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**The Challenge of Attracting
and Keeping Quality Teachers
in Catholic Schools in
Australia**

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The Challenge of Attracting and Keeping Quality Teachers in Catholic Schools in Australia

Anthony Stokes

There are considerable challenges facing Catholic school administrators and educational authorities in general in attracting and keeping quality teachers. These challenges spread from the individual school to universities and Catholic educational administrations. This paper will discuss some of these challenges and some possible policy responses from all levels of the Catholic education community. Some of the key challenges that will be considered in this paper are:

- (i) the ageing teacher workforce;
- (ii) a growing teacher shortage, especially in certain secondary school discipline areas;
- (iii) the decline in teacher wage relativities;
- (iv) the challenge to keep beginning teachers;
- (v) the loss of trainee teachers at university;
- (vi) the declining quality of teacher entrants at university; and
- (vii) the falling numbers of graduates from Catholic universities in some fields of study.

(i) The ageing teacher workforce

The average age of the teacher workforce is older than the remainder of the workforce. It has been estimated that 50 percent of the current high school teacher workforce in NSW will leave the teaching profession in the next ten years and that the numbers of new teachers entering the profession will fall well short of that number. In the non-government sector throughout Australia almost a quarter of primary school teachers were aged over 50 in 2004 (Figure 1) (MCEETYA, 2004). In addition a further 17 percent were aged 45-49. Similarly in the non-government sector throughout Australia 27 percent of secondary school teachers were aged over 50 in 2004 (Figure 2). In addition a further 15 percent of secondary teachers were aged 45-49. At the same time the current entry rate of new teachers especially in secondary schools will not match the retirement rate in the years ahead.

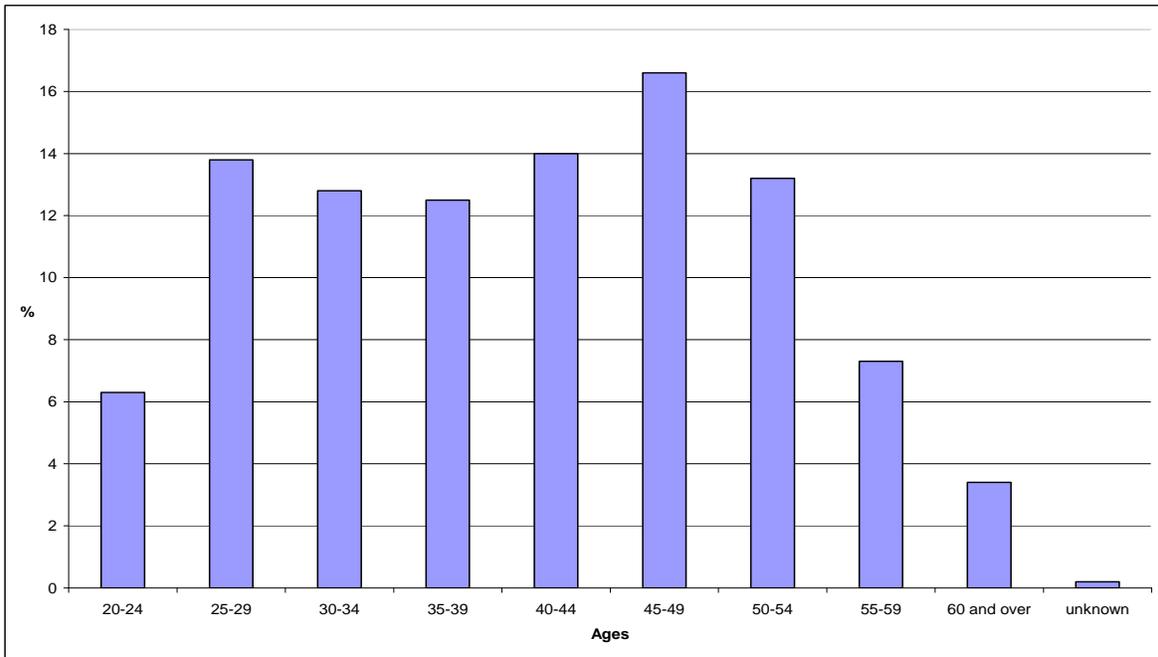


Figure 1 Age distribution of non-government sector Primary school teachers, Australia 2004

