OECD Initial Teacher Preparation Study

Promising Practices

Attracting Teachers to Schools in Rural and Remote Areas in Australia

OECD

This case study describes a "promising practice" drawn from an OECD review of initial teacher preparation in Australia from 22-26 May 2017.

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Promising Practice 1.
Attracting Teachers to Schools in Rural and Remote Areas in Australia

Context

Region-related disparities are among the main factors that explain differences in access and equity in education (Lee, 2002[1]). Schools in remote and rural areas often have difficulty in recruiting and retaining staff with certain qualifications and experience, and preparing them to address the educational complexity in these areas, such as multi-grade settings and specific student groups (OECD, 2018[2]). The challenge of attracting teachers with experience is particularly severe in Australia, where the proportion of secondary teachers with five years or less of teaching experience in areas of 15 000 people or fewer is the second highest among countries participating in TALIS – 26% compared to an average of 18%. (OECD, 2014[3]). In the Australian context, as distance from metropolitan centres increased, student performance as measured by PISA decreased, with students from metropolitan schools achieving significantly higher than those from provincial or remote schools (Thomson, De Bortoli and Underwood, 2016[4]). Importantly, the terms rural and remote need to be understood as they relate to a specific context. For example, rural areas close to cities and remote rural areas can show different trends in the share of population, and very particular ways of capitalising on natural environments and strategic economic sectors (OECD, 2017[5]).

The Australian Statistical Geography Standard (ASGS) remoteness indicator is a measure used by the Australian Bureau of Statistics to divide Australia into broad geographic regions that share common characteristics of remoteness: *metropolitan* refers to mainland state capital city and city-based areas; *provincial* refers to central and regional areas; *remote* and *very remote* refer to isolated and highly remote areas (Figure 1). Schools are ranked by their degree of remoteness, and states and territories may use different systems of categorisation, which are often linked to career and compensation structures. The states of Victoria and the Australian Capital Territory do not have any schools classified as "very remote", while Tasmania and the Northern Territory do not have any schools located in "major cities" (Table 1).

Table 1. Geographical distribution of students in Australia (2017)

Number of full-time enrolments in Australia, by Australian Statistical Geography Standard (ASGS)
remoteness classification and state/territory

ASGS Remoteness Classification	New South Wales	Victoria	Queensland	South Australia	Western Australia	Tasmania	Northern Territory	Australia Capital Territory
Total area (km²)	*809 444*	*237 629*	*1.85 million*	*984 377*	*2.65 million*	*68 401*	*1.42 million*	*2 358*
A: major city	908 109	726 698	509 951	197 270	317 203	0	0	69 034
B: inner regional	237 051	189 126	159 969	30 363	40 141	58 519	0	234
C: outer regional	58 248	36 651	120 314	29 098	31 356	21 330	23 762	0
D: remote	3 728	588	9 757	6 890	16 768	701	8 346	0
E: very remote	1 335	0	8 415	2 008	7 236	259	9 415	0
Total	**1 208 470**	**953 063**	**808 406**	**265 629**	**412 705**	**80 809**	**41 522**	**69 268**

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics (2018[6]), *Statistical Bulletin 4221.0 - Schools, Australia, 2017*, ABS, Canberra, http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/4221.0.

In Australia, the recent Independent Review into Rural, Regional and Remote Education confirmed that "…notwithstanding the efforts of governments, attracting and retaining the best teachers for regional, rural and remote schools continues to be one of the most persistent challenges on the 'education agenda'…" (Halsey, 2018, p. 17[7]). According to the findings of the Staff in Australia's Schools 2013 survey (McKenzie et al., 2014[8]), early career teachers make up 22% of the primary and 18% of the secondary teacher workforce, but 45% and 30% of those in remote schools, respectively. In addition, primary teachers in remote schools are six years younger, on average, than in metropolitan, and secondary teachers in remote schools are three years younger than metropolitan teachers, on average. Furthermore, on average, teachers working in remote schools have about three to five years fewer experience than teachers in metropolitan and provincial schools. Data from the Longitudinal Teacher Education and Workforce Study conducted in 2012-13 show that principals in metropolitan schools in Australia reported the least difficulty retaining graduates, while those in remote locations had the most difficulty retaining them, with the exception of the Northern Territory (Deakin University, 2014[9]).

