

RESEARCH INTO INITIATIVES TO PREPARE AND SUPPLY A WORKFORCE FOR HARD-TO- STAFF SCHOOLS

Final Report

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Abstract

This project examines the notion of ‘teacher shortages’ within the context of the difficulties that some schools have in finding and retaining enough teachers, not only across rural, regional, and remote geographic contexts, but also across high poverty school settings and within key discipline or subject areas. Framing this broad issue as a workforce issue for *hard-to-staff schools*, the project sought to learn more about the reasons teachers accept or fail to take up the many vacant positions in these schools or prematurely leave the profession once employed in these complex settings.

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Executive Summary

This project examined the notion of ‘teacher shortages’ within the context of the difficulties that some schools have in finding and retaining enough teachers, not only across rural, regional, and remote geographic contexts, but also across high poverty school settings and within key discipline or subject areas. Framing this broad issue as a workforce issue for *hard-to-staff schools*, the project sought to learn more about the reasons teachers either fail to take up the many vacant positions in these schools or prematurely leave the profession once employed in these complex settings. In addition, the project aimed to shed light on why some initiatives appear to run successfully for many years while the lifespan of other projects are much shorter. We also focused on aspects of educational leadership that facilitate impact and success in this sector and the key lessons which can be passed on to policy makers regarding issues related to program design, recruitment, and retention. This project worked from the pretext that the hard-to-staff schooling context is under-problematised and hence we aimed to not only answer the research questions, but to also contextualise our responses through the voices of those most closely involved.

RESEARCH DESIGN

The project was divided into four phases, which began with a qualitatively analysed meta-synthesis of key policy documents, evaluations, and associated academic publications related to initiatives that sought to address the teaching workforce in hard-to-staff settings with a specific focus on the area of leadership. This first phase (*Audit*) involved the collation of information on a range of major Australian initiatives that specifically focused on teacher workforce shortages within hard-to-staff school contexts. There was an overarching focus on leadership and the scope of the audit was restricted to the past 20 years. The second phase (*Interviews*) involved in depth interviews and discussion with both those who have led the initiatives as well as teachers and school leaders who participated in them. These interviews allowed an examination of the conceptual and policy drivers at the time of their delivery and an opportunity to reflect on the outcomes of their strategies and learnings, which might be applied to current and/or future policy. The third phase (*Analysis*) examined both the implications and common themes identified across the *Audit* and *Interview* stages.

This phase scrutinised whether these initiatives can be determined as having made short term, long term, and/or systemic change, the sustainability of the initiatives, and their transferability to different contexts. It also sought to identify other ways ‘change’ or impact might be determined. The final phase (*Dissemination of Findings*) takes form in this report, which has been delivered to Government in order to inform the direction on addressing teacher workplace shortages for hard-to-staff schools.

KEY FINDINGS IN RELATION TO THE THREE KEY RESEARCH QUESTIONS

How have Australian workforce initiatives over the past 20 years sought to recruit, prepare, and retain teachers within historically hard-to-staff schools/areas?

It is clear from an analysis of both Phase One and Phase Two datasets that while specific strategies of how to recruit, prepare, and retain teachers vary between initiatives, there are the following commonalities and overlapping approaches:

- Most programs (107 of 147 audited) were administered by either Government (48), Universities (43) or collaborations between both Government and University (16).
- While there was a combination of Government initiatives across federal, state and territory sectors, most university-based programs involved non-G8 institutions.
- The focus of most programs (86) targeted pre-service teachers with either a regional, remote, or Indigenous focus.
- Many initiatives targeted mechanisms that incentivised teachers to move into, or stay within a hard-to-staff school location. These included rural/remote schools, low socioeconomic schools, the early childhood sector, and schools offering specific subject areas such as science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM).
- A smaller number of programs targeted mechanisms that incentivised distinct types of teachers to enter the teaching profession such as pre-service teachers/teachers who are Indigenous or who are from specific locations, teachers in specific subject areas and future school leaders.
- While approximately one third of all programs relied solely on financial incentives (48), many programs used a combination of enticements such as financial, professional, enhanced career trajectories and superior working conditions in the form of salary loadings, subsidised housing, or extra leave loadings.

What impact have these initiatives had on teaching and how have school leaders perceived their impact?

Many of the hard-to-staff initiatives analysed lacked any formal evaluation. Of the 147 programs audited as part of Phase One, only 15 were identified as having been substantially evaluated. Hence it is difficult to draw firm conclusions from this first data set in relation to impact. The project was however able to utilise Phase Two to better understand impact across the areas of Program design and organisation, Preparation (i.e., Initial Teacher Education), Recruitment and Induction, Retention and Attrition, and Leadership.

- Impact of initiatives on teaching may be strengthened through centralised policy that aligns with specific hard-to-staff school contexts.
- Impact of individual initiatives on teaching is heavily influenced by the degree to which sustainable resourcing is available.
- School leaders raised the notion of stress points where a particular local issue or policy impacts on other untended areas of the hard-to-staff school setting. An example given being the ‘transfer’ or ‘points system’ in remote locations which leads each year to large numbers of experienced staff being transferred back to urban settings and these staff being replaced largely by inexperienced graduate teachers.

What policy lessons can be taken from these initiatives?

Those interviewed requested a desire for more sustainable resourcing and for more long-term support for successful programs. The interviews highlight that while different hard-to-staff locations present completely different sets of complexities, school leaders across different locations are often required to respond to centralised policy directives with little regard to localised context. Key policy issues raised by both leaders and teachers include:

- The need for targeted policy that overtly supports the recruitment process through promoting the benefits of teaching in hard-to-staff locations.
- Policies that ensure teachers’/leaders’ wellbeing and working conditions are supported in different ways depending on the context of the school.
- The need for centralised policies and procedures to embrace innovative approaches in terms of recruiting or retaining key staff, particularly convert high performing teachers from contracts to full time appointments.

- A strong preference amongst school leaders for a degree of school autonomy in terms of hiring.
- Recognition that changes in government and subsequent jurisdictional changes in policy, at times make it hard for school leaders to maintain momentum, consistency, and fidelity of specific strategies.
- Wellbeing and working conditions of all school staff as a core policy issue of major significance.
- Further research holds the potential to continue to inform policy of productive means of recruitment, retention, and attrition.

GENERAL IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY

1. Robust evidence-based evaluations of existing programs may assist in better determining the effectiveness of individual initiatives and allow for the sharing of successful approaches of attracting, preparing, and retaining teachers in hard-to-staff schools.

The first phase (*Audit*) of the project examined existing evaluations and reports across a range of initiatives specifically focusing on teacher workforce shortages within hard-to-staff school contexts. This phase of the project found there were limited formal evaluations and in cases where there had been an appraisal, evidence for the effectiveness of the various approaches undertaken was generally weak and often relied on anecdotal, and or informal data.

2. Robust evidence-based understandings of teacher attrition and its impact in different geographic and socioeconomic locations may provide a more comprehensive appreciation of why so many teachers leave the profession prematurely.

A common theme across the second phase (*Interviews*) was the reality that many teachers choose to either leave the hard-to-staff setting and return to ‘easier’ urban or independent schools at the first opportunity, or choose to leave the profession all together. While the interviews provide a wide range of anecdotal accounts as to why this occurs, the exact numbers and reasons for why teachers leave the profession are difficult to determine within the Australian context. This issue is exacerbated by a lack of national data collection on teacher attrition.

3. Understanding the retention of teachers at key ‘walking point’ moments would assist policymakers in designing longer-term, more impactful interventions to attract teachers towards hard-to-staff schools (especially when they are considering leaving the profession).

This point overlaps with the implication outlined above and suggests the benefits of a stronger evidence-based understanding of these ‘walking points’ and a more fine-grained understanding of just-in-time solutions.

4. While the area of financial incentives and bursaries is commonly used as a means of recruiting and retaining teachers in hard-to-staff schools, the underlying dynamics of using this form of compensatory enticement are complex and at times poorly understood.

Despite research on the success of financial incentives or bursaries being relatively weak, there was almost universal acceptance (particularly across the remote schooling sector), that some kind of financial enticement is required to attract and retain suitable staff. The range, shape, and form these financial incentives takes varies (i.e., sign-on bonuses, salary loadings or subsidised housing) while also differing across states and jurisdictions in terms of implementation.

- The success of financial incentives appears stronger in terms of recruitment compared to retention.
- What is often missing in the discussion is the fact that if financial incentives are to be offered, especially in areas such as mathematics and science, there is a need for these incentives to be large enough to compete with the salaries from rivalling professions.
- It was suggested that some incentives such as rental assistance and cost of living loadings may potentially encourage relocation into hard-to-staff schools (i.e., for existing teachers).

5: The importance of non-financial incentives as a means of complementing established compensatory models.

The interviews unambiguously highlight how teachers feel rewarded when their knowledge and expertise is valued with some interviewed suggesting that intrinsic (non-financial) incentives are an important aspect in retaining staff. Examples include, time-release for professional development, the opportunity for further study, time release for additional curriculum development, being treated like an esteemed colleague and a member of the local community are all valued by teachers and serve as evidence of a supportive school culture.

6. The importance of continued support of existing successful initiatives

It was suggested that the sector suffers from a cycle of new initiatives often using similar concepts or models used in the past. Several leaders argued for continued support for ongoing initiatives, rather than recreating approaches already trialled before an existing program has a chance to develop or to be evaluated for impact.

IMPLICATIONS FOR LEADERSHIP

1. Teacher and school leadership ‘burn-out’ are increasingly seen as major factors leading to many teachers/leaders leaving the profession prematurely.

The report documents how additional resources enhance hard-to-staff school leaders’ capacity to:

- improve school culture (a major factor in teacher attrition),
- ease the challenging working conditions and workloads of teachers, such as providing reduced load/timetables for teachers in hard-to-staff schools,
- provide more administrative staff so teachers’ work can be ‘quarantined’ for teaching.

2. Multi-faceted benefits flow from increased opportunities for school leaders and university Initial Teacher Education (ITE) programs to work more collaboratively.

The project documents several examples where strong partnerships between hard-to-staff schools and individual Initial Teacher Education programs produced long lasting and tangible impact via:

- co-designed mentorship for early career teachers,
- experiential on-the-ground professional learning opportunities for preservice-teachers,
- targeted employment opportunities for graduate teachers.

3. Teacher recruitment, preparation and retention are all enhanced when the central role of both ‘context’ and ‘place’ are part of pre-and in-service teacher development.

Several interviews conducted in the project explicitly note the degree to which both Initial Teacher Education and school leaders of hard-to-staff schools develop teachers in ways that

- focus on the geo-social particularities of their schools, e.g., metropolitan, regional and remote,

- focus on the multidimensional nature of poverty and disadvantage to avoid deficit, stereotype and generalisations about students and their families,
- focus on diversity, such as including Indigenous education and cultural diversity,
- focus on additional high-needs areas such as contemporary classroom management strategies (i.e., restorative justice), trauma-informed learning and teacher/student mental health and wellbeing.

4. The crucial role leaders and mentors play in supporting teachers' feelings of belonging to a school-based community of practice and feeling professionally and personally supported.

The interviews included numerous anecdotes of the importance to teachers of belonging to a personal and professional community of practice and how this contributed to the degree teachers felt supported at critical times. For teachers in these hard-to-staff settings, there appears to be a clear correlation between job satisfaction and feelings of agency within their own classrooms, in school-based decision making and feeling connected to other education/teacher professional networks. Feeling connected significantly increases teachers' sense of well-being and likelihood of either accepting or continuing a position within a hard-to-staff school. Benefits include:

- teachers' sense of well-being, including their sense of being valued by the school,
- teachers' professional knowledge, and hence their confidence, enhanced by being part of professional networks,
- at least partly overcoming the isolation of teaching in remote and or regional settings,
- improved career prospects for school leaders and teachers who experience expeditious career trajectories and promotion.

5. While mentoring is perceived as key in supporting teachers in hard-to-staff schools, the consistency and quality of mentoring varies.

The research unearthed a degree of tension created by repeat cycles of large numbers of inexperienced teachers arriving at the start of each school year. A number of those interviewed noted, not only the high demand for mentors required to support these new teachers, but also the varied quality of mentoring available in some settings. School leaders would benefit therefore by:

- some form of additional professional development in terms of the selection, training, and support of mentors,
- mechanisms that empower or reward quality mentors through acknowledging the workload implications of the role.

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List of Abbreviations

ECEC = Early Childhood Education and Care

HTS = Hard-to-Staff

ITE = Initial Teacher Education

LSES = Low Socioeconomic Status

PD = Professional Development

RRR = Rural, Regional, and Remote

1 Introduction

1.1 REPORT OBJECTIVES

Teacher shortages within Australian hard-to-staff schools are not new, nor are attempts by governments and initial teacher education programs to address issues of recruitment and retention as well as ones related to teacher quality (Lampert et al., 2016; Halsey, 2018). Regional, rural, and remote locations often find it hard to recruit and retain teachers and leaders as do schools in Indigenous communities and those in low socioeconomic urban areas. There are also hard-to-staff issues linked to certain disciplines (i.e., STEM) and educational sectors (i.e. Early Childhood). Likewise, the persistent problem of teacher attrition in challenging school settings is well-acknowledged, including the impact this issue has on already vulnerable students and communities (Mason & Poyatos Matas, 2015; McKinnon, 2016). The reasons for recruitment and retention issues in these settings, along with the reasons teachers and school leaders leave the profession altogether, are complex. The underlying factors that are driving these staffing shortages cannot be captured by simplistic explanations provided by workforce supply and demand models. Instead, the issues at play within hard-to-staff school contexts are multifaceted and related to various stages of the teacher workforce shortage process.

The main objective of this report is therefore to provide a contemporary meta-synthesis of the broad range of Australian programs/initiatives that have sought to prepare, recruit, and/or retain teaching workforces within hard-to-staff schools. The report examines initiatives that have taken an overt focus on shortages defined in geographic, socioeconomic, place-based, and/or disciplinary terms as well as ones addressing leadership shortages in these hard-to-staff schools. The three key research questions that guided the design and operation of the project are as follows:

- How have Australian workforce initiatives over the past 20 years sought to recruit, prepare, and retain teachers within historically hard-to-staff schools/areas?
- What impact have these initiatives had on the teaching workforce and how have school leaders perceived their impact?
- What policy lessons can be taken from these initiatives?

1.2 SCOPE OF INQUIRY

The impetus for undertaking this research is the fact that much of what we currently know about Australian teaching workforce initiatives targeting hard-to-staff schools comes in a form that sheds little light on the degree to which these historical and current initiatives have made a difference. Individual evaluations and program reports do little to direct attention to how policy interventions work together. Critically reviewing and synthesising what is known about all of these initiatives will help define as well as track the long-term impact of these initiatives on teachers' themselves, schools, students, and communities. This will ensure governments and programs do not merely 'reinvent the wheel' and spend money on initiatives that have not previously made long-term change or impact. This is especially important in light of recent and post-COVID concerns about present and future teacher shortages.

This research project therefore provides a meta-synthesis of the individual and shared strategies that define how governments and initial teacher education institutions have initiated strategies to address teacher supply and demand for hard-to-staff schools. The report provides a thematic analysis of the nature of these initiatives and their mechanisms in context in order to determine what impact they have had and under what conditions.

The project consists of an audit and qualitatively analysed meta-synthesis of key policy documents, evaluations, and academic publications related to initiatives that address the teaching workforce shortages in hard-to-staff settings, with a specific focus on the area of leadership. The scope of this research spans a 20-year timeframe across all six states and two territories in Australia. Additionally, the project involves interviews with 'key players' in these initiatives, including those leading the initiatives as well as teachers and school leaders who participated in them. Drawing on the data gathered in the audit and interviews, the report identifies the impact of and gaps in initiatives designed to recruit, prepare, and retain teachers in hard-to-staff schools.

1.3 REPORT STRUCTURE

The report contains six chapters which are summarised below:

- **Chapter 1 - Introduction:** This introductory chapter identifies the report's objectives and scope of inquiry.

- **Chapter 2 - Literature Review:** The next chapter, the literature review, documents existing research on teacher shortages in hard-to-staff schools. It outlines organisational responses to this issue and specific mechanisms being used to address problems with recruitment and retention. It also identifies specific research on school leadership in relation to this problem.
- **Chapter 3 - Research Design:** This chapter maps the key phases of this project. It details the report's three research questions and the methodology used to respond to these lines of inquiry.
- **Chapter 4 - Audit Data Analysis:** Chapter 4 provides a thematic synthesis of existing hard-to-staff school initiatives in terms of location, duration, stakeholders, funding, target, focus (recruit/retain/prepare), mechanism/process, and evaluation.
- **Chapter 5 – Interview Analysis:** Chapter 5 provides a detailed analysis of the central issues and concerns that came out of interviews with a range of stakeholders involved in the effort to recruit, prepare, and retain teachers in hard-to-staff schools. It also provides a specific analysis of the interview themes around school leader shortages in these settings.
- **Chapter 6 – Implications and key findings:** The final chapter identifies a number of implications and key findings that can inform future policies and leadership in the hard-to-staff schooling sector.