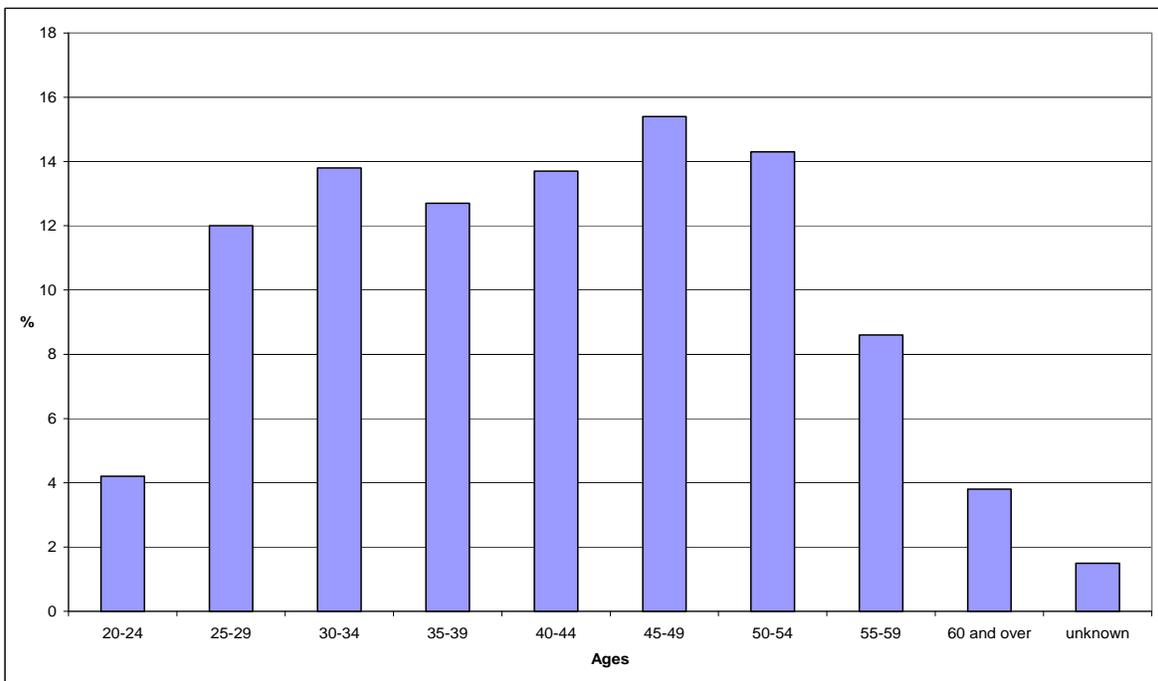


Figure 2 Age distribution of non-government sector Secondary school teachers, Australia 2004

(ii) Teacher shortages in discipline areas

There is a growing shortage of teachers in selected areas in Australia with the biggest areas of concern being in secondary schools. Currently these are only in particular fields and geographical locations, but there are projections that these could become more widespread. The States and Territory Skills in Demand Lists for Australia (2006) show that there is a nation wide shortage of high school teachers in:

- Manual Arts/Tech Studies (Technological and Applied Studies);
- Maths;
- Physics/Chemistry; and
- General Science.

In addition there are shortages of high school teachers in individual states in the areas of:

- Languages;
- Home Economics;
- Design and Technology;
- Information Technology;
- Special Needs, and
- Physical Education.

