



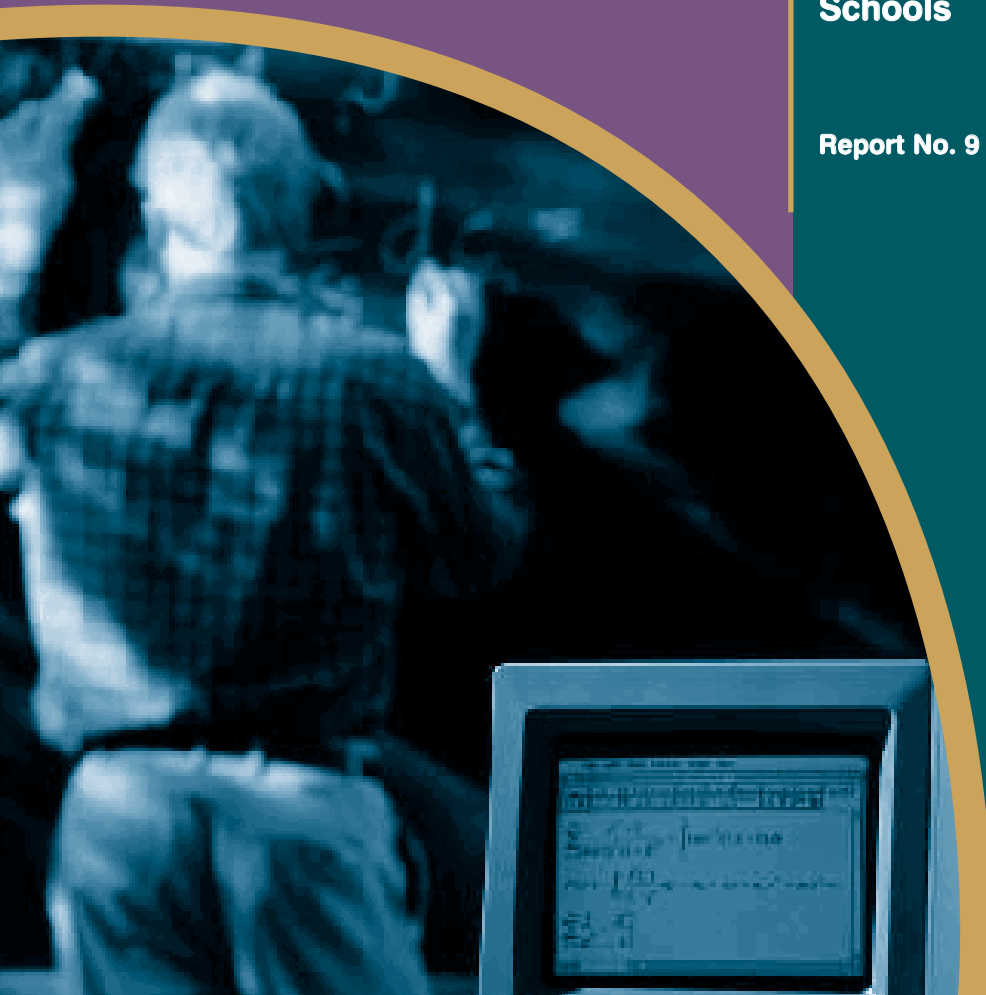
**auditor general**  
western australia

**Performance Examination**

## **A Tough Assignment**

### **Teacher Placements in Government Schools**

**Report No. 9 October 2000**



# A Tough Assignment Teacher Placements in Government Schools

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**THE SPEAKER**  
**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY**

**THE PRESIDENT**  
**LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL**

**PERFORMANCE EXAMINATION: A Tough Assignment: Teacher Placements in Government Schools**

This report has been prepared consequent to an examination conducted under section 80 of the *Financial Administration and Audit Act 1985* for submission to Parliament under the provisions of section 95 of the Act.

Performance examinations are an integral part of my overall Performance Auditing Program and seek to provide Parliament with assessments of the effectiveness and efficiency of public sector programs and activities thereby identifying opportunities for improved performance.

The information provided through this approach will, I am sure, assist Parliament in better evaluating agency performance and enhance Parliamentary decision-making to the benefit of all Western Australians.

D D R PEARSON  
AUDITOR GENERAL  
October 18, 2000

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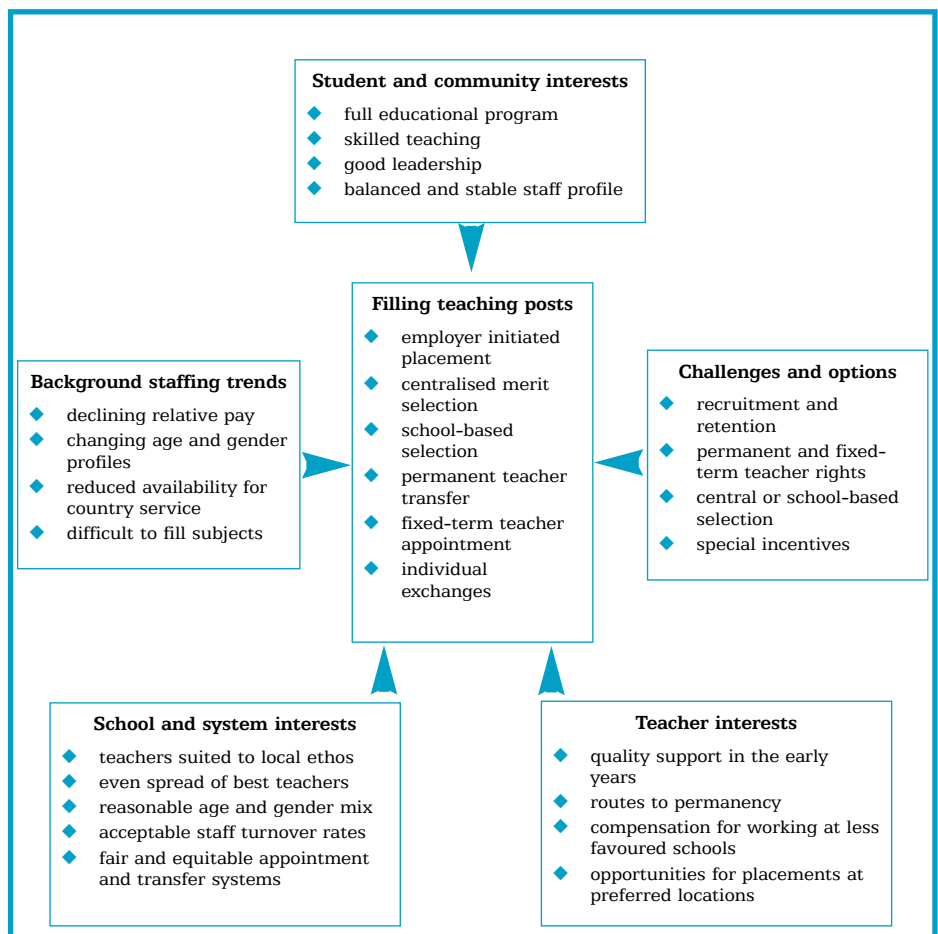


# Executive Summary

## Introduction

About 20 000 teachers, with an annual salary bill of around \$800 million, are employed at over 760 government schools to teach more than 265 000 students. In excess of 5 000 appointments, transfers and promotions of teachers are made each year.

