.

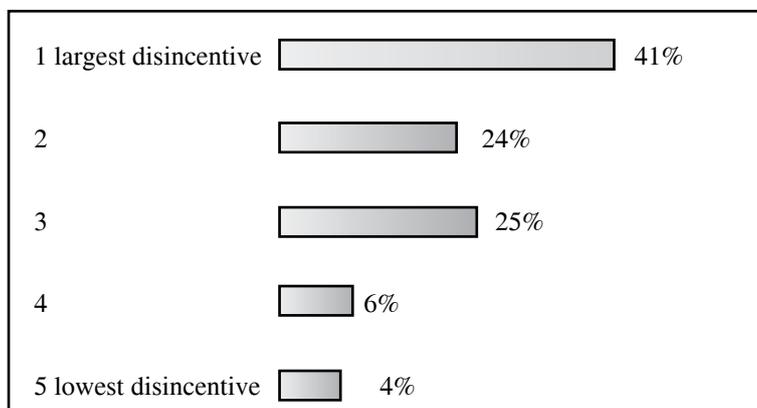
“NSW has taken a significant step in the right direction by increasing the personal leave available for teachers in rural and remote schools.”

In Western Australia's Remote Teaching Service, teachers accrue this leave based on the length of their service. This leave is at their usual level of pay and is available at the rate of 10 weeks for three years service, 22 weeks for four years service and an extra week for each half year thereafter. In Queensland, teachers in rural and remote areas accrue emergent leave based on their level of relative isolation. Teachers in less isolated areas accrue four days per year while teachers in the more remote areas accrue eight days per year.

Teachers in remote locations of the Northern Territory accumulate credits towards full paid study leave at the Northern Territory University or other institution. Teachers receive a semester's study leave after accruing 20 credit points and a year upon accruing 40 credit points. These points accumulate at different rates depending on the degree of isolation with the most isolated locations attracting five points a year and the less isolated attracting two or three. Under this scheme a teacher from a remote school can access a semester's paid study leave after two years and a year's paid study leave after four.

Leave is, however, often dependent upon the ability to replace an absent teacher. In the context of the earlier discussions about the lack of casual teachers it is not surprising then to see that the lack of casual teachers to facilitate leave is a significant issue for 65 per cent of respondents who ranked it either 1 or 2 on a five point scale for professional disincentives (figure 58). It is therefore imperative that the methods mentioned previously to increase the number of casual teachers or improve staffing formulas in rural and remote schools are realised. Failure to provide casual staff disrupts educational programs and encourages staff to leave due to heightening social isolation.

Figure 58: How great is the disincentive of availability of casual relief for leave?



While isolation from family and friends can be somewhat reduced by increasing leave provisions, there is no easy solution to a number of other social disincentives. These include the distance from a major centre, limited access to cultural activities (plays, sport, concerts and so on), access to fresh produce and a general lack of privacy living in a small community. Major regional development programs are the best hope to ameliorate some of these disincentives; however, most of these are just factors of living in a rural and remote community. Again, increased leave may help alleviate some of these effects with cash bonuses and guaranteed transfer compensation. It also takes a certain type of person to thrive with these limitations so appropriate selection criteria may assist in the appointment of teachers who are willing to look beyond these limitations. The only existing initiative to address any of these issues is a reimbursement

for freight costs on food items that applies in remote Northern Territory locations, an initiative which was supported by the HREOC inquiry into rural and remote education.

Living in small rural and remote communities can be a unique experience because of the close interrelationship between the school and the community. Teachers play an important part in the community through either direct or indirect involvement in sporting teams and various community organisations. Due to their small size many of these communities are very close with everyone knowing everyone else's business. While some people thoroughly enjoy this close interrelationship between the school community and the strong sense of "community" that many of these towns have, others find it invasive. This sense of a loss of privacy was reflected in the survey by 49 per cent of respondents who ranked it either 1 or 2 on a five point scale of social disincentives. Again, this is difficult to overcome but the selection of appropriate staff, particularly those from such communities and willing to return, can only be an advantage. In helping teachers adjust to living in small rural communities the review of schooling in rural Western Australia suggested that these communities actively develop strategies to help new teachers adjust to rural living. This proposal certainly has merit and should be further explored by education bureaucracies in partnership with community organisations.