2 Literature Review

2.1 BACKGROUND

There is an extensive, international body of scholarly literature on the ‘wicked problem’ of teacher shortages in hard-to-staff or ‘disadvantaged’ schools (Keltchermans, 2017). This literature includes programmatic descriptions of approaches for attracting, preparing, and retaining teachers as well as, to a lesser extent, some research and impact studies. The most comprehensive critique of the various strategies implemented to ‘solve’ the issue of an unprepared, overstressed, burnt-out, and transient quality teaching workforce in historically hard-to-staff schools is See et. al's (2020) U.S. meta-analysis of 120 programs and interventions, though these are mostly from the United States. Their analysis concludes that there is a dearth of strong research determining the effectiveness of any of the common approaches to addressing this issue; approaches which include financial incentives, alternative routes to teaching, induction and mentoring programs, professional development, and leadership support. Although there were aspects that worked in all approaches, See et. al's (2020, p. 5) main conclusion is that administrative support, a positive school climate, a supportive leadership culture, and fair working conditions are the most influential factors “associated with higher job satisfaction for teachers and a reduction in the odds that they would want to leave their school”.

This literature review chapter summarises some of the main points in the research around teacher shortages in hard-to-staff schools but does not claim to be a comprehensive review of all existing literature on the topic. Instead, it aims to provide a brief overview and some background to explain how we selected categories and programs for the interviews conducted for this report. Alongside our interviews and reviews of policy and grey literature, this literature review also informs our recommendations.

It is useful to keep in mind that the US context where much of the research on this issue emerges from (and where hard-to-staff schools are usually discussed under the distinctly US-based term ‘urban schools’) is quite different to the Australian context where hard-to-staff schools can be urban/metropolitan or regional, rural, and/or remote. Thus, one main

consideration of any strategy addressing this issue is that the reasons that make a school hard-to-staff are unique and place-specific and due to this, so must be their solutions (Somerville et al., 2010).

Additionally, it is important to note that although there is a great deal written on the topic of teacher attrition and retention in the Australian context, it is mostly qualitative and anecdotal. Mason and Poyatos Matas (2015) explain that the Australian work in this area is still dominated by small-scale, qualitative exploratory studies and thus is still considered an emerging field of research.

The rest of this chapter offer an overview of the literature around workforce shortages in hard-to-staff schools in Australia (Section 2.2) and the broad organisational responses to this issue (Section 2.3). It also discusses specific mechanisms that are identified as tools for recruiting and retaining teachers in hard-to-staff schools (Section 2.4), including a review of the particular ways recruiting and retaining school leaders in hard-to-staff schools is addressed in the literature (Section 2.5).

2.2 THE ISSUE OF WORKFORCE SHORTAGES IN HARD-TO-STAFF SCHOOLS IN AUSTRALIA

The persistent problem of both quality teacher preparation, recruitment, and retention, especially in hard-to-staff schools and vulnerable communities, is well documented (Lampert et al., 2016; Halsey, 2018). While reports are varied, the rate of loss to the profession in many countries, including ‘like’ countries such as Australia, the UK, Canada, and the US is often reported to be around 40–50% over the five years post entry into the teaching workforce (Gallant & Riley, 2014; OECD, 2006). In Australia, recent estimates about the levels of attrition vary amongst reports and differ between geographic locations. It is often estimated that around 25-50% of teachers leave the profession within the first five years of their career, although these figures are debated (Allen et al., 2019; AITSL, 2016). In Queensland, estimates of early career attrition rates range from 8% to 50% (Halsey, 2018; Niesche, 2019; Queensland College of Teachers, 2013) while in Victoria, where teachers are employed initially on short-term contracts, attrition rates are extremely difficult to determine as teachers whose contracts expire are not captured in the attrition data (Weldon, 2018).

While teacher and school leader retention issues and shortages exist across the board, especially in many regional and remote schools, such shortages particularly impact Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and certain subject areas including STEM (especially mathematics and technology) and Special Education. Teacher attrition and its impact on high-poverty, hard-to-staff schools and vulnerable communities is well documented (Mason & Poyatos Matas, 2015; McKinnon, 2016). For example, there is a high proportion of teachers teaching out-of-field subjects in low socioeconomic (LSES) schools. Du Plessis et al. (2015) note this requirement often falls on early career or novice teachers and has significant impacts on their self-efficacy, confidence, and desire to remain in the school. Following this, the students who are most likely to miss out on the benefits of a stable teaching workforce are far more likely to be from LSES backgrounds, Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, or from rural and remote communities (Hall, 2012; Holden & Zhang, 2018). This is a particular issue for Indigenous students as a stable, culturally knowledgeable teaching workforce has been identified as factors that assists with ‘closing the gap’ (Halsey, 2018; Luke et. al, 2013).

Additionally, the extraordinary COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated concerns that teacher attrition will, as always, have the most impact on disadvantaged and/or LSES schools in regional, rural, and remote locations, which were already identified as hard-to-staff (Cullinane & Montacute, 2020). As just one example of the speculative impact COVID will have on staffing in schools, Phillips and Cain (2020) observed that stress, exhaustion, and overload were newly exacerbated during the pandemic, noting some teachers were working 60% to three times more hours than in pre-COVID times. This leaves schools leaders with an exhausted, burnt-out staff, many of whom are considering leaving the profession (Ballantyne & Retell, 2019).

2.3 OVERVIEW OF ORGANISATIONAL RESPONSES TO TEACHER AND LEADER SHORTAGES IN HARD-TO-STAFF SCHOOLS

The effort in Australia to address employment issues related to hard-to-staff schools goes well beyond the scope of any simplistic workforce supply and demand model based merely on forecasting current and future staffing needs in relation to projected population growth. Despite teacher workforce planning at the government departmental level having the advantage of sophisticated population projections that can be used to anticipate aggregate teacher demand

many years in advance, the issues at play within hard-to-staff school contexts are complex, multifaceted, and directed at various stages of the teacher shortage process. This section therefore provides an overview of some of this literature in order to broadly map some of the organisational responses to this issue.

Just as teacher shortages within Australian hard-to-staff schools are not new, nor are organisational attempts to target the relatively small number of willing and suitable teachers for such settings. These top-down responses come from governments, Initial Teacher Education (ITE) providers, and other sectors including corporate, philanthropic/non-profits, and school systems.

Over many years, government initiatives have mostly taken shape around incentive schemes, which are generally structured around financial or other enticements, enhanced leadership opportunities, accelerated permanent employment status, extra leave/holidays, and/or subsidised accommodation. Government, as well as private industry and philanthropic foundations, have also supported alternative teacher certification programs and non-traditional pathways into teaching. In some cases, partnerships between and across these sectors have been developed to try to address the ongoing issue of supply and demand with regards to hard-to-staff schools.

Alongside these efforts, ITE initiatives have created programs designed to prepare and graduate teachers who are committed to teaching in challenging settings that they may be unfamiliar with, including culturally diverse settings, Indigenous communities, or regional towns. Over time some of these ITE programs have taken an employment focus, becoming involved in employment ‘match-making’ (Burnett & Lampert, 2019) or offering employment-based ITE programs. Core components of many ITE programs, such as Raewyn Connell’s earliest work in the Disadvantaged Schools Program (White et al., 1991), include facilitating understandings of social justice in an attempt to prepare often white, middle-class pre-service teachers for culturally, economically, and/or geographically diverse settings (Lampert et al., 2016).

It is important to note that although some of these initiatives have specifically targeted urban or metropolitan hard-to-staff schools, much of the recent attention has been on regional and remote settings where schools have experienced the most persistent long-term recruitment and retention issues, including problems with retaining high quality school leaders due to stress, isolation, and burn-out (Drummond & Halsey, 2013; Stephenson & Bauer, 2010). While some

of the reasons for stress and attrition are the same across geographical locations, staff in remote locations also report the stress of having to be accountable to policies they feel are geared towards metropolitan schools. For example, some school leaders in remote settings appear to leave the profession over what they perceive as ethical or moral issues, such as when they feel they cannot meet the needs of Indigenous families because they must respond to policies that do not recognise the uniqueness of their context (Guenther & Osborne, 2020). This example points to the broader fact that organisational responses to workforce shortages in hard-to-staff schools, including the specific mechanisms discussed in the next section, are setting out to address a highly context-specific, diverse, and multifaceted range of teachers, schools, and communities.

2.4 MECHANISMS FOR RECRUITING AND RETAINING TEACHERS IN HARD-TO-STAFF SCHOOLS

Building on the overview of organisational responses discussed in the previous section, this section discusses the specific mechanisms identified in the literature that are used to recruit, prepare, and retain staff in hard-to-staff schools.

Alternative Pathways into Teaching

One key mechanism identified in the literature to address workforce shortages in hard-to-staff schools is bringing new, preferably high achieving people into the teaching profession. These include career-changers. One way this is done is by offering alternative pathways into teaching instead of traditional university-based ITE programs. Such alternative pathways into teaching are more common in other nations, such as the UK, are generally more school-based, for example teacher residencies and model teaching schools. In Australia, two current examples of alternative teaching pathway initiatives are Teach for Australia and Nexus; both of which are supported by the Federal government. Sometimes (though not in the case of Nexus) alternative pathways are faster than traditional ITE programs and attract different cohorts of future teachers, such as career changers (Varadharajan, Buchanan, & Schuck, 2020). Research suggests that these alternative pathways are highly varied in terms of their success and are sometimes designed in ad-hoc ways dependent on the government of the day but when supported over a period of time can be determined to be effective (Youens et al., 2018).

Although alternative pathways into teaching vary in quality and impact (Crawford-Garret et al., 2021), studies show that “the experiences and performances of teachers who entered through different pathways depended on the interaction of what teacher candidates brought with them, the features of programs and pathways as experienced, and the resources, leadership, and cultures of school contexts” (Cochran-Smith & Villegas, 2015, p. 16). Notably, in terms of leadership, there is no question that these sorts of initiatives have influence as leadership programs in the space of hard-to-staff schools. Though alternatively trained teachers may not stay any longer in the profession than other teachers, their leadership trajectories may make them influential in creating future policy (Rice et al., 2015).

University-School Partnerships

Both the alternative pathways model described above and traditional university-based ITE programs employ strategies to attract the ‘right’ sort of teachers into the profession. The focus on quality in ITE has gained prominence and is the focus of Australia’s current review into Quality Initial Teacher Education. Some ITE programs are specifically designed to recruit, prepare and graduate effective, well-prepared, and quality teachers to take up positions in hard-to-staff settings. Overall, a central feature of improving all three areas of need in these schools – attraction into the profession, preparation of quality teachers, and teacher retention – are genuine and sustainable partnerships between universities and schools (Zugelder & Shelton, 2020).

When teachers take up employment in hard-to-staff schools they are most effective when they are well-prepared by evidence-based training, hold practical knowledge of the context of their students’ lives, and are invested in their work (Glasswell et al., 2016). The teachers most likely to take up employment (and stay) are those who have spent prolonged periods of time in traditionally hard-to-staff settings, such as LSES schools, before they find themselves in front of a class (Perryman & Calvert, 2020). Dawson and Shand (2019) explain the importance of prolonged block placements or internships as a strategy to attract teachers to these schools. They believe the more familiar a teacher is with their setting the less likely they are to experience culture shock.

There are many benefits to school-university partnerships but one issue that is regularly raised is the gap between enthusiastic graduate teachers who generally begin with high

aspirations and the disillusionment that sometimes takes place when teachers begin their teaching careers. Although some reports lay responsibility on ITE programs in terms of needing to better prepare their graduates to be realistic about what they will encounter (Green et al., 2018), others cast their eye on schools that fail to transition, support, and induct new teachers in an effective way. These schools may appear to graduates as not demonstrating the best practice they learned at university and may not always seem to new teachers to be operating to best serve historically disadvantaged families and students (Kearney, 2021). Mentors and school leaders often express feeling discouraged when they are not empowered within their positions to make change within what they believe is a conservative institution (Rowlands et al., 2020). When school leaders and teachers are genuinely embedded in the communities in which they teach, the evidence is that they are more satisfied with their jobs, feel more committed to their students and families, and stay in the profession longer (Thomas et al., 2020; Ellis et al., 2016). There is some consensus on the value of university-school partnerships as a mechanism for recruiting and retaining quality teachers, particularly through longer block placements or internships that familiarise and prepare future teachers for hard-to-staff schools.

Financial and Other Incentives

Strategies around recruiting and retaining teachers also often focus on financial incentives for teachers that aim to entice them to come to or stay in hard-to-staff schools (Huat et al., 2020). For example, financial incentives are used to recruit and retain teachers in hard-to-staff schools in both Queensland and Victoria. Queensland's Department of Education established schemes ranging from traditional cash sign-on and salary bonuses to initiatives where staff receive 'transfer points' and extra annual leave (e.g. the Remote Area Incentive Scheme). In Victoria, the Department of Education and Training's financial incentives include scholarships for hard-to-staff schools (e.g. the Teaching Scholarship Scheme). There is a corpus of critique of the effectiveness of financial incentives. Financial incentives are well-acknowledged as one effective way to recruit preservice teachers or new graduates (Sinclair, 2008; Kline, White & Lock, 2013; Handal et. al., 2018) but unless they are substantial (See et. al., 2020) it only gets them in the door. Small financial awards are far less important than intrinsic motivations to convince teachers to stay. For instance, Brasche (2012) found that even when incentives were taken up for teachers to work in remote Indigenous communities there was no guarantee those teachers intended on staying. Ingersoll (2001) has noted for a long time

that financial incentives cannot compensate for organisational structures that make schools difficult to work in.

Targeted Professional Development and Support

While financial and other related incentives may have some impact on addressing recruitment difficulties and attrition rates, decisions around where to teach as well as those around leaving certain schools or teaching altogether are driven by more than just economic considerations. These often include disillusionment around such things as high workloads and increasing administrative demands on time (McKenzie et al., 2014) as well as a lack of on-going learning, support, and leadership (Queensland College of Teachers, 2013). Simon and Johnson (2015, p. 2) also identify “salary, professional status and the remoteness of geographic location” as factors that teachers consider in terms of their employment in hard-to-staff schools. The literature suggests that teachers are rarely ever ‘fleeing their students’ but rather early career teachers are leaving hard-to-staff schools due to negative experiences around things such as induction (Deakin University, 2013), mentoring (Schuck et al., 2011), leadership, collegial relationships, and/or school culture (Fuller et al., 2016).

Due to these diverse range of factors that may contribute to workforce shortages in hard-to-staff schools, it is clear that teachers in these settings require unique kinds of professional development and support (Burnett & Lampert, 2019; Cochran-Smith & Villegas., 2016). The evidence is that professional development that offers opportunities for teachers to learn more or be part of professional networks are intrinsically rewarding and do have some positive effect on teacher retention (See et al., 2020). In many cases the intrinsic rewards are more effective than the extrinsic rewards, such as financial incentives, which are successful in the short term but less successful in retaining teachers over time. This is an important learning for school leaders who wish to support their staff.

Other strategies advocate for specialised in-service learning for teachers who work in schools perceived as needing it, such as offering programs where teachers are invited to examine their own stereotypes (Burns et al., 2018) and programs for teachers to develop positive, strength-based beliefs in their students (Lavigne, 2014). Though these are designed as professional development, they are believed to support a high-quality teaching workforce

and there is some evidence that teachers who have opportunities such as these stay longer in their communities (Gore & Bowe, 2015).

In particular, there has been significant attention paid to the importance of professional development and support in high-poverty schools, whose teachers unsurprisingly have greater needs than those in higher socioeconomic status schools (Productivity Commission, 2012). The needs of these teachers, in part, are exacerbated by insufficient recognition of their work and the poor public image of teachers in challenging communities (Willett et al., 2014). Many teachers in these settings express that they would stay longer if they received more targeted professional development around poverty and disadvantage (Kelly et al., 2015) as well as more opportunities to reflect, be re-motivated, and feel their work was valued. Burns et al. (2018) found that the opportunity to reflect in a writing workshop was more rewarding and affirming for teachers than traditional professional development. Following this, substantive research indicates the importance of communities of practice, teacher efficacy, and the belief that one is ‘making a difference’, which includes regular opportunities for critical reflection amongst a safe, validating, and affirming group of professional peers (Burnett & Lampert, 2016). Freedman and Appleman (2009) note that this sort of extrinsic reward provides teachers with a ‘sense of mission’; something that can be reinvigorated for tired or jaded staff. In other words, there seems to be evidence of the value of programs that focus on teachers’ desire for stronger cultural and intellectual capital around the profession (Manuel & Hughes, 2006). That is, many teachers working in high-poverty settings strongly desire to engage more deeply and intellectually with their peers. Some recent research suggests that the use of social media platforms increases the retention of new teachers and are untapped as ways to build a community of practice (Mercieca & Kelly, 2018). Internationally, issues of teacher retention in such settings revolve around maintaining a commitment to teaching and ensuring teachers feel well supported at crucial ‘walking points’, both emotionally in terms of teachers’ own on-going learning (Gallant & Riley, 2014). This identification of emotional support alongside professional development and support points to the importance of considering teacher wellbeing when addressing issues of workforce issues in hard-to-staff schools.

