

PRE01632: Teachers and nurses: professional futures

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(Note: this is a working paper, and a more complete version will be available from the author in 2002)

The teaching and nursing professions have a great deal in common. In this paper I want to especially focus on the age profiles of the professions – over the past half century, and the coming decade, the implications of a tight labour market (shortages), and the differences regarding professional regulation (registration).

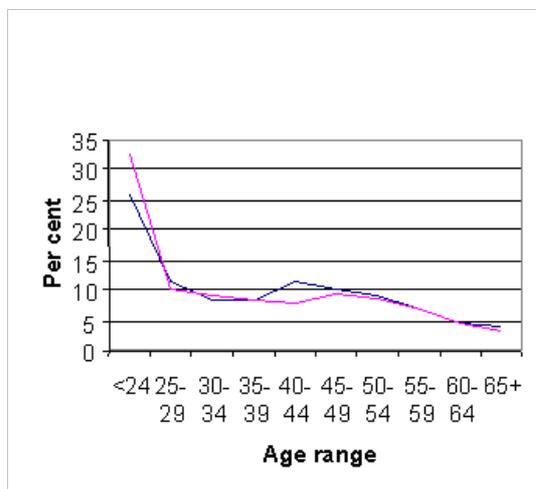
Both teachers and nurses experienced a huge expansion around the 1970s (nurses a couple of years later than teachers, and to a lesser extent) because of increases in client base (especially for teachers as enrolments in schools burgeoned), and rapid increases in public funding (as governments reaped the benefits of the economic boom until the mid 1970s, and continued some improvements because of firm commitments and policy stances already in place). The table below shows the number of registered nurses and school teachers in each five year age range in 1996 (ABS Census custom tables – there are more accurate sources of actual teacher and nurse numbers, such as the ABS *Schools* collection, but the Census provides teacher and nurse comparable data according to age).

Table 1:				
Australian registered nurses and school teachers, by five year age range, 1996				
	Registered nurses		Teachers	
	<25	12 365	17 041	
	25-29	19 736	29 039	
	30-34	22 364	26 863	

	35-39	29 410	39 285	
	40-44	27 965	48 821	
	45-49	22 909	37 967	
	50-54	14 737	22 494	
	55-59	8 316	10 172	
	60-64	2 898	2 860	
	65+	862	984	
	Total	161 562	235 526	

From soon after World War II until around the late 1970s, the teaching and nursing workforces were numerically dominated by successive cohorts of young professionals. Those of these cohorts who remained had numerically few older than them or around their own age, and many younger than them. Thus they had excellent career advancement opportunities if they wanted to (or were able to) take them up. Of course, as more or less predominantly female occupations, for many the opportunities were put aside as family commitments took precedence through their late twenties to late thirties, and discrimination against women (especially married women) prevented career advancement.

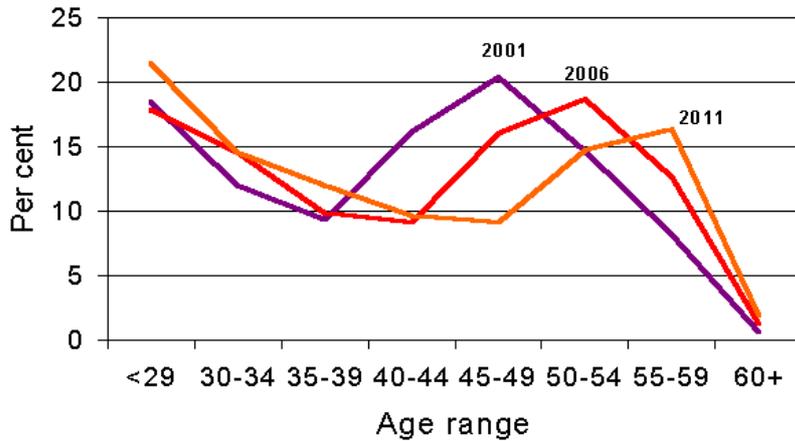
From the late 1970s until the present, one cohort has numerically dominated – those recruited around the 1970s. This is more notable in teaching than nursing, but it is still the case there. This cohort has professionally and culturally dominated, but, as it has been so numerically large, individual members have had substantially fewer promotions and other leadership opportunities. Thus, in teaching, there has been impetus for other ways to recognise, reward and keep motivated those who, if they were ten or so years older, would have been promoted almost as a matter of course. In the early 1990s we saw the development of ‘advanced skills teaching’ classifications, and other mechanisms have been tried over the decade. There has been a common complaint that the proportion of teachers (mostly in their forties) receiving the classification/promotion was too high. Yet, I expect that a very much higher proportion of teachers who were in their forties in the 1950s and 1960s would have gained even more substantial promotion. Aspects of award restructuring in nursing had a similar impetus.