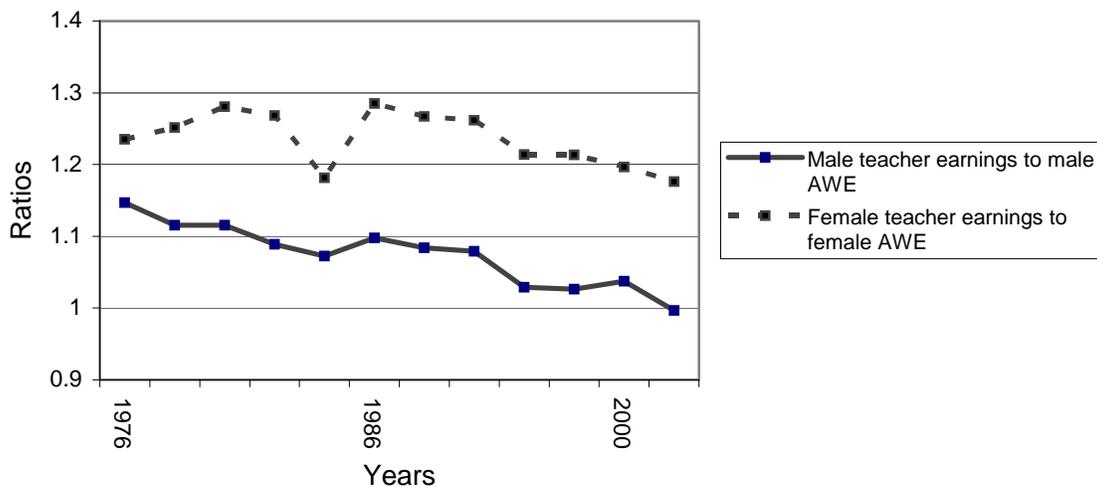
A number of studies on teacher supply and demand undertaken by Preston (MCEETYA, 2003, 2004), commissioned by the Australian Council of Deans of Education, also identified particular shortages in identified subject areas and locations. Preston's analysis has also been confirmed by the Australian review of teacher education in Science and Mathematics (Kwong Dow, 2004).

Despite the growing number of successful university completions in Australia, fewer newly qualified graduates are entering the teacher labour market. The Commonwealth Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST, 2006) reported that while the overall number of people graduating from university in Australia increased over the decade to 2005, the number of people completing a university qualification in the field of teacher education decreased by 27 percent to 16,250 in 2005. Three-quarters of the students who completed university courses in 2005 in the field of teacher education were women. Similar patterns occur in the number of people commencing and continuing study in teacher education courses. From 1986 to 2005 the proportion of higher education students

studying education declined from 21.3 percent to 10.2 percent. This pattern has continued across Australia with the actual number of teacher education students falling from 73,510 in 1996 to 63,194 in 2005.

(iii) The decline in teacher wage relativities

Part of the reason for the decline in the number of students studying to be teachers is the decline in the relative wage that a teacher gets paid compared to other workers. The following time series study shows the average weekly earnings of male and female teachers in Australia to the level of average weekly earnings for all adult males and females in Australia¹. As can be seen in Figure 3 there has been a general decline in the relative earnings of both male and female teachers in the period.



Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, Employee Earnings and Hours, Cat. No. 6306.0.

Figure 3: The relative average weekly earnings of male and female teachers in Australia 1976-2002

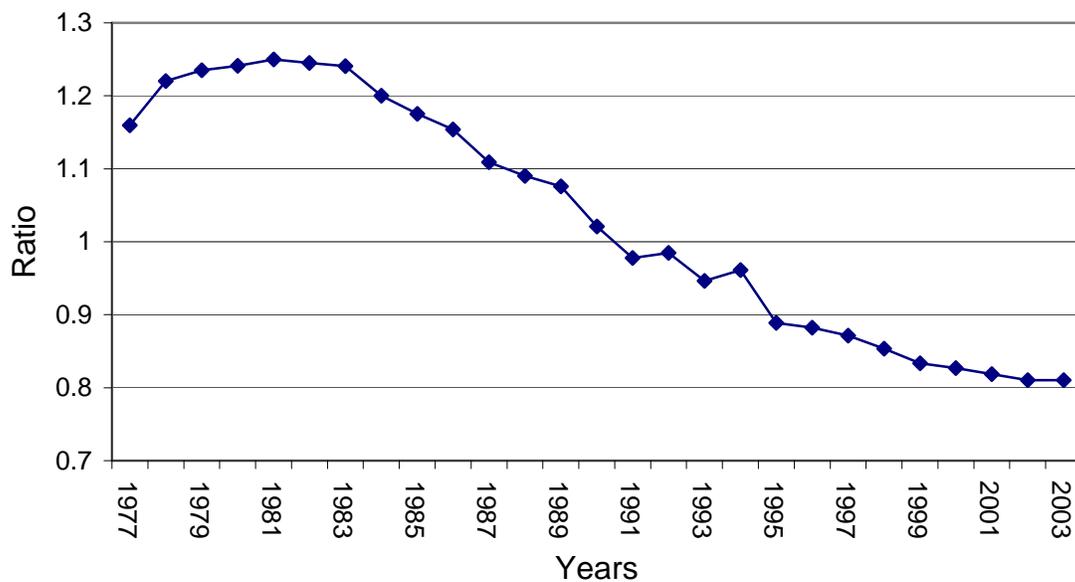
In 1976 the average earnings of a male teacher was 14.7 percent higher than male average weekly earnings and for a female teacher it was 23.5 percent greater than average female weekly earnings. By 2002 the average weekly earnings of male teachers had fallen to less than male average weekly earnings (-0.3 percent), while female earnings had declined to be 17.6 percent more than female average weekly earnings. The relative