The Education Department of Western Australia (EDWA) has developed a range of staffing policies and practices to address the often conflicting needs of students, teachers, individual schools and the system as a whole.



**Figure 1: Interests, placement methods, trends and challenges in school staffing**

Source: OAG

## Key findings and conclusions

The most important task is to keep all schools fully staffed. The statewide number of vacancies is monitored daily and is generally fewer than ten, indicating that the vast majority of schools have a complete establishment of teaching staff at any given time.

There is no overall numerical shortage of qualified teachers in Western Australia. However, staffing problems occur in some specialised subjects and at schools less favoured by teachers, mainly in rural and remote locations.

The centrally administered placement procedures for classroom teachers (which decide the majority of appointments and transfers) lead to significant differences in staffing profiles. Country districts have higher proportions of younger, fixed-term teachers. The most popular schools, mainly in the city, tend to be staffed by older, permanent teachers and have lower turnover rates.

School administrator positions (Principals, Deputy Principals and Heads of Department) are now competed for on merit rather than filled by a transfer system based on length of service. This has resulted in a higher proportion of posts being won by women.

About 120 schools have been granted rights to select some or all of their teaching staff. Local selection recognises that schools can have special needs, because of the students they serve or programs they offer, that call for careful individual matching of applicants to vacancies.

EDWA has addressed the problem of staffing the least favoured schools by providing financial and career development incentives for over 2 000 teaching posts in about 120 schools. Applications and staff retention rates have increased for Remote Teaching Service positions. It is too early to judge the impact of the Difficult To Staff schools scheme.

An automated system for primary classroom teachers allows thousands of placements to be efficiently decided in the 'bulk run' before the start of a new school year. A similar system is to be introduced for secondary teachers. The main concerns about the vacancy matching systems are that the placement rules are causing congestion and that they impede schools from moving towards a preferred staffing profile.



Continuing challenges and issues in staffing schools include:

- ◆ recruiting and retaining the best teachers;
- ◆ balancing the rights afforded to permanent and fixed-term staff;
- ◆ deciding the balance between school-based selection and centrally administered placements;
- ◆ determining the nature and level of incentives for attracting the right type of staff to less favoured schools;
- ◆ overcoming congestion in the classroom teacher transfer system;
- ◆ considering whether any changes should be introduced to tenure arrangements; and
- ◆ responding to emerging matters such as the expansion of vocational education and the impact of changing the school starting age.

## Recommendations

**EDWA should build on its achievements to date in staffing matters by:**

- ◆ **defining objectives and indicators to measure how the staffing of schools, districts and the whole government schools system is moving compared to preferred directions;**
- ◆ **articulating the objectives of all changes to staffing practices and more rigorously evaluating their outcomes; and**
- ◆ **establishing a structured program of review and action, covering fine-tuning adjustments and more radical options, for staffing policies and procedures.**

# Introduction

## Background

At the start of 2000 the Education Department of Western Australia (EDWA) employed about 20 000 teachers (17 000 full-time equivalents) at 767 schools to educate 266 171 students. School-based teachers account for more than one-sixth of the public sector workforce and incur an annual salaries bill of around \$800 million.

An EDWA principle of schooling is that “*all students, irrespective of their personal circumstances or location, should have comparable opportunities to develop the understandings, skills and attitudes relevant to their individual needs*”.

Experienced teachers are not evenly distributed across the State. Demand for positions at the most favoured metropolitan schools far exceeds supply while many rural and remote schools have difficulties in attracting and retaining staff. Most country schools have a higher proportion of younger, less-experienced teachers working on fixed-term contracts.

The main challenge in staffing government schools is to design placement methods that achieve acceptable compromises between the needs of students, teachers and schools. A decade ago, most movements at all levels were decided centrally on the basis of seniority. The present situation is much more complex and continues to evolve.

## Students, teachers and schools

**Staffing formula** – EDWA uses a formula to set the number of teachers at each government school. The main determinant is the number of enrolled students, with adjustments for factors such as school type, size, location, special teaching programs and socio-economic conditions. Enrolments are revised each semester and the staffing establishment recalculated where enrolment variations are substantial.

**Student to staff ratios** – Overall there are about 16 students per teacher. The student to staff ratio ranges from under five in some education support centres, through about 13 in a typical metropolitan senior high school, to more than 25 in some large primary schools.

**District statistics** – Table 1 summarises by district the number of schools, students and teachers in the first semester of 2000.





District	Students	Schools	Teachers
Perth	31 525	84	2 165
Fremantle	37 988	87	2 375
Cannington	31 971	81	2 033
Joondalup	21 620	42	1 265
Swan	41 869	102	2 661
Peel	21 211	41	1 246
Albany	7 970	28	534
Bunbury	13 095	35	821
Narrogin	5 484	30	419
Warren-Blackwood	7 826	23	530
Esperance	3 739	21	264
Midlands	10 679	63	775
Mid West	9 643	43	703
Goldfields	7 355	33	480
Pilbara	8 770	30	590
Kimberley	9 643	24	470
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>266 171</b>	<b>767</b>	<b>17 330</b>

**Table 1: The number of students, schools and full-time equivalent teachers by education district at government schools in 2000 semester 1.**

Source: EDWA Schools Statistical Reports and PeopleSoft

**Teaching staff levels** – Teaching staff are classified as *school administrators* (16 per cent) employed as Principals, Deputy Principals, Heads of Department and some other posts, and *classroom teachers* (84 per cent).

**Employment status** – About 74 per cent of teachers are *permanent*. In practice, they are allowed to remain indefinitely in their schools although they have no contractual entitlement to the actual position. The remaining 26 per cent are *fixed-term*, mostly employed on contracts of between four weeks and a year. *Relief* teachers provide short-term cover for unplanned absences and are normally organised directly by schools as needs arise.

## Appointments, transfers and promotions

Teachers are appointed, transferred and promoted in several ways.

