

Commonwealth Teaching Scholarship



Teaching is a profession that is essential to our society. We place the care and education of our children in the hands of our nation's teachers. Our children spend a significant part of their childhood in schools. Education for our children is not just about the future productivity of our economy but much more importantly education is about valuing our children and setting them up for their lives ahead.

The Australian Greens are proposing the introduction of a national Commonwealth Teaching Scholarship Program to:

- attract the best and brightest high school students and others who have completed their education into teaching;
- raise the profile of the teaching profession;
- assist in addressing teacher shortages.

BACKGROUND

Teaching should be a profession that is valued highly in our society that is remunerated accordingly and is accorded proper professional status in our community. However, teacher shortages are a significant concern – whether it is within specific subject areas such as mathematics and science; in different sectors, such as male primary school teachers; or hard to staff geographic areas. There are a range of factors causing teacher shortages, including failure to attract students into the profession, inadequate remuneration, lack of recognition and status for the profession and an ageing teacher population. The Greens proposal, in conjunction with our Supporting Teachers policy, will increase the opportunities and appeal to enter the profession as well as restoring the status of teaching in our community and help to retain teachers in the education system.

Teacher shortages – retirement, attraction and retention

Australia is facing a growing teacher crisis with many older teachers coming up for retirement. A 2008 auditors report in NSW found that 50%, or nearly 25,000, teachers will reach retirement age by 2016. The Australian Education Union's 2009 State of Our Schools survey found that 59% of school principals had problems with the supply of teachers and 57% said the problem was getting worse.

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There is an urgent need for a national workforce plan for teachers. Teacher shortages vary from state to state and various state governments have had programs to address shortages over the years. However, a national approach to planning, including a national program of incentives for people to enter the profession, is important.

There are many factors underlying the appeal of the teaching profession to people choosing a career. The remuneration does not match the workload or responsibilities of the job and the profession is not valued in a community as it should be.

Current approaches are not working

A Commonwealth Scholarship program is needed because the current Commonwealth Government approach to increasing the number of quality teachers in our schools is not only inadequate but devalues the profession rather than building it up.

The federal government's current program, Teach for Australia, is not a solution. The trial program in Victoria is costing the federal government \$22 million for 45 teachers. The AEU calculates this is 15 times more than comprehensive teacher training. More disturbingly, Teach for Australia places people in schools as teachers with only 6 weeks of training. The program shows a lack of appreciation for the professional nature of teaching. It is an insult to be placing unqualified teachers into schools of high need rather than assisting teachers to get full qualifications and supporting them in their profession.

THE GREENS PROPOSAL

The Australian Greens propose a Commonwealth Scholarship program to address some of the factors in attracting people into the teaching profession. The scholarship program does not diminish the responsibility of federal and state governments to ensure teachers' pay is significantly increased and that workload issues and class sizes are also be addressed. We also recognise that attraction to the profession is only one half of the problem and that the retention of teachers is also a vital issue to be addressed.

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The Commonwealth Teaching Scholarship Program will:

- provide up to 3000 scholarships a year, divided between states on a per capita basis;
- make scholarships available for up to 5 years to allow flexibility to complete a full teaching degree or specialty degree for graduates;
- be worth \$5000 a year;
- cost an estimated \$17m for the first year and up to \$80m a year on-going;
- provide scholarships which are tax free and exempt from consideration of eligibility for Youth Allowance;
- target high school students as well as mature age students who want a career in teaching, in either primary or secondary school;
- guarantee students in receipt of the scholarships a teaching job in a public school in an area of need – either a subject matter area or geographic area;
- require students to remain in full time permanent employment in a public school for a minimum of three years.

The scholarship process

Students will be required to apply for the scholarships and will include an interview involving representatives from the relevant states and territories. Student would need to be citizens or permanent residents and complete a Working with Children Check.

Role of state governments

State governments will play a key role in identifying the needs of the teaching profession in their state and determining how many and what specific areas their scholarships will be directed. The program will therefore be flexible and responsive to the actual needs of the education system. For example, a state may determine it only has a shortage in maths and science secondary school teachers and so will seek to offer a number of scholarships in that area. Other states may be facing a broader teacher shortage and want to direct teachers from a range of disciplines into regional areas and will direct their scholarships accordingly. The program will complement the NSW Government Teacher Education Scholarship Program, which offers 300 scholarships each year.

Representatives of teachers and principals

Teacher unions and principals' associations will also have a role in the administration of the scholarship program. Their members are at the coal face of our schools and are well-placed to know the needs of schools in respect of teaching staff. These organisations would be involved along with the Commonwealth and State governments in determining the nature and number of scholarships for each state.