¹ Due to changes in ABS classifications in the period 1977 to 2003 the average wages for males and female teachers are for all teachers not just high school teachers. For years with data specifically on high school teachers their average wages are five to six percent higher than that for primary teachers. Changes in teacher salaries have generally been similar over the time period between states.

earnings of male teachers have declined 20 percentage points in the period 1976 to 2002, while the relative earnings of female teachers have declined only 5.9 percentage points.

In the period 1977 to 2003 the number of high school teachers in NSW increased 42.4 percent. The number of female high school teachers increased by 70 percent, while the number of male teachers rose by only 18.7 percent. In 1977 the ratio of male teachers to female teachers in NSW high schools was 1.16 to 1, rising to 1.25 to 1 in 1981. The decline in the male/female teacher ratio began after the 1983 economic recession. By 1991 there were more female teachers in NSW high schools than male teachers (Figure 4). By 2005 the ratio of male to female teachers had fallen to 0.79 in high schools and 0.25 in primary schools throughout Australia (ABS, 2006).

The decline in the relative number of male teachers accompanied the relatively larger decline in relative earnings for male teachers. The relative earnings of female teachers was not only greater in absolute terms but had also declined by a smaller proportion than the relative earnings for male high school teachers during the period.



Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, Schools Australia, Cat. No. 4221.0

Figure 4: The ratio of males to female teachers in high schools in NSW, 1977–2003

Since 1988 there has been a decline in absolute terms in the number of male teachers in NSW high schools by 2.7 percent from 17,961 to 17,610 and an increase in the number of

female teachers in NSW high schools by 31 percent from 16,474 to 21,580. At the same time the relative wage for male teachers declined by 10 percentage points. There appears to be a link between the time series data on relative wages and the quantity of teachers, at least in the case of males. The decline in the relative wage of males is associated with fewer males teaching in high schools in NSW. The relationship with female teachers is more complex as the decline in the relative wage of females has been less and the relative wage of female teachers is still more than 17 percent higher than other females in the workforce. These factors would tend to make teaching an attractive proposition for females at least for the time being. The proportion of male teachers in NSW high schools was highest when the relative wage of male teachers was at least ten percent higher than male average weekly earnings.

This issue has been recognized by many of the independent schools in NSW who are offering wages up to 20 percent higher than that offered under the enterprise agreements in NSW public and Catholic schools. This is attracting many of the best Catholic teachers into the independent schools system. In addition, these teachers are being offered considerably higher levels of pay for academic qualifications such as honours, masters and doctoral degrees.

(iv) The challenge to keep beginning teachers

Having attracted a graduate to a school to be a teacher there is no guarantee that they will remain in teaching. It has been estimated that as many as 25 percent of teachers leave teaching in their first five years of employment (MCEETYA, 2003). The report found that there were an estimated 117,000 qualified teachers who had given up on teaching and were working in other occupations. In addition, education authorities have estimated that in the previous 7 years more than 31,000 qualified Australian teachers left to work overseas.

A survey conducted for the Ministerial Council on Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) found that teachers nominated the following factors which were driving them out of the profession:

- Poor remuneration;
- Poor resources/heavy workloads;
- Lack of professional standing in the community;

- Large class sizes;
- Poor student behaviour.