- ◆ **Employer Initiated Placements** – When permanent positions disappear because of falling enrolments or school reorganisations, the teachers affected become redeployees. As happens throughout the public sector, they have first claim on any vacancies at their level, irrespective of merit or seniority.
- ◆ **Merit selection for school administrators** – School administrator vacancies (unless filled by redeployees) are now competed for on merit. Previously, many school administrator positions were filled by a transfer process based on seniority. Merit selection is administered centrally or through local selection processes, depending on the post.
- ◆ **School-based selection** – Local merit selection rights have been granted to about 120 schools for some or all of their teaching staff. Vacancies are advertised centrally but the remainder of the selection process takes place at school level.
- ◆ **Classroom teacher transfers** – Permanent classroom teachers can remain in post or apply for a transfer for the next school year. Each applicant gives a preference list of schools, opts for full or part-time work and states the areas in which they are qualified and wish to teach. Applicants are given precedence according to the transfer points (varying from 1.0 to 3.5 per year according to the school) they have accumulated during previous service.
- ◆ **Fixed-term classroom teacher appointments** – Teachers seeking new fixed-term contracts are considered after all permanent classroom teacher placements have been made. If the posts they seek have not already been assigned, incumbent fixed-term teachers are reappointed if they wish to stay and have the support of the Principal. New graduates or re-entrants, unless involved in special initiatives, are the last group to be considered for any remaining vacancies.
- ◆ **Individual exchanges** – Direct exchanges can be arranged with the joint consent of the teachers, principals and district directors involved. Few placements are made by this method.



## Trends in education and staffing

The staffing of government schools is taking place against a background of State, national and international general trends.

- ◆ **Enrolments** – The school population continues to rise but an increasing proportion is being educated privately. In the first semester of 2000, government schools enrolled 75 per cent of primary pupils and 66 per cent of secondary students.
- ◆ **Relative earnings** – The pay of teachers has decreased from 147 per cent of average income in 1974 to 113 per cent in 1997. Better paid alternative career opportunities contribute to the shortages of teachers in some subjects.
- ◆ **Feminisation of the workforce** – Women accounted for 59 per cent of the teacher workforce in 1987 and 70 per cent in 2000. Female teachers are, in general, less mobile and more likely to take extended leave or prefer part-time work.
- ◆ **Ageing of the workforce** – The average age of teachers has risen from 37 in 1990 to 42 in 2000. Average age will continue to increase for some years followed by a peak of retirements as many teachers reach the end of their careers.
- ◆ **Reduced mobility** – The proportion of new graduates making themselves available for appointments anywhere in the State fell from 79 per cent in 1992 to 22 per cent in 1999. There has been an increase in the number of mature female graduates who are part of a two income family with restricted mobility outside the metropolitan area.
- ◆ **Subject staffing difficulties** – There is no overall shortage of qualified teachers in Western Australia. However, for a number of subjects there are insufficient teachers with the necessary qualifications and mobility to meet the demand.

## Examination themes and report structure

The remainder of the report is divided into three chapters addressing the themes of the examination.

- 1 **Staffing profiles** – Important staffing factors include the capability to teach a full educational program, stable leadership, reasonable mixes of gender and age, and turnover rates that are neither too high nor too low. This chapter presents examples of differences in school and district staffing, and recommends that profiles and turnover should be more closely monitored to inform developments in policy and practice.

- 2 Impact of changes to staffing practices** – Changes to staffing practices have been introduced for various reasons, such as responding to the Equal Opportunity Tribunal, attracting staff to less-favoured schools or improving the efficiency of placement processes. This chapter reviews the impacts of some major changes and recommends that EDWA should take a more rigorous attitude towards evaluation.
- 3 Challenges and options** – Staffing policies and practices need to evolve as circumstances change. This chapter outlines a number of major challenges and some of the options for handling staffing issues, and recommends a structured program of review and action.



## Staffing Profiles

- ◆ *Most government schools are fully staffed at all times. The vacancy rate for school-based teachers is normally less than one in a thousand.*
- ◆ *Shortages of teachers in some subjects and the need to use generalist staff for specialist teaching compromise some educational services.*
- ◆ *There are wide variations in staffing profiles (such as gender and age mix) and turnover rates at schools of the same type.*
- ◆ *Public sector recruitment standards and centralised systems for placing staff impede schools from moving towards more desirable staff profiles.*

For a school to be well-staffed, there are many factors other than simply filling the number of allotted posts. This chapter describes variations in staffing profiles across the government schools system and the obstacles to achieving more balanced staff mixes. It is recommended that EDWA develops indicators to measure whether staffing at schools is moving in the desired directions.

## Overall vacancy levels

Teaching staff vacancies are closely monitored and filled as soon as possible. The typical level of between five and ten unfilled posts on any day is very low in relation to the total numbers of teachers and schools. An unusually high number of vacancies in early 1999 was largely due to a one-off reduction in the supply of new Bachelor of Education graduates following the change by the universities from a three year to a four year course.

## Delivering educational programs

An EDWA internal document acknowledges difficulties at some schools in finding suitably qualified teachers to deliver the desired range of subjects, reporting that *“there is evidence that the lack of specialist teachers in some areas led to Principals abandoning some programs and structuring their delivery to accommodate the restricted supply”* and *“there is also indisputable evidence that quality was compromised in finding teachers willing to fill some of these vacancies. Generalist teachers are employed in some specialist areas.”*

For subjects such as mathematics, design and technology, some languages other than English and the growing demand for vocational training, the problems of attracting teachers to less favoured schools are aggravated by a statewide shortage of teachers with the appropriate qualifications and mobility.

## Gender and age mix

Schools benefit from a balance in the gender and age mix of their teaching staff for educational, social and pastoral care reasons. However, the potential to move a school towards a preferred staffing profile is impeded by equal opportunities legislation and public sector recruitment standards.

### Gender mix

In 2000 women accounted for 70 per cent of the teaching workforce, 75 per cent of primary teachers and 85 per cent of staff at education support centres.

Secondary schools have a more even balance, with slightly more males overall. In many secondary schools 60 per cent or more of the teaching staff are male.

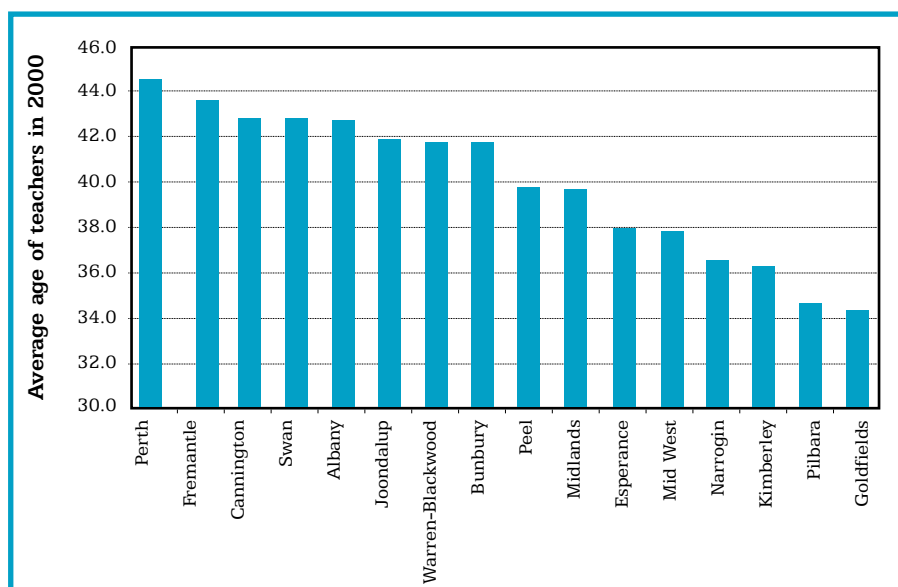
Further striking differences in gender distribution include:

- ◆ some schools with as many as 15 staff have no male teachers;
- ◆ 80 per cent of teachers below the age of 30 and 81 per cent of fixed-term teachers are female; and
- ◆ the split for school administrators is 29 per cent female and 71 per cent male.