Support of Teacher Wellbeing

Teacher wellbeing is receiving particular attention as a cause of attrition, especially in high-poverty schools (Freedman & Appleman, 2009); something Curry and O'Brien (2012)

refer to as a ‘wellness paradigm’. This is due to the fact that factors believed to contribute to teacher retention include teachers’ mental and physical health, feelings of safety, resilience, and personal and professional support systems. Decision making autonomy (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011) is also identified as a factor that influences whether teachers stay in these settings; as are factors such as “resilience, reflection, and responsiveness” (Buchanan et al., 2013, p. 126), intrinsic motivation (Ashiedu & Scott-Ladd, 2012; Kelly & Fogarty, 2015), and teachers’ experiences of ‘success’ with the students they teach. One study, for instance, found male teachers were more likely to leave the profession because of management practices that impacted on their sense of agency (Gallant & Reilly, 2017). Additionally, Singh (2018) notes that teachers in LSES schools often experience stress and anxiety over their students’ performances on high stakes tests, which is reflected in the popular book *Teacher: One Woman’s Struggle to Keep her Heart in Teaching* (Stroud, 2018). As in Smith and Ulvik’s (2017) findings, Stroud sees her decision to leave teaching as agentic (taking control over her own life) rather than as a sign of a lack of resilience. As managerial practices become an increasing part of teachers’ work, teachers feel their expertise, creativity, and decision-making power is reduced. This is making teaching a much less attractive profession, especially in LSES schools where teachers very often enter the profession with a sense of mission.

Day and Hong (2016) confirm that emotional resilience is more important for teachers in schools located in areas of socioeconomic disadvantage compared to those in other areas. In their study, resilience was most strongly demonstrated when teachers felt professionally and personally supported, forming strong relationships with colleagues based on common teacher identity and enthusiasm for working in challenging schools. While some studies confirm wellbeing as crucial to teacher retention (Robertson-Kraft & Duckworth, 2014), almost all studies recognise that novice teachers’ capacity to network with and engage in healthy professional learning communities serve to mitigate some of the professional and emotional challenges associated with teaching in historically hard-to-staff schools (Keichtermans, 2017). Specialised professional development can meet the wellbeing needs of teachers in hard-to-staff schools in a variety of useful ways, such as offering restorative justice training for teachers to become more able to handle trauma behaviours (Lawson et al., 2019) or opportunities to improve teachers’ capacity in areas such as literacy and STEM (with the reward of becoming highly trained as a leader in the field). These are some of the ‘constellation of factors’ related to teacher wellbeing that impact whether teachers can be retained in hard-to-staff schools (Freedman & Appleman, 2009).

2.5 MECHANISMS FOR RECRUITING AND RETAINING LEADERS IN HARD-TO-STAFF SCHOOLS

In the literature, leadership programs and incentives are identified as notable mechanisms in addressing workforce issues in hard-to-staff schools. This approach focused on leadership is premised on the idea that teachers will stay longer in schools if better career and promotion opportunities are made available to them. Barty et al.'s (2005) early study of why principals 'move on' from LSES schools noted an issue that still exists today; that leading a LSES school is often seen as a stepping-stone towards promotion or one that will be rewarded with a posting to an 'easier' school.

Leadership training is perceived as crucial to finding solutions to quality staffing shortages in disadvantaged schools. It seems evident from the literature that offering financial and other incentives alone is not enough to compensate for poor working conditions, issues with school leadership, and school climate (Geiger & Pivovarov, 2018; See et al., 2020). Some research has been conducted over the years specific to school leadership programs in terms of how to retain school leaders in hard-to-staff schools and to provide more guidance to school leaders on how to best support their teachers. These include studies of professional development programs (Rice et al., 2017), leadership training (Heffernan, 2021), and mentoring programs (Naidoo & Wagner, 2020). In general, these strategies have historically been designed to retain teachers once they are employed and to address the considerable teacher attrition that impacts particular schools. The research seems to indicate that the quality of induction and school-based mentoring varies and significantly, that the most effective mentoring can only take place when mentors are given adequate time-release to play this role (See et al., 2020). Otherwise, even with good mentor-training, mentors are unable to give attention to this role and are sometimes themselves unhappy with the support they receive. In other words, leadership programs are only ever as good as school climate, culture, and workplace conditions (Lynn & Nguyen, 2020).

Other kinds of leadership programs to support teachers in hard-to-staff school include those that provide opportunities for Indigenous or culturally diverse teachers to gain leadership roles in schools (Achinstein et al., 2010; Hall, 2019). The Stronger-Smarter Institute has been influential in providing leadership programs for school leaders and teachers to provide more

culturally safe and strength-based teaching to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students (Sarra, 2011). On a related note, despite what we know about the importance of teachers who come from the same backgrounds as the children they teach, it is not just difficult to attract Indigenous teachers into the profession but, because of the emotional toll these roles take on these teachers, it is also hard to retain them (Santoro, 2013). Important funded leadership initiatives such as the More Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Teachers Initiative (MATSITI) (Buckskin, 2016a) focused funding and energy on increasing the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers in schools as a priority. However, there are many barriers to attracting and supporting Indigenous teachers, not excluding their experiences with racism (Hogarth, 2019) and cultural obligations. There is an extensive literature that focuses on poor opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education workers who carry out crucial roles in schools but many, because of their lack of university degrees, can never be paid as a fully qualified teacher (Price et al., 2018). There is support for recognition of prior knowledge (RPL) to properly reward Indigenous educators so they can be employed as teachers but to date this approach has not been adopted (MacGill, 2017)

Finally, some leadership programs aim to encourage the professional development and support of regional teachers who come from the communities in which they will teach, which are often called ‘grow your own’ programs (Versland, 2018). These leadership programs are perceived by teachers as being personally and professionally rewarding and appear to improve the quality of teaching in hard-to-staff schools though it is hard to know whether in and of themselves they improve retention.

2.6 CONCLUSION

Despite research on the multifaceted reasons for what the Australian Council of Deans of Education called 'teacher exodus' (Aspland, 2016) and others refer to as ‘the revolving door’ (Ingersoll, 2001), teacher burn-out (Rajendran et al., 2020), and teacher plateau (Meister & Ahrends, 2011), there remains a diversity of opinions and strategies on how to best address the issue. The wide range of organisational responses and mechanisms in place to address teacher shortages in hard-to-staff schools reflects the difficult, persistent nature of the issues at hand.

While governments and other institutions in Australia and around the world have shown a commitment to a range of responses to improve teacher recruitment and retention, these

appear to have made little significant, systemic difference. The reasons why teachers leave the profession, especially in hard-to-staff schools, are far more complex and under-problematised than commonly believed (Gallant & Riley, 2014).

This review of the literature highlights the need for a more robust evidence base related to a range of issues impacting on teacher shortages in hard-to-staff schools, which is a point taken up later in an examination of the implications for both policy and leadership. The issues of preparing, recruiting, and retaining an effective teaching workforce for hard-to-staff schools is ongoing, and many would argue increasing given the current climate of uncertainty.

3 Research Design

3.1 RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND PROJECT PHASES

This project is structured around three core research questions:

RQ1: How have Australian workforce initiatives over the past 20 years sought to recruit, prepare, and retain teachers within historically hard-to-staff schools/areas?

RQ2: What impact have these initiatives had on teaching and how have school leaders perceived their impact?

RQ3: What policy lessons can be taken from these initiatives?

To respond to these questions, the research for this report consists of a qualitatively analysed meta-synthesis of key policy documents, evaluations, and associated academic publications related to initiatives that seek to address the teaching workforce in hard-to-staff settings. Additionally, it involves interviews with the ‘key players’ of these initiatives, namely those leading the initiatives as well as teachers and school leaders who participated in them. The scope of the research spans a 20-year time frame across all six states and two territories in Australia. Drawing on this data, we will identify the impact of (and potentially, gaps in) initiatives designed to recruit, prepare, and retain teachers in hard-to-staff schools.

The project was divided into four phases:

Phase One: *Audit*

- Audit to collate information on major government initiatives that have sought to address teacher workforce shortages over past 20 years, specifically those focusing on the area of leadership.
- Collation and analysis of all evaluations and research papers related to the initiatives being examined.

Phase Two: *Interviews*

- Interviews with selected leaders of these initiatives in order to examine the conceptual and policy drivers of these programs at the time as well as to reflect on the outcomes of their strategies and learnings, which might be applied to current and/or future policy.
- Interviews with teachers and school leaders who participated in each of these programs to explore their perceived impact.

Phase Three: *Analysis*

- Analysis of recommendations and common themes identified within the initiatives.
- Analysis of impact, which may include considering whether these initiatives can be determined as having made short term, long term, and/or systemic change, the sustainability of the initiatives, and their transferability to different contexts. Analysis also to identify other ways ‘change’ or impact might be determined.

Phase Four: *Dissemination of Findings*

- Production of a report to be delivered to government to inform direction on addressing teacher workplace shortages for hard-to-staff schools.

3.2 OVERVIEW AND DESIGN OF AUDIT ANALYSIS (PHASE ONE)

Phase One of the research involved a policy audit of the programs and initiatives designed to address staffing issues in hard-to-staff school contexts. It was timely to critically review and synthesise what is known about existing initiatives for reasons documented in the literature review.

This first phase of the project aims to:

- Synthesise and review key information on strategies over the past 20 years that have been designed to recruit, prepare, and retain teachers in historically hard-to-staff schools/areas (with a specific focus on the area of leadership).
- Focus on initiatives that have taken an overt focus on teacher workforce shortages defined in geographic terms (i.e. rural, regional or remote), economic terms (i.e. LSES or disadvantaged) or disciplinary terms (i.e. STEM).
- Identify ways that the targeted initiatives and interventions have sought to address various factors contributing to teacher workforce shortages.

In all, the audit comprises 147 contemporary and historical programs, projects or incentives addressing the preparation, recruitment, and retainment of teachers in hard-to-staff schools. These were initially grouped under the following headings:

- Initial Teacher Education (ITE)
- Financial Incentives
- Leadership
- Early Childhood
- Government Programs
- Programs targeting the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teaching workforce
- Miscellaneous

The audit (Phase One) involved two key methods. Firstly, a systematic audit of existing Australian programs and initiatives in hard-to-staff school contexts was collated. A compilation of publicly available programs and initiatives classified as addressing staffing in these schools was created with as much available existing information on the programs/initiatives. This information included location, key stakeholders, funding sources, and any existing evaluation work on the program/initiative.

Secondly, a preliminary library was collated, featuring predominantly grey (policy) literature and academic articles from the last 20 years. Many of these specifically focused on the programs found in the audit, while some policy works briefly described a range of programs and initiatives created to address workforce shortage. Snowballing was also used as search technique given the number of decommissioned initiatives. That is, when several relevant references had been identified, their bibliographies led to other references of other programs in a similar area. Given the number of decommissioned initiatives, this process included exploring the websites of organisations and including archived reports related to the targeted problem. In sum, two months was allocated for:

- Exploration of the grey literature
- Survey of the scientific literature
- Exploration of databases, including keyword searches
- Survey of publicly available websites of key institutions

The final library consists of conference proceedings (n = 15), grey literature (n = 114), journal articles (n = 60), and website captures and brochures (n = 31).

The preliminary exploration of the literature resulted in a selection of public initiatives and programs to be examined. During this in-depth documentary research, a detailed inclusion and exclusion criteria was applied as follows:

- Australia
- 2000-2020 years
- Program details publicly available
- Program exclusions: Three specific initiatives were excluded from interviews, namely Teach for Australia (TfA), National Exceptional Teaching for Disadvantaged Schools (NETDS), and Nexus. These exclusions are because some of the investigators or their

institutions are involved in delivering these programs and as such there could be a perceived conflict of interest.

3.3 OVERVIEW AND DESIGN OF INTERVIEW ANALYSIS (PHASE TWO)

The interview phase (Phase Two) of the project included semi-structured interviews with individuals identified as ‘key players’ in some of the hard-to-staff schools initiatives identified in the first audit phase. Ethic clearance was sought and approved through the La Trobe University’s Ethics Committee (HEC20500). Twenty-one (n = 21) targeted interview participants were identified using the following criteria:

- Location: Urban, regional, remote
- Sample population group: Program leaders or directors, school leaders
- Program goals: Preparation, recruitment, retention, leadership

Participants were identified and recruited primarily via emails obtained from public documents or identified by word of mouth. An email was sent first with information about the project to ascertain participant interest. Once interest was communicated, consent forms were sent along with arrangements for an interview by phone or Zoom. Participants signed consent forms ahead of or at interviews. All interviews were undertaken between February and April 2021. A semi structured interview scheduled was utilised to ascertain:

- Participant and program background: Participants were asked about their professional background, details about their involvement in the program, and their choice and motivation for involvement in the program.
- Program details: Participants were asked to clarify how the program addressed the recruitment, preparation, and/or retention of teachers in hard-to-staff schools/areas. Participants were also asked about the perception of how the program was received by people in schools.
- Partnerships and funding: Participants were asked details about partnership organisations as well as the applicable funding and resourcing of the program.

All interviews were selectively transcribed with all participants de-identified in the transcripts. Interviews were then analysed for themes in agreement with the three research questions with attention focusing on:

- Program Design and Organisation: The design and organisational parameters of specific programs and initiatives
- Preparation: Attraction into the profession and preparation of quality teachers in hard-to-staff school contexts, primarily through ITE programs.
- Recruitment: The recruitment and employment of teachers in hard-to-staff school contexts.
- Retention: The retention of teachers and the reasons why teachers leave hard-to-staff school contexts.
- Leadership: The recruitment and retaining of high quality school leaders in hard-to-staff school contexts.

4 Audit Data Analysis

4.1 OVERVIEW OF AUDIT DATA ANALYSIS (PHASE ONE)

As described in the previous chapter, the data collection and analysis in the project was divided into two phases: Phase One, which was an audit of data pertaining to existing initiatives/programs, and Phase Two, which was a series of semi-structured interviews with stakeholders involved in addressing issues in the hard-to-staff school space. This chapter addresses the compilation and analysis of the audit data (Phase One).

When gathering the data for the audit that forms the basis of Phase One of this research, the heterogeneous nature of the hard-to-staff school programs and initiatives (quantitative, qualitative, descriptive, research-based, and external to research) became clear. Due to this, a thematic synthesis was utilised for this project. The data drawn from the audit was summarised in a structured manner and was classified under the various dimensions of an analytical framework based on the intervention logic (the chain of effects expected to link the policy under study to the targeted problem).

Below is an analysis of the audit data on hard-to-staff school programs and initiatives, compiled under the following themes:

- Location
- Duration
- Stakeholders
- Funding
- Target
- Focus (Recruit/Prepare/Retain)
- Mechanism/Process
- Evaluation

4.2 LOCATION

Location	Number of Programs
QLD	33
NSW	26
WA	20
VIC	17
SA	13
Multiple states	12
Not applicable	9
NT	7
Not identified	4
TAS	4
National	1
ACT	1
Total	147

Table 1. Classification of programs by location

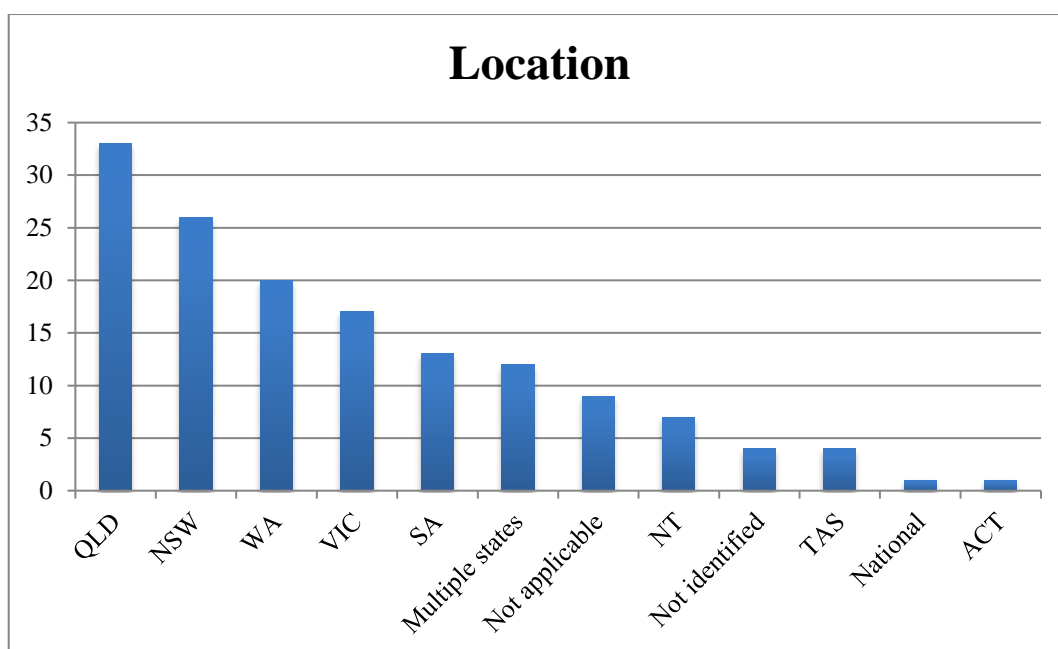


Figure 1. Classification of programs by location

In this study, location refers to the states and territories that a program is targeting rather than the location of the stakeholder organisation/s (although these are often the same). The largest number of programs were in Queensland ($n = 33$), which primarily represents the effort to address the staffing needs of the state’s significant regional and rural areas. New South Wales had the second most number of programs ($n = 26$), followed by Western Australia ($n = 20$) and Victoria ($n = 17$), which again was largely a result of a focus on the needs of regional and rural schools. States and territories with smaller populations (South Australia, Northern Territory, Tasmania, and Australian Capital Territory) had a smaller number of programs.