While the loss of privacy can be an issue, the results of the survey appear to indicate that there is a positive sense of community at work in many of these areas. While many teachers have great reservations about moving into small rural and remote communities, their experiences upon arrival generally allay such fears. Teachers interviewed prior to rural service often express high levels of concern relating to socialisation and fitting into a small community. When they have lived in these communities for over a year they may still hold concerns about privacy but generally comment upon the positive aspects of living in the community. The most frequent responses are that the people are friendly, there is a strong sense of community, that people are genuinely caring and interested in you and that the lifestyle is generally relaxed. In fact, it is this very lifestyle and sense of community that was found to be important in retaining teachers in Boylan's study of long-staying rural teachers. Perhaps using the stories of beginning and longer serving teachers about their experiences in rural communities could be used to promote rural and remote teaching.

Due to the constant images presented in the media about rural decline, as well as images of unemployment, violence and substance abuse in many rural communities, respondents were asked to assess the impact of this negative publicity. It appears that while these negative images may have an effect on attracting teachers it is not a significant social issue once they become part of the community. Only 20 per cent of respondents ranked it either 1 or 2 on a five point scale of social disincentives (rank in order of priority: 1 largest disincentive – 5 lowest disincentive).

It was considered that negative images of many rural communities and problems of curriculum access related to school size could be significant social disincentives to retaining teachers. However, it appears from the survey that this was only a moderate concern in comparison to other issues with only 35 per cent of respondents ranking it as either a 1 or 2 on the five point

scale (rank in order of priority: 1 largest disincentive – 5 lowest disincentive). There is clearly still a concern which is potentially based on the curriculum breadth and resource issues previously discussed. Increasing resourcing and changing staffing formulas to guarantee a breadth of curriculum in rural and remote schools can therefore also be seen as strategies for retaining teachers and potentially attracting teachers with young

“The single biggest social disincentive which needs to be overcome is the limited access to services.”

families. If this were to occur, teachers with young families might be attracted to these schools by the lower class sizes such an initiative would afford. The idea that children may become easily bored by not having access to a range of social institutions and entertainment was also considered. It appears, however, that the relaxed outdoor lifestyle of many rural and remote communities may outweigh these concerns.

The single biggest social disincentive which needs to be overcome is the limited access to services. The most important service shortfall is health. It is well established that access to health services is an issue in many rural and remote communities. Unfortunately both state and federal governments like to pass the blame for this problem back to each other rather than working collaboratively for a solution. While many of these areas are not going to have a range of specialists, access to a general practitioner is a basic requirement. With 85 per cent of respondents ranking this as either 1 or 2 on the five point scale of social disincentives (rank in order of priority: 1 largest disincentive – 5 lowest disincentive) there is clearly an educational equity argument to be added to the provision of health services in rural areas. As these figures suggest, teachers will leave rural communities because of the lack of access to health and other services. This amplifies potential rural disadvantage by having significant negative educational impacts.

As previously mentioned, issues facing rural schools occur in the context of a general rural decline. This decline results in shrinking rural economies and a reduction in job opportunities. This makes it extremely difficult for non-teaching partners of teachers to find employment. Further, professional partners are unlikely to be able to continue their careers and instead need to look for lower paying non professional employment. The lack of employment opportunities for teachers' non-teaching partners is a real disincentive to taking up positions in rural schools, especially when nearly a third of teaching graduates are mature age students. The significance of this as an issue is reinforced by the fact that 72 per cent of respondents ranked it as either a 1 or 2 on the five point scale (rank in order of priority: 1 largest disincentive – 5 lowest disincentive). There is no obvious solution to this except for education bureaucracies to make the incentives to work in these schools so rewarding as to offset this dilemma. The review of schooling in rural Western Australia suggested that “local community organisations be encouraged to make every effort to welcome teachers' spouses to retain teachers in country service as long as possible”.

One incentive could be the provision of free housing. As has already been discussed in the previous

chapter, the provision of quality housing is extremely important in attracting teachers to rural and remote schools. It therefore follows that it is also an important retention issue. Indeed, the availability and quality of housing is also a significant social disincentive to remaining in rural and remote communities with 69 per cent of respondents ranking it as either a 1 or 2 on the five point scale (rank in order of priority: 1 largest disincentive – 5 lowest disincentive).