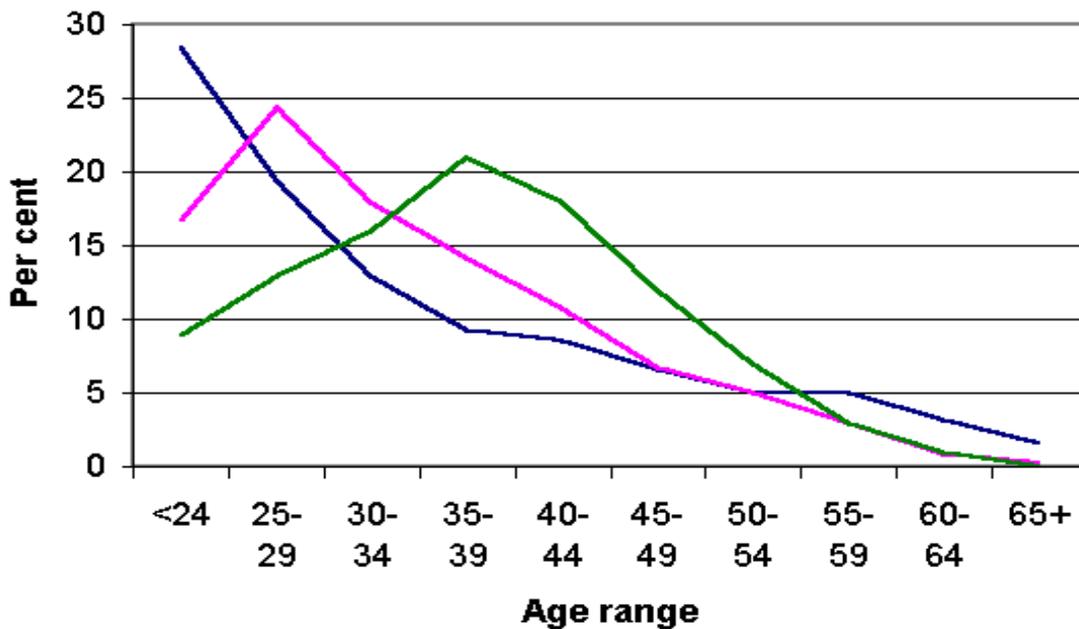
The change in age profile can be seen as beginning with a sea cliff (the swell, moving out between 1954 and 1961, probably indicating those employed before the war, and returned service personnel employed after the war). The following graph shows the age profiles of Australian school teachers, according to ABS Census data for 1954 and 1961.

Then a mountain forms and begins to advance (again, ABS Census data for school teachers):

Figure 2: Australian school teachers, age profiles, 1971, 1981 and 1991



Then, a valley forms, and the old mountain erodes as a new one expands on the other side of the valley



(projections for school teachers developed by the author for Preston 2000, see Table 2).

Figure 3: Australian school teachers, projected age profiles, 2001, 2006 and 2011