There were also a number of ‘multiple state’ programs identified ($n = 12$), often run by interstate organisations (such as the National Alliance for Remote Indigenous Schools (NARIS), which targets remote Indigenous communities across the Northern Territory, Western Australia, Queensland, South Australia, and New South Wales) or national universities (such as the Australian Catholic University’s Away from Base program, which targets Indigenous students from multiple states). There were also one identified national program: the National Survey of Science, ICT and Mathematics Education in Rural and Regional Australia (based at the University of New England but with university hubs in each state and territory).

Finally, ‘not applicable’ (n = 9) primarily refers to programs identified as general reports and research projects that are not directly linked to a particular university or organisation. ‘Not identified’ (n = 4) refers to instances where the location of the stakeholder organisation/s administering the program was identifiable but the location being targeted by the programs were unclear and/or insufficient information was available.

4.3 DURATION

Duration	Number of Programs
Less than 1 year	0
Less than 1 year (ongoing)	3
1-3 years	10
3-5 years	11
More than 5 years	13
Not identified	107
Older Program	3
Total	147

Table 2. Classification of programs by duration

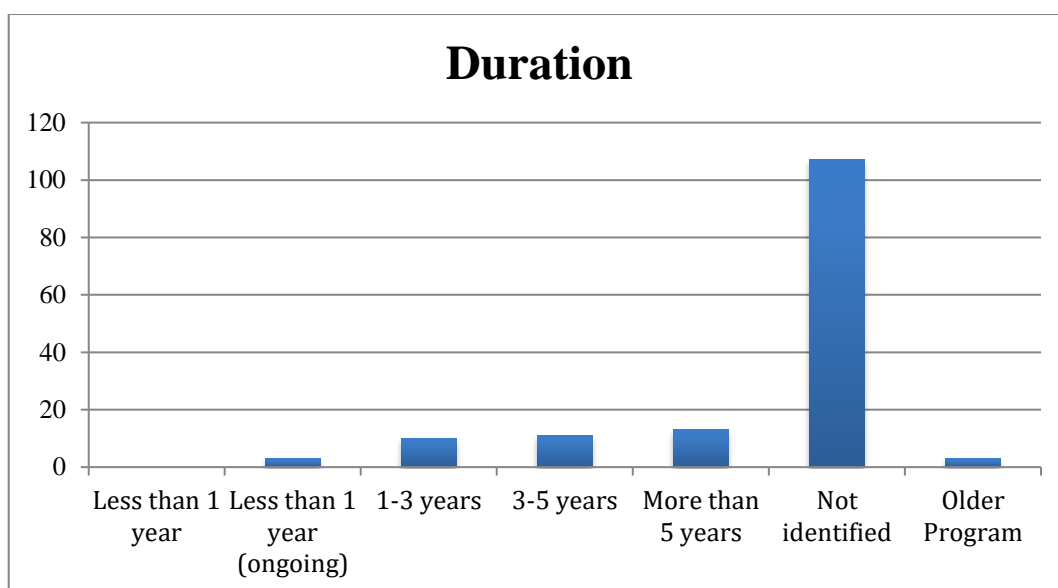


Figure 2. Classification of programs by duration

The duration of the vast majority of programs/initiatives in the audit were not directly identifiable due to insufficient information. Some of these programs in this category have ceased operation while others are ongoing. In both cases, however, the length of their existence was unclear.

A small number of programs did have identifiable durations. These were often government programs where funding was specifically given for a set time, for example the Kimberly Schools Project in Western Australia, which received 25 million dollars of Royalties for Regions funding over three years (2018 – 2020).

There were 13 programs that have run for over five years, many in an ongoing way. These programs are:

- The Pilbara Education Project in Western Australia; a corporate (BHP)-government partnership of over 15 years.
- The Tim Fairfax Family Foundation Rural and Remote Education Bursary; a philanthropic-university (University of the Sunshine Coast) partnership of over 10 years.
- The Melbourne Graduate School of Education’s Rural Education Field Trip; a six day trip begun in 1999 to showcase rural schools and communities to pre-service teachers studying in-demand subject areas, particularly mathematics, science, and languages.

- The National Exceptional Teachers for Disadvantaged Schools program (NETDS, formerly ETDS); a program preparing high quality teachers for the disadvantaged school sector, which originated at Queensland University of Technology and expanding to eight other universities in 2013.
- The Rural Teaching Program (formerly the Student Teacher Rural Experience Program) in Western Australia; a government program that financially supports professional experience placements for final year pre-service teachers in Western Australian public schools. The program commenced in its original version in 1999 and in its current version in 2008.
- Teach for Australia; a government-university partnership of over 10 years, which places high-achieving graduates and professionals with certain subject area expertise into disadvantaged (LSES and/or rural and remote) secondary schools.
- The Rural and Remote Training Schools (RRTS) project from the Western Australian government; a program begun in 2011 to provide supported placements for pre-service teachers undertaking their professional experience in a rural or remote school.
- The George Alexander Foundation Bursary; a philanthropic-university partnership for rural and remote students, which has supported students at 20 institutes since 2002 with 11 active university scholarship programs across multiple states.
- Beyond the Range Professional Experience Grant; a Queensland government program that has been running for approximately 10 years and provides funding to pre-services teachers undertaking professional experience placements in high priority regions and subject areas.
- Take the Lead; an ongoing government program targeting high performing teachers, leaders, and principals who aspire to higher level school leadership roles in rural and remote locations in Queensland.
- The Remote Area Teacher Education Program (RATEP); a distance education program for Indigenous students run by the Queensland government in partnership with TAFE Queensland North and James Cook University.
- Coast to Country; a five day field trip providing pre-service teachers with an experience of both living and working in rural communities and schools, which has been running at the University of the Sunshine Coast since 2009.

- Kimberly Calling Program; a government-funded program run by Catholic Education Western Australia (CEWA) since 1998 that focuses on recruiting staff for the Kimberly region.

4.4 STAKEHOLDERS

Stakeholders	Number of Programs
Government	48
University	43
Government and University	16
Not identified	9
School System	7
Non-Profit	7
Philanthropic and University	3
School and University	3
School System and University	2
Government and Non-Profit	2
Government and Schools and University	1
Union	1
Government and Corporate	1
Government and School System	1
Non-Profit and University	1
Government and Non-Profit and University	1
Non-Profit and School System and University	1
Total	147

Table 3. Classification of programs by stakeholders

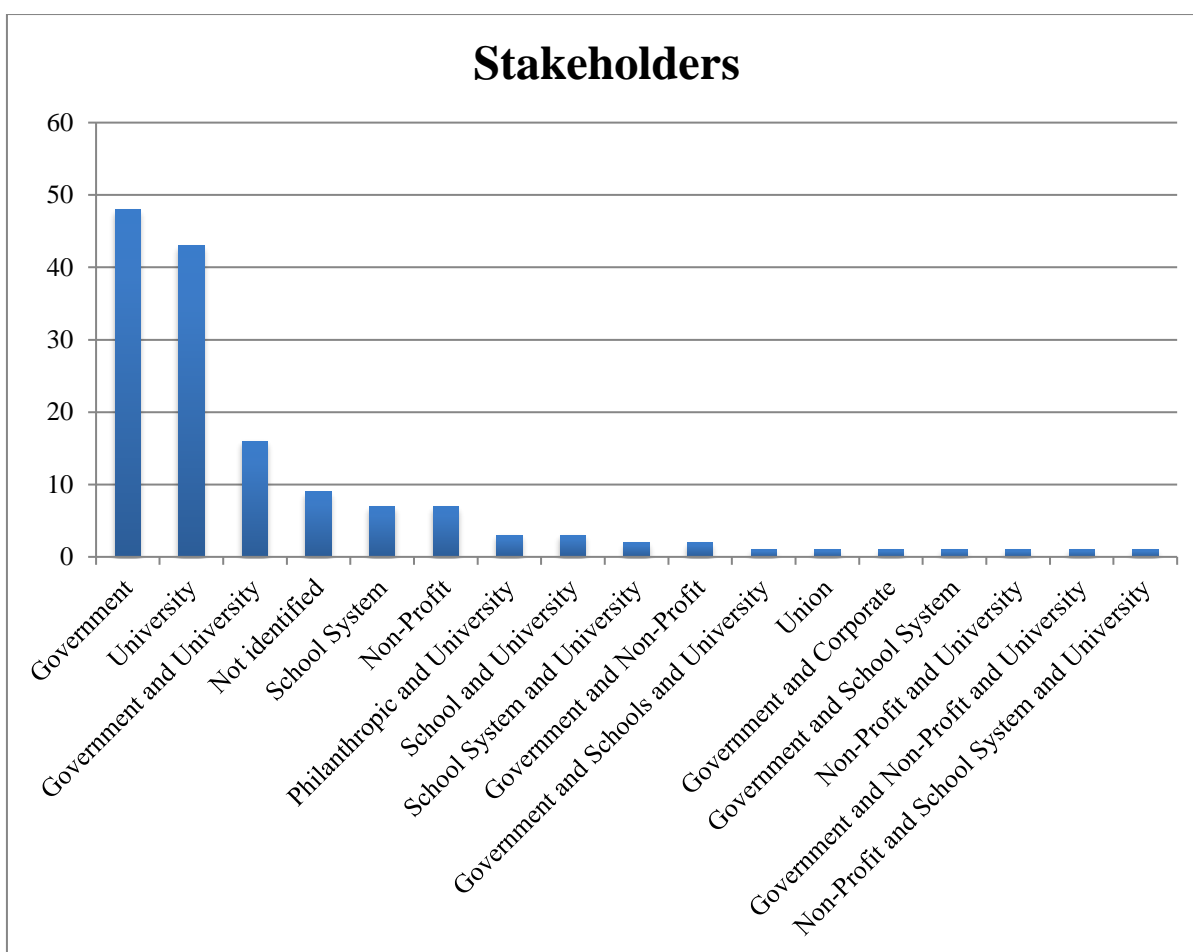


Figure 3. Classification of programs by stakeholders

In this study, stakeholders refer to the organisation/s that were involved in the creation and/or administration of the relevant program. Often these stakeholders are in partnership with one another, which is reflected in how they are identified in this section of the report. The most common stakeholders involved in the creation and/or administration of programs targeting hard-to-staff schools are governments (n = 48) and universities (n = 43) followed by partnerships between the two (n = 16).

In terms of government programs, there were both federal and state/territory initiatives with the latter being the far more common. Federal programs were largely created and/or administered through the Department of Education, Skills, and Employment (formerly the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations), such as Teach Next (announced in the 2011-12 Federal Budget under the Teacher Quality National Partnership).

State/territory-based government programs were connected to the respective education departments, for example the Queensland Department of Education and Training's Rural and Remote Graduate Teacher Scholarship and the Victorian Department of Education and Training's Early Childhood Aboriginal Pathway Scholarships.

In terms of universities, it is notable that the vast majority of programs (both stand alone and in partnership with other stakeholders) involved non-G8 institutions, including Queensland University of Technology, Australian Catholic University, Charles Sturt University, University of New England, Western Sydney University, University of Wollongong, University of Newcastle, La Trobe University, Macquarie University, Southern Cross University, Flinders University, University of Tasmania, University of Southern Queensland, Deakin University, University of the Sunshine Coast, University of South Australia, University of Canberra, Edith Cowan University, University of Technology Sydney, Federation University, James Cook University, Curtin University, Charles Darwin University, and Murdoch University. The significant representations of universities in this group from New South Wales and Queensland, and to a lesser extent Victoria, reflects the locations of the programs in this study as well as the distribution of universities across Australia.

There was involvement by all but one G8 universities (there were no identified programs associated with the Australian National University), which consisted primarily of internal scholarships for pre-services teachers at these institutions (e.g. University of Queensland's Rural Practicum Incentive Scholarships and University of Adelaide's Esther Burns/DECS Country Teaching Scholarships). It is notable that individual G8 institutions had less broad involvement across a range of programs in comparison to many of the non-G8 institutions listed above.

Other identified stakeholders included school systems (which in this audit refers to non-governmental education systems e.g. Catholic Education South Australia), philanthropic organisations (e.g. the George Alexander Foundation), non-profits (e.g. Queensland Council of Parents and Citizens' Associations), corporations (e.g. BHP), and unions (e.g. New South Wales Teachers Federation).

4.5 FUNDING

Funding	Number of Programs
Not identified	90
Government	43
Philanthropic	4
University	2
Non-Profit	2
School System	1
Government and Corporate	1
Government and Non-Profit	1
Government and University	1
Government and Non-Profit and University	1
Union (grant)	1
Total	147

Table 4. Classification of programs by funding

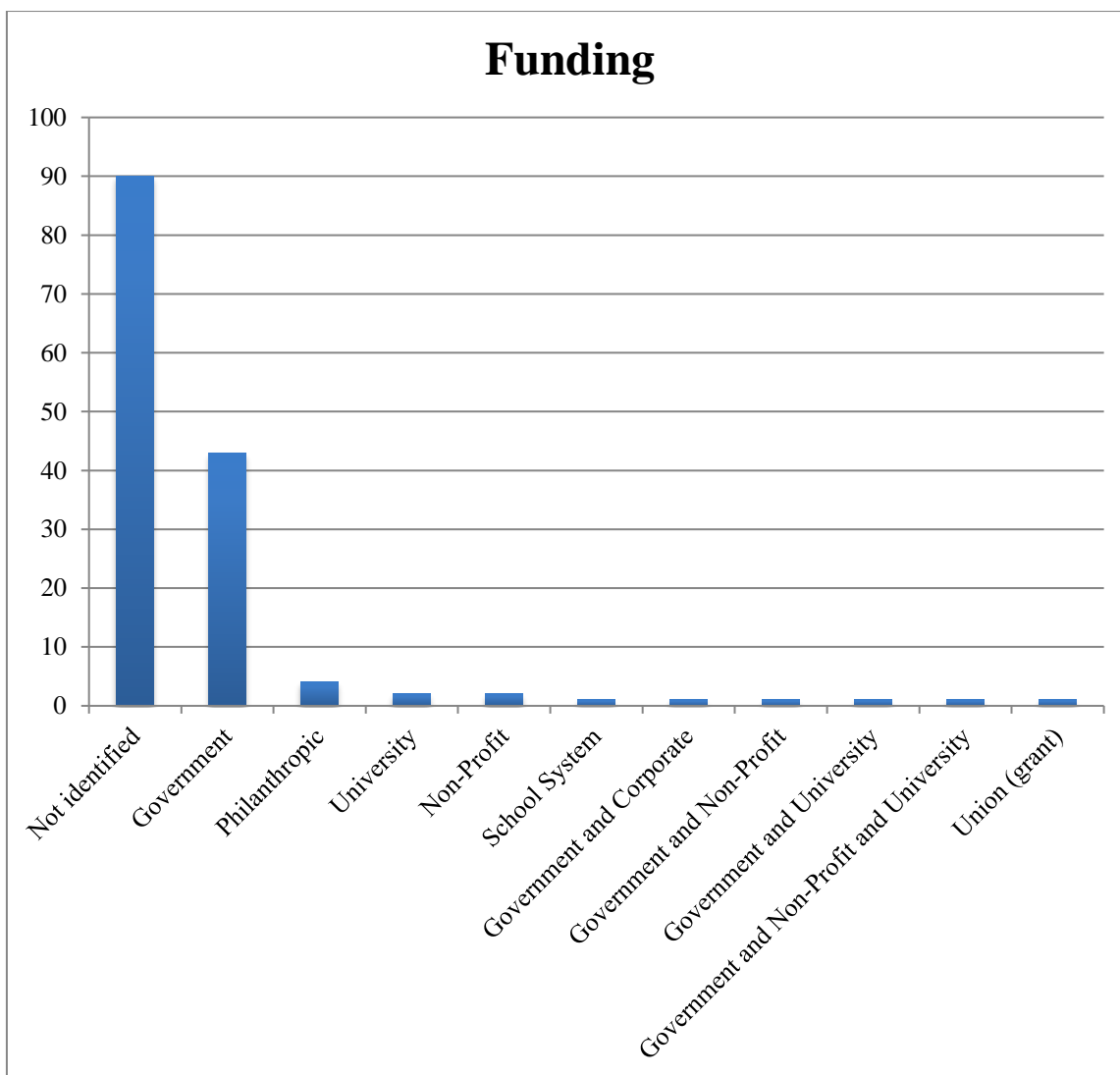


Figure 4. Classification of programs by funding

The largest identified funder of programs/initiatives was government (n = 43), which included a number of programs that governments created, administered, and funded such as Link and Learn from Education Queensland’s Indigenous Education and Training Alliance and NSW Department of Education’s Rural and Remote Leadership and Development program.