This apparent concern with the quality and availability of housing strongly reinforces the need to increase funding for teacher housing. Similarly, the range of measures suggested to improve teacher housing and maintain it as a separate authority are supported by these results. If teacher housing authorities believe they are presently providing an adequate service then these figures should be of great concern. They clearly show that present availability and quality is not up to the standard demanded by teachers.

Increasing the rental subsidies, as has recently happened in NSW, is a step in the right direction. However, it may be necessary to consider a balance between rental subsidies to attract teachers and further subsidies to retain them. Greater rental subsidies which increase with the length of service were supported by respondents to the survey where 61 per cent of them ranked it in their top 4 of nine potential incentives to retain. Similarly, 51 per cent of respondents ranked a similar measure in their top 4 of eight potential incentives to attract them to rural and remote schools.

While rental subsidies are widely applied to all teachers in rural and remote schools, a reappraisal of how they apply may assist retention. This could involve a sliding scale of rental subsidies based on years beyond the minimum period of service, similar to that used for cash subsidies in Western Australia. There would need to remain an attractive subsidy for newly appointed teachers but the 90 per cent subsidy may be better applied to retention. Alternatively, such a subsidy maintained throughout the period of service may encourage retention. Altering rental subsidies would need to be offset by other incentives to encourage the attraction and retention of staff in rural and remote areas.

Building the schoolhouse

Staff retention rates can be an important determinant of the quality of education being delivered to rural and remote children.”

HREOC, "Emerging themes," in National Inquiry into Rural and Remote Education (Canberra, 2000).

Pokataroo, Angledool and Come-by-Chance, to name only a few, are no longer towns but just names on a map because the schoolhouse is empty or gone. Hopefully this research can contribute positively to the debate about how to stop other communities suffering the same fate.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, to which Australia is a signatory, has clearly stated that “everyone has a right to education” while the Convention Against Discrimination in Education, to which Australia is a party, states that “an inferior standard of education can amount to unlawful discrimination”. The surest way to provide for this right and ensure that rural students are not discriminated against is to ensure that all schools are staffed adequately with appropriate, qualified, experienced teachers and support staff.

In Australia this view has been adopted by the Ministerial Council for Employment Education, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) in the Adelaide Declaration on the National Goals for Schooling in the Twenty-First Century. This Declaration stated that education contributes to “a socially cohesive and culturally rich society”. The declaration states that:

“3. Schooling should be socially just, so that:

“3.1 Students’ outcomes from schooling are free from the effects of negative forms of discrimination based on sex, language, culture and ethnicity, religion or disability; and of differences arising from students’ socio-economic background or geographic location...

“3.3 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students have equitable access to, and opportunities in, schooling so that their learning outcomes improve and, over time, match those of other students.”

The most significant factor in education quality for rural and remote communities is the provision of appropriate, quality, stable and experienced staff. The HREOC inquiry into rural and remote education and the Vinson inquiry have highlighted many areas of concern and suggested a number of possible solutions to the disadvantages faced by students and teachers in rural and remote schools. However, these inquiries are still only a scratch on the surface of a greater problem, with the limited examination of the staffing concerns in rural and remote schools being excused by the holistic nature of these inquiries. It is hoped that this research has gone some way to filling these gaps.

Our rural communities are facing many challenges brought about by the changing global economy and the economic policies of Australian Governments. These challenges have further been exacerbated by the current drought. It is in the context of a general rural decline that education is so important. In many ways what is needed are provisions that overcome the effect of this economic breakdown by ensuring a positive and happy school to build communities.

Overcoming disadvantage is an issue for all schools and education systems. In light of the Universal Human Rights and MCEETYA declarations, there should be no differences in the quality of education received by students in rural and remote communities compared to their metropolitan counterparts. However, this is not the case as the quality of education in rural and remote areas is adversely affected by high teacher turnover, a higher concentration of beginning teachers, teachers teaching outside their subject area and a lack of commitment by education bureaucracies which encourage teachers to leave rather than stay. If schools have a role to reproduce equity in societies and deconstruct divisions this educational discrimination cannot continue. To do nothing is akin to a knowing abuse of human rights and the rights of the child.

With the impending teacher shortage and the acceleration of economic decline in many rural areas, the ability of education bureaucracies to staff their rural schools will only get worse. The Australian Education Union already recognises that rural and remote regions are already the hardest hit by the teacher shortage. To overcome this they are calling for a “specific country strategy that addresses the particular needs of country communities and acknowledges the needs for special measures to attract and keep high quality teachers in the country”.

A number of the issues which discourage teachers from accepting positions in rural and remote communities are beyond the control of education departments. What is needed, therefore, is a coordinated, whole-of-government approach to address the staffing needs of rural and remote schools. Without such an approach, equity will not be achieved as quality teachers are not enticed to rural and remote areas. As Australia’s report for the UNESCO working party on attracting, developing and retaining effective teachers states:

“The issue of effective teachers is not only instru-

mental and pragmatic; it takes us to the roots of society and the quality of life that is being sought.”

A constant theme throughout this report has been that of improving the professional satisfaction of teachers in rural and remote schools. This theme is similar to that of the Vinson Inquiry into the Provision of Public Education in NSW which uses the theme of enhancing professionalism throughout its report. Such an approach is important as too many of the existing ‘incentives’ related to rural and remote schools relate to either economic gain or encourage teachers to leave. While these are and will remain essential components of any scheme to attract and retain teachers, they ignore the primary motivation of teachers to enter and remain in the profession; an enjoyable and rewarding career.

Enhancing the status of the teaching professional, generally, will assist in this process. However, there must be a corresponding enhancement of the conditions under which rural and remote teachers work. As remuneration is linked to professional status, it must be enhanced in recognition of the work teachers do and their role in society. This will only go part way to achieving that all important job satisfaction which numerous academic studies have linked to teacher retention. In addition to remuneration the conditions under which rural and remote teachers work should also reflect their professional status. It is imperative, however, that we avoid the conservative interpretation of professionalism and deregulate the staffing of schools with the introduction of contract employment. This move has only accelerated the educational discrimination experienced by rural and remote communities and impacted negatively on union membership density.

In compiling this report there were significant gaps in the research and existing government reports which needs to be addressed. There was a considerable amount of literature available on pre-service teacher training, beginning teacher issues and strategies, mentoring and the access to education (curriculum) in rural areas. Most of these are general, however, and do not contain a construction about how to specifically address these in rural and remote areas. There were not a lot of references available on staffing issues, ways to attract and retain teachers or effective rural pedagogy. A number of reports on rural education were primarily concerned with student access to the curriculum. Most of these reports, including the HREOC and Vinson inquiries, contained a few pages stating that attracting and retaining teachers was an area of concern. While these reports often suggested some possible remedies they were invariably brief and not linked with any reasoned argument or evidence. This absence appears problematic as one of the issues raised in any of the reports can be overcome without the provision of appropriate, quality and stable staffing of rural and remote schools.

When lobbying for improved “incentives” it may be useful to consider using the word “compensation” instead. In South Australia the phrase “overcoming disadvantage” is used rather than “incentives” while Western Australia has changed its wording from “incentives to attract and retain” to “compensation and incentives”. This changed wording is in recognition that housing, professional development, technology, travel funds and so on are not incentives but necessities. The only real incentives are permanency and transfer points. Overcoming disadvantage is similarly important as it recognises the economic and social impact of accepting a position in rural and remote schools. While being mindful to avoid a deficit approach, campaigning for

“compensation” is more descriptive and of itself suggests further improvements. It is therefore suggested that we refer to measures for our rural teachers as incentives to attract, compensation for unfavourable living conditions and incentives to retain.

Broad directions

From this report four broad directions for improving the attraction and retention of teachers in rural and remote areas have been identified. These directions indicate a model of rural staffing which encourages professionalism, recognises rural difference, compensates for economic loss and limits social isolation. The proposed model of rural staffing has deliberately not been divided into attraction and retention as they should be seen as interlinked concepts. Thus the conditions and professional value of rural teaching should be such that teachers who are attracted are also those that would be retained.

Professionalism

Rural teaching is a rewarding professional experience

- specifically train teachers for the rural and remote teaching context
- improve staffing formulas to ensure all subjects are taught by trained teachers and all subjects have the correct number of face to face lessons
- increase the training and development budget
- allocate further time to professional development
- facilitate interaction between teachers in surrounding schools and other areas
- improve information technology
- support further study by paying HECS and study leave
- encourage experienced teachers to take up appointments in rural and remote schools
- provide effective leadership by allowing principals a ‘trial period’ before accepting positions
- support beginning teachers with effective mentoring programs
- improve consultancy support
- maintain a statewide staffing system to ensure quality
- extend initiatives to and specifically target casual teachers

Rural Difference

The rural teaching context is different

- encourage and support trainee teachers from rural and remote areas
- increase the number of indigenous teachers
- specific pre-service training on rural and remote teaching
- support pre-service practicum in rural and remote schools
- increase the resources available to rural and remote schools
- change staffing formulas to ensure all subjects are taught by appropriately trained teachers with the appropriate number of face to face lessons
- select appropriate teachers
- include specific standards for rural teaching in any standards developed by a teaching institute
- guaranteed transfer for professional growth
- maintain a statewide staffing system so that rural service is not devalued
- increase inbuilt district relief

Economic

Rural teachers have higher costs and are locked out of the economic cycle

- pre-service teacher education scholarships
- entry scholarships
- paid HECS
- paid removals on initial appointment
- acceptance payments to cover the cost of setting up a home
- vehicle allowances
- increased allowances for the cost of living
- cash payments which increase with the length of service
- standard rental subsidies
- increasing rental subsidies with the period of service
- subsidised utility and food freight costs
- increased paid travel
- paid removals on transfer
- subsidised home loan

Social

Rural teachers live away from family and friends

- increased paid personal leave
- increased paid medical leave
- increased leave with period of service
- paid sabbatical/study leave
- support rural community development
- community programs to support new teachers
- effective induction programs
- provide quality housing
- limit shared accommodation
- travel time at each end of vacations
- enhance staffing formulas to ensure education meets their children's needs
- enhance incentives to support families
- guaranteed transfer
- increased transfer points with the period of service
- maintain a statewide staffing system to facilitate movement

If the living and working conditions of teachers in these communities continue to erode comparatively to their metropolitan colleagues, there is no hope of attracting them to or retaining them in these communities. There is therefore a strong industrial argument, as well as a human rights argument, for improving the conditions experienced by teachers in these communities. It is in no way suggested that this proposed model would solve the raft of problems facing rural and remote communities. However, if education is the tool to help break the cycle of disadvantage and dislocation experienced by many of these communities, then ensuring that the schoolhouse is not empty is certainly the first step in achieving such an outcome.

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Interviewees

Linda Gale	Australian Education Union Federal Office
Denis Fitzgerald	Australian Education Union Federal Office
Michaela Kronemann	Australian Education Union Federal Office
Michelle White	State Schools Teachers Union of Western Australia
David Kelly	State Schools Teachers Union of Western Australia
Paul Kaplan	State Schools Teachers Union of Western Australia
Chris Sharpe	State Schools Teachers Union of Western Australia
Kim Ward	Education Department of Western Australia
Greg Ryan-Gadsden	Education Department of Western Australia
Geraldine Farr	Education Department of Western Australia
Allan Perrin	Australian Education Union Northern Territory Branch
Linda King	Northern Territory Department of Education
David Rolfe	Northern Territory Department of Education
Philip Brennan	Office of the Commissioner for Public Employment Northern Territory
Peter Steele	Australian Education Union Victorian Branch
Brian Henderson	Australian Education Union Victorian Branch
Rob Glare	Australian Education Union Victorian Branch
Bill Hignett	Australian Education Union South Australian Branch
Andrew Gohl	Australian Education Union South Australian Branch
Dan Farmer	Australian Education Union South Australian Branch
John Gregory	Australian Education Union South Australian Branch
Barry Thompson	South Australian Department of Education
Robyn Hull	Australian Education Union Tasmanian Branch
Leigh Taylor	Tasmanian Department of Education
Steve Ryan	Queensland Teachers Union
Brendan Crotty	Queensland Teachers Union
John Battams	Queensland Teachers Union
Terry Evans	Queensland Teachers Union
Jim Sykes	Queensland Teachers Union
Rynell	Hastie-Burroughs Education Queensland
Gay Gray	Education Queensland
Bill Green	Charles Stuart University Bathurst
Matti Novak	Charles Stuart University Bathurst
Jeff Barnes	NSW Department of Education and Training
Norman McCulloch	NSW Department of Education and Training
Charline Emzin-Boyd	NSW Teachers Federation
David McSwan	James Cook University

And all the people with whom I talked either on the day, the phone or via email.



Staffing an empty schoolhouse:

attracting and retaining teachers in rural,
remote and isolated communities

Eric Pearson Study Report

Phil Roberts

NSW TEACHERS FEDERATION