



SASSLA's Response to Workforce Strategy

Chapter2: Education Leaders and Teachers

THE TEACHER LABOUR MARKET

Work undertaken by the Australian Government Productivity Commission in 2012 made the following summative points about the teacher labour market.¹

- There have been persistent surpluses of general primary teachers in metropolitan areas.
- Most secondary roles have been filled with limited choice in harder to staff subject disciplines, and more generally in rural remote and indigenous schools.
- Many of the imbalances seem likely to persist for some time although future magnitudes are difficult to predict.

The findings of the Productivity Commission align with work undertaken by the Department in 2010-12 as part of the Teacher Education Taskforce:²

- Modelling undertaken by the taskforce indicated that the primary sector was oversupplied relative to the secondary sector. There were no shortages in the primary sector and shortages in secondary were restricted to a small number of subject areas and difficult to staff locations.
- That South Australia was expected to have an oversupply until 2015 and beyond this point the aggregate level of oversupply would begin to tighten.

The report of the Teacher Education Taskforce provides a useful overview of the methodological issues associated with forecasting future demand and supply of teachers. The following points are highlighted.

- Teaching is a national labour market. The 2010 ABS statistics showed that 320 South Australian teachers were seeking registration in another jurisdiction compared with 177 seeking registration in South Australia. This appears to be consistent with the outflow of young South Australians outside of the state that has occurred from the 1990s.
- Only aggregate data was available on the Catholic and Independent sector and this restricted the capacity to provide more detailed forecasts at the state level.
- The importance in factoring in the difference between 'potential' and 'active' supply. Analysis of the Department's employable teacher register (ETR) indicated that of the

¹ Australian Government Productivity Commission Research Report; *Schools Workforce*, April 2012.

² The Teacher Education Taskforce Monograph 2; *Teacher Supply and Demand in South Australia Beyond 2010*, March 2012.

approximately 8000 persons on the ETR only 30% were active with the remaining 70% of the ETR not considered active. The actual number looking for work at any one time was only about 1000 of the potential pool of 8000.

The role played by the market in ensuring stable supply:

A strong supply of graduates, low exit rates of existing teaching staff and a continuing availability of a reserve pool of teachers has ensured strong supply relative to demand. This has had two positive outcomes:

- The strong supply characteristics have provided a positive incentive for staff to accept country employment as an entry point to teaching.
- Strong supply has enabled the maintenance of a viable reserve capacity to fill short term vacancies.
- High application rates have generally provided a “quality filter” through competition for available positions. This has mostly been the case in the metropolitan area and some preferred regional and rural locations.

The market has provided the conditions to ensure an equilibrium between demand and supply with supply problems restricted to a small number of hard to staff areas. However, there is no guarantee this will continue over time and shortages could emerge and become quickly embedded due to lag times for the market to adjust or supply based strategies to be implemented. The early warning signs of increased shortages will usually be experienced in harder to staff areas including rural, remote, and some low SES locations. Changing market conditions could be experienced in several ways:

- Inability to fill advertised positions.
- Appointing less qualified and capable candidates where necessity requires the position to be filled.
- Reduced capacity to cover short term vacancies that arise.

A clear signal of problems in the market will be when the problems identified above occur in an increasing number of locations and become persistent over time.

CURRENT TRENDS IN THE TEACHER LABOUR MARKET

Initial teacher Education (ITE)

- At the national level, the overall number of initial teacher education (ITE) graduates, that is the number of completions per annum, has increased by an average of only 0.4% per year. This is lower than the growth in the Australian population of school-aged children and teenagers aged 3- 18 years which has grown 1% per year over this time period.³
- Reductions in the number of completions were largely due to decreases in completions in primary education which fell at an average decrease of 0.6% per year between 2006-2017,

³National Initial Teacher Education Pipeline - Australian Teacher Workforce Data Report 1, AITSL, November 2020, p. 9.

falling most rapidly between 2014 and 2017. This compares to growth of an average 1.4% per year, from 2006-2018, in Australian children aged 5 to 12 years.⁴