It is important to note that stakeholders and funders did not align in all programs, for example Kimberly Calling Program, which was funded by the Western Australian government and administered by a school system: Catholic Education Western Australia.

Additionally, there were a small number of other funding sources identified, most notably philanthropic organisations, universities, non-profits, and school systems. There were also some single instances of funding partnerships. Some examples of these hybrid funding models include government and non-profit (Pilbara Education Project funded by the Western Australian state government and BHP) as well as government and non-profit (Esther Burns/DECS Country Teaching Scholarships, which has matching funds from the University of Adelaide via a bequest and the South Australian Department for Education).

The largest number of programs (n = 90) did not have a readily identified funding source. At times, as with location, a funding source could be inferred but without direct identification it was not included. This lack of availability or clarity may be due to the fact that many of the programs/initiatives in this audit only had short term funding that did not support it in a sustained, long term way. Of particular note are the programs where universities were the sole stakeholders (n = 43) or stakeholders alongside government (n = 16). In these programs, the funding source was less often overtly identified, which was often a symptom of there being limited information about the program more generally.

4.6 TARGET

Target	Number of Programs
Pre-service teachers and Rural/Remote	57
Pre-service teachers and Indigenous education	17
Pre-service teachers	12
In-service teachers and Rural/remote and Leadership	5
Pre-service teachers and Rural/Remote and Subject specific	5
Pre-service teachers and Subject specific	5
Early Childhood	4
Indigenous education	4
Rural/Remote	4
In-service teachers and Rural/remote	3
Pre-service teachers and LSES schools	3
In-service teachers and LSES schools	2
In-service teachers and Pre-service teachers and Leadership and Indigenous education	2
In-service teachers and Pre-service teachers and Rural/Remote	2
Pre-service teachers and Subject specific and LSES Schools	2
Early Childhood and Indigenous education	1
Early Childhood and Rural/Remote	1
In-service teachers and Indigenous education	1
In-service teachers and Leadership	1
In-service teachers and Pre-service teachers	1
In-service teachers and Pre-service teachers and LSES schools	1

In-service teachers and Pre-service teachers and Rural/Remote and Indigenous education	1
In-service teachers and Pre-service teachers and Rural/Remote and Subject specific	1
In-service teachers and Rural/remote and Leadership and Indigenous	1
Leadership	1
LSES Schools and Rural/Remote	1
Not identified	1
Pre-service teachers and Indigenous education and Rural/Remote	1
Pre-service teachers and Rural/Remote and Indigenous education	1
Pre-service teachers and Rural/Remote and Subject specific and LSES Schools	1
Pre-service teachers and Subject specific and Rural/Remote and LSES Schools	1
Rural/Remote and Leadership	1
Rural/Remote and Subject specific	1
School students and Indigenous education and Rural/Remote	1
School students and Rural/Remote	1
Total	147

Table 5. Classification of programs by target

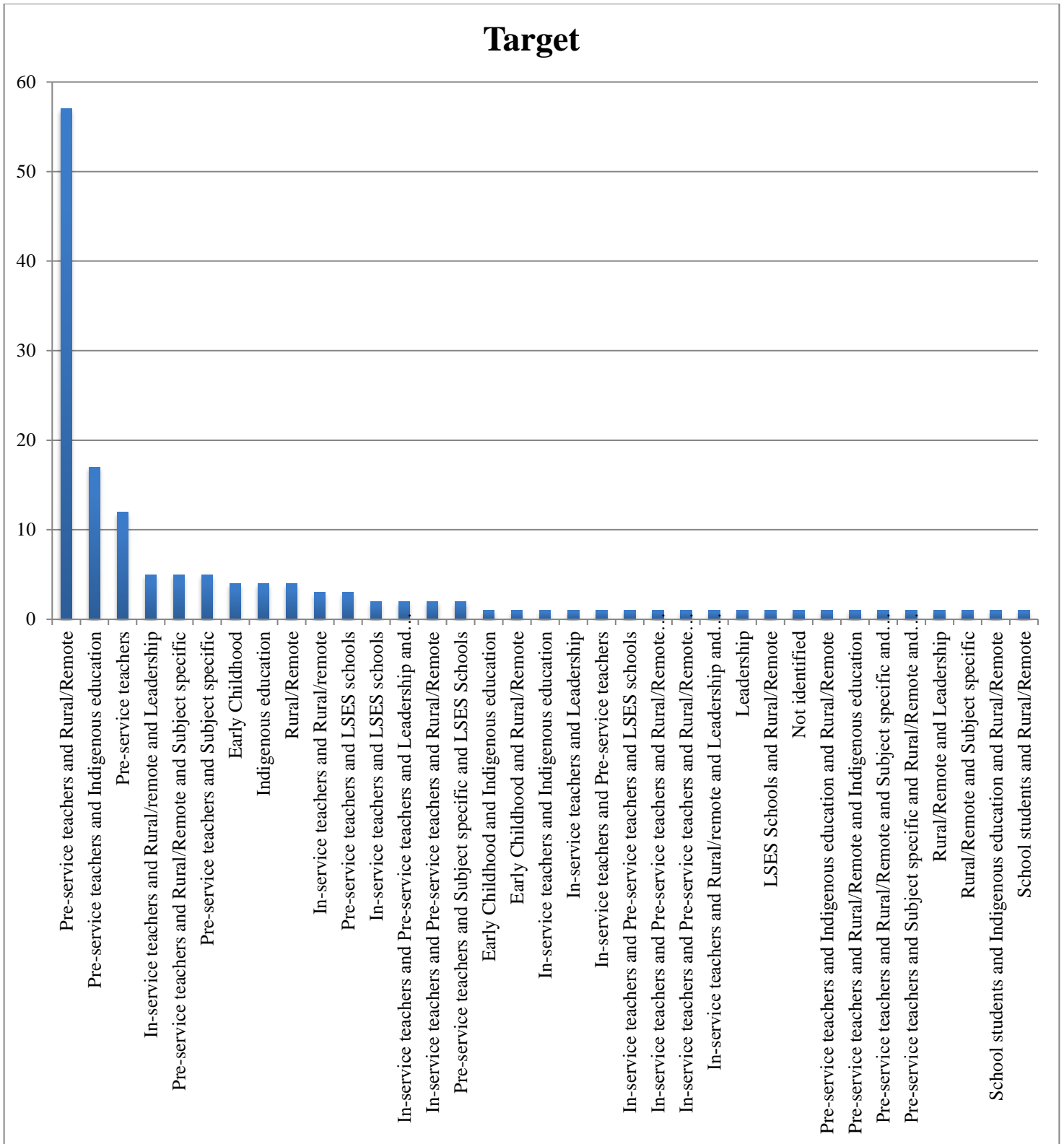


Figure 5. Classification of programs by target

In this audit, target is understood in two key ways:

1. About the types of schools/student populations/subject areas teachers are being incentivised to move to or stay in. This includes rural/remote schools, LSES schools, the early childhood sector, and particular subject areas such as STEM.
2. About the types of individuals being incentivised to enter or remain in teaching. This includes pre-service teachers, teachers who are Indigenous, and/or teachers who are from specific locations. It also includes teachers in specific subject areas, school leaders or future leaders, and high school students interested in teaching as a career.

Of the identified programs, the most common type in terms of target were those aimed at attracting and preparing pre-service teachers for rural/remote schools (n = 57). These programs often focus on supporting professional experience placements in these locations, such as Charles Sturt University's Inland Education Foundation Rural Professional Experience Grants. Other initiatives in this category include shorter terms programs aimed at exposing future teachers to these schools and study opportunities to develop their knowledge around rural/remote teaching. This category also captures the recruitment of students from rural/remote areas into teaching, for example the University of Queensland's Bid O'Sullivan Teaching Scholarships that assists Year 12 students from these areas of Queensland to pursue teaching degrees.

There were also a number of programs targeting pre-service teachers and Indigenous education (n = 17), which are largely about recruiting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people into teaching e.g. the University of South Australia's Anangu Tertiary Education Program. There were also a number of programs targeting pre-service teachers in a more general way (n = 12), e.g. the Logan City Teacher Education Centre of Excellence program that aimed to attract high achieving pre-service teachers to Logan City state schools.

While most programs were aimed at pre-service teachers, there were also some that targeted in-service teachers. These programs often relate to developing leadership skills and promoting leadership opportunities in hard-to-staff schools. One example of this is the Western Australian government's Country Teaching Program, which offers financial and professional incentives to encourage teachers to pursue long term employment and leadership positions in rural/remote schools.

4.7 FOCUS (RECRUIT/PREPARE/RETAIN)

Focus (Recruit/Prepare/Retain)	Number of Programs
Recruit	37
Prepare	49
Retain	1
Recruit and Prepare	18
Recruit and Retain	8
Prepare and Retain	2
Recruit, Prepare, and Retain	4
Not identified	14
Not applicable	14
Total	147

Table 6. Classification of programs by focus (recruit/prepare/retain)

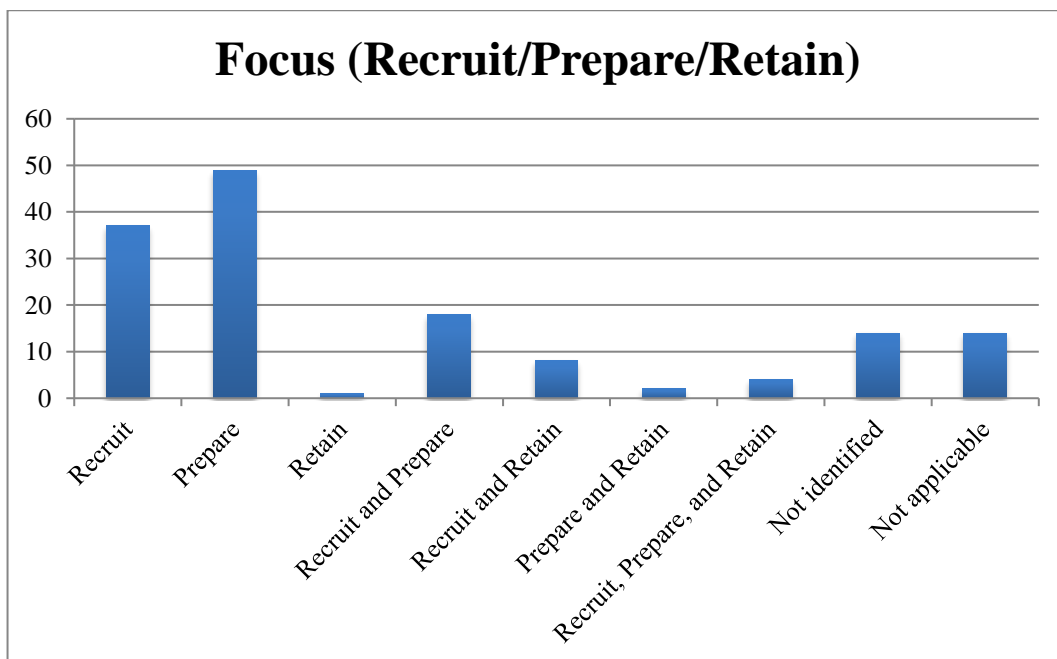


Figure 6. Classification of programs by focus (recruit/prepare/retain)

The focus or aims of the programs in this audit can generally be understood as about recruitment, preparation, or retention (or a combination of the three). The distribution of the audited programs in relation to these categories is as follows:

- Recruit (n = 37): Financial incentives (scholarships, stipends, relocation expenses etc.) and exposure (professional experience placements and trips etc.) were the key ways programs recruited teachers to work in hard-to-staff schools. These same mechanisms were also used to recruit certain types of future teachers into the profession. In terms of recruitment, pre-service teachers and recent graduates were most often targeted by programs although a small number of programs targeted in-service teachers (for instance leadership development in rural/remote schools).
- Prepare (n = 49): Professional experience placements and study options were the primary way programs gave pre-services teachers the opportunity to develop the knowledge, familiarity, and expertise to teach at specific types of schools/in specific positions. Some programs also sought to prepare in-service teachers for work in in demand schools, such as the Fair Go Project in New South Wales, which provided professional development around a student engagement pedagogy for teachers in LSES schools.
- Retain (n = 1): Only a single program was identified as focusing primarily on retention, namely the Bush Tracks Teaching Transitions project. This research project sought to understand issues of rural teacher mobility, especially in relation to rural in-service teachers' movements into leadership positions in these schools.

The focus or aim of the audited programs were also often a combination of recruitment, preparation, and retention. A number of programs were concurrently about recruitment and preparation (n = 18), such as the Enhanced Teacher Training Scholarship Program from the New South Wales Department of Education, which targets schools with high Indigenous student populations. Similarly, some programs focused on both recruitment and retention (n = 8), for example Western Australia's Metropolitan Teaching Program, which uses financial incentives and professional opportunities to attract and retain teachers in LSES schools.

Additionally, a small number of programs/initiatives (n = 14) fell outside/were less directly connected to the categories of recruit, prepare, and retain and therefore were coded as 'not applicable'. These programs were often awards, which are loosely about recruitment and retention (e.g. the Rural Education Award, which recognises the achievements and practices of teachers and leaders in rural and remote Victorian areas) and some research projects, which

again are broadly about the three main categories but in a much more indirect way in comparison to other programs/initiatives e.g. *Katu Kalpa*, a federal government report on the effectiveness of education and training programs for Indigenous Australians (Senate Employment, Workplace Relations, Small Business and Education References Committee, 2000). A further set of programs were coded as ‘not identified’ (n = 14) due to unclear and/or insufficient information.

Broadly, it is evident that the programs/initiatives in this audit largely aim to address workforce issues from the supply side rather than the demand one. The comparative lack of focus on retention, as opposed to recruitment and preparation, revealed in this data suggests an effort to increase supply but not necessarily one to maintain the long term impact of this supply. This lack of focus on retention is compounded by the fact, as discussed earlier, that the duration of many of the programs in this audit could not be identified, which suggests many programs suffer from a lack of ongoing funding or organisational continuity. These issues may be contributing factors that lead to ‘teacher churn’, whereby teachers (often recent graduates) are funnelled into hard-to-staff schools but only remain there for a limited amount of time.