(v) The loss of trainee teachers at university

A number of capable and often the most capable students training to be teachers do not become teachers. Some change their courses during their university studies; others complete their studies and seek alternative employment. In 2006 (GradsOnline) 12 percent of new education graduates gained employment in non-teaching occupations. A survey was conducted of third and final year secondary education students throughout NSW to see if their decision to become a teacher was affected while they were at university. They were also asked, if their attitude had changed, whether it was more positive or more negative and the factors that had caused it to change. Forty three percent of the students responded that their attitude had changed. Of these 67 percent had a more positive attitude towards pursuing a career as a teacher and 33 percent a more negative attitude. The factors that had contributed to a more positive attitude towards pursuing a teaching career were:

- positive experiences during the teaching practicum;
- the quality of teaching at university;
- greater career opportunities, such as a shortage of Mathematics teachers;
- job security;
- having trained at university they feel 'better equipped and motivated' to cope as a teacher; and
- the positive influence of other students who want to be teachers in order to help others.

The factors that had contributed to the students having a more negative attitude towards pursuing a teaching career were:

- negative experiences during the teaching practicum relating to the students, e.g. classroom management and discipline;
- negative experiences during the teaching practicum relating to the teachers who were supervising them or other teachers in the school, especially in regard to a lack of support and 'disgruntled teachers';
- negative attitudes towards teaching in a school from university lecturers (some of whom were also current school teachers);
- complaints from teachers about salaries and conditions;

- practicum experiences showed that teaching was 'too hard';
- lack of resources in schools;
- high expectations places on teachers and little support in schools;
- child protection legislation is a concern as it creates a fear in teachers of how they can deal with students;
- lack of reward for the work of teachers as reflected in poor salaries;
- negative media perceptions of teachers; and
- the declining funding of public schools and the governments' attitudes towards public education.

The attitude of a number of the respondents is reflected in the following survey response.

I feel reluctant to become a teacher and join a 'sinking ship.' Conditions are getting worse and worse in our schools, especially for teachers. They are not respected or valued by government, society, or students. I have done well in my studies. I deserve better.

The issue of being able to support a family on the salary of a teacher was a concern expressed by a number of respondents. A number said that, while they wanted to be teachers, they would resign and pursue a higher paying career, if they could not properly support their families.

Overall the factor that had greatest influence on the students who initially intended to become teachers when they started university was the teaching practicum. Positive experiences on the practicum made the student more likely to become teachers, while many of the students who had negative experiences on the practicum had decided not to pursue a teaching career any longer. While some of these potential teachers may not have been suited to teaching others were negatively affected by the lack of support from teachers during their practicum. This is an issue that will be pursued in regard to policy implications later in this paper.

(vi) The declining quality of teacher entrants at university

The aptitude of new teachers appears to have fallen in recent decades. While there are still many capable students entering teacher education and going on to become teachers, Leigh and Ryan (2006) report that between 1983 and 2003 the average percentile rank of

those entering teacher education fell from 74 to 61. At the same time the average rank of new teachers fell from 70 to 62. This is supported by the decline in the UAI's required to enter many teaching courses in recent years. This is most serious in regards to secondary education where the greatest declines have occurred.

- (vii) The falling numbers of graduates from Catholic universities in some fields of study

An important role for Catholic universities is to provide teachers, who are trained to teach religious education and other areas of study, who have a commitment to Catholic traditions and teachings. In recent years at Australian Catholic University in Sydney the UAI's for some important areas of teaching such as Mathematics, Computing and other TAS subjects have declined (Table 1). In addition, the numbers of teacher graduates from areas such as Mathematics, Economics/Business Studies and Geography have also declined. This potentially creates an environment where there will not be trained Catholic teachers available in some subject areas. This will then impact on the role of the teacher in Catholic schools.

Table 1 University Admission Index ACU National, Sydney, Education Courses

Course	UAI 2004	UAI 2007
B Ed Primary	85.35	86.10
BT/BA Computing	76.10	65.15
BT/BA Humanities	83.70	77.00
BT/BA Mathematics	78.55	66.60
BT/BA Technology	78.55	67.25

What are the solutions?