- Early childhood and secondary programs experienced some growth over the period 2006-2017. The number of secondary completions grew by an average 0.9% per year compared with average growth in the number of Australian children of secondary education age, of an average of 0.3% per annum. Early childhood completions grew by an average 2.9% per annum over this period. This compares with an average growth of 1.7% for Australian children aged 3-4 years.⁵
- Data from ITE completions of a teaching qualification in South Australian tertiary institutions show a reduction, most notably a significant drop off between 2018 with 1430 completion and 2019 with 1121 completions. Consistent with national trends a reduction in primary/middles completions and increases in early childhood/junior primary and significant increases in secondary are evident. Over the five year period postgraduate qualifications have remained steady with 379 (2015) and 374 (2019). Undergraduate completions have fallen from 868 (2015) to 747 in (2019), representing a reduction of 13.9%.⁶
- Enrolments in all South Australian Tertiary Institutions were 6092 (2019) compared with 6383 (2015), representing a reduction of 4.6%.

Declines in completion rates, such as those in primary education, may reflect market adjustments to increased demand, or may reflect other adjustments such as adjustments to intakes and courses provided by ITE providers.

Recruitment

- Departmental data indicated continuing strong interest in advertised teacher positions:⁷
 - Average 21.9 applicants per vacancy for metropolitan ongoing vacancies.
 - Average 5.9 applications per vacancy for ongoing country vacancies.
 - Average 8.0 applications for metro temporary contract advertised positions.
 - Average 8.1 applications for country temporary contract advertised positions⁸.
- Australian Government Department of Employment Skills, Small and Family Business South Australian Labour Market Analysis April 2019 measures public and private providers of education services. The data suggests some tightening of the labour market particularly in demand for early childhood educators:
 - Primary School - The average number of applicants per vacancy decreased in 2019 (12.8) compared to 2018 (17.1). The average number of suitable applicants decreased in 2019 (2.5) compared to 2018 (2.8).
 - Secondary School - The average number of applicants per vacancy in 2018 (10.5) a decrease from 2018 (13.8). The average number of suitable applicants per vacancy in 2019 (2.6) a slight increase from 2018 (2.3).
 - Early Childhood (including kindergartens, childcare and early learning centres) - The average number of qualified applicants decreased in 2009 (2.3) compared to 2018

⁴ ibid

⁵ ibid

⁶South Australian university students studying teaching or education 2015- 2019, Internal DfE publication, p. 4 -5.

⁷ AEU Request for Data – Teacher Recruitment and Selection provided to SASSLA by DfE.

⁸ This figure should be read with caution because of the limited pool of vacancies.

(6.3). The average number of suitable applicants per vacancy reduced by more than half in 2019 (0.7 per vacancy) when compared with 2018 (1.8 per vacancy). Early childhood is now a designated skills shortage area.⁹

- A survey undertaken by SASSLA of seven country principals reports the following:¹⁰
 - Recruitment conditions over the last five years have largely followed trend over the last 10 years with persistent problems in attracting staff in specialised vacancies, short term vacancies and relief coverage. On a rating scale, principals rated the current labour market as showing some moderate risk increase compared to conditions over the last five years. No principals interviewed expressed a view that market conditions would improve in the short to medium term.
 - A consistent response from the principals interviewed was that successful recruitment was “a relational business” that required actively seeking out potential employees. This could include building connection with tertiary institutions and following up leads provided by other schools, staff, or community members. One principal stated, “I spent a greater part of January making contacts and ensuring I could get good staff to come to my school”. These approaches were becoming more of a necessity as established Departmental recruitment systems were not meeting needs (see Teacher Recruitment to Whyalla Secondary School 2020/21 below).
 - There has been a strong uptake of “placed based” strategies in some country locations. This usually involved employing local people as SSOs and supporting them in gaining a teaching qualification. The success of these strategies was generally rated highly; an employee who came through this pathway was appointed in an Assistant Principal role¹¹.
 - Innovative practices are being used of scarce resources such as STEM teachers on the West Coast that involved peripatetic placement and uses of technology to provide a quality education to students.

Teacher recruitment to a Whyalla secondary school 2020/21:

A Whyalla school advertised three vacant positions in term 4, 2020; a physical education teacher, a special education teacher and an English teacher on one year contracts commencing in 2021. Prospects beyond 2021 for continuing employment were high for successful candidates:

- The special education position was advertised once in term 4, 2020 and three times in term 1 2021. Total number of applicants across that period was 5.
- The English position was filled from the ETR pool in week 2, term 1, 2021.
- The physical education position was advertised once in term 4, 2020 (no applicants) and early in term 1 (no applicants) and again mid-term 1 2021. There was only one applicant who applied in response to the third advertisement, this person was nominated and then declined.
- In early 2021 the school accessed the ETR. The two people identified as suitable were contacted but declined due to Whyalla not being a preferred location.