Despite the urgent need of a national focus for rural, regional and remote education, training and research (Halsey, 2018[7]), there are several noteworthy and longstanding initiatives in different states and territories to attract teachers to schools in these areas that illustrate good practice. This case study will focus on only three initiatives to attract and retain teachers – in terms of both quantity and quality – to schools in these areas in the three states and territories in Australia with the highest proportion of very remote schools: the Northern Territory, Queensland and Western Australia.

Figure 1. Map of the 2016 Remoteness Areas for Australia
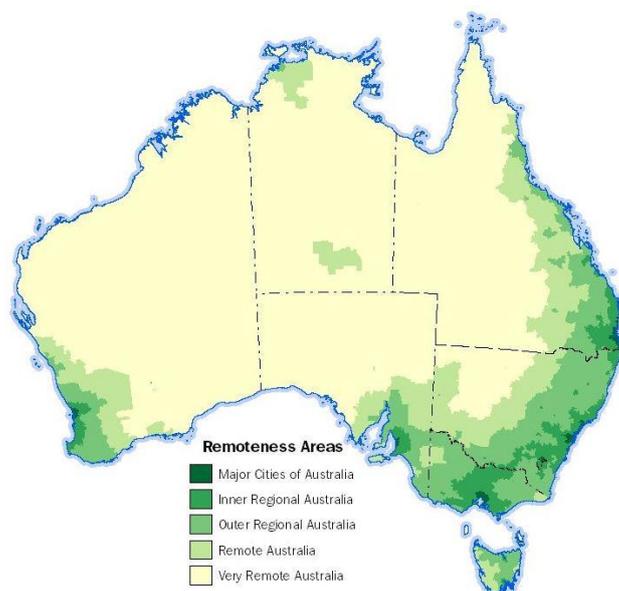
Source: Commonwealth of Australia (2018[10]), *2016 Australian Statistical Geography Standard: Remoteness Structure*, Australian Bureau of Statistics, Canberra.

What special incentives are offered to teachers to work in remote areas?

Northern Territory

In the Northern Territory – which has a population of 246 100 (2017) and area of 1.42 million km^2 – recruitment of new teachers is the shared responsibility of schools and the Northern Territory Department of Education – and a number of initiatives have been initiated by the government and schools to attract teachers to remote schools (Northern Territory Government, 2018[11]). Approaches include:

- *Collaborating with universities outside* the Northern Territory to offer practicum places to students from other states that have an interest in remote schools and teaching indigenous students.
- *Providing opportunities for school leaders and experienced teachers* in remote schools to participate in roadshows and other events aimed at recruiting teachers across Australia.
- *Offering financial and other incentives to teach in remote schools*. For example:
  - furnished housing, and subsidised or free electricity
  - relocation allowances
  - free airfares out of isolated locations
  - increased pay through incentive allowances, and salary progression
  - extra business days to access services not available in remote locations.
- *Providing professional development opportunities through study-leave incentives and online courses.* A range of online courses are available, which can be included as evidence in a teacher's portfolio to support their progression to "proficient" and "highly accomplished" and "lead" teacher status, according to the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers. In addition, teachers in remote schools are able to accumulate points for paid study leave on full or half pay.

Queensland

The state of Queensland – which has a population of 4.69 million (2013) and area of 1.85 million km^2 – offers a similar range of benefits, with a very clear structure for incentives, based on the remoteness of the school: subsidised relocation, housing, salary supplements, special leave and induction support (Queensland Government, 2017[12]) (Table 2).