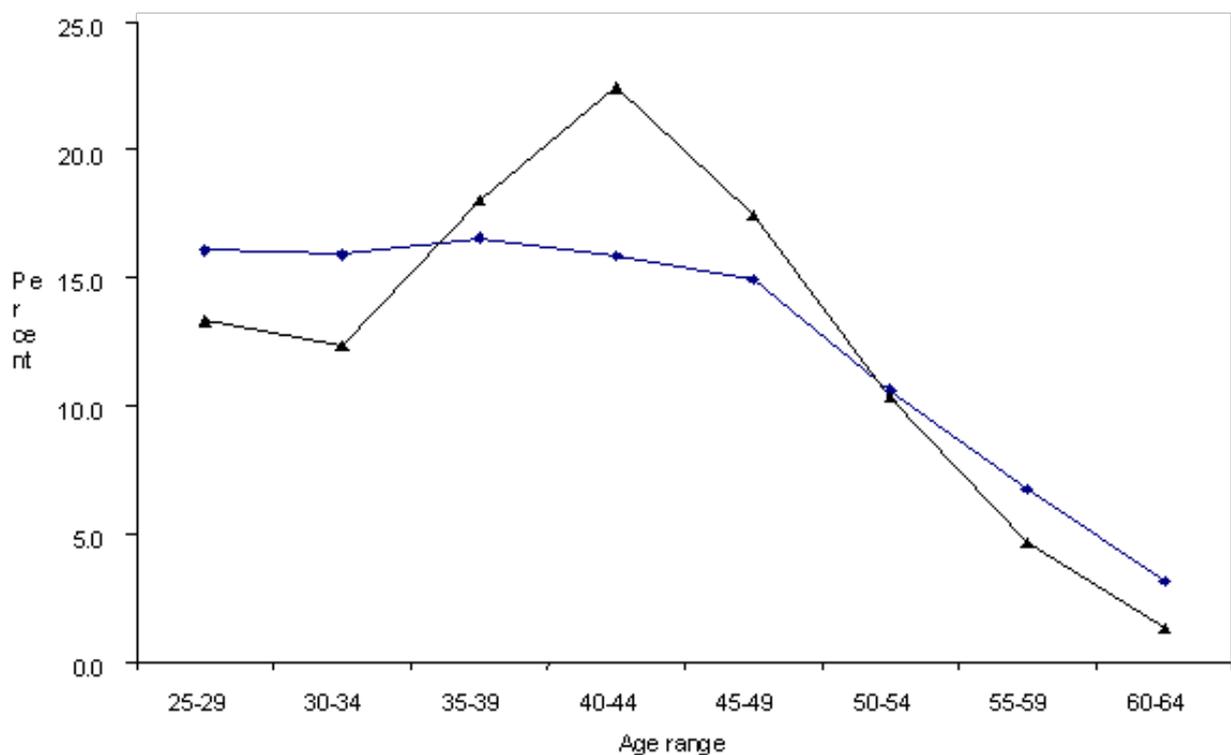
What we are now seeing are increasingly bimodal age profiles, and potentially bifurcated professions.

The age profile is a key factor in the future of teaching and nursing. It has a very large influence on the culture in schools and hospitals and in the professions as a whole, on the interrelationships between teachers and school communities (especially in country towns),

and nurses and their clients and colleagues from other professions. It largely determines the size of the pools from which professional leaders (and those who fill a range of other roles in the professions) are drawn, and thus the age profile is a significant factor in the need for particular types of continuing professional education and support. The age profile is the major factor in change in the need for new recruits to teaching and (to a lesser extent) nursing, and it has implications for the availability of teachers and nurses in various locations and for various types of employment, and thus for recruitment, staffing and support strategies.

I will consider the teaching profession in some detail, noting some comparisons with nursing. As indicated above, in a decade the age profile of the Australian teaching workforce will be very different from what it is today. It will be flatter, a much smaller proportion of teachers will be in their forties, and a higher proportion will be under thirty and over fifty. The exact structure cannot be predicted. But the crucial, immutable element is the aging of the cohort of teachers recruited during the rapid expansion around the 1970s, and who are now around their late 40s.

Figure 4. Age profile - teachers, and all persons in the labour force, 1996 Census



Source: ABS Census custom tables

Compared with the peak in the teaching workforce, the bump of baby boomers in the general workforce appears trivial. According to 1996 ABS Census data, of those aged 25 - 64, almost 60 per cent of teachers were aged 35 - 49, but only about 48 per cent of those in the workforce were aged 35 - 49 (it would be 38 per cent if there were equal numbers in all equal age ranges – a flat profile from 25 - 64) (see Figure 4, and Appendix 1). Yet there was substantial publicity given early in 2001 to a report prepared by Access Economics (2001) for the then Minister for Aged Care, Bronwyn Bishop. The report points out that the effects of aging on the general Australian workforce will begin to impact significantly next year – in

2002, 'when the peak year of baby boomers, those born in 1947, will reach age 55' (p. 22). Access Economics point out that, according to their projections, the rate of growth in the workforce is about to drop sharply in most states. The sharpest falls will occur from about 2002 in South Australia, and from about 2005 in NSW and Victoria. Growth will be negative in Tasmania from about 2003, in South Australia from around 2010, in Victoria from around 2012, and in NSW from about 2020. The rate of growth will slow sharply in Queensland and Western Australia around 2012, but will stay positive. In the Northern Territory it will remain fairly constant around current levels, and in the ACT it will drop sharply to around zero around 2012, remaining there through the projection period to 2051.