⁹ The report notes that some non-government providers felt they were less attractive to applicants. As Government preschools and kindergartens have higher remuneration, shorter working hours and additional leave (school holidays).

¹⁰ Includes three schools on the West Coast; one in Whyalla; one in the Riverland and two in the South East.

¹¹ There was only one report of a person coming through this pathway as being of average quality.

- To support the school at the commencement of 2021, three permanent relieving teachers (PRT) were assigned from the Whyalla pool.
- To assist the school, the Office of People and Culture (OPC) sent an email to all eligible candidates seeking expressions of interest for special education, physical education and Home Economics (behind LSL terms 2, 3 and 4). This elicited a positive response with potential candidates identified but with only one acceptance for the special education role.
- At the commencement of term 2, 2021 vacant positions for the physical education position and Home Economics position remain. A state wide PRT has been appointed to the physical education position, however, cannot commence until week 3 of term 2.
- The Home Economics and physical education contract positions were readvertised week 1 term 2 2021.

The Need for Forecasting Teacher Demand and Supply

The combination of plateauing growth in the number of new ITE graduates overall and indications of tightening supply of qualified teachers in the market, deserve analysis of impact on the ability of ITE to meet the Department's needs. The Australian Government Department of Employment Skills, Small and Family Business South Australian Labour Market Analysis April 2019 suggests that declines in application rates and numbers of suitable applications warrant some attention.

The impact of a tightening labour market will mainly be felt on the edges of the system – in rural remote and hard to staff locations, and subject areas. The impact will also tend to fall on the areas where the need for high quality public education is most needed to improve the life chances and social mobility of young people.

Forecasting is important because of the long lead times required to put in place strategies to address imbalances in the labour market.

Experience in the Department and across the education sector more generally has been that forecasting is complex because of imperfect data and the variables that inform the working of the teacher labour market. This situation has been made more complex in recent years due to increasing enrolments in on-line courses serviced by interstate providers. The advent of improved national data may make forecasting more robust, and it is worthwhile to review what is now possible.

An alternative and more simple approach to the development of a complex statistical model is to undertake a risk analysis of the current labour market to inform future policy settings over the next three years. This could be done using the following available data sets:

- Projected student enrolments disaggregated to locations.
- Exit rates from teaching (resignations, retirements, career progression).
- New teacher supply (ITE and active reserve capacity).
- Use of survey techniques to identify current experience of the labour market and particular areas of risk.

A model that incorporates these elements could be used to develop future scenarios as a basis for developing policy choices. Should the Department wish to advance this thinking, it is worthwhile reading the Australian Government Department of Employment Skill Shortage methodology which

provides for quantitative and qualitative analysis of labour markets and is a validated statistical tool.¹²

WORKFORCE MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES – THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN INCENTIVES AND SUPPLY BASED STRATEGIES

Two key strategies available to the Department to manage market conditions are the use of incentives and initiatives focussing on improving teacher supply to areas of need. Market conditions will determine how these strategies can be most effectively used.

Incentives

It is important that all schools have access to quality teachers and leaders to meet community expectations and standards of performance established by the Department.

There can be an inherent tension between the Departmental and local interest in how scarce resources are managed to maximise system wide benefit. This is particularly important because the teaching labour market is not a level playing field and some schools have considerably more market power in attracting and retaining high quality leaders than others.¹³

This is illustrated in the hypothetical example below:

Maths and science teachers are deemed as a scarce resource. An inner metropolitan school has a small number of candidates for a position with one “stand out”. The same candidate has also applied for a near country school. The inner metropolitan school applies for an attraction allowance and is successful on the basis that it satisfies the criteria in the policy to employ a high quality candidate. The near country school misses out and either accepts the best candidate available or re-enters the market and acts to set a higher price to attract a preferred candidate.

