

## Sharing relevant insights for Schools Workforce Study

August 2011

The Productivity Commission is conducting a study into the Schools Workforce due April 2012. The Issues Paper , June 2011 covers the following aspects:

- Why is the performance of the schools workforce important?
  - o Student outcomes
  - o Workforce issues
- Recent policy developments
- Further improvements in schools workforce outcomes
  - o Balancing supply and demand
  - o Job design and innovation
  - o Training and professional development
  - o Remuneration and performance evaluation
  - o School leadership
  - o School autonomy
  - o Meeting the needs of particular student populations

Teach For Australia is an independent, not for profit organisation with a mission to confront educational disadvantage. We recruit outstanding graduates and with our partners transform them into exceptional teachers and inspirational leaders. Our Associates (teachers) are placed in the neediest areas, which is part of the process of developing them for leadership.

Our partners include Federal & State governments, State, Catholic and Independent employers, teacher registration boards, unions and other bodies that have a stake in secondary school education.

The program is an employment based pathway into teaching. Associates undertake a 2 year program that combines practice and theory. Whilst the program is relatively new, we believe our contributions add value to the broader discussion of how the teacher workforce could evolve. Teach For Australia wishes to respond to a couple of specific areas.

## Further improvements in schools workforce outcomes

### Balancing Supply & Demand

As the Issues Paper has identified, teacher shortages are in specific areas, such as Maths and Science and whether certain factors are amenable to policy action.

To date, 80% of the schools that expressed interest in the Teach For Australia program requested a Maths/ Science teacher. 55% of all vacancies submitted were in Maths and Science. Teach For Australia's strategy to address this shortage and therefore attract more candidates has been to target graduates with Maths, Science and Engineering degrees. We have also received applications from Economics graduates who have specialised in areas such as Econometrics.

Where applicants have a major sequence of subjects in Mathematics, currently they are eligible to enrol in the Post Grad Diploma of Teaching with Mathematics as one of their learning areas. However, where an applicant does not have the requisite number of pure Mathematics units but has had to master mathematical concepts to successfully complete other units (such as an Engineering graduate completing Thermodynamics), they are not eligible to teach Mathematics.

In our experience, this restriction contributes to the shortage of Mathematics teachers as it means that experts in the field of Mathematics are not able to teach this subject. The recent release of AITSL's Accreditation of Initial Teacher Education Programs in Australia, Standards and Procedures, April 2011 also poses an interesting question as to whether further constraints in attracting suitably qualified entrants to meet the Mathematics shortage, particularly as Teach Next is about to be launched as well.

Under Program Entrants, one of the standards (3.3) pertaining to program entry requires that:

Graduate entry initial teacher education programs have clear selection criteria and equitable entry procedures that require students to have achieved a discipline-specific qualification, relevant to the Australian curriculum or other recognised areas of schooling provision.

For secondary teaching this is at least a major study<sup>8</sup> in one teaching area and preferably a second teaching area comprising at least a minor study<sup>9</sup>.

For primary teaching this is at least one year of full-time equivalent study relevant to one or more learning areas of the primary school curriculum.

8. Study undertaken for a major study will be equivalent to a total of three-quarters of a year of successful full-time higher education study, usually comprising sequential discipline study taken over three years. In most programs, this equates to six units, with no more than two at first-year level and no fewer than two units at third-year level.

9. Study undertaken for a minor study will be equivalent to a total of half a year of successful full-time higher education study, usually comprising sequential discipline study taken over two years. In most programs, this equates to four units, with no more than two at first-year level.

If the teaching workforce needs to attract more graduates with a science and/ or maths background into teaching, the question for Teach For Australia is whether "equivalent" will be defined by university



providers in a way that supports greater participation from alternative sources than traditional maths/science programs. The questions that the new standards raise are as follows:

- Will the definition be based on a deeper analysis of the content of the academic transcript?
- Will an external assessment tool determine an applicant's suitability for a teacher training degree specialising in, for example, Maths methodology?
- How narrowly or broadly is "discipline-specific qualification" defined? For example, would a Media Studies qualification be acceptable as part of the English-specific discipline? Or a Thermodynamics qualification is part of a Mathematics specific discipline?

### **Training and professional development**

As noted in the Issues Paper, reforms have been initiated to improve the quality of entrants into teaching courses and as such, the Federal Government has sponsored Teach For Australia under the Teaching Quality National Partnership Framework. As an alternative employment based pathway into teaching, top university graduates in various fields are encouraged to consider a career teaching in educationally disadvantaged schools.

To date (in a 3 year period):

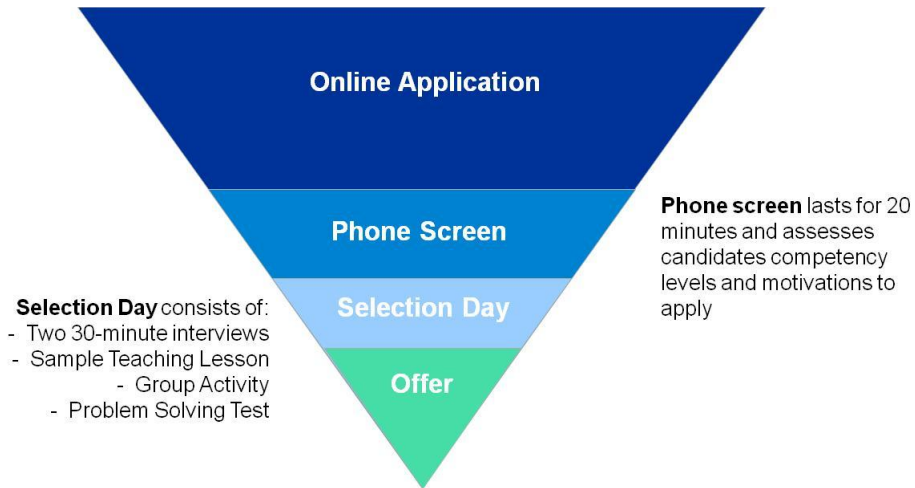
- Teach For Australia has received approximately 2000 applications and the selection process yielded less than 10% of successful applicants.
- The retention rate of the first and second cohort is 96% which compares favourably to other Bachelor or Post grad degree programs.

Given that the teacher workforce is 250 000 strong, the Teach For Australia program, at this point of its life cycle, is very much a complementary program. However, there is evidence to indicate that the TFA program can contribute to improving the quality of teacher entrants. The ACER Evaluation of the program found that as well as the MGSE program and the support offered to Associates, "The use of a rigorous selection process for Associates that has – in most cases – successfully chosen high quality candidates with the necessary ability and personal attributes to succeed in the program" has contributed to its success so far.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> **Teach for Australia Pathway: Evaluation Report Phase 1 of 3 (April-July 2010)**  
Submitted to DEEWR – Pathways Section, Quality Teaching Branch

The selection process is robust and requires applicants to overcome a number of hurdles:



Furthermore, applicants are assessed against the following core competencies;

- Leadership
- Resilience
- Humility and Learning
- Communication and Influencing
- Planning and Organising
- Problem Solving
- Commitment to TFA mission

The investment in such a rigorous selection process does pay off with respect to attaining quality applicants. Furthermore, the mission of confronting educational disadvantage is a significant factor that contributes to the attraction of these high quality applicants. Applicants are “high achievers” but they also have a strong social conscience or desire to make a difference.

In examining the schools workforce and the impact on student outcomes, we believe greater attention needs to be directed at the motivation of the applicant.