Access Economics points to the general labour shortages that are likely to accompany the falls in workforce growth. 'If the shortage of labour is not addressed through higher participation rates among mature Australians, the current account may widen, wages may take off and returns to the owners of capital may fall' (p. 32). A general labour shortage is certainly of direct benefit to the unemployed and those seeking to increase hours of work and pay. But is generally not of benefit to employers and their customers or those they serve – including school students and their communities.

There are two implications of the Access Economics work for the teaching workforce:

First, if there are such concerns about the general workforce with its relatively flat age profile (see Figure 4), why is there not more concern about the impact of the age profile on the future for the teaching workforce?

Second, the projected labour shortages will have an impact on the teaching labour market. In general, the sharper the fall in the rate of growth in the general workforce, the greater the general labour shortage, and the greater the efforts by employers outside teachers to attract those with teaching qualifications to their employment. As noted above, the very large and steep falls are projected for South Australia, New South Wales and Victoria. I will return to this later, when I discuss teacher supply and demand projections.

The age structure for the coming decade can be projected from ABS 1996 Census data, with assumptions about student enrolments, student-teacher ratios, net separation rates for teachers in each age range, and the age of teachers at initial recruitment. Table 3 shows the actual age structures in 1991 and 1996, and those I have projected for 2001, 2006 and 2011 for four age ranges that broadly match career stages. Figure 3 shows similar projections for all five-year age ranges, for 2001, 2006 and 2011. (Those years are ABS Census years.)

The age structure will become flatter as the age peak of those recruited around the 1970s moves through retirement age, though it will most probably be followed over the next thirty years by a lesser shadow peak of those recruited over the coming decade, replacing those retiring. Between the two peaks is a substantial trough, reflecting the low rate of recruitment around the early to mid 1990s.

The increasing proportion of teachers in the under thirty and over fifty age ranges (a bifurcation in the age profile) indicates the inappropriateness of the measure of *average age* of teachers when assessing future demand or considering the general nature of the teaching profession – in fact the average will soon be in the five year age range with the smallest proportion of teachers!

The change in age structure will mean a change in net separation rates, and thus in the need to recruit new teachers ('net separation rates' includes reentrants and returnees from leave, as well as retirements, resignations, the taking of leave, and other movements out of teaching – see Preston 2000, pp. 35-36). The over fifty and under thirty age ranges have

high net separation rates, and the late thirties age range has a negative net separation rate (more teachers re-enter or return than leave teaching). I will return to this later.

Table 2: Percentage of teachers in each age range, 1991 and 1996 actual, and projected for 2001, 2006 and 2011

	Under 30 (beginning teachers)	30 – 39 (middle level)	40 –49 (senior)	50+ (towards retirement)
	%	%	%	%
1991	22	37	30	11
1996	13	31	40	16
2001	19	21	37	24
2006	19	24	25	33
2011	22	27	19	33

Source: 1996 data from ABS Census custom tables, projections prepared by the author.

The projections assume constant student-teacher ratios from 1999; DETYA school enrolment projections; no substantial change in net separations (resignations, reentry and retirement) for each five year age range from 1996, and that beginning teachers are mostly under 30. Details of assumptions and calculations available from the author.

The projections assume the continuation of the general pattern apparent from 1991 and 1996 census data that, though about 80 percent of graduates enter teaching, by their early thirties fewer than 55 per cent of those with teaching qualifications are teaching; there is then a slight return to teaching through the late thirties, with almost 60 per cent of those in their early forties teaching; there is then a continuing loss through to retirement age; overall, fewer than half of those of with teaching qualifications of working age are teaching – see Preston 2000, pp. 65-66.

If there is an overall improvement in PTRs (see discussion in this paper), then there will be a higher proportion of teachers in 2006 and 2011 in the younger age ranges, and a smaller proportion in the older age ranges.