This hypothetical example highlights the potential adverse outcomes that can result from not taking a systems based view in how incentives are applied. The labour market in public education has never been a level playing field and preferred schools and locations have greater market power. This trend appears to be becoming more embedded due to demographic, economic and cultural changes.¹⁴ Remuneration based incentives should act as a counterbalance to pre-existing market power and not exacerbate it. A significant risk associated with the introduction of more open and accessible scheme of attraction and retention allowances is that some schools will be able to compete more successfully for scarce resources than others and these schools may not be the schools of greatest need.

A critical test which needs to be applied to all applications for remuneration incentives is a “public interest” style test. A test of this type can assess the broader interests of the public education system and is crucial for how resources are managed to support the overall interests of public education. Such a test would need to draw on a clear base of evidence on the functioning of the current labour market by identifying where scarcity of high quality teachers and leaders is creating risks for public education and how incentives can be used to address this imbalance.

¹² Available on Commonwealth Department of Employment website.

¹³ This can be demonstrated by the number of applications received for advertised vacancies across individual schools.

¹⁴ Campbell, A. M & Yates G. C. R., *Want to be a country teacher? No, I am too metrocentric*. Journal of Research in Rural Education 2011.

Supply Side Strategies

Where supply problems become embedded in an employment market, incentives have less value and can lead to rapid escalation of wage costs and distortion of relativities. In situations of market imbalances, supply side strategies play a vital role because they focus on increasing the pool of potential employees that are available to fill hard to fill vacancies. Supply based strategies can include:

- Scholarships and other market entry schemes that seek early engagement with prospective employees in high demand areas.
- Internal development of existing staff through structured learning and development designed to meet local needs not well serviced by the market.
- Changes to barriers to entry to the labour market (this includes options such as Teach for Australia and related alternative entry programs such as the specialist STEM program - Teach SA. It would also potentially include changes to teacher registration that supports specialist instruction in areas such as design and technology).

The use of incentives and supply based strategies is not an either/or question. It is a question of understanding market conditions and specific issues arising in individual locations to meet Departmental needs.

The functioning of the teacher labour market needs to be continually evaluated to assess market risks. The assessment of risks will inform strategic choices as to how remuneration incentives and supply based interventions are best applied to meet the interests of public education.

Positively Supporting Country Schools

Based on the analysis of market conditions and the information gained through interview of seven country principals, a five point strategy for improving recruitment and retention is presented for consideration and discussion:

- *Prioritise Place Based Recruitment:* The number of teachers who are permanently located in a town or immediate locality have a significant impact on recruitment needs of a school. Australian research also indicates that country people are more likely to remain in the country even if it is not in their hometown.¹⁵ Schools with a high percentage of locally based teachers tend to be in a better position to respond to tightening labour market conditions - those that rely on a transient pool of employees are most affected. On the best information available, the number of place-based teaching staff varies from about 20% to 80% - this usually follows the desirability of the location and population density.¹⁶ The information gained from phone interviews suggests there has been success in providing pathways into teaching for local people who have the capability and interest in becoming a teacher. These staff are often employed as SSOs and access online degrees. This avenue presents as a highly cost effective way to build capacity in a school and manage market risks.

¹⁵ Campbell, A.M., & Yates G.C.R. *Want to be a country teacher? No, I am too metrocentric.* Journal of Research in Rural Education 2011.

¹⁶ Anecdotal information suggests examples at the low end Coober Pedy at around 20% and at the high end Loxton at around 80% plus.

- *The Country Desk*: information gained through telephone interviews indicates that successful recruitment is more based on a relational based approach. This strategy is time intensive and will potentially become more difficult if the labour market tightens. A way to positively support principals is to establish a “country desk” staffed by a person experienced in country employment. Such a role could actively assist leaders in all areas of recruitment, liaise with tertiary institutions, plan practicum placements, and identify prospective employees. The person would be the active voice of country employment in the city.
- *Priority Access to the Market*: Priority be given to country access to existing programs such as Teach for Australia and support for the development of new niche programs that support employment stability in country locations.
- *Flexible Deployment of Staffing Resources*: Positive support be given to the sharing of scarce resources through using specialist teachers across a number of schools supported by technology and employment practices tailored to specific needs of participating schools.
- *People Focussed Incentives*: Have ready access to incentive packages where it is essential to attract or retain key people. These packages to be tailored to individual needs and could include:
 - Housing.
 - Support for a spouse to obtain work.
 - Professional development.
 - Vehicle.
 - Return travel to the city.