4.8 MECHANISM/PROCESS

Mechanism/Process	Number of Programs
Financial incentives	48
Professional Development	27
Research	14
Financial incentives and Professional Development	14
Not identified	12
Financial incentives and Professional Conditions	9
Promotion of Opportunity	8
Financial incentives and Professional Development and Professional Conditions	6
Professional Development and Research	2
Professional Development and Promotion of Opportunity and Research	2
Professional Development and Professional Conditions	2
N/A	2
Professional Development and Promotion of Opportunity	1
Total	147

Table 7. Classification of programs by mechanism/process

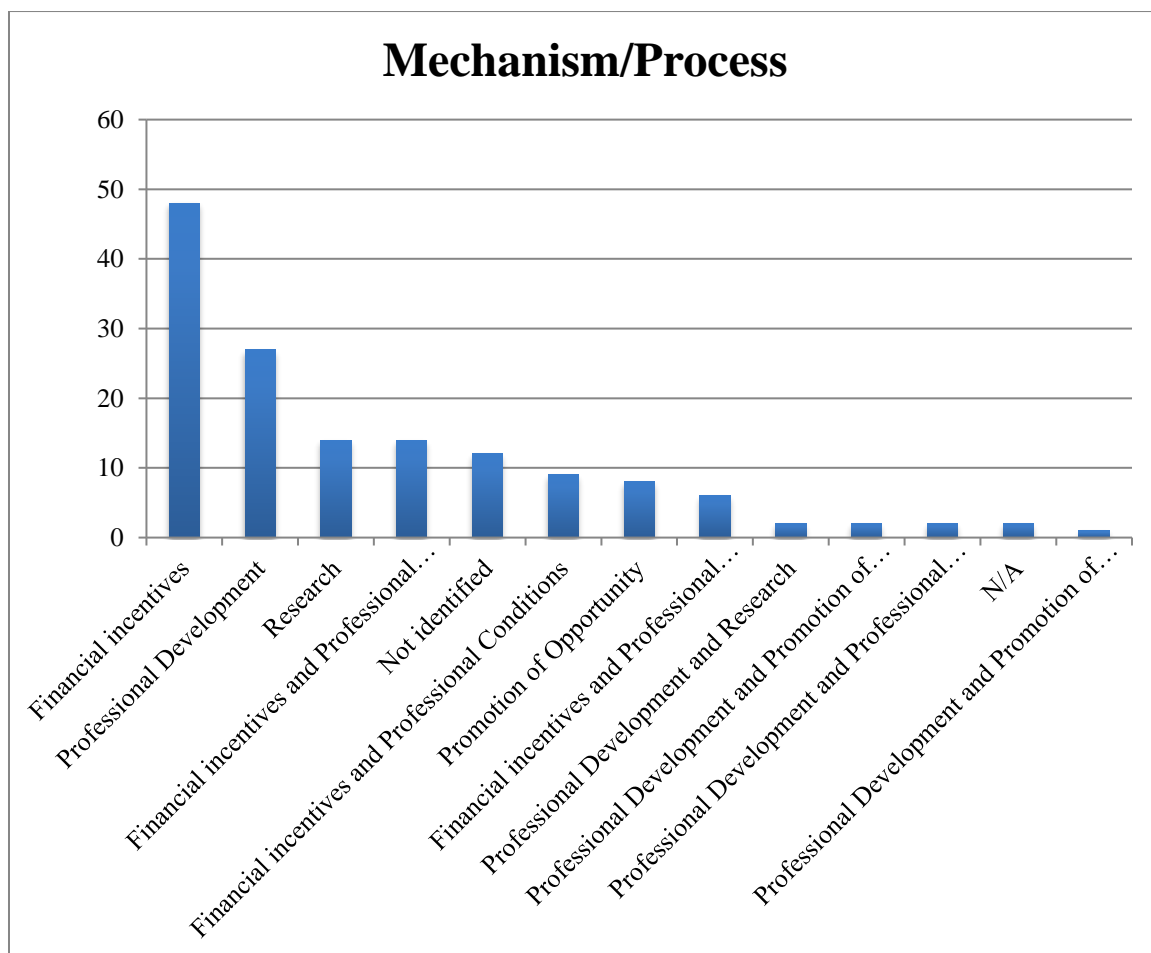


Figure 7. Classification of programs by mechanism/process

The mechanism or process used to address the issue of hard-to-staff schools varied across programs/initiatives although about a third relied solely on financial incentives (n = 48). The use of financial incentives took a number of forms, including:

- Scholarship programs to recruit individuals from target groups into teaching degrees, such as Indigenous, LSES, and/or rural/remote students (e.g. the Aboriginal Teacher Education Scholarship in the Northern Territory for Indigenous students).
- Scholarships and stipends to allow students to undertake professional experience placements in schools with particular staffing needs, often in rural/remote areas (e.g. the Esther Burns/DECS Country Teaching Scholarships for University of Adelaide pre-service teachers in maths or science to undertake a country teaching practicum).

- Scholarships and/or financial incentives to recruit teachers into positions in in demand areas, such as the early childhood sector, LSES schools, rural/remote schools, and particular subject specialities (e.g. the Kimberly Calling Program in Western Australia offers staff who take positions in remote areas relocation expenses, an annual service bonus, increased long-service leave, and Christmas vacation travel time).

Professional development was another key mechanism that programs used to address staffing issues in particular schools/areas. Twenty-seven programs solely used professional development as their mechanism. In these types of audited programs, professional development most commonly pertained to pre-service teachers being given the opportunity to undertake a professional experience placement in a hard-to-staff school (often in a rural/remote setting). Here, a placement functioned as professional development to provide future teachers with the knowledge, skills, and experience to teach in a similar type of school once qualified. One example of such initiatives is the Monash-Gippsland SCTE Remote and Rural Placement program, in which Monash University has partnered with 20 local schools to offer pre-service teachers a three week placement in a rural/remote school. This placement also included a weekend conference for the pre-service teachers to meet with principals for reflection and mentoring.

Professional development as a mechanism driving these programs also includes alternative pathways into teaching (e.g. Teach for Australia and Teach Next) and university-based units of study within teaching degrees focusing on issues connected to hard-to-staff schools (e.g. the elective unit Teaching in Rural and Remote Locations at the University of Tasmania). Additionally, a further 14 programs in this audit used professional development in tandem with financial incentives, such as financially supported study program (e.g. Catholic Education Western Australia's Aboriginal Teaching Assistants Study Scholarships).

Other key mechanisms included professional conditions (such as a guaranteed period of employment) and promotion of opportunities (short trips to expose potential staff to schools with staffing needs). These, along with financial incentives and professional development, were often combined by programs to offer individuals a range of incentives to prepare for, move to, or stay in particular locations and/or teaching areas.

Finally, 14 of the programs were research-based efforts to understand the reasons and potential solutions for staffing issues at a range of in need schools, for example the Katu Kalpa report from the Federal Government, which was an inquiry into the effectiveness of education

and training programs for Indigenous Australians (Senate Employment, Workplace Relations, Small Business and Education References Committee, 2000). Another is the Bush Tracks Teaching Transitions Project, which aimed to understand the transitions individuals experience when becoming teachers and school leaders in rural schools.

4.9 EVALUATION

Evaluation	Number of Programs
Yes	15
Limited	7
Pending	1
No	1
Not identified	123
Total	147

Table 8. Classification of programs by evaluation

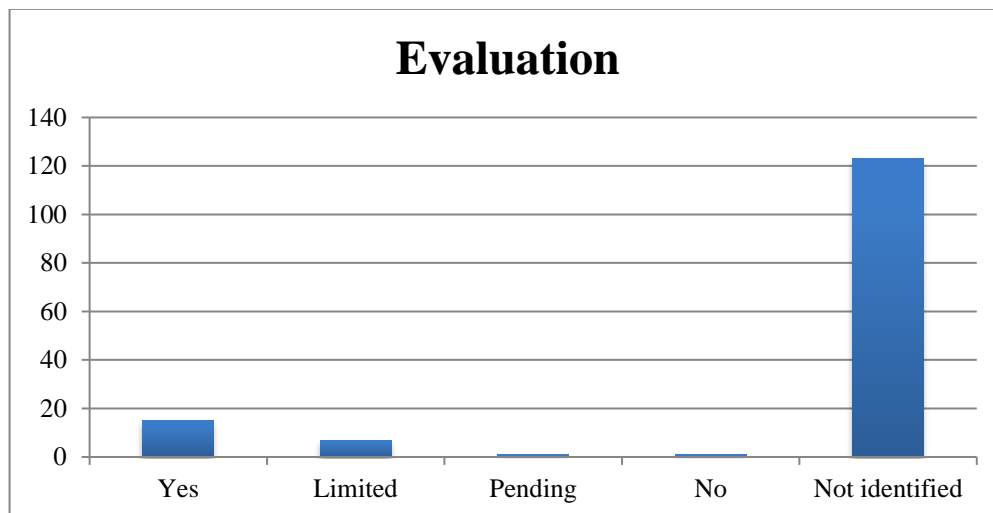


Figure 8. Classification of programs by evaluation

Of the 147 programs included in this audit, 15 were identified as having been substantially evaluated. The way these evaluations took place varied, including through academic journal articles (e.g. Locke (2008) on the WA DET's Student Teacher Rural Experience Program), internal evaluation reports (e.g. the More Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Teachers Initiative's report, see Buckskin, 2016b), and external evaluation reports (e.g. the Australian Council for Education Research's report on Teach for Australia, see Weldon et al., 2013).

Programs that were identified as having 'limited' evaluation included those briefly engaged with in academic or grey literature, as opposed to in an in-depth or holistic way. For the vast majority of programs (n = 123), if they had been evaluated or not could not be determined due to insufficient information. Notably, the evaluations of the 15 programs where there was substantial material were all found via open access sources. Following this, there is the potential that some programs in the 'not identified' category here may have been evaluated but were not made available in the same open access way and thus were not captured in this audit.

5 Interview Analysis

5.1 OVERVIEW OF INTERVIEW ANALYSIS (PHASE TWO)

Following the analysis of Phase One in the last chapter, this chapter focuses specifically on the analysis of data derived from the Phase Two of the project, which involved interviews with 21 participants from 12 hard-to-staff initiatives. These interviews were conducted, recorded, and transcribed between February and April 2021. All discussions used a semi-structured interview style as this allowed the order and structure of questions to be slightly modified depending on the context and location of each program. A thematic analysis, in contrast to a more fine-grained discourse analysis, was then conducted with the final recommendations (see Chapter 6) emerging from a combination of the analysis in Phase One and Two.

The sections in this chapter begin with an overview of each broad theme, followed by a discussion of any subthemes that emerged. Importantly, responses from those interviewed demonstrated the complex and multifaceted nature of any attempt to apportion or allot responses neatly into pre-determined or pre-designated groupings. The participants, without promoting, would at times break-down our initial categories into a number of sub-themes. For example, ‘recruitment’ was broken down by some participants into the sub-topic of ‘incentives’ (both financial and work-related), which was then further broken down by others into ‘sign-on bonuses’, ‘salary loading’, ‘rental assistance’, ‘workplace conditions’, and ‘workplace culture’. The broad themes, however, which structure this chapter’s discussion are as follows: Program design and organisation, Preparation: Initial Teacher Education, Recruitment and Induction, Retention and Attrition, and Leadership.

5.2 PROGRAM DESIGN AND ORGANISATION

The most often discussed aspect of the preparation of new teachers for hard-to-staff school contexts was program design. The various programs and initiatives discussed by participants in this research have been developed and operated typically by university Schools of Education to support pre-service teachers to undertake successful professional experience placements in hard-to-staff school contexts. This includes the development of the knowledge pre-service teachers require to skilfully understand diverse school contexts, with the longer term view of supporting those students as beginning teachers to start their teaching careers in

those locations. The programs discussed in the interviews appeared to be most often operating within an overall pre-service teacher education program, however these programs were not generally part of the mainstream teacher education program offered by that university. These programs were structured as an addition to the mainstream degree program and contained smaller cohorts of students who were identified through some form of innovative program design, often in partnership with state Department of Education as well as individual regions and schools:

- “...to be able to do what I... I’ve been allowed to be very risky, well, not risky, I’m not really risking, but to be able to have some freedom to trial and do things that maybe break the norm a little bit. And being able to move forward a little bit. To create things. I guess that works, because I’m actually meeting the needs of the students and the schools”.
- “We don’t have high quality pre-service teachers; we have high potential pre-service teachers. People who have the right attitude. They have a good academic transcript that’s showing me that they’re learning, they’re growing. They may have had glitches along the way, but they got back up again. They’re resilient”.

In terms of project design, resourcing was identified as an ongoing issue. Whilst some financial support was provided by Schools of Education, most programs were operating by accessing additional resources from either government or philanthropic funding. The difficulty of maintaining the such things as high-quality mentoring or the necessary school partnerships to continue the work would appear to be closely connected to program funding arrangements which will be elaborated on in the following section. Program leaders wanted it known that high quality initiatives are by no means cost neutral.

Two further key issues were identified in the interviews in relation to project design: first, a general lack of targeted policy initiatives, and second, the subsequent issue of sustainable resourcing for programs:

- “I think what you will observe is that we’ve stopped so much investing in the undergraduate space, in terms of scholarships, and we’ve turned our mind much more – or the department’s policies moved a lot more to – investing in accelerated Masters, employment-based programs, and then initiatives to redistribute supply”.
- “I think you have to target the program. Policy is really bad at differentiating. But you do have to target. You do have to have a special role recruiting for these schools, and advertising and promoting, and what the benefits are to go to these schools. You do need

a targeted policy incentive scheme to get them there, you do need targeted retention policy to keep them there, you do need the housing. It has to be targeted across the board. And I think the departments don't do the targeted support very well".

Participants also discussed their views that funding partners often expected programs to produce measurable impact in too short a timeframe. The imperative to demonstrate short term impact is clearly connected to funding cycles, changing priority areas, changing governments. Capturing this, one participant stated, "you're a victim of those cycles of funding, government changes", while another noted:

- 'Look at return on investment – how much this costs to train someone in the program, how much does it cost to train a pre-service teacher to the [fully qualified] level, then how much cost it is for churning of first-year teachers, you know, having to replace staff'. And so that calculation was never done which is unfortunate. Because if they analysed 'where are we getting our bang for our buck?' That would be it. That rather than say they employ five graduates, five graduates say 'see you later' after three years, versus having graduates stay long term, where you're not re-training them, you're not spending resources, time, and money... it's just unfortunate that they didn't look at that".

Finally, participants noted the complexities of working between highly centralised government departments and the necessity of working closely with schools. Staffing needs varied greatly both by school and by context, and successful programs identified the need to work closely with the school. Importantly, the centralised recruitment processes made it difficult for schools to convert teachers that they have attracted to their school into full time appointments:

- "If you want a process that works, it varies from centre to centre, but it's a real contextual type situation. I think there's a really complex structure in regional offices with staff recruitment, and really the work often happens at the school-based level where teachers know people and we've made the contacts. So in our world, the best type of model is a very flat structure, where resources – whether it be money or staff – is sent to the schools on the ground to do a range of that promotion. Rather than having a fairly complex HR type approach. Regional office has attraction teams, they've got retention teams, they've got a whole range of teams who are really great people. But they tend to want to come to us, the kids do, the pre-service ones".

- “But the corollary of that is that we have less power over the schools compared to other jurisdictions...we can’t appoint a principal, for instance. The school council in conjunction with the regional executive appoints a principal. We can’t appoint a teacher. Even if I have this absolute rockstar teacher here, and I have a school that doesn’t have any teachers ...we can’t place that teacher in that school”.

5.3 PREPARATION: INITIAL TEACHER EDUCATION

In addition to program design and organisation, a broad grouping of themes also emerged from the interview data in relation to the importance of the preparation of pre-service teachers for hard-to-staff schools. Responses from those interviewed discussed notable models of preparation that included immersion programs, grow your own programs, and programs designed to target preparation for rural and remote school contexts. This list is in no way exhaustive of the programs that have developed in this area, but does go some way toward beginning to identify approaches that are currently being operationalised to support pre-service teachers prepare for careers in hard-to-staff schools. Other issues discussed include the importance of partnerships for the successful operation of programs as well as the increased diversity of pre-service teacher candidates.

Program Structure

Participants discussed a variety of innovative programs to support pre-service teachers in preparing for careers in hard-to-staff schools, such as:

Immersion models: These programs appeared to emphasise extended professional placement time in schools or an early placement experience with pre-service teachers often assigned to a specific hard-to-staff school. This approach appeared to work toward the development of a ‘pipeline’ of staff for hard-to-staff schools. Those interviewed spoke about having completed a placement at an identified school, having moved into casual teaching in the same school, and then moving straight into a permanent position at the same school. A key component of these programs was that the majority worked closely with universities to get placement students into targeted schools, and then proceeded to hire these same teachers through an accelerated ‘permission to teach’ in Term Four, with a subsequent fulltime teaching position offered in the school the following year:

- “When they started their first full year of teaching in the next year, they all already had 6 months experience. They knew the kids and they knew the community”.
- “The point of it was, I suppose, was to get teachers into the schools quickly. And so the school that I did my prac at gave me a casual job for Term Four and then I was a targeted grad, and I started there full-time the next year, permanently”.

Grow Your Own models: These programs focus on nurturing pre-service teachers from within communities rather than relying on a ready supply of teachers from other geographical locations. The rationale for this is that teachers who are from a certain community are much more likely to return once they have completed university education and stay in in that community with clear flow on benefits in terms of reducing teacher turnover:

- “It’s built around the idea that because recruiting outsider teachers is always difficult and because you’re pretty much guaranteed that most of them won’t stay that long, but that people who are part of a remote community are generally - you know it’s their own community, it’s their own place that they live, you’re not having to attract them to the location, they are already there, that’s where they want to be. So if you can train them to be teachers, the idea is then you’ll be able to retain them”.
- “Doing dumps and runs is not good enough... I hear constantly, oh we send out ambassadors, we go and talk to the universities, we do this, I said well one or two sessions of dumping and running of information doesn’t build confidence and there’s no relationship. So I guess the other thing is about relationships and mentorships”.

