

INDEPENDENT EDUCATION UNION OF AUSTRALIA

THE NATIONAL TEACHER SHORTAGE – IEU STRATEGY PAPER

1. INTRODUCTION

Teacher unions, academics, education researchers and others in the education industry have predicted a shortage of teachers around the turn of the century for the past 5 to 6 years.

It is only in the last year or two that some governments and employing authorities have begun to acknowledge the validity of the teacher shortage projections. In some areas it has become critical.

The IEU strongly believes that the issues of teacher recruitment and retention are directly connected with a number of others, including but not limited to:

- the status of the profession;
- the speed and process of policy change and implementation;
- the loss of resources to education;
- the salary and conditions paid to teachers and issues related to the need for professional standards.

In developing a comprehensive strategy to properly manage national teacher supply and demand and teacher recruitment and retention, policy makers must address the overall contextual picture.

Reasons for the malaise within the profession over the past decade and community perceptions that it is a profession and career with little going for it, are complex and require scrutiny by governments, employing authorities and other key stakeholders.

The education profession needs to be able to attract the best teachers and retain the best. The teaching profession could be described currently as at a peak in terms of experience, skill and age, as this cohort retires, there will be a commensurate loss of skills and expertise within the profession.

Over the past decade, substantial research, reports and projects have been produced for governments and other authorities which provide direction and advice for the way forward to addressing the problems of the profession's status and morale and the consequent problems of poor levels of recruitment and retention.

The IEU believes that it is not a lack of research, knowledge, understanding, or general acknowledgment which is the impediment to addressing the issues but a lack of will on the part of government (both federal and state) and system and school authorities to give reality to their rhetoric.

IEU members strongly support the union's taking a leadership role in education policy debate and development, recognising the strength, independence, commitment and resources that the union brings with its advocacy. It is important that the IEU makes

clear to its membership, to non government employing authorities, federal and state governments and the community in general, the strategies it believes are needed to address this critical issue.

2. THE CURRENT CONTEXT - A PROFESSION IN CRISIS

Over the past decade the union has welcomed policy initiatives intended to recognise, advocate and further strengthen the critically important contribution which the teaching profession makes to the nation. Despite this, there continues to be a marked decline in the morale and status of the teaching profession, and a growing crisis in teacher supply and demand.

The reasons for this are complex, but the union believes that at the core of the profession's malaise and loss of heart, the following issues are relevant:

- (i) Ambivalence on the part of policy makers and school authorities in acknowledging and supporting the hallmark of the teaching profession which is teacher professional judgement. Teachers perceive their role and their efforts are no longer valued or respected by the community. Their professional judgements are often ignored, their input not valued at policy levels and they continue to work in the context of relative isolation. This is particularly evident in a number of key areas such as curriculum design, assessment and reporting of student achievement.
- (ii) The subjection of schooling by policy makers and commentators to the ideology and rhetoric of the market place and economic rationalism. It is rhetoric which emphasises an individualistic, competitive and user-pays model, from which as well as winners, there must be losers. This jars with the collaborative, co-operative and democratic approach which most teachers believe underpins quality teaching and learning and their deep commitment to the education and welfare of every student, and that all students should be winners from their experience of school.
- (iii) Derisory and contradictory statements by government members, policy makers and media commentators which are generally gratuitous and based on a poor understanding of the complex work of teaching.
- (iv) The implementation of policies at system and school level which have resulted in a greater focusing on the planning, delivery and monitoring of individualised, student-centred approaches in an attempt to better meet the great diversity of student need. Alongside the move to more individualised programming has grown the need for more collaborative, team-based teacher work structures. These approaches, while supported by teachers as highly desirable, are however, less and less supported by systemic resourcing, and are difficult to sustain in traditional school timetabling and staffing structures.
- (v) In addition to changes in pedagogical approaches, the changes in the structure of families, the cultural plurality of school populations, youth unemployment and the diversification of the labour market and the increasing retention rates in schools have meant that greater responsibility for much of the socialisation and general care of students has fallen onto schools and, in particular, teachers.

As a consequence of these increased expectations, there has been a significant increase in both the general workload and level of stress experienced by teachers. The effect of this on teachers' morale is exacerbated by their perception that they have received insufficient support from the community and government and its agencies in this area.