Table 2. Incentives in Queensland based on the remoteness of the school

Transfer rating	Compensation benefit (AUD)	Dependent benefit (AUD)			Incentive benefit (AUD)	Annual financial benefit (AUD)	
		Adult	Child or student	Child		Taking the family	Going solo
4	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	2 400	2 400	2 400
5	1 200	1 200	900	600	3 600	7 200	4 800
6	2 100	2 100	1 575	1 050	4 800	11 625	6 900
7C	3 000	3 000	2 250	1 500	6 000	15 750	9 000
7B	4 800	4 800	3 600	2 400	6 000	21 600	10 800
7A	6 000	6 000	4 500	3 000	6 000	25 500	12 000

Note: Transfer rating refers to the remoteness measure, and Compensation Benefit refers to covering the cost of travel to and from the remote location.
Source: Queensland Government (2017[13]), *Choose Your Teaching Adventure in Rural or Remote Queensland*, https://teach.qld.gov.au/teachingwithus/Documents/PDF/remote-teaching-booklet.pdf.

Beyond the need to attract more teachers to remote and rural schools, the regional government is also concerned about increasing the quality of teachers recruited to remote areas. The state of Queensland runs two schemes targeted at high achieving teacher candidates in the final year of their initial teacher education programme:

- *Rural and Remote – Graduate Teacher Scholarship*. This provides a one-off payment of AUD 15 000 and an offer of permanent employment to 40 high-achieving primary or secondary pre-service teachers, committing to teaching in remote areas.
- *Rural and Remote – STEM Graduate Teacher Scholarship*. Similar scholarships but offered to 32 high achieving pre-service teachers with a science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM) specialisation.

Western Australia

The Rural and Remote Training Schools project (RRTS) was launched in 2011 in the state of Western Australia. The state has a population of 2.59 million (2013) and area of 2.65 million km^2. The aim of the project is to promote the experience of teaching in remote and rural schools in the state and to provide supported placements to teacher candidates wishing to undertake their professional experience in a rural or remote school. In the longer term, the project seeks to strengthen the link between the long-term practicum experience and a potential employment outcome following completion of the initial teacher education (ITE) programme (Western Australia Department of Education, 2017[14]).

The project assists teacher candidates in arranging accommodation for the length of the practicum, in addition to providing a department stipend, induction programme, field visit, regular communication, debrief programme on return and career pathway support. The

RRTS staff collaborate with the eight regional executive directors and school principals to identify suitable schools; all universities in the state of Western Australia and department staff, who review and respond to strategic directions in teacher education; and the eight regional and other networks (e.g. secondary schools) in the state, which may identify areas of high need, such as physics, mathematics or English.

Since 2011, 400 teacher candidates have completed their professional experience through this programme. In 2010, 11 teacher candidates undertook placement in remote schools, compared to 82 in 2011. Over 90% of teacher graduates participating in the programme and who subsequently completed their ITE programme were employed in rural or remote schools in the state of Western Australia. In one school in the far north of the state, 18% of teaching staff in the school had completed their professional placement at the school. Finally, the project has placed 22 school psychologists on long-term practicum in Western Australia, all of whom have obtained employment following completion of their ITE programme.

Why is it a strength?

The OECD team in its review of Australia from 22-26 May 2017 noted:

- *Addresses the shortages and quality of teachers working in remote and rural schools*. By offering a wide range of significant incentives to teach in these schools, and providing pre- and in-service professional experiences in rural and remote areas, these programmes address some of the key challenges that both experienced and new teachers face when considering teaching in remote and rural schools.
- *Enhances the chances of preservice teachers working in remote and rural schools in the future.* The opportunity for a rural experience, even if it is based on a short period of time, has a positive impact on the way preservice teachers consider future employment in rural and remote areas after completing ITE.

How could it be improved?

The OECD team noted:

- *Online and blended ITE programme delivery to build teacher capacities*. The improvement of the quality and resources of online programmes that are strongly focused on practice is key to overcoming the challenges of distance and remoteness, in particular in areas that currently struggle to attract teachers.
- *Need for a comprehensive, targeted and resourced national campaign to increase the attractiveness of teaching in remote and rural schools, supported by high performing teachers and administrators*. Other initiatives to attract teachers could include offering rural experiences in schools and areas that have a track record of innovation and/or success. Such initiatives should focus on the social and professional rewards of working in remote and rural schools, such as opportunities to expand teaching practices and gain experience working with diverse communities.

For further information

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