### Age mix

The age profile of teaching staff is changing. The average age of teachers has increased from 37 years in 1990 to 42 in 2000. Because of the low retirement rate and greater age of new entrants, the average age is expected to rise for some years before falling as a consequence of an increased retirement rate.

There is a tendency for teachers to work in the country during the early stages of their careers. Figure 2 shows the average ages by education district. In the Goldfields, 42 per cent of all teaching staff are less than 30 years old compared to only 7 per cent in Perth. At the start of 2000, the average age of teachers in medium to large schools or colleges (with at least 20 staff) ranged from 30 to 49 years.



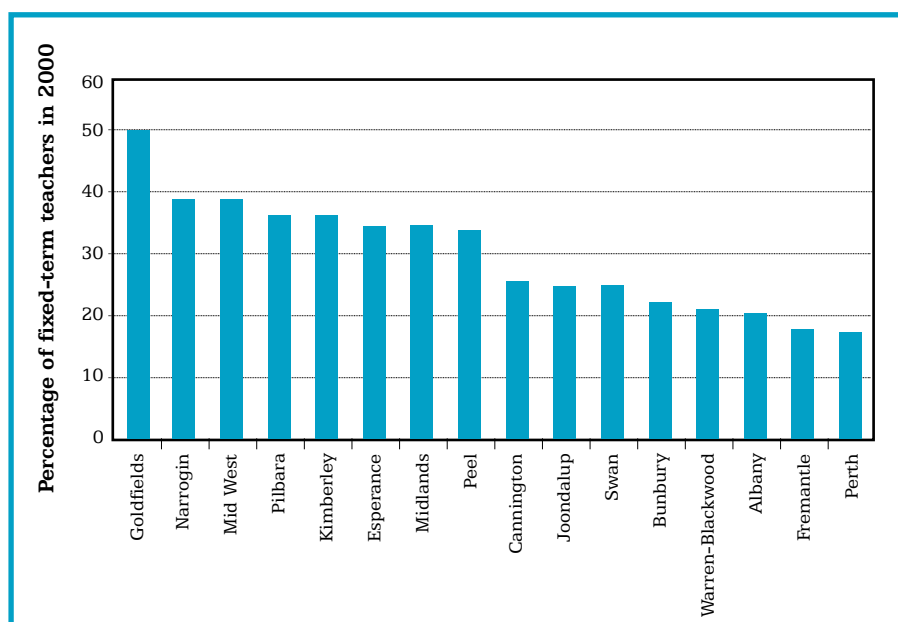
**Figure 2: Average age of teachers by education district in 2000.**

Average teacher age ranges from below 35 years in the Goldfields and Pilbara districts to over 44 years in Perth.

Source: OAG analysis of EDWA PeopleSoft data

## Fixed-term and permanent teachers

Many schools, generally in less popular country locations, have a high proportion of relatively inexperienced fixed-term teachers. Figure 3 shows the greater reliance of most country education districts on fixed-term teachers.



**Figure 3: Percentage of fixed-term teachers by education district in 2000.**

Half of the teachers in the Goldfields are fixed-term compared to less than 20 per cent in Fremantle and Perth.

Source: OAG analysis of EDWA PeopleSoft data

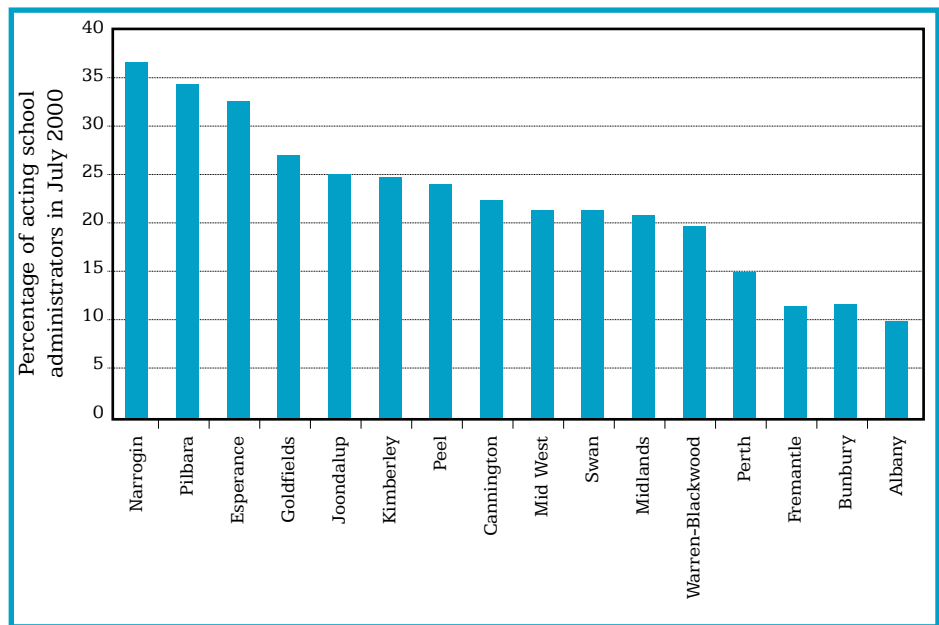
Examples of extremes in the permanent and fixed-term mix in April 2000 include a metropolitan primary school with 24 staff, all permanent, and a country district high school with 16 fixed-term teachers in a staff of 22.

## Acting school administrators

School administrators provide general and educational leadership. The performance of a school may be adversely affected if too many senior positions are occupied by staff in acting roles.

There will always be a need for some acting administrator appointments. In 2000, about 400 administrators are taking periods of extended leave that need to be temporarily covered. Acting opportunities assist personal development and EDWA operates a scheme for teachers aspiring to leadership positions where staff can join a pool seeking temporary placements.

Districts vary widely in the proportion of administrator positions filled by acting staff (Figure 4). Women accounted for over 50 per cent of acting school administrators in July 2000 although they held a lower share of substantive posts.