Rural/Remote models: One of the most discussed program design models to address the preparation of teachers for hard-to-staff schools focused on preparation for rural and remote contexts. Again, a variety of different approaches were discussed, but common to them all was the notion of familiarising pre-service teachers from metropolitan areas about life in rural and remote communities:

- “Our biggest problem we have is just exposing people to what it’s like. I couldn’t tell you the amount of times that I’ve spoken to pre-service teachers and they literally think it’s all dirt roads. And that it’s the wild west up where. So just trying to debunk those myths and move forward with some actual true understanding of what it’s like. And that you can be very successful and that its actually going to give you a pathway in your careers”.
- “I think a challenge would be moving away from home, like uni students moving away from possibly Brisbane where they know they’ve got access to shops and events and things

like that, so I think it's like what's available out in the rural/regional communities, I think that's probably something that might prevent people from coming out here”.

The Importance of Partnerships

The importance of partnerships was identified by both those participants focusing on the preparation of new teachers (i.e., those working with pre-service teachers to prepare them for the profession) and those working on specific initiatives to prepare pre-service teachers for careers in hard-to-staff schools. The partnerships described tended to be between universities and government departments at an organisation level, but on a daily basis it was the individual university-school partnerships that made these programs work. This results in a need to simplify the process and reducing the number of different individuals who are working together to support a complex project or initiative, such as assisting pre-serve teachers to develop the knowledge and skills required to take up a career in hard-to-staff schools. For example, participants often commented on the difficulties and expertise required to sustain partnerships, and ensure programs were operational. This included the work required to develop common project goals across multiple partners as well as the impact of high staff turnover on partnerships:

- “Making sure that everyone who is involved keeps working together and that time is spent to ensure that you still have shared goals. I think that this sort of program involves so many different participants, the schools, the university...the educational bodies, as well as all the individuals in those. So just trying to keep everyone on the same page as you go”.
- “Keeping schools and other team members on board. Because the program depends on having so many participants collaborating, if any of them are weak, it makes it really hard”.
- “You give me 18 people I don't want to know about you. I really don't. I do not have time to work with 18 different people in 4 years”.

Diversity of Pre-Service Teachers

There was also a view expressed in the interviews around a need for diversity among those undertaking pre-service teacher education courses as well as a need for this diversity to be reflected in policy initiatives targeting the preparation and recruitment of teachers. Staffing policies that are built on a supply of pre-service teachers who are all young school leavers with few economic and family commitments, and thus able to provide a highly mobile workforce

supply, was interpreted as no longer useful. Instead, participants in this project consistently reinforced the importance of having a diversity of people undertaking pre-service teacher education.

Participants involved in preparation programs targeting the development of pre-service teachers for hard-to-staff schools also commented on the complexities of asking these students to undertake preparation work on top of their standard university degree so they could be well prepared when they undertook placement in hard-to-staff school contexts:

- “Most of our students are mature age as well... that may or may not be part of its success. They have families, they have work, they have mortgages, they have community that they do community programs in their local areas, so they have huge commitments. So, this is a huge layer on top of their already heavy workload...”
- “...looking to transfer me, that’s okay, I’ll do something else. We have got this different way of thinking, that they’re more transient between jobs, they’re not thinking teaching has to be there forever for them. Or permanency. We used to say, well if you come out West we’ll offer you permanency... ‘today a lot of younger people are happy for taking a 12-month contract 2kms from where they live and if they’re in an area of high demand such as math, they can feel assured that they’ll be sought after by local schools. If a teacher believes they are higher quality, they know they’ll be picked up by metro schools. So high quality teachers in rural and remote becomes a pool of teachers who weren’t able to get a job in the metro region. So, offering scholarships means getting high quality teachers out into the regions”.

Finally, programs designated as supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to complete teacher education identified an additional goal; namely, that they could create new career pathways for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people within remote communities. One person interviewed stated: “[i]t’s a really good chance to be part of a cohort of other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students together working toward the same goals. Because you learn from each other, and you have quite a lot in common and you can support each other. That cohort support is super-duper important”.

5.4 RECRUITMENT AND INDUCTION

This section begins by unpacking the dynamic nature of recruitment and induction through the lens of the subtheme of supply and demand, including the autonomy many leaders

in hard-to-staff schools demand in terms of selecting the type of staff they want to employ. The discussion then moves on to consider several commonalities leaders talked about when discussing criteria that should be used to determine the ‘right’ candidates. This includes the importance of creating a conducive professional induction journey that enables new staff to not only adapt to their new school environment, but to take advantage of opportunities in the form of time-release and specialised Professional Development.

The Importance of Supply and Demand

Several interviews overtly stressed the need for policy makers to move the scope of their discussion beyond the traditional ITE framework and its out-dated, Fordist predisposition to merely producing more teacher graduates. It was suggested that the problem for many hard-to-staff schools was not one of ‘volume’ but rather one of ‘distribution’ with one interviewee stating, “we might have enough teachers, but they’re not in the places that we need them to be”. Using a similar logic, others stressed:

- “We do have enough supply for most of our positions. Where we have trouble is distributing that supply to geographic locations and certain schools which are disadvantaged. But we do have some supply constraints in terms of specialised subjects. And those shortages have a lot of context in that, you know, Australia doesn’t have enough mathematics graduates full stop, across all professions, so that flows through to we don’t have enough mathematics teachers. And therefore, we don’t have enough mathematics teachers in rural areas. And it’s those intersections of those challenges which create the biggest issues”.
- “It doesn’t matter what job it is, regional-remote, always hard to staff. Unless you’re mining, and you throw thousands of dollars at them. Then people can hack it”.

The Importance of Choosing the Right Candidates

While there was considerable discussion around the need for hiring decisions to be made ‘on-the-ground’ by leaders aware and attuned to local contextual issues, several participants stressed that some programs were forced to work within “a system that inherently disadvantages ... remote schools”. While it is clear that considerable effort and attention was devoted across all the initiatives examined in terms of selecting appropriate staff, how each program actually undertook this process varied considerably. There appears to be a continuum with at one end, a focus on the previous teaching experience and the pedagogical knowledge of applicants — described in one interview as “the science of learning, the science of teaching

— through to hiring only people who appear “to be in it for the long haul” and are “able to stay with a project” or have “a good handle on what is happening”. Common themes for school leaders in relation to the sub-theme of ‘choosing the right candidates’ suggest that it is, “very, very hard to ensure that people who come to our schools have come for the right reasons, and like their first questions aren’t ‘how much allowance do I get?’ and ‘how often do I get to go to Perth?’, ‘what’s my accommodation like?’ It’s more about ‘tell me about the community, how many kids will I have in my class, what would their learning styles be? What do I need to be aware of?’”

The Importance of Financial Incentives

Following this, while there seemed to be some broad agreement around the notion that “money is not the answer”, there was almost universal acceptance (across at least remote school settings), that some kind of financial enticement is required to attract and retain suitable staff. The range, shape, and form such financial incentives take varies from initial sign-on bonuses of up to \$20, 000 in some Queensland initiatives through to salary loadings that cover, for example, subsidised housing and even free rent and electricity in remote Western Australian settings. Some issues with such incentives were noted in remote locations where one participant stated, “we got 90% rental subsidy. But there was no incentive if you bought your own house there. So, there were local teachers who wanted to stay, but for them financially, they almost lost money, because they’re not using teacher housing... it’s too short-sighted and decomplexified”. Other themes included:

- “If you work for three years straight in a remote school you get three months off on full pay. If you work four years in a remote, you get 6 months on full pay. If you’re, say [school name] remote community school, which is [many kilometres] south of Broome, you get \$15,000 a year allowance. Free housing, two trips to Perth, a trip to Broome, you don’t pay electricity, you don’t pay water, so there’s a number of financial incentives to be in a remote school. Plus, after two years, you get your permanency”.
- “If you get the incentive for three years, you stay for your three years, then you bolt. You don’t look to stay in the community”.
- “The fact that they were able to offer permanency and all the benefits that came with that including the paid move out, meant that it was no longer a burden for me to have a go out rural. I wouldn’t have to find my own place; I wouldn’t have to find a school or a job or pay for movers to go out there. To me, it looked like this was the perfect bridging

opportunity to get teachers out rural without having all those obstacles in the way – that’s what I believe the purpose of the [program] is and why it’s so successful”.

The Importance of Non-Financial Incentives

This somewhat loose grouping of incentives differs from those of a financial or compensatory nature in that they cover a range of inducements that share the underlying subtext that “[g]iving people more money doesn’t actually solve the problem. You need to give them other things ... [as] the new gen, they have a different view of what they see as an incentive”.

Workplace conditions: Incentives in this grouping include a conscious effort by leaders to improve some aspect of employment that goes beyond normal ‘award’ conditions. Included here are how some programs offer beginning teachers immediate permanency when they sign up/on or the more common policy of some kind of accelerated transition from contract to permanency after a much shorter period of time compared to urban settings. One long standing practice in the context of Queensland remote initiatives, is the established departmental policy of ‘transfer points’, which are accrued normally on the basis the degree of distance/remoteness from a major urban city.

In some remote Indigenous communities in Cape York Peninsula, teachers acquire the maximum number of transfer points, which was described as “the thing that gets teachers up in those remote schools in Queensland for two years is the transfer points system ... there’s an incentive to go, you kind of have to go if you want a permanent job. And then they [DET] do honour it, when you come back you get your first choice of schools... the problem is when you have 10 new teachers in a school in one go”. The problematic nature of a contracted workforce is particularly evident in remote Indigenous communities where one school leader frustratingly commented “we’re not interested in contract, contract, contract, contract, we want to know that you want to stay here. We want the community to know that you want to stay there. Because the first question that the kids ask these teachers when they go on their first holiday ‘hey Miss, you coming back here? Are you coming back here?’ ...it’s not fair on anyone, for the stability, for the culture of the school”.

Other notable comments from participants on workplace conditions included:

- “You can’t... to give someone a six month contract and think they are going to stay with you for four years is ridiculous. I know that from a teacher, because I’m an employer. So I get that. So, if I give a teacher six months I’ve already got teachers that I’m panicking about because they’ve been offered three private school jobs”.

- “I’m not prepared to put the lives, and we are talking about lives here, people do forget that we are talking about people and jobs and careers. We can’t work on 6-month contracts or two years of funding. I won’t. If I only had two years, I’d be looking for another job right now. Because most high performers will want ... to know what they are doing in a year’s time”.

Workplace Culture: In contrast to concentrating on workplace conditions, another grouping of comments from participants sort to focus on facilitating (and promoting) a school’s professional culture, with one school leader suggesting that “one of the key reasons the good teachers will go to a school is because there’s a principal there they want to work with, which is leadership”. Other themes in this grouping included:

- “One of the biggest things we’ve found, and we do a lot of work with beginning teachers, is they want to be recognised, they want to be connected, they want opportunities for career progression over ‘I’ll take \$5, 000 if I go over there”.
- “Because for a lot of them, they don’t care about the corporate side of it. They really don’t. They care about okay, is the job permanent? Is it temporary? And do I get accommodation? They’re the big ones they worry about... their biggest concern is how the hell am I going to be supported when I get there? Who’s going to be my friends? Who can I rely upon?”

Living conditions: Several of those interviewed stress the importance of teachers feeling comfortable and safe away from the school. With this in mind the benefits of recruiting couples and/or friends has been tried in several initiatives and it was suggested that “If people don’t have a good housing situation, they won’t stay. If they’re fighting with their roomies, they won’t stay. If it’s not secure, they don’t stay... That’s like bread-and-butter stuff, but really actually important to getting people to stay”.

5.5 RETENTION AND ATTRITION: THE IMPACT OF BURN-OUT AND TRANSIENCE

One phenomenon shared across most of the initiatives was a tension expressed between the importance of retaining staff on the one hand, and on the other, a pragmatic acknowledgment that there would most likely be high levels of attrition and staff turnover. As one interviewee bluntly stated, “[y]ou can’t just have an attraction strategy, you’ve got to have a retention strategy as well. And if they’re not married together, then all for naught. No good

attracting people if you haven't got a way of keeping them involved in what you're doing". Interestingly, none of those interviewed attempted to gloss over the reality that leaders must anticipate a high turnover of staff and therefore leaders need to plan accordingly. One participant stressed the fluid nature of working in these challenging environments suggesting that "things change at schools, things changed here at [school name], things changed at [education authority], and so the expertise, the priorities, the beliefs, all those sorts of things change. Somewhere like the NT you're going to get that, ... as a territory, we have much higher turnover than other jurisdictions. So, you have to build in for change. You cannot anticipate that the same person will be doing a job in three years, five years, 10 years... that's why you have to build in that refreshing of goals and what it looks like in a really regular way. Otherwise, people come in - someone leaves, someone else comes in - and they're filled in only on the day-to-day operations stuff but they don't get filled in on the rest of it".

5.6 LEADERSHIP

Some of the initiatives where we conducted interviews directly identified leadership as an overt component or aim of the program, however across most initiatives, issues related to leadership were discussed in more generic terms. This generic framing of leaderships did not in any way detract from its importance for there was overlapping agreement that without strong school leadership none of the initiatives that targeted attracting, preparing, or retaining teachers could possibly have any lasting effect. In addition, there was strong agreement that leadership trajectories or accelerated pathways to positions of leadership were often an incentive in attracting teachers to work in hard-to-staff schools. Moreover, high-quality mentoring was commonly discussed as a key leadership theme closely aligned to the attraction, induction, and retention of the best teachers for the hardest to staff metropolitan, regional, rural, and remote schools. While it was difficult to separate leadership from the many other overlapping themes, it was clear that while the success and impact of the initiative may have been dependent on multiple factors, leadership had a fundamental link to them all.

In this section we attend to direct and specific points made by participants who identified themselves as having led, participated in, or designed what they themselves identified as leadership initiatives. Importantly, many of the points raised largely reiterate previous themes that arose throughout the research.

Program Leadership: Longevity, Sustainability, Budget Cycles and Institutional Knowledge

One specific issue that arose in several interviews concerned the transience of leadership across both government and ITE initiatives that had been designed to address teacher workforce shortages. It was indicated that sometimes when directors or program leaders left or changed departments, they were replaced with new directors or managers who did not have the same institutional knowledge, and in some cases lacked a similar passion for the work. Similarly, some participants lamented that key strategies which had taken considerable time to develop were regularly replaced after elections or some other form of institutional restructure and that this made it extremely hard for programs to maintain momentum, consistency, and/or the fidelity to particular strategies or directions.

In addition, such change often impacted on the ability of an initiative to collect evidence of the program's impact over time. In this respect, it was clear that those interviewed saw the leadership of some initiatives negatively affected by change, with one participant stating that the leadership role was:

- “Sometimes landed on people who took over programs. There is transience in who leads this work overtime, and both institutional knowledge and commitment can be lost”.

This was a source of frustration for another participant who said, “If you've got even three new people coming on board, that is a whole heap of time and effort that you've got to pump into those people to bring them up to speed”.

Interestingly, this same point was interpreted as an issue of accountability, with another participant maintaining that:

- “[g]overnance means there has to be sustainability of the people that are on that governance... I had 18 people in 4 years in those roles. Now most people wouldn't be able to manage that. That means 18 times I had to tell people what I had to do, 18 times I had to tell them about the program, 18 times. And that is an unsustainable practice”.

Concerns were also expressed about inefficiencies and lack of forethought related to the short cycles of funding. In speaking about getting good teachers out into the regions and trying to get programs up and running, one participant said, “the potential of it was incredible, but getting the education departments to sign up to things like that are just incredibly difficult. Because what they'll do is exactly what you've just outlined, there'll be two year or four year

cycles of funding. Once that's gone, oh well, don't worry about that now, the problems not there anymore or the issues gone away. Well, that's just not true". Others repeated similar concerns:

- "And if the evaluation comes in with some good findings, you've got a fairly good chance of managing to get further funding. But not every budget bid has the same number of years attached to it, it can be variable".
- "The first year they're still working out what they're going to do so the money doesn't do anything for the first six months at least. By the fourth year, they're evaluating, or halfway through the third year and everyone is shutting shop and going home."
- "Some things have changed but I think departments by their very nature, they're big beasts that are very difficult to manage, the corporate memory doesn't hold onto the things that work well".

On a related note, there appeared to be some concern that new initiatives (designed around new and often 'innovative' labelled funding sources) were continuously replacing strategies that were already in existence, and that this was both confusing and disruptive rather than innovative. One program manager interviewed expressed concerns about what their own department was bringing in, saying that there were:

- "New initiatives tried all the time, new things brought in... Well okay we now have an Indigenous Coordinator, we've got a STEM Coordinator, we're offering programs for principals in this. So suddenly a lot of the things were happening all at once and that was their only complaint, was that 'wow, all these packages are coming all at once'. So that was a learning as well. How do we make sure we engage them fully in the conversation, so they have the ability to immerse [in] them and contextualise the programs, and not be bombarded with five or six programs at once?"

School Leadership: Quality Leadership, School Autonomy, and Wellbeing

School leaders are, unsurprisingly, the most passionate about the issue of 'leadership'. This is particularly the case in regional and remote locations where they experience teacher shortage on a daily basis. The transfer/points system in some remote locations was specifically emphasised as causing stress for school leaders:

- “Where we had, the first year I arrived, I arrived in July, I had 25 staff leave who had done their three years. It was just ridiculous, the whole school was ripped out, we almost had to start again”.