Just as the challenges facing Catholic schooling are diverse, so will be the variety of possible policy initiatives to deal with them. The solutions require action at the Catholic education system level as well as in individual schools and also between the system administrators, schools and Catholic universities. There are further links between the Catholic schools administrations and governments that must also be considered.

Policy recommendation 1

Education system administrators should encourage increased labour market flexibility by:

- allowing schools to offer higher salaries to attract teachers in areas of shortage;
- allowing paid overtime of current staff to fill shortages; and
- paying bonuses and performance loadings to the best performing teachers.

There are a number of ways that increased labour market flexibility could increase the availability and quality of staff in schools. First, schools should be given finances that reflect their particular circumstances. Schools in more socially disadvantaged areas that have difficulty attracting teachers, should be given greater funding per pupil to improve resources and to pay higher salaries for teachers to teach in those school. School principals should have the financial resources to attract staff by offering higher salaries to teachers in areas of geographical and discipline shortages.

Second, in areas where there are teacher shortages, teachers could receive paid overtime to take extra classes. It is better for a specialist in an area to take a class than someone teaching out of their field. This may require some restructuring of the traditional school day of 9am to 3pm to one of 8am to 4pm. There is already considerable evidence that many teachers work in outside employment to earn additional income (Stokes 2005). Many would probably welcome the opportunity to earn additional income from teaching rather than in outside employment such as cleaners or waiters. This would be budget neutral as the teachers are replacing other less qualified teachers who would have been employed to take the classes. This would not only be a benefit to the teachers but also to the pupils.

Third, so as to improve the retention rate of the most capable teachers, bonuses and performance loadings could be paid to the best performing teachers. While measurements of teacher productivity are very difficult to make and generally controversial, teacher appraisals, similar to those applying in many business organisations in Australia, would be possible. These appraisals are generally carried out by a supervisor and are measured based on set performance criteria and outcomes. These could include some element of peer appraisal and even parental and student appraisal in measuring the teacher's performance. The use of parental appraisal could improve the attitude of parents to teachers, and the work the teachers do, and the

remunerations the teachers receive. The use of performance loadings has achieved improved outcomes in business organisations and it is likely that such policies would improve the performance of teachers and the educational outcomes for the students. The higher remuneration would also be an incentive to remain in teaching.

Policy recommendation 2

School administrators should adopt a number of initiatives that would assist new teachers in their early years of teaching. These include:

- (a) a formal induction process;
- (b) a mentor teacher; and
- (c) reduced face-to-face teaching time in the first year of teaching.

Some of these are already in place in some schools, but not in all schools.

(a) A formal induction process

An induction process for teachers can take many forms in some instances it may not be much more than introductions to colleagues and being shown around the school. Ewing and Smith (2003) reported in their study of 196 beginning teacher graduates from the University of Sydney that the most often reported mentoring or induction, if any, was categorised as 'informal support'. Only 12 percent of the respondents reported systematic and regular sessions for the whole year. A further 13 percent reported regular sessions in the first two terms². None of the respondents reported any continuation of induction sessions beyond the first year of teaching. In many cases the induction process was very brief lasting just one day or a few sessions. Beginning teachers need continual assistance as they face new challenges and as they begin to develop their skills. A more formal and ongoing induction process is required for beginning teachers. This induction process should include the provision of a mentor.

(b) A mentor teacher

Schools need to have mentor teachers who can assist not only the beginning teachers but also the teachers in training who are placed in the school for practicums. While mentoring

² In NSW there is a four-term school year, so this would involve about 20 weeks of actual school time.

