

Chapter 4

The state of the teacher labour market in selected overseas countries

In order to place the Australian teacher labour market in a broader context, this chapter provides a short review of the state of the teacher labour market in four English speaking countries – the UK, the USA, New Zealand and Canada – whose teacher labour market arrangements are similar to those in Australia. Information from other countries, while useful, are more difficult to obtain.

United Kingdom

In the UK the annual school-based Survey of Teacher Vacancies provides information on vacancies by type of school, region and subject area. The survey results are published by the Department for Employment and Education (DfEE).

An important measure derived from this survey is the “vacancy rate” which is the ratio of vacancies to the number of permanent full-time teachers employed. The survey results do not refer to shortages as such but recruitment difficulties can be expected to be greater when the vacancy rate is high.

Between 1995 and 2000 the overall vacancy rate more than doubled from 0.3 per cent to 0.7 per cent. It rose for all subject areas, with the highest vacancy rates being in four subject areas: mathematics, computer studies, languages other than French and German, and craft, design and technology. These subject areas are also those where recruitment fell short of the target by the greatest margin.

Vacancy rates were also higher in some geographical areas than others. London and the South East areas have consistently experienced high vacancy rates over time.

The study of the UK teacher labour market by Straker (1991), while somewhat dated, noted that in subject areas of recruitment difficulty such as mathematics, physics and craft, design and technology, many teachers did not have specialist qualifications in their subject area. He used the term “hidden shortage” to describe this situation. Currently some subject areas in the UK could fall in this category.

The UK Government has taken a number of steps to address these recruitment difficulties and the details are available on the DfEE website at www.dfee.gov.uk. These initiatives include:

- The Teacher Training Agency, established in 1994, which promotes teaching as a profession and sets out to raise the standard of teaching and the quality of teacher training courses;
- Financial incentives to encourage the take-up of teacher training especially in areas of high demand. These incentives include the waiving of tuition fees for postgraduate certificate of education courses; and the provision of an incentive payment (of 5000 pounds) for those who take up teaching in mathematics and science;
- Encouragement of mature individuals to enter teacher training by offering them employment as “unqualified teachers” while they are training by way of an individualised training programme. The school receives an incentive payment of 2000 pounds to cover the costs of the training; and
- Refresher courses for returners to teaching, including help with childcare, and a welcome back bonus for qualified teachers who have been out of teaching for more than a year and return to the profession.

While immigration is not cited as a measure adopted by the UK Government for increasing its supply of teachers, reports have appeared in the Australian media about recruitment agencies hiring teachers in Australia for UK schools. The extent of this is difficult to gauge.

The recruitment difficulties in the London region have led to the Government instituting a special recruitment strategy for that area. This is described at www.teachers4london.com.

United States of America

The most authoritative information on teacher demand supply comes from the Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS) conducted on behalf of the National Centre for Education Statistics (NCES). The survey covers public and private schools and has components providing information about teacher demand and shortages, the view of schools principals and of teachers, and data on the school and school district. The information is published by the NCES on their web site <http://nces.ed.gov>.

Analysis of these data has not produced a general consensus in the USA about the extent of teacher recruitment difficulty. However, the most comprehensive and widely quoted study on this issue *What Matters Most: Teaching for America's Future* published by the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future (NCT&AF) in 1996, stated that recurring shortages of teachers have characterised the US labour market for most of the 20th century. According to that report, shortages as measured by the vacancy rate and more qualitative measures of recruitment difficulty, were most pronounced in 1996 in bilingual education, special education, physics, chemistry, mathematics and computer science. Black American teachers were also particularly highly sought after. Shortages were most severe in the poorest districts.

Individual States in the USA have the responsibility for addressing teacher demand and supply but information on the State measures taken are difficult to assemble. The federal government also assists schools in "approved teacher shortage areas" to meet their recruitment needs but its efforts are mainly directed at improving the overall quality of teachers. This emphasis seems to reflect the finding from the NCT&AF that upward of 27 per cent of all new teachers lacked a "proper licence" in their teaching field. In 1997 the federal government provided \$350m to recruit new teachers in the neediest areas, especially in rural and poor urban neighbourhoods.

New Zealand

New Zealand has a rich data source on teachers and teacher movements, including in and out of teaching and between schools. This is derived from their annual surveys of schools conducted by the Ministry of Education.

During the 1990s New Zealand experienced teacher shortages in primary schools due to the sharp rise in student enrolments associated with a "demographic bulge" centred around the early years of schooling. This group of young people are now of secondary school age and some teacher shortages in the secondary sector are expected in the early years of the current decade.

Currently teachers in the primary sector are in over supply. In the secondary sector, teachers of mathematics, science, technology, information and communications technology are in great demand and so are teachers from Tereao, Maori and Pacific Islander backgrounds.

New Zealand has been active in assisting the growth in the supply of teachers which as a result increased markedly in the 1990s. Some of the key measures have included:

A nationwide program of TV advertising to boost the profile of teaching;

A \$10 000 scholarship paid to those commencing a teacher training course in subjects in high demand;

Funding schools to build up a pool of relief teachers;

Retraining of teachers who have been out of teaching for some years, with preference given to those qualified in “shortage” specialisations;

A national relocation grant for teachers moving into priority teaching positions and a recruitment bonus to schools which take on these teachers. Teachers coming to New Zealand also qualify for an international relocation grant; and

A grant for persons returning to a full-time position after an absence of 3 years or more;

Further details are available on the website www.teachnz.govt.nz.

Canada

There is not the same depth of coverage and quality of information on teacher shortages in Canada as in the other three countries discussed above. There also appears to be a lack of official sources of information at the national level.

The most recent analysis of the teacher labour market was commissioned by the Canadian Teachers’ Federation in 2000. In its report the Federation claimed that schools in Canada face acute teacher shortages, especially in science, chemistry, biology and physics. Speech therapists were also ranked as in short supply. Retaining teachers was perceived as a problem and schools in Newfoundland and the North West Territory all expected that recruitment difficulties would continue into the following year.

While now somewhat dated, a contrary view of the severity of teacher shortages in Canada was presented by Press (1997). His study of schools reveals that of the 136 school districts which responded to the survey, 98.5 per cent reported no teacher shortage and 92.4 per cent reported that they did not expect to have a teacher shortage in the next five years. Press concluded that in Canada there was a surplus of teachers which would continue for a few years.

Summary of teacher supply and demand in overseas countries

While the available evidence from the four English speaking countries is not of a consistent quality and currency, it appears that some teacher recruitment difficulties are being faced by all of them. These difficulties are mostly in areas such as mathematics, some sciences and languages, information technology and crafts and design. Rural areas and remote regions face greater difficulties and generally for a wider range of teachers. In North America and New Zealand teachers from minority backgrounds are also in short supply. The UK and New Zealand governments appear to be the most active in terms of initiatives to increase supply.