If retirement age generally increases, then there will be a higher proportion of teachers in the 50 plus age range, and a slightly smaller proportion in the other age ranges.

The projected age profiles indicate large changes in the proportions of teachers at various stages in their careers (see Table 2). In contrast to today, there will be a much smaller proportion of teachers with around 15 to 25 years of experience (aged in their forties) in 2011 because of the very low rates of recruitment of new teachers from the late 1980s to late 1990s - this period of low recruitment is reflected in the relatively small proportion of

teachers under thirty in 1996, and it created a 'trough' in teacher numbers that contrasts with the 'peak' recruited around the 1970s. Currently almost 40 per cent of teachers are in their forties, and the proportion is rapidly falling as the peak of teachers initially employed around the 1970s are moving into their fifties. By 2011 I have projected that fewer than 20 per cent of teachers will be in their forties. However, in the years after 2011, the proportion of teachers in this 'senior' age range will most probably increase, as the increasing numbers of teachers recruited from the late 1990s enter this age range. The proportion of teachers aged over fifty, and thus moving towards retirement, is projected to increase to 2011 – approximately doubling. It is then likely to reduce back over the subsequent decades, with the 'trough' in teacher numbers moving into the retirement age around 2020.

The changes thus have implications for the career opportunities for cohorts of teachers, and for the staffing of schools. Teachers now in their early to mid thirties will have much greater opportunities for promotion and leadership positions over the coming decade than older teachers have had, or than younger teachers will have. School authorities will need to be aware that they will be selecting from a smaller pool of teachers for promotions positions, and thus will need to ensure that quality, accessible professional education and support is in place so that sufficient numbers of these teachers are well prepared for professional leadership.

The general pattern of a bifurcated age profile will be even more pronounced in many schools (just as it will be less pronounced in other schools). Strategies will need to be in place to ensure there is not a dysfunctional division between the over fifties and the under thirties where there are few in the ages between. Schools and systems that do not themselves have a greater bifurcation than average, yet seek to avoid any problems by recruiting teachers in their thirties and forties from other schools, will be unfairly exacerbating the problem elsewhere. The teaching profession as a whole may need to do what it can to ensure the equitable distribution of teachers of all ages, and the overcoming of problems related to age profiles by means other than shifting the problems to other schools.

A higher proportion of usually mobile younger teachers may mean that hard-to-staff schools are a little easier to staff – as long as there is an adequate overall supply. But it also means that hard-to-staff schools may have an overall younger and less experienced teaching staff than they currently have because there will be fewer experienced teachers in the workforce as a whole, and those teachers will be able to be more selective about where they teach. Thus school authorities will need to develop effective strategies to ensure that hard-to-staff schools have sufficient experienced and highly competent teachers. There are parallel implications for the profession.

I expect that nursing will experience similar developments and challenges – in some respects not as pronounced, in others more so (because of the more highly feminised nature of nursing).

Women teachers and nurses

Women make up a large proportion of both teachers and, especially, nurses. In 1997 females made up 92 per cent of the employed registered and enrolled nurses (AIHW 2001, p. 37). This is the same percentage indicated by 1996 ABS Census data for registered nurses (Census custom tables). In 2000 women made up 78 per cent of the primary teaching workforce and 54 per cent of the secondary teaching workforce (Table3).

Table 3 shows women as a proportion of all teachers, by level and sector of schooling, in 1978, 1990, 1999 and 2000. Because of the changing role of religious teachers in nongovernment schools, the government sector should probably be used to indicate the

underlying trend – from women making up 57 per cent, increasing to 67 per cent of teachers over the period from 1978. (In 1978 between a third and a half of primary nongovernment school teachers were religious, though the number of religious had been falling sharply – from 7727 in 1974 to 6088 in 1977 (Commonwealth Schools Commission 1981, p. 114).)