To be successful a country strategy will require:

- Initiatives that will need to be resourced.
- Active engagement and involvement of school principals including reasonable levels of empowerment to make decisions.
- The Department demonstrating its commitment to people going to the country through career development that actively support positive career opportunities when they return to the city.

It would be prudent to undertake a cost benefit analysis of a country workforce strategy. I am confident a properly thought through strategy would clearly show a positive return on investment.

SCHOOL AND PRESCHOOL LEADERS – A SPECIFIC LABOUR MARKET

Departmental data shows generally low application rates for principal and preschool director positions which is a lead indicator of a shortage of candidates interested in pursuing these roles.

Based on 2020 data, the average number of applicants for metropolitan Band A Principals ranged from a low of two applicants (A-7 level positions) to a high of 3.5 applicants for (A-6 level positions) . For Preschool Director positions at Level A-1 and A-2 director the number of average applicants was 1.75 per position¹⁷. Average application rates for country schools tended to be higher but this would

¹⁷ DfE data taken from spreadsheet AEU Request for Data – Teacher Recruitment and Selection.

likely be explained by external applicants seeking entry to the system who would not meet minimum standards. Data from 2017 indicates that 14% of advertised positions were not filled¹⁸. Anecdotal evidence is that it is becoming very difficult to fill hard principal and preschool director roles in some locations.

Workforce demographic data suggests that vacancy creation will remain high across the Band A and Band B leadership cohort. A combination of retirement rates and transition of principals into Education leadership roles, including district based leadership roles suggests strong demand will continue for the foreseeable future.¹⁹

The market in recent years appears to be stuck in low supply of quality candidates relative to available vacancies. This condition is also replicated across other Australian jurisdictions. There are two areas of enquiry that may shed greater light on employee behaviour in the current labour market:

Leader mobility

There now appears to be limited mobility of leaders from city to country and from more advantaged to disadvantaged schools compared to experience over the last 30 years. Mobility is important because it can be used to optimise available resources in a system by relocating capable staff from areas of strong supply to areas of weaker supply.

Where employees are less mobile it is left to individual sites to build their own capacity and this now appears to be the new reality for many hard to staff locations. While this may be an option of necessity it may not be the best option for two important reasons:

- There is great value gained from diversity of experience and capabilities at a site level and the hybrid vigour that is brought from new thinking and ideas.
- The overall stock of human capital is improved by a large pool of leaders having the experience of working in different contexts.

In my view, it would be useful to understand the factors that shape employee mobility and what policy options may be explored to increase mobility to ensure that high quality leaders are available in the areas of greatest need.

Demographic Change

An important and seemingly neglected area of enquiry is how demographic trends may be influencing the labour market for school leaders. Understanding and responding to these trends will be critical to developing a strategy for maintaining a strong future supply of leaders:

- The teaching workforce is rapidly “greening” as represented in the significant upward trend in 25-44 age bracket which now represents 47% of the teaching workforce.²⁰ This group of employees are in an age bracket where family formation occurs. It is also the group where contingent employment is more prevalent than the older age bracket employees.

¹⁸ DfE data shows that in 2017, 215 principal positions were advertised and of these 30 were not filled in the first advertisement.

¹⁹ DfE 2018 school and preschool sector leadership summary Issue 7 June 2018, indicates that 43% of the Band A and B leaders are 55 or older. The average age for Band A principals and band B deputy principals is 48 years and other Band B Leaders is 44 years.

²⁰ DfE school sector teaching workforce – summary June 18- Table 4 School sector teaching workforce by age group and gender.

- A glaring statistic is the continuing rise of part time work which is currently 36.5% of the total teaching workforce.²¹ 42% of school teachers are now part time. These numbers are not replicated in leadership roles within the schooling system where 1% of Principals and 9.5% of Band B leaders work part time.²²

The demographic trends suggest that employee behaviour is being influenced by social and economic trends that restrict access to, or do not incentivise employees to apply for leadership positions. The obvious case is part time employment where highly capable teachers may not consider taking up a role because it conflicts with their individual needs, or there simply are not the jobs available that cater to the needs of a part time employee.

The stark reality is that the market for school and preschool leaders is now a sellers' market and this requires greater understanding of the interests and needs of employees to ensure the best teachers are attracted to leadership roles.