**Figure 4: School administrator posts held by acting staff in July 2000.**

*Over 30 per cent of administrators in the Narrogin, Pilbara and Esperance districts were acting rather than substantive.*

Source: OAG analysis of EDWA PeopleSoft data





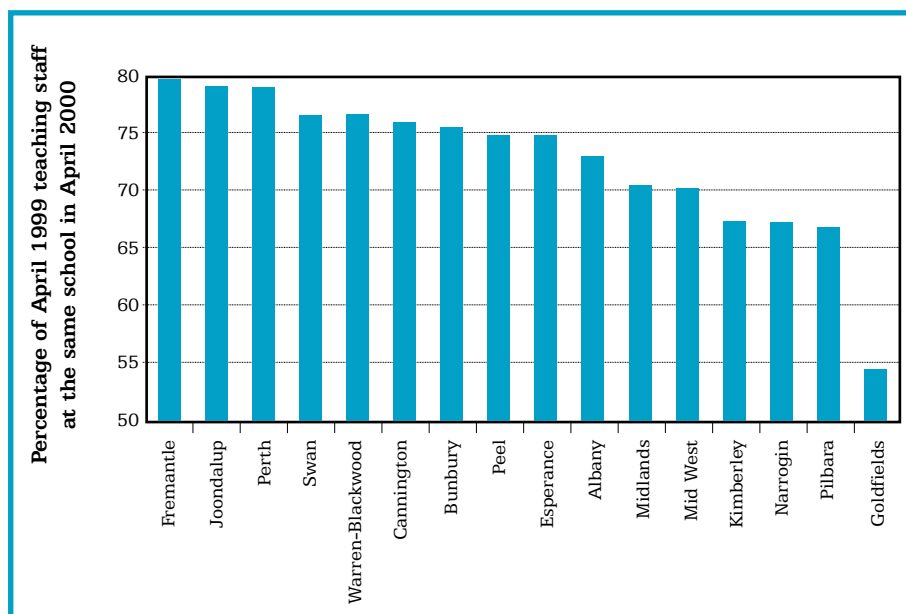
## Staff turnover

Excessively high or low rates of staff turnover can inhibit the smooth functioning of a school. High turnover may cause problems in performing as a team and establishing good relationships with the local community. Low staff turnover may lead to stagnation and lack of innovation.

In April 2000, 14 824 teaching staff (75 per cent of the head count) were attached to the schools where they had been a year earlier and there were 4 828 new placements (25 per cent). At 44 schools, mainly in the country, at least half of the staff were new while 54 schools retained more than 90 per cent of their 1999 staff.

For fixed-term teachers with positions in April 1999, 60 per cent were at the same school a year later compared with a retention rate of 84 per cent for permanent teachers.

The lowest retention rate from 1999 to 2000 was in the Goldfields where 54% of the teaching staff stayed at the same school. The highest retention rates occurred in the Fremantle, Perth and Joondalup districts (Figure 5).



**Figure 5: Proportion of April 1999 teaching staff remaining at the same school in April 2000 by education district.**

*Retention rates by district for teaching staff remaining at the same school varied from 80 per cent in Fremantle to 54 per cent in the Goldfields.*

Source: OAG analysis of PeopleSoft data

## Relief teaching

Relief teachers are normally arranged directly by schools to cover for short periods of unplanned absence, most commonly sick leave. To overcome the shortage of relief teachers in some remote locations, EDWA operates a special team, employed on permanent terms, whose members are sent when no local relief teacher is available.

In 1999, there were 136 000 days of relief teaching in government schools, equivalent to more than 650 full-time teachers. Relief days to cover sick leave averaged four days per teacher across the six metropolitan districts compared with two days for the Esperance, Pilbara, Kimberley, Mid-West and Goldfields districts.

Relief teachers are a small but vital part of staffing profiles. They are the means by which EDWA fulfils its duty of care when regular teachers are away. However, relief teaching is generally a short-notice, short-term arrangement that interrupts planned courses of lessons and unusually high levels are undesirable.

## Monitoring and modifying staff profiles

EDWA's main priorities and achievements in staffing schools in recent years have been:

- ◆ developing an equitable staffing formula that now applies to all schools;
- ◆ ensuring that vacancy levels are held at a minimum; and
- ◆ implementing appointment and transfer systems that are operationally efficient, educationally effective and compliant with legislation and policy.

To date, EDWA has not systematically monitored the ability to deliver educational programs, teaching staff profiles, turnover rates, numbers of acting school administrators and other staffing factors. The lack of monitoring was a consequence of inadequate human resources information systems rather than a lack of perception as to the need.

Recognition that some schools may not be best-served by centralised staff allocation is seen in the rationales for granting school-based selection rights, for example:

- ◆ *"the special circumstances pertaining require staff who are prepared to undertake the pastoral care and support roles necessary";*
- ◆ *"school undergoing significant changes in climate and culture . . . would like option of selecting staff to match school's direction";*



- ◆ *"unique in its student problems and program delivery for post compulsory students . . . requires a specific staffing profile"; and*
- ◆ *"set up differently from a traditional district high school . . . need staff empathetic to our developing modes of curriculum development and pedagogy".*

With the advent of improved information systems, the success in keeping the number of unfilled vacancies at low levels and the greater responsibilities now devolved to schools, it is now timely for EDWA to define objectives and monitor key indicators of school staffing, and to use the measures to inform the development of staffing practices.

## Recommendation

**EDWA should define objectives and indicators to measure how the staffing of schools, districts and the whole government schools system is moving compared to preferred directions.**

# Changes to Staffing Practices and their Impacts

- ◆ *Merit selection has resulted in a higher proportion of school administrator positions being awarded to women.*
- ◆ *Applications and retention rates have increased at Remote Teaching Service schools. It is too soon to judge the impact of the Difficult To Staff schools scheme.*
- ◆ *School-based selection of staff is strongly supported by participating Principals. A large proportion of successful applicants are already employed at the school.*
- ◆ *Automation of the system for placing primary school classroom teachers has improved administrative efficiency and will be extended to secondary school teachers.*
- ◆ *All changes in staffing policies and practices should be carefully evaluated to determine how well they have achieved their aims and to identify any adverse side-effects.*

EDWA has made many changes to staffing practices in recent years in response to external requirements, internal needs and a desire for more efficient processes. The most significant are centrally administered merit selection for school administrator positions, improved incentives for working at country schools, the rights granted to some schools to select their own teaching staff and the automation of the appointment and transfer system for classroom teachers. This chapter summarises the major changes and assesses their impacts.

## Merit selection for school administrators

Before 1998 the majority of vacancies for Principals, Deputy Principals and Heads of Department were filled using a transfer system based on seniority with no assessment of merit.

In 1997 the Equal Opportunity Tribunal ruled that the transfer system indirectly discriminated against women because they tended to be less mobile and were more likely to take career breaks. EDWA was ordered to abandon the transfer system for school administrator positions and introduce merit selection from the beginning of 1998.

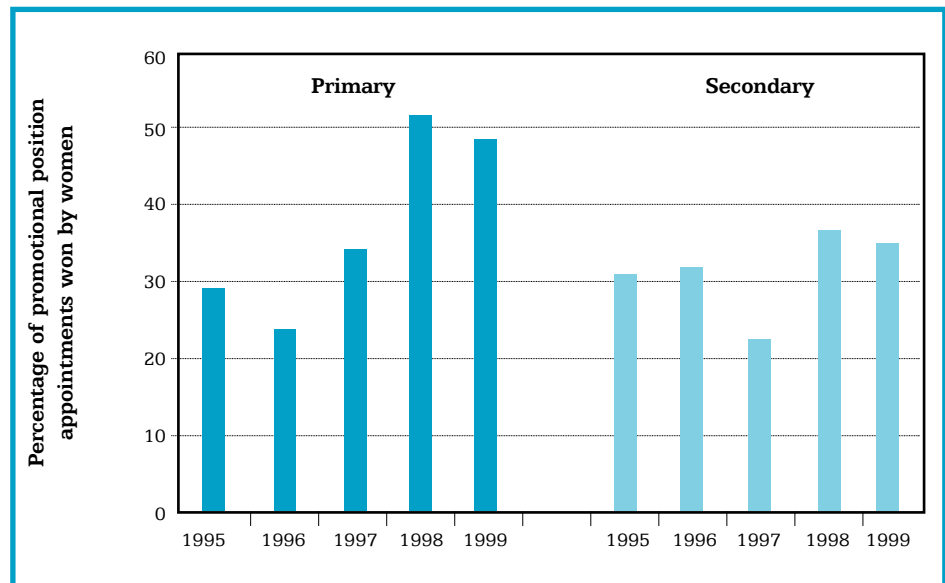
All qualified teachers, including those with fixed-term status and without the four-year training now necessary to enter the profession, now have equal rights to apply for any school administrator post.



**Changes to Staffing Practices and their Impacts**

Selection of most administrators is administered centrally. There are normally four rounds each year, each assessing pools of applicants competing for batches of vacancies. A two-stage selection process is used for Principals because of the importance of matching a candidate to an individual school. A standing panel determines a shortlist, followed by school-based interviews for each position. For other school administrator vacancies a single generic assessment of merit is made, after which the top-ranked candidate is appointed to his or her first choice, and so on for the remaining candidates and vacancies.

Merit selection has led to women winning an increased share of school administrator positions in 1998 and 1999 compared to the preceding transfer system (Figure 6).



**Figure 6: Share of school administrator posts gained by women under the transfer system in 1995, 1996 and 1997 and by merit selection in 1998 and 1999.**

*In the first two years of merit selection the proportion of posts won by women has increased to about 50 per cent in primary schools and almost 40 per cent in secondary schools.*

Source: EDWA Promotions Unit

# Incentives at remote and difficult to staff schools

## Remote Teaching Service

**The scheme** – In 1996 special employment conditions were introduced for teachers at 35 Remote Teaching Service (RTS) schools in the Goldfields, Kimberley, Pilbara and Mid-West districts. The workplace agreement was modified in 1998 and an extra school added. The aim was to fill teaching posts in the most remote locations and encourage staff to stay within the RTS for several years by offering incentives including:

- ◆ permanent status after three years;
- ◆ free housing and additional payments of up to almost \$20 000 per year;
- ◆ ten weeks additional paid leave after three years or 22 weeks after four years;
- ◆ 3.5 transfer points per year, doubled on satisfactory completion of three years service; and
- ◆ the right to an Employer Initiated Placement, giving teachers wishing to leave the RTS precedence over teachers seeking normal transfers.

School-based selection applies to all RTS positions, allowing applicants to be assessed for their suitability to serve in the unusual and isolated conditions existing at RTS schools.

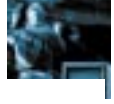
**Applications** – The scheme has resulted in many more applications to the 35 schools (which employed nearly 300 teaching staff in 2000). Before the scheme started, there were typically fewer than 10 applications annually. This number increased to 60 in the first year and over 110 in 1999 and 2000.

Applicants express preferences for individual schools rather than declare themselves available for any RTS vacancy. Some schools are now regularly over-subscribed but others remain less favoured. In a sample of 65 applications for the RTS in 2000, three schools were listed by 25 or more candidates while three others had one or zero preferences.

**Retention** – Retention rates at RTS schools were 51 per cent from 1993 to 1994 and 63 per cent between 1999 and 2000, indicating that the average length of service at the same school has extended from about two to three years. The retention rate for the RTS as a whole is higher (67 per cent between 1999 and 2000) because some staff transfer to other schools within the service<sup>1</sup>.

The RTS scheme has largely met its objectives. Schools have been staffed, retention rates have improved, and teachers have received financial and career benefits for living and working in challenging but professionally rewarding environments.

<sup>1</sup> EDWA has reported higher retention rates, the difference resulting from using a shorter time period and excluding teachers knowingly appointed for short periods.



## Country Incentives Scheme

**The scheme** – In addition to the Remote Teaching Service, 95 schools with a total establishment of about 2 000 teachers have been designated as ‘difficult to staff’ because of proven long-term problems in filling posts. Schools had to meet three out of five criteria to qualify, including a rapid turnover, a high proportion of new graduates or difficult living conditions. All except two of these schools are in country districts.

Incentives for teachers include permanency after three years, double transfer points and increasing annual bonuses on the satisfactory completion of each year’s service. The payments range from nothing at two metropolitan primary schools to a total of over \$19 000 over three years at a Kimberley district high school. Full details of the scheme were finalised in 1999 but teachers already at the designated schools in 1998 benefited from earlier service.

**Applications** – The scheme has proved more attractive to fixed-term than to permanent teachers. Between April 1999 and April 2000, two thirds of the 563 new placements were fixed-term. The number of transfer-seeking permanent classroom teachers listing any of the present difficult to staff schools in their preferred locations approximately halved from 1996 to 1999. Among the 80 non-secondary schools in the scheme, 21 received no applications from permanent teachers in 1999 and a further 21 schools attracted only one or two applications.

**Retention** – Retention rates for staff at schools now in the scheme have ranged between 62 per cent and 66 per cent over the last four years, implying an average stay of three years. It is too early to evaluate the full impact of the country incentives. The first teachers to achieve permanency by completing the qualifying years of service will do so at the end of 2000.

## School-based selection

School-based selection rights have been granted to about 120 schools, including all new and RTS schools, in a scheme (with several variants) that has been retained after a two-year trial. EDWA advertises vacancies with schools receiving applications and setting up selection panels to make appointments.

The trial was evaluated by external consultants, mainly by means of surveys of applicants and selection panels. The findings included:

- ◆ All participating Principals supported the movement away from a process of central appointment to one of local selection.
- ◆ The main reasons for preferring local selection were to meet specialist teaching needs, to select teachers suited to a school’s ethos and to promote stability.

- ◆ Significant amounts of administration and panel time (about ten hours per member per appointment) were needed, drawing on existing resources.
- ◆ Applicants agreed and disagreed in similar numbers that “*on the whole the school-based process is fair and equitable*”, this result closely matching the number of successful and unsuccessful applicants in the survey.

EDWA has reported the results of a 1998 trial of school-based selection in which 252 classroom teachers and 37 school administrators were appointed. Findings included:

- ◆ Of the 118 schools reviewed, 76 made no local selections.
- ◆ For classroom teacher appointments, 35 per cent were to the same school, 16 per cent country to metro and two per cent metro to country.
- ◆ For school administrator appointments, 37 per cent were to the same school, 13 per cent country to metro and 13 per cent metro to country.

Popular schools, mainly in the metropolitan region, are likely to favour local selection because it opens applications to a wider field and allows candidates to be individually assessed. The most competent teachers have improved prospects of obtaining posts at preferred schools without working in the country.

The possibility that school-based selection could aggravate the problems of staffing country schools, by reducing the number and quality of applicants, needs to be carefully monitored if the present small proportion of posts filled by local merit selection increases significantly.

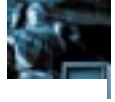
## Automated vacancy matching

The process of placing classroom teachers has been made administratively much more efficient by the automated Transfer Vacancy Matching System (TVMS) for primary teachers, first used in 1996. Manual placement methods that could take weeks to complete are now executed within a few minutes by computer. Secondary classroom teachers are still placed manually but there are plans to automate the process before the end of 2000.

A special feature of the automated system is the way it handles the new vacancies that are created by moving a teacher to another school. Each such vacancy is checked back against the preferences of all higher ranking applicants. An earlier placement is changed if the released vacancy corresponds to a higher preference.

The strengths of automated vacancy matching are the speed with which hundreds or thousands of placements can be made and the clearly defined rules that drive





## Changes to Staffing Practices and their Impacts

the system, minimising any openings for favouritism or unequal treatment within each applicant group and placement category.

The main weakness of a transfer points system, whether automated or manual, is the underlying principle that classroom teachers should be placed solely on the basis of declared location preferences, full or part-time availability and teaching areas. Further assessments of applicant qualities or school needs play no part in the decision rules, and if ties occur they are resolved by random numbers.

The transfer system is open to some forms of manipulation. Vacancies can be protected by Principals, most probably to retain an incumbent fixed-term teacher, by not declaring them by the closing date for the bulk round or listing unusual combinations of teaching requirements.

## Other staffing incentives

Further EDWA initiatives to address staffing difficulties include:

- ◆ **Retraining** – Short retraining courses are available in some difficult to fill subjects for staff who want to extend or change their range of teaching.
- ◆ **Country practicums, cadetships and internships** – More teacher training practice placements are being arranged in country schools. Various scholarships and schemes are in place to assist trainee teachers willing to accept country positions.
- ◆ **Right to return** – Permanent teachers can transfer temporarily to the country while retaining their city post should they wish to return. They may also try an administrator position in the country for two years and either take the promotion substantively or return to their teaching position.
- ◆ **Inter-state and overseas recruitment** – Useful numbers of inter-state and overseas teachers have been appointed, often for relatively short periods as they combine work with travel.
- ◆ **Relief teacher flying squad** – Relief teachers are in short supply in many country areas. A flying squad has been established, whose availability to go to remote schools at short notice is compensated by guaranteed full-time salaries.

## **Evaluation of impacts of staffing practice changes by EDWA**

Significant changes in policies and practices should have declared objectives and targets, and the impacts should be evaluated to determine whether the intended outcomes are occurring and to identify any unexpected effects.

Partly as a consequence of the design of earlier human resources information systems, EDWA's reporting of staffing operations and evaluation of the impact of changes in staffing practices has been limited. The introduction of the PeopleSoft human resources information system in September 1998 has improved the quality of data available.

EDWA should extend the reporting of the number and types of teacher appointments and include an evaluation plan as part of any change in staffing policies or practices.

## **Recommendation**

**EDWA should articulate the objectives of all changes to staffing practices and more rigorously evaluate their outcomes.**



## Issues and Options in School Staffing

- ◆ *Continuing challenges and issues in staffing schools include:*
  - ▲ *recruiting and retaining the best teachers;*
  - ▲ *balancing the rights afforded to permanent and fixed-term staff;*
  - ▲ *deciding the balance between school-based selection and centrally administered placements;*
  - ▲ *determining the nature and level of incentives for attracting the right type of staff to less favoured schools;*
  - ▲ *overcoming congestion in the classroom teacher transfer system;*
  - ▲ *considering whether any changes should be introduced to tenure arrangements; and*
  - ▲ *responding to emerging matters such as the expansion of vocational education and the impact of changing the school starting age.*

There is no achievable perfect solution to school staffing. Compromises will always be needed in balancing the needs of schools against the career expectations of teachers, in deciding the powers to be retained at the centre or devolved to schools, and in providing incentives for country service.

This chapter presents a range of issues in current staffing practices, and some of the fine-tuning adjustments and more radical options that might be considered.

### **Recruiting and developing new teachers**

Ideally EDWA would recruit all the most promising new teachers and help them develop their skills at the maximum rate. As a consequence of the higher precedence granted to permanent and fixed-term teachers, EDWA is at a disadvantage in competing for new graduates. Independent schools can and do head-hunt top trainee teachers at an early stage.

The majority of graduates are not assessed for merit when they apply to EDWA. They are approved to teach if they have the appropriate academic qualifications and satisfactory police clearances, and then given the lowest precedence in the appointment system. Most of the graduates obtaining posts are assigned to country schools, where they may spend their early teaching years with relatively inexperienced colleagues and no formal mentoring.

Steps have been taken to ensure or improve the employment prospects of some new graduates. Seven groups are now eligible for preferential treatment including major prize winners, holders of scholarships funded by EDWA, graduates with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds and the top 60 applicants prepared to teach anywhere in the State.

There is considerable support among District Directors and Principals that all new teachers should serve an internship at a school with a quality-assured mentoring program. The benefits would be faster professional development for teachers and greater experience of staff posted to the country after an intern period.

A trial has been under way in the last two years to place new graduates in well-supported metropolitan or country centres. A risk is that the most promising teachers may then be able to advance their careers without spending any time at a less favoured country location.

## Equity for fixed-term teachers

EDWA acknowledges the challenge of retaining “*competent fixed term teachers, who are disadvantaged by the current system*”. Many fixed-term teachers are filling temporary vacancies caused by permanent teachers taking various forms of leave, on secondment to a district or central office or undertaking higher duties. Fixed-term staff must always give way to permanent teachers, irrespective of merit.

The appointment system previously ranked fixed-term teachers according to a performance rating with the intention that the most competent would have first call on remaining vacancies. Recognised inconsistencies in the assessments resulted in them being abandoned.

In the vacancy matching system preference is given, if positions are still available, to fixed-term teachers whose Principals support their applications. This rule helps to ensure that highly-regarded fixed-term teachers remain employed and avoids unnecessary turnover. About three quarters of the fixed-term teachers in 1999 who were also employed in 2000 continued at the same school.

Several hundred fixed-term teacher applicants are left unplaced at the start of each school year. However, opportunities for shorter appointments and relief teaching regularly occur. All fixed-term teachers, even if they are unsuccessful at first, have the chance to demonstrate their worth and earn the support of Principals for the next bulk round of appointments.

The permanent and fixed-term classification divides teachers into two very differently treated groups with respect to job security and access to vacancies.



Although routes to guaranteed permanency exist (such as serving three years at difficult to staff or remote teaching service schools), they may not be accessible to fixed-term staff with restricted mobility. Any increase in the rights of fixed-term teachers may require an erosion of the privileges granted to permanent staff and challenge one of the most firmly-established principles of school staffing.

## Centralised and school-based merit selection

All applicants for Principal positions and vacancies to be filled by school-based selection are assessed against the needs of individual schools. In all other cases a ranking of applicants is established according to generic merit, transfer points or random numbers. Placements are then decided by where applicants will accept positions rather than by where they are professionally most needed or best suited.

Principals are held accountable for the performance of their schools but generally (except in local merit selection schools) have no role in appointing staff, apart from being able to support the re-employment of fixed-term teachers whose posts have not been assigned to permanent classroom teachers.

Merit selection was recommended for all EDWA appointments by a Human Resources Working Group in 1998 but the classroom teacher vacancy matching systems have been retained. A large majority of all teaching staff placements are still made with no regard to generic merit or suitability for a particular post.

A concern about any extension of merit selection is the possible adverse effect on staffing country schools. EDWA has stated that "*the Equal Opportunity Tribunal's decision [to replace the transfer system by merit selection] has had a negative effect on the Department's ability to staff administrators' positions in rural and remote schools. Teaching administrators . . . fear that they will be 'stuck' in these locations*".

## Incentives

Providing incentives for service at less favoured schools is essential to attract staff and reward them for the disadvantages they experience. Any changes to staffing practices that erode the rewards for country teachers are likely to aggravate an already difficult situation.

Financial incentives only apply at Country Incentives Scheme and Remote Teaching Service schools. Payments range from under \$400 in the first year at some difficult to staff schools to over \$19 000 each year at some RTS schools. Permanency and double transfer points are additional benefits for teachers satisfactorily completing their terms of service. The only reward at all other country schools and about 150 less favoured metropolitan schools is a higher rate of transfer points.

Any extension of merit selection that took no account of transfer points could have serious effects on the willingness of teachers to work in less favoured locations. Safeguards to such a change are possible, such as reserving a number of metropolitan vacancies for country teachers.

The principle of incentives is well established with more than 2 000 teaching staff at about 130 schools receiving additional payments, and over half of all posts earning above the basic rate of transfer points. There is scope to fine-tune or extend incentives, such as more closely relating transfer points to the number of applications or providing greater rewards to staff offering 'difficult to fill' subjects.

## Transfer congestion

The number of permanent teacher transfers has reduced in recent years. In the 'bulk round' for the start of the next school year, placements of primary teachers handled by the Transfer Vacancy Matching System fell from 1114 to 782 from 1996 to 1999. Secondary teacher movements decreased from 783 to 531 from 1997 to 1999.

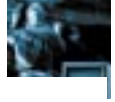
The country incentives program is likely to change the pattern of classroom teacher transfers. For example, a new teacher who spent his or her first three years at remote community schools could move to a permanent post at a highly favoured city senior high school at the start of 2000, having established precedence over any metropolitan or country teacher seeking a normal transfer.

The Country Incentives Scheme and Remote Teaching Service schools have the potential to generate several hundred new permanent teachers each year, most of whom could seek a return to the city with more transfer points than any metropolitan teacher of ten years standing.

The transfer points system credits only the last ten qualifying years of service, discounting any earlier country experience, making it increasingly difficult for long-serving metropolitan teachers to move.

## Tenure

Permanent teachers are, in normal circumstances, allowed unlimited tenure at their current school. Their status is generally earned by country service or because they teach a subject in short supply. In contrast, fixed-term teachers usually have contracts ranging from four weeks to a year. The annual transfer and appointment round is dominated in number by fixed-term teachers who are about to become unemployed, all of whom rate below the much smaller proportion and number of permanent teachers applying for a move.



## Issues and Options in School Staffing

Limited tenure, with opportunities for renewal, is established for some school administrator positions. It is only the permanent teachers in the middle echelons of the teaching workforce who are allowed by current practice to remain indefinitely at a school.

EDWA and the State Schools Teachers' Union recognise that the jointly developed transfer system has weaknesses as well as strengths. Proposals to establish greater equity and increase mobility by, in effect, placing a limited tenure on school appointments have been discussed. The future tenure arrangements for permanent teachers is a live issue with major cultural and industrial implications, but one that EDWA proposes to address.

## Other issues

### Staffing by numbers or funding

The staffing numbers set for each school makes no allowance for age or experience. The top of the classroom teacher salary scale is about \$15 000 (or 50 per cent) higher than the lowest rate. Schools with similar teacher numbers may have very different salary bills.

A consequence of staffing schools by numbers rather than costs is to shift funding to the most favoured metropolitan schools with the highest average staff age. Elsewhere in the public sector, restrictions on staff numbers have been replaced by salaries budgets. If this approach was extended to government schools, the classroom teacher placement systems (which take no account of an applicant's position on the salary scale) would be untenable.

### Change of school starting age

In 2001 the starting age for kindergarten schooling shifts by six months, as part of the expansion of pre-primary education. The move to more early childhood education will halve the Year 1 intake in 2003 and this reduced cohort will persist all the way through to Year 12.

As the half-cohort progresses it will cause falls and rises in enrolments at different times according to school type. For example, at a middle school (teaching Years 8 to 10) the arrival of a half cohort in 2011 will reduce student numbers by about 16 per cent, to be followed by a similar increase three years later. The transition years will present significant staffing challenges.

## Vocational education and training

Vocational education and training (VET) is expanding rapidly in secondary schools and will continue to do so. Between 1996 and 1998 the number of Year 11 and 12 VET students grew from under 700 to over 3 800. This trend can be expected to increase the retention rate at secondary schools, create a demand for a new type of teacher and require lower student to staff ratios in vocational subjects because of the needs for closer supervision.

## Matching the supply and demand for new teachers

EDWA does not train the teachers it needs. It liaises closely with Western Australian universities about estimated future needs and recruits teachers from elsewhere in Australia and overseas, but has no direct control over the type and number of local graduates.

The universities are presently producing too many graduates trained to teach in primary schools and too few to teach mathematics, design and technology and some languages other than English. Difficulties for the universities include the lack of applicants for teacher training in some subjects and shortages of adequately supervised teaching practice places.

## The development of school staffing

This report has presented some of the key issues, responses and challenges of staffing government schools. EDWA faces a complex task of finding an acceptable balance between many competing interests against an ever-changing background.

The main conclusion of the report is that EDWA should continue to build on its achievements to date. To this end, the key matters are:

- ◆ Defining objectives and indicators that can be used to measure whether the staffing of individual schools, districts and the whole government schools system is moving towards or away from a preferred state.
- ◆ Articulating the objectives of all changes to staffing practices, and more rigorously evaluating the outcomes of operations and initiatives.
- ◆ Establishing a structured program of review and action, covering fine-tuning adjustments and more radical options, for staffing policies and practices.





## **Recommendation**

EDWA should establish a structured program of review and action, covering fine-tuning adjustments and more radical options, for staffing policies and procedures.