Essentially the school often felt they lost experienced teachers with the key local knowledge in favour of an assembly of new teachers with little or at times no experience in such settings.

One topic repeatedly raised was the issue of school leaders’ own stress and overload. For instance, school principals not only had to adopt a rolling series of new initiatives but were also having to adapt to working with increasingly constrained budgets and at times having to step in themselves face-to-face teaching roles. The wellbeing of school leaders was clearly a major theme with one interviewee framing it as “remote schools need a whole lot more money for PD...you should be able to buy extra teachers if you need” and that “[i]t’s the worst thing in the world to be Band 5 principal of a school that size and still meant to teach all day”. This was a theme picked up on by another participant who commented, “the principal role in a smaller school is – the principal is everything, as well as necessarily having a teaching load. So that can be quite daunting for many, trying to do two things at once”. The quality and consistency of leadership within schools also comes through in some interviews with one participant explaining that their school did not always even have an actual principal on staff, which resulted in “the deputy is stepping up all the time or someone else is having to run the school”. Another stated, “I would rank leadership as our number one issue with recruiting quality teachers. It’s equal. It’s not a competition, you’ve got to have both”.

The morale of school leadership appears to be related in part to how much leaders feel rewarded by their work, how long they stay in hard-to-staff schools and, consequently, whether they are able to both recruit and or support their teachers. A point raised earlier in this chapter has relevance to this current discussion as we were told that “one of the key reasons the good teachers will go to a school is because there’s a principal there they want to work with, which is leadership”. This particular participant makes the point about effective leadership in schools being closely tied to delegation and knowing where mentorship can be most effectively directed with the goal of keeping the school processes running smoothly. Such feeling of being rewarded included not only a feeling that their hard work is appreciated but also feeling their hard work is financially rewarded:

- “In terms of salary, principals of smaller schools are usually paid the same amount as an assistant principal. And yet an assistant principal has a network around them...”

you're expected to be all things to all people, but you perhaps don't get the same remuneration".

There was some debate about whether initiatives should be national, state or local and school-based. Generally, there was a strong preference amongst school leaders for some degree of school autonomy in terms of hiring, if not also recruiting. The overall preference was for place or context driven initiatives that were not "run out of a central office" but were locally administered:

- "I think there's a really complex structure in regional offices with staff recruitment, and really the work often happens at the school-based level where teachers know people and we've made the contacts. So, in our world, the best type of model is a very flat structure, where resources – whether it be money or staff – is sent to the schools on the ground".

One principal explained that in his school governance is centred on a global school budget, saying:

- "Rather than funding particular activities in a school, we fund a school as a whole, and the principal has substantial devolved responsibility for using that money to deliver schooling to their student cohort. One aspect of such operations might be how leaders manage their teacher supply challenges and needs".

While departmental support was clearly considered important, one message was that "policy is really bad at differentiating. But you do have to target. You do have to have a special role recruiting for these schools, and advertising and promoting, and what the benefits are to go to these schools. You do need a targeted policy incentive scheme to get them there, you do need targeted retention policy to keep them there, you do need the housing. It has to be targeted across the board. And I think the departments don't do the targeted support very well".

Teacher Leadership Pathways

There is little question that accelerated leadership pathways are seen by some teachers as an incentive of teaching within hard-to-staff schools. The importance of advertising and making known that accelerated leadership pathways are possible was seen as critical for some program leaders and principals who believed that many teachers "want...to be identified as being on a projected career path with professional development to be able to help them grow

and develop – so that professional development was key to being out there. And then also the ability, once they’ve done some time out there, could they be promised a place of choice when they came back in. We called that boomerang”. There was nonetheless some concern about people at times being promoted or given leadership roles prematurely and the “higher likelihood in a rural area that people would go from a teacher to a principal role”.

While many of the interviews did not overtly link leadership to the loss of high achieving or quality teachers, there was a shared (yet seemingly not unexpected) concern that many teachers in hard-to-staff settings:

- “Don’t stay in the profession for very long. So, we’ve got retention issues, and it’s not that they just decide that teaching is not for them, they often move into policy style roles within education. Because of who they are, and what they can bring, there’s a huge demand”.
- “You can put lots of people through [a program] but it’s really then up to them whether they are going to stick their hand up to fill those positions”.
- “Once they are an effective teacher and they’re working well in a school ... obviously we would like these people to be in leadership positions. We want them in the future to be running schools.”

For some of those interviewed the notion of ‘teaching transience’ and its impact on school leadership was seen as a generational demographic change whereby teachers fail to stay in the same profession for the same lengths of time as in the past due to the fact that “has been a change in culture and thinking of younger people now, indications are that they don’t necessarily see it as the ultimate career pathway, that I’ll be a teacher and I’ll be a teacher for the next 30 years”...“I think one of the answers is... creating Master Teachers. And having that career path where you can stay in the classroom and earn a lot of money but also have a lot of respect. And also fixes the problem of having first year teachers spending six hours a night curriculum planning when they don’t know what they’re doing anyway... it gives people a career path for people who wouldn’t otherwise stay and also provides the support for beginning teachers who don’t have that support at the moment”. The relatively short period of time teachers who participate in pathway initiatives spend in schools is also discussed in some interviews in relation to programs that seek to recruit Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers. As in other leadership programs a percentage of graduate teachers never choose the career path of teaching in schools, yet end up nonetheless working in TAFE, in the health sector or in some kind of community work. In some programs, such as those that focus on Indigenous

teachers or the 'grow your own' pathway, it was argued that there are often limited leadership conduits and hence, "for a whole lot of reasons some people have left teaching".

Mentoring as a Leadership Activity

Lastly, the induction and mentoring of new teachers were topics mentioned across many of the interviews. It would appear that induction and mentoring are perceived as directly related to leadership, with an understanding that new teachers, no matter how well prepared, need time to learn the context-based knowledges and skills required to begin teaching in challenging schools. While there was little disagreement as to the importance of having a mentor, several of those interviewed directly raised the problem of the need to monitor the training and quality of the mentors. It was acknowledged that simply being assigned a mentor was not enough for many beginning teachers as these mentors themselves might sometimes be demoralised, 'burnt-out', or not possessing the requisite skill needed to effectively operate in a challenging school setting. One participant suggested the mentor system "didn't quite work out for me, I had a mentor who ended up changing jobs mid-Term Two so I kind of lost that mentor because of that – but I know that other people developed a really close relationship with their mentor so they were going into a classroom every week for a day, if not more days". Similarly, another participant stressed that "when you come into a community and it's new to you, it's crucial that your induction is done well. That the ongoing support is there. That you have mentors, you have coaches". The notion of coaching appears to be used interchangeably with mentoring as there are "coaches for young staff, behaviour coaches, pedagogy coaches, upskilling leaders, psychologists be sent out regularly to attend to the emotional and mental wellbeing of the staff". Interestingly, there was in some cases a suggestion mentoring and coaching needed to go beyond the school walls and that some form of 'community of practice' served as a means of bringing 'isolated' teachers together:

- "If you bring people together, there's less isolation, which means a higher likelihood you're going to have people who are wanting to go and work in those schools. Because it's not as isolated as you would have thought".

6 Implications and Key Findings

6.1 KEY FINDINGS IN RELATION TO THE THREE KEY RESEARCH QUESTIONS

How have Australian workforce initiatives over the past 20 years sought to recruit, prepare, and retain teachers within historically hard-to-staff schools/areas?

It is clear from an analysis of both Phase One and Phase Two datasets that while specific strategies of how to recruit, prepare, and retain teachers vary between initiatives, there are the following commonalities and overlapping approaches:

- Most programs (107 of 147 audited) were administered by either Government (48), Universities (43) or collaborations between both Government and University (16).
- While there was a combination of Government initiatives across federal, state and territory sectors, most university-based programs involved non-G8 institutions.
- The focus of most programs (86) targeted pre-service teachers with either a regional, remote, or Indigenous focus.
- Many initiatives targeted mechanisms that incentivised teachers to move into, or stay within a hard-to-staff school location. These included rural/remote schools, low socioeconomic schools, the early childhood sector, and schools offering specific subject areas such as science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM).
- A smaller number of programs targeted mechanisms that incentivised distinct types of teachers to enter the teaching profession such as pre-service teachers/teachers who are Indigenous or who are from specific locations, teachers in specific subject areas and future school leaders.
- While approximately one third of all programs relied solely on financial incentives (48), many programs used a combination of enticements such as financial, professional, enhanced career trajectories and superior working conditions in the form of salary loadings, subsidised housing, or extra leave loadings.

What impact have these initiatives had on teaching and how have school leaders perceived their impact?

Many of the hard-to-staff initiatives analysed lacked any formal evaluation. Of the 147 programs audited as part of Phase One, only 15 were identified as having been substantially

evaluated. Hence it is difficult to draw firm conclusions from this first data set in relation to impact. The project was however able to utilise Phase Two to better understand impact across the areas of Program design and organisation, Preparation (i.e., Initial Teacher Education), Recruitment and Induction, Retention and Attrition, and Leadership.

- Impact of initiatives on teaching may be strengthened through centralised policy that aligns with specific hard-to-staff school contexts.
- Impact of individual initiatives on teaching is heavily influenced by the degree to which sustainable resourcing is available.
- School leaders raised the notion of stress points where a particular local issue or policy impacts on other untended areas of the hard-to-staff school setting. An example given being the ‘transfer’ or ‘points system’ in remote locations which leads each year to large numbers of experienced staff being transferred back to urban settings and these staff being replaced largely by inexperienced graduate teachers.

What policy lessons can be taken from these initiatives?

Those interviewed requested a desire for more sustainable resourcing and for more long-term support for successful programs. The interviews highlight that while different hard-to-staff locations present completely different sets of complexities, school leaders across different locations are often required to respond to centralised policy directives with little regard to localised context. Key policy issues raised by both leaders and teachers include:

- The need for targeted policy that overtly supports the recruitment process through promoting the benefits of teaching in hard-to-staff locations.
- Policies that ensure teachers’/leaders’ wellbeing and working conditions are supported in different ways depending on the context of the school.
- The need for centralised policies and procedures to embrace innovative approaches in terms of recruiting or retaining key staff, particularly convert high performing teachers from contracts to full time appointments.
- A strong preference amongst school leaders for a degree of school autonomy in terms of hiring.
- Recognition that changes in government and subsequent jurisdictional changes in policy, at times make it hard for school leaders to maintain momentum, consistency, and fidelity of specific strategies.

- Wellbeing and working conditions of all school staff as a core policy issue of major significance.
- Further research holds the potential to continue to inform policy of productive means of recruitment, retention, and attrition.

6.2 GENERAL IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY

1. Robust evidence-based evaluations of existing programs may assist in better determining the effectiveness of individual initiatives and allow for the sharing of successful approaches of attracting, preparing, and retaining teachers in hard-to-staff schools.

The first phase (*Audit*) of the project examined existing evaluations and reports across a range of initiatives specifically focusing on teacher workforce shortages within hard-to-staff school contexts. This phase of the project found there were limited formal evaluations and in cases where there had been an appraisal, evidence for the effectiveness of the various approaches undertaken was generally weak and often relied on anecdotal, and or informal data.

2. Robust evidence-based understandings of teacher attrition and its impact in different geographic and socioeconomic locations may provide a more comprehensive appreciation of why so many teachers leave the profession prematurely.

A common theme across the second phase (*Interviews*) was the reality that many teachers choose to either leave the hard-to-staff setting and return to ‘easier’ urban or independent schools at the first opportunity, or choose to leave the profession all together. While the interviews provide a wide range of anecdotal accounts as to why this occurs, the exact numbers and reasons for why teachers leave the profession are difficult to determine within the Australian context. This issue is exacerbated by a lack of national data collection on teacher attrition.

3. Understanding the retention of teachers at key ‘walking point’ moments would assist policymakers in designing longer-term, more impactful interventions to attract teachers towards hard-to-staff schools (especially when they are considering leaving the profession).

This point overlaps with the implication outlined above and suggests the benefits of a stronger evidence-based understanding of these ‘walking points’ and a more fine-grained understanding of just-in-time solutions.

4. While the area of financial incentives and bursaries is commonly used as a means of recruiting and retaining teachers in hard-to-staff schools, the underlying dynamics of using this form of compensatory enticement are complex and at times poorly understood.

Despite research on the success of financial incentives or bursaries being relatively weak, there was almost universal acceptance (particularly across at the remote schooling sector), that some kind of financial enticement is required to attract and retain suitable staff. The range, shape, and form these financial incentives takes varies (i.e., sign-on bonuses, salary loadings or subsidised housing) while also differing across states and jurisdictions in terms of implementation.

- The success of financial incentives appears stronger in terms of recruitment compared to retention.
- What is often missing in the discussion is the fact that if financial incentives are to be offered, especially in areas such as mathematics and science, there is a need for these incentives to be large enough to compete with the salaries from rivalling professions.
- It was suggested that some incentives such as rental assistance and cost of living loadings may potentially encourage relocation into hard-to-staff schools (i.e., for existing teachers).

5: The importance of non-financial incentives as a means of complementing established compensatory models.

The interviews unambiguously highlight how teachers feel rewarded when their knowledge and expertise is valued with some interviewed suggesting that intrinsic (non-financial) incentives are an important aspect in retaining staff. Examples include, time-release for professional development, the opportunity for further study, time release for additional curriculum development, being treated like an esteemed colleague and a member of the local community are all valued by teachers and serve as evidence of a supportive school culture.

6. The importance of continued support of existing successful initiatives

It was suggested that the sector suffers from a cycle of new initiatives often using similar concepts or models used in the past. Several leaders argued for continued support for ongoing initiatives, rather than recreating approaches already trialled before an existing program has a chance to develop or to be evaluated for impact.

6.3 IMPLICATIONS FOR LEADERSHIP

1. Teacher and school leadership ‘burn-out’ are increasingly seen as major factors leading to many teachers/leaders leaving the profession prematurely.

The report documents how additional resources enhance hard-to-staff school leaders’ capacity to:

- improve school culture (a major factor in teacher attrition),
- ease the challenging working conditions and workloads of teachers, such as providing reduced load/timetables for teachers in hard-to-staff schools,
- provide more administrative staff so teachers’ work can be ‘quarantined’ for teaching.

2. Multi-faceted benefits flow from increased opportunities for school leaders and university Initial Teacher Education (ITE) programs to work more collaboratively.

The project documents several examples where strong partnerships between hard-to-staff schools and individual Initial Teacher Education programs produced long lasting and tangible impact via:

- co-designed mentorship for early career teachers,
- experiential on-the-ground professional learning opportunities for preservice-teachers,
- targeted employment opportunities for graduate teachers.

3. Teacher recruitment, preparation and retention are all enhanced when the central role of both ‘context’ and ‘place’ are part of pre-and in-service teacher development.

Several interviews conducted in the project explicitly note the degree to which both Initial Teacher Education and school leaders of hard-to-staff schools develop teachers in ways that

- focus on the geo-social particularities of their schools, e.g., metropolitan, regional and remote,
- focus on the multidimensional nature of poverty and disadvantage to avoid deficit, stereotype and generalisations about students and their families,
- focus on diversity, such as including Indigenous education and cultural diversity,
- focus on additional high-needs areas such as contemporary classroom management strategies (i.e., restorative justice), trauma-informed learning and teacher/student mental health and wellbeing.

4. The crucial role leaders and mentors play in supporting teachers' feelings of belonging to a school-based community of practice and feeling professionally and personally supported.

The interviews included numerous anecdotes of the importance to teachers of belonging to a personal and professional community of practice and how this contributed to the degree teachers felt supported at critical times. For teachers in these hard-to-staff settings, there appears to be a clear correlation between job satisfaction and feelings of agency within their own classrooms, in school-based decision making and feeling connected to other education/teacher professional networks. Feeling connected significantly increases teachers' sense of well-being and likelihood of either accepting or continuing a position within a hard-to-staff school. Benefits include:

- teachers' sense of well-being, including their sense of being valued by the school,
- teachers' professional knowledge, and hence their confidence, enhanced by being part of professional networks,
- at least partly overcoming the isolation of teaching in remote and or regional settings,
- improved career prospects for school leaders and teachers who experience expeditious career trajectories and promotion.

5. While mentoring is perceived as key in supporting teachers in hard-to-staff schools, the consistency and quality of mentoring varies.

The research unearthed a degree of tension created by repeat cycles of large numbers of inexperienced teachers arriving at the start of each school year. A number of those interviewed noted, not only the high demand for mentors required to support these new teachers, but also the varied quality of mentoring available in some settings. School leaders would benefit therefore by:

- some form of additional professional development in terms of the selection, training, and support of mentors,
- mechanisms that empower or reward quality mentors through acknowledging the workload implications of the role.

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