of beginning teachers is officially encouraged, by the major teaching authorities, Ewing and Smith (2003) reported that almost 40 percent of the beginning teachers surveyed reported that they did not have a mentor teacher. It was also reported that half the respondents also did not have a supervisor. Thus, for over half of the study's respondents, there was no teacher who was assigned to have a special responsibility for assisting the beginning teacher. Ewing and Smith stated that one of the reasons for this weakness stemmed from the lack of recognition or recompense for the role of the mentor. A promotional position of mentor teacher should be established. This person would have to complete training to learn how to be an effective mentor and they would be evaluated to see how well they carried out the mentoring process. This would provide a promotional position for experienced teachers who have much to offer as classroom teachers but who do not wish to become or are prevented from being administrators. The mentor teacher would have a formal weekly meeting with the beginning teacher to discuss issues in the teacher's development and adjustment to teaching. The mentor would also review the classes of the beginning teacher and offer assistance in improving their teaching performance. The cost of such a program would vary from year to year depending on the number of new mentors and the number of retiring mentors. It could be expected that between five and ten percent of staff in a school could be mentors. They could be paid an allowance for example equal to half the rate of a teacher in charge of a key learning area in a school. This would probably add an additional cost to the teaching wage bill of between around 0.25 of a percent³ but the benefits of keeping staff and better teacher quality far exceed this cost.

(c) Reduced face-to-face teaching in the first year

The first year is generally the most difficult year for the beginning teacher, as they learn to adapt to the expectations of being a teacher. The normal load for a teacher in high schools in NSW is 20 hours of face-to-face teaching a week. This is quite a load for a new teacher who has to prepare new work for all their teaching subjects as well as learn how to adjust to the other demands of teaching. One way to alleviate this pressure would be to reduce the amount of face-to-face teaching for a beginning teacher to 16 hours a week in the first year. This would allow more time for preparation of lessons, marking etc. and time

³ This assumes that the average salary for a high school teacher as at 1/1/2005 would be approximately \$60,000 and between five and ten percent of teachers would be mentor teachers.

to seek assistance from their mentor teacher in developing their teaching. The estimated cost of such a program would vary from year to year depending on the number of first year teachers employed in high schools. Again the lack of available data on this is a problem. MCEETYA (2003) estimate that approximately 5.2 percent of public high school teachers in NSW left teaching completely in 2001 and needed to be replaced. They estimate that approximately 70 percent of the replacements came from new graduates. Based on these figures, a four-hour reduction for new graduate teachers would increase the teaching wage bill for NSW public high schools by less than 0.75 percent. The cost for non-government schools in NSW would most likely be slightly higher as they have a higher annual percentage of replacement teachers.

The overall cost of the recommendation to adopt a mentor teacher program and reduce face-to-face teaching for new graduates is likely to add only about one percent to the cost of teacher employment in NSW high schools. The possible benefits in terms of more satisfied beginning and experienced teachers and lower teacher resignation rates could easily outweigh the cost. A similar model could be put in place for primary school teachers.

Policy recommendation 3

School administrators should introduce policies that encourage more males to enter teaching. These policies include:

- more flexible salary/employment packages, and
- equal numbers of teacher scholarships for males and females.

While an increase in the relative wage of all teachers is likely to lead to an increase in the numbers of teachers, it is not necessarily going to improve the male/female teacher ratio. No doubt a policy that advocates salary increases for male teachers only, even though their earnings have been declining more in comparison to their male counterparts, would be considered as gender discrimination and illegal. An alternative approach is the development of salary/employment packages that suit the individual preferences of the teachers. For some this may involve longer periods of paid parental leave being traded off for salaries. Other teachers may be willing to trade off a part of their holidays for additional remuneration and visa versa. Policy recommendation 1, introduced earlier in this report, advocating paid overtime, is more likely to benefit male teachers as they are already

working on average longer hours in teaching, and a higher proportion of males seek additional income in other employment (Stokes 2005). This policy could act as an incentive to increase the proportion of male teachers in high schools.

In an attempt to increase the number of male primary school teachers, Sydney Catholic Education Office offered the same number of male and female teacher scholarships (to overcome anti-discrimination legislation). A similar policy could be implemented in regard to teacher scholarships in secondary education.

Policy recommendation 4

School system administrators should increase nonwage amenities for teachers and improve trade offs between salaries and nonwage amenities.