Rethinking Leader Attraction and Retention

Role design:

Australian research suggests four factors that are important in attracting potential applicants to principal roles²³

- Capacity to achieve work life balance.
- School location acceptable to family.
- Good work conditions.
- Good remuneration.

Three of the elements relate to qualitative conditions of employment with remuneration the only specific rewards-based element. This suggests there is a strong case to reassess the job design of principal and leadership roles to reflect the needs and interests of the new demographic of emergent leaders. Important issues that need further assessment are access to part time work, entry level support, manageable workloads, and reasonable flexibility to respond to family and other needs.

Role preparation:

Over the last 20 years the move to local management of schools across all jurisdictions in Australia has led to principal and more recently preschool director roles taking on greater managerial work and accountabilities.

The pathway that used to be commonplace for people developing capabilities in Band B roles over several years before progressing into a principal role no longer holds in many hard to staff schools. The old supply chain, while not severed, is fraying at the edges. In the preschool sector it is not uncommon for contract teachers with minimal experience to step into Director roles.

²¹ The teaching workforce includes teachers, seconded teachers, and leaders.

²² DfE school sector teaching workforce - summary June 18 - Table 3 school and preschool sector leadership persons and FTE by legislative act.

The extensive research on leader workload indicates that new appointees to principal jobs have particularly high workloads due to the lack of tacit skills, learned over time.

In this environment, the availability of high-quality preparation is crucial to assist new leaders. Access to high quality preparation may also give people confidence to step into a leadership role knowing there will be a structured process for developing the requisite capabilities for undertaking the role.

A relational approach to succession planning:

The evidence of low levels of applications for leadership positions and the difficulty of filling some positions point to the reality that conventional processes of advertisement and selection are less effective than in the past.

The emergent labour market is becoming more important to pursue active recruitment strategies by engaging directly with high potential candidates and developing tailored pathways into leadership roles.

This type of behaviour is already being shown by country principals who rely heavily on networks and making connection with candidates for attracting graduate teachers to their site.

Incentivise movement through the system:

Increased internal mobility for aspirant and early career leaders (Band A and Band B leaders) provides an opportunity to develop system wide capabilities and the take up of positions in hard to staff schools and locations.

The value to people is that it gives them an opportunity to develop capabilities in different educational contexts and to build confidence in planning their career path. The value to the Department is that it increases the potential pool of people who may be open to the opportunities available in hard to staff schools.

New approaches for development and trial could include thinking such as:

- A program designed to give aspirant leaders a development opportunity working for one term in a designated site.
- The use of alternative incentive schemes to attract existing and potential leaders to designated schools.

SELECTION PROCESSES

In my role in SASSLA, I have had the opportunity to gain a good overview of the existing selection the current system of recruitment and selection of leaders.

I make three key observations about the role and functioning of the system.

- While the merit system architecture has been progressively modified over the last 20 years, the practices have changed little. My specific observations are:

- The reliance on applications in the process when research clearly shows they have a very low predictive value in determining suitability for a role.
 - Variable quality of referee reports.
 - Overreliance on interview questions that have limited evidentiary value.
- The process is grounded in testing for validated experience in doing a role and not the potential of a person in doing a role. The current “greening of the workforce” means that processes need to be purposefully designed to test for potential in a role.
 - Many staff express little confidence in the selection processes, and this may be a factor in declining application rates. Many schools appear to apply the risk management principle of appointing known people rather than taking a risk on an outside appointment, and this may act as a disincentive for people to commit to the time intensive task of preparing a job application.

Given the issues raised above it is timely to review the recruitment and selection of leaders.

CULTURE

The cultural models that have sustained public education are based on a professional model of genuine engagement with the underlying purpose of education. In the education context, the term “moral purpose” has been used to describe this set of values.

In a school setting, people view their work through a cultural lens. In an environment where there is a strong and collegiate professional culture, evidenced by the values held by staff in relation to student learning and strong commitment to professional development, the culture of a school will be highly conducive to student learning.

The success of public education rests on the intrinsic values people bring to their role, more so than any other single attribute.

Online surveys can cover a lot of territory and can give valuable information on behaviour in a system but may not always be the best mechanism to measure the underlying values that motivate people in their roles. Thought can be given to understand more about the intrinsic motivators and how these can be further developed and nourished.