This general ‘feminisation’ of the teaching workforce should be no necessary cause for concern – though there might be justified concern about a lack of male teachers in particular circumstances. It appears that the increase in the proportion of women teachers is in part a consequence of women teachers tending to take less extensive periods of time out from teaching for child-rearing purposes. This would generally mean a higher level of continuity, and, perhaps, professional commitment and competence of those women who do not leave teaching for such extensive periods. Figure 5, based on ABS Census data, indicates the flattening between 1961 and 1996 of the curve of the proportion of women in each five-year age range, with the very substantial dip in the proportion of women around the main childrearing age range almost disappearing. (Primary teachers are over-represented in the data, so the actual figures overstate the total proportion of women teachers.) (Note the dip in the proportion of women in the 45-49 age range in 1961 – this coincides with the ‘swell’ noted earlier, and this is probably the age range with a large number of male ex-service teachers.)

Figure 5: Females as a percentage of all teachers in five year age ranges, 1961, 1981, and 1996

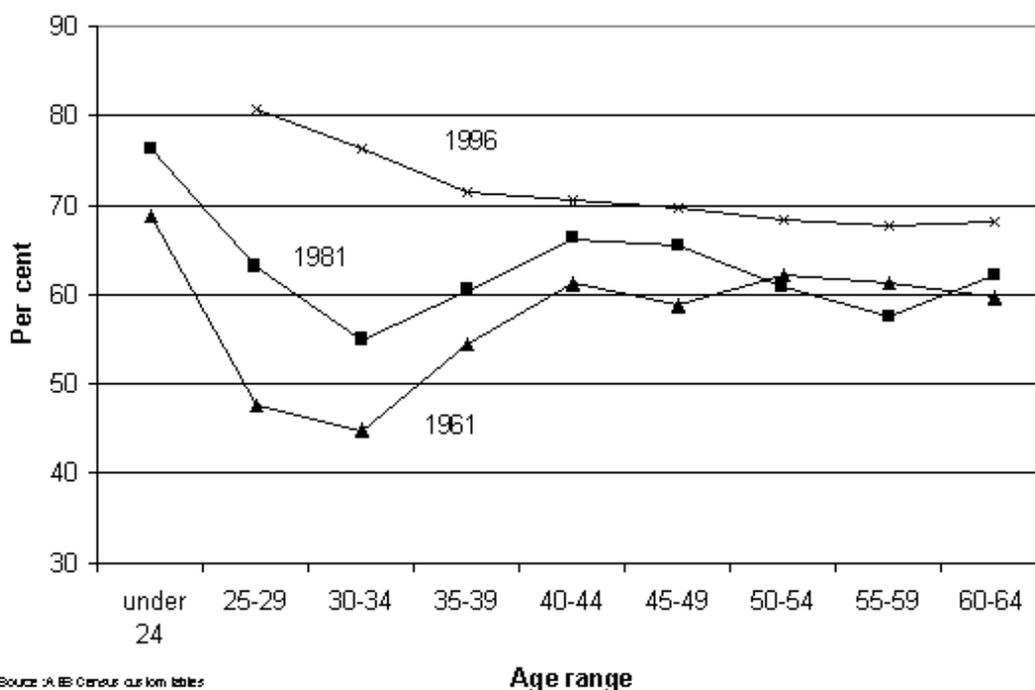


Table 3: Female teachers as a percentage of all teachers (FTE) at the same level and sector of schooling, Australia, 1978, 1990, 1999 and 2000