Improvements in job satisfaction for workers could also occur as a result of greater flexibility in nonwage benefits. These may be achievable with little or no increase in school budgets. Many organisations have set benefits that apply to all workers. Greater utility could be achieved for some workers, if they were able to trade off some of those benefits for increased wages and visa versa. Job sharing arrangements for parents with children is a common example of a trade off that has already been implemented in a number of schools that has provided a more satisfying working relationship for those teachers. Provisions such as salary sacrificing, trade offs between work hours/holidays and wages, and maternity/paternity leave provisions could all improve teacher satisfaction, recruitment and retention rates, and the educational outcomes achieved by students. A teacher will decide to remain or leave teaching based on the overall package of salary and working conditions that they are offered. If the salary can not be improved then working conditions will need to improve to attract and retain teachers. Similarly a decline in working conditions will require an increased salary to compensate for the loss in teacher satisfaction.

Policy recommendation 5

Trainee teachers on their practicum need to be given sufficient support and mentoring, and encouraged to become competent teachers.

Schools should see the opportunity of having trainee teachers as a chance for teachers to share their experience with new teachers and also an opportunity to perhaps learn some new approaches to teaching from the trainees. Staff should be allocated to this process because of their ability and enthusiasm, not just for the extra income that can be earned. All staff in schools also need to be aware of the importance of this experience for the trainee teachers and that continually complaining about their life as a teacher has a major negative impact on the trainee's decision on entering teaching. Let the trainee decide for themselves whether they wish to pursue a career as a teacher.

Policy recommendation 6

Catholic education authorities need to offer scholarships to high achievers in the HSC and mature age students to study and become teachers.

This may involve payment of HECS and/or a living allowance in areas that there will be potential shortages of teachers. These scholarships should be linked with study at Catholic universities. The students will be required to work a minimum amount of time in Catholic schools or refund the payments. If the quality of teachers in Catholic schools is below that offered in other systems then parents may send their children to public or independent schools and the role of Catholic schools in teaching the Catholic faith will be diminished.

Catholic education administrators also need to put pressure on governments to increase funding for teachers salaries but also in the following areas to improve the quantity and quality of teachers.

Policy recommendation 7

The Australian Government should increase the number of secondary trainee teacher places at universities. These should not only be in areas of current curriculum shortage but in areas of likely future curriculum shortages.

The number of teacher education places is set by a quota for each university by the Australian Government. While there has been some increase in the number of teacher

education places allocated this has not kept pace with the likely future demand for teachers. The increase in places in areas such as Mathematics and Technology has generally been accompanied by lower UAI cut-off scores. So while an increase in places is part of the battle without greater incentives to become teachers there may be a further lowering of the standard of teaching.

Policy recommendation 8

The Australian Government should adopt a policy that all university graduates who become teachers should be subject to the same Higher Education Contributions. The graduates who become teachers should have all their subjects charged at the Education Band rate and only be liable for contributions for a period of four years of higher education.

While teachers are paid the same salaries, irrespective of the subjects that they teach and are qualified in, the cost of gaining these qualifications varies depending on the subjects the teachers study. This is a disincentive for some students studying in some subject areas (such as Economics, Business, Mathematics, Science and Computing) to become teachers. It is interesting to note that the Federal Opposition Leader, Kevin Rudd, recently put this forward as part of his education platform.

Conclusion

The quantity of new entrants to teaching especially in high schools will shortly not keep up with the retirement rate of teachers. There are already shortages of qualified teachers in a number of key learning areas and this is on the rise. The quality of people entering teaching is on the decline. The income return for a teacher studying at university is lower than most other graduate occupations, especially for males.

While these are problems facing all educational authorities there are additional issues for Catholic schools such as shortages of teachers who can teach religious education as well as other teaching areas that have shortages. The alternative will be to have many specialist teachers who only teach Religious Education. This may challenge the Catholic philosophy that currently exists in schools.

Some of the solutions offered here already take place in some schools. Others such as increased wage and workplace flexibility are on the government's political agenda at this time. In the past Catholic and independent schools have often led the way in implementing educational reforms. Independent schools are doing some of this with wages higher than public and Catholic schools but also higher wages for performance and qualifications. While budgets are strongly limited by government funding, alternative workplace reforms are not. The situation is simple. If society considers that education is important for the nation then more resources will need to be diverted into paying teachers a higher relative salary to ensure the quality and quantity of the teaching workforce. Failure to do so will lead to an inevitable decline in the overall quality of education being provided in Australia.

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