- (vi) Changes to industrial conditions and work practices including an increase in contract work, the introduction of performance appraisal, large class sizes, continued high expectations in relation to teacher workloads and legislative requirements in relation to child protection.

3. SUPPLY AND DEMAND

The issue of supply and demand of the teaching profession is a critical one. There is now broad consensus that a critical shortage of teachers exists in a range of subject areas and in particular rural and remote regions across most states and the NT. The lack of access to secondary education for Aboriginal children in remote areas of the NT is acute. The critical nature of the shortage will increase unless focused policy strategies are implemented.

Factors which contribute to the shortage include higher retirement rates of teachers as the teaching population ages, increased demand for replacement teachers, and changes in student enrolment numbers. The key issue that the IEU urges governments and employing authorities to consider is the development of long term strategies that address the issues of supply and shortage without reducing the quality of educational outcomes for students.

A trigger response to expected shortages, or for that matter, supply would be damaging to the profession. The IEU is strongly critical of any short-term responses that would result in a reduction in the quality of Australian schooling. These include the imposition of increases in general teaching workloads, reducing curriculum choice in areas that require specialist staff, and the employment of unqualified teachers.

4. STRATEGIES TO ADDRESS THE TEACHER SHORTAGE

Strategies that the IEU endorses include

- a) A national approach which takes account of the numerous reports from research and government sponsored projects, including the recommendations from the Senate Inquiry into the Status of Teachers and the MCEETYA National Teacher Recruitment Strategy Taskforce.
- b) A financial commitment to improve salaries and conditions and job security. The IEU urges governments and employing authorities to commit to the restoration of proper salary relativities for the teaching profession as part of the problem of recruitment and retention of high quality personnel into the teaching profession.
- c) Improved resourcing and increased support for teachers (especially beginning teachers in difficult schools) and other mechanisms to improve teachers' effectiveness and professional satisfaction; particularly including an increase in relevant professional development and retraining programs.

- d) Enhancing the status of teaching in the wider community (and thereby lifting the morale of teachers), through public and practical support for teachers and their work and by promoting the value and worth of the work of the teaching profession to students, the community and the nation.
- e) Increased resourcing and improved planning for initial teacher education programs at a national level and in particular strategies which encourage young people who have achieved excellent academic standards to enter the profession. There is a need to develop a set of industrial and professional conditions which are likely to attract to teaching in appropriate numbers students with high academic ability and appropriate personal and potential professional expertise.
- f) The development of professional competencies and standards represents the mark of a profession and are fundamental to the public interest. The IEU believes that the development of professional standards which have had input and are owned by the profession are an important element in the strategy to address planning, recruitment and retention policies which are currently in place.
- g) The IEU has strongly supported a national scheme of teacher registration, covering all teachers in government and non-government schools. Such a scheme provides the opportunity to address a broad framework of issues such as professionally established entry and advanced standards, questions of professional ethics, requirements for teacher training courses, ongoing professional development and the capacity for deregistration. Such a nationally consistent set of standards and system of registration arrangements would enhance the standing of the profession and clearly serves the public interest.
- h) The union believes that the induction of new teachers should be recognised as a major responsibility of schools and employing authorities. Attracting good teachers to the profession remains a strong concern, but retaining them and ensuring that their skills continue to develop and are recognised is an equally paramount issue. The first step of this process lies in the induction of a beginning teacher. Those teachers that are part of this process, through mentoring and the provision of professional support, should also have their input and skills developed and formally recognised within the profession, rather than the current reliance on the goodwill and voluntary labour of others.
- i) The IEU has made particular recommendations to HREOC's Inquiry into Rural and Remote Education which address the issues of recruitment and retention of teachers in schools in these difficult to staff regions. These recommendations include support and incentives enshrined in Awards/ Agreements such as:
- assistance with housing arrangements
 - the facilitation of professional development and study opportunities
 - opportunities for transfer
 - remote area allowances
 - paid return to home

The IEU urges governments, employing authorities and other key education industry stakeholders to support the development of a national plan which takes account of the above strategies to address the developing crisis of teacher supply and demand.