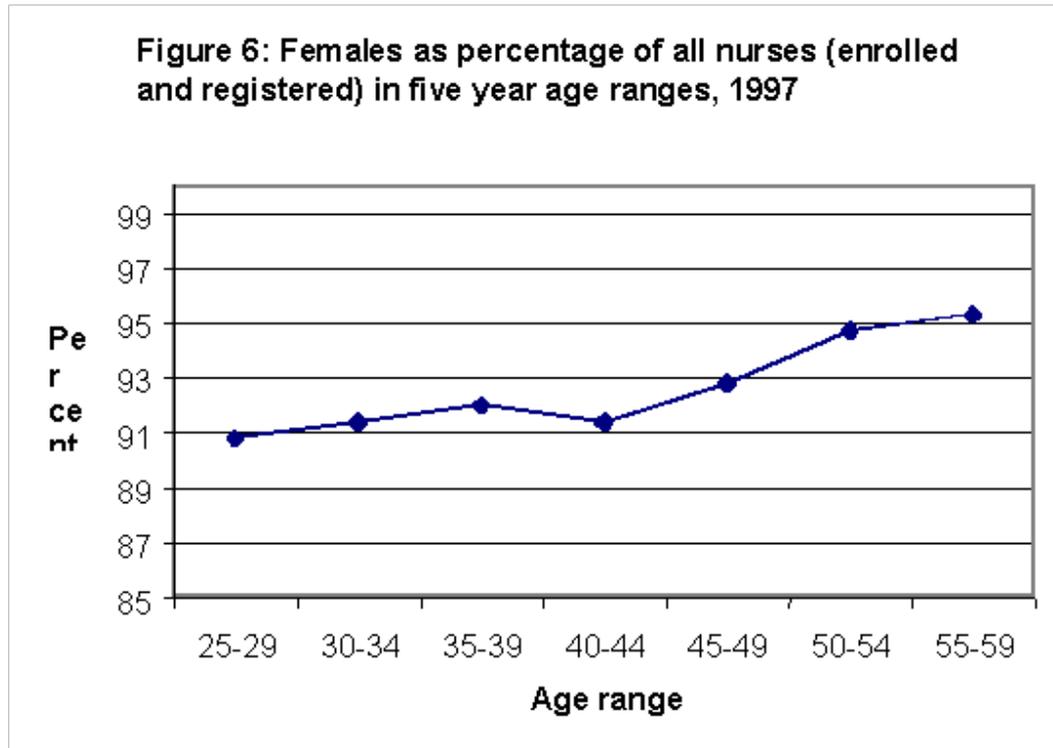
	1978	1990	1999	2000
	%	%	%	%
<i>Primary</i>				
Government	68	72	78	78
Nongovernment	84	78	79	79
Total	71	73	78	78
<i>Secondary</i>				
Government	44	49	54	54
Nongovernment	50	53	54	55
Total	46	50	54	54
<i>All schools</i>				
Government	57	61	67	67
Nongovernment	66	63	65	65
Total	59	61	66	66

Sources: 1978 data: Australian Schools Commission (1981), *Australian students and the schools*. Canberra: ASC, p. 118

1990 data: Australian Bureau of Statistics, *1990 Schools Australia*. Cat. No. 4221.0, Table 20, p. 68.

1999 data: Australian Bureau of Statistics, *1999 Schools Australia*. Cat. No. 4221.0, Table 64, p. 80.

2000 data: Australian Bureau of Statistics, *2000 Schools Australia*. Cat. No. 422010, Table 63, p. 112.



In the nursing workforce the proportion who are female is much greater. Also the proportion who are female increases by age, in contrast to teaching, where the proportion who are female decreases by age.

Professionalism

In this section I discuss teacher professionalism. Any implications for nursing are not drawn out. But there is one clear difference: nurses have statutory registration throughout Australia – teachers do not in all States and Territories, though there is some increasing move towards registration.

A highly professional teaching workforce has been a policy priority from time to time since the late 1980s and the ‘teacher quality’ projects of the Schools Council of the National Board of Employment, Education and Training, culminating in *Australia’s Teachers: An Agenda for the Next Decade* (Schools Council 1990), followed by the 1991 to 1993 work of the collaborative National Project on the Quality of Teaching and Learning. Earlier, the Schools Commission had devoted much attention to teacher competence (through, especially, inservice professional development) and the quality of teacher’s work though teacher participation in decision-making and support for innovative activities and programs for which teachers took major collective and individual responsibility. I think we would all agree here that enhanced teacher professional work is a key factor in the improvements needed in schooling for all students. However good schooling may be, there is always room for improvement, and such improvement is necessary for social justice and better lives for everyone.

I believe that over the past decade or so there has been much confused thinking about the appropriate (and possible) nature of ‘teacher professionalism’, about structures and mechanisms to support that professionalism, and about the professional nature of teachers’

work (Preston 1995). There has been a certain defensiveness, even a cringe, around teacher professionalism, often associated with a belief that teachers should be emulating the traditional elite professions (especially medicine). Yet this has often been associated with a misrepresentation or misunderstanding of the professional structures of those other professions, and the nature of their professional work – individually and collectively in contemporary Australian society.

In this section I want to outline my understanding of the nature of teachers' professional work, to draw out the implications of this, and to discuss some of the key aspects of professional structures that will need to be addressed if we are to have high quality teaching for all students in the coming decade.

We need to understand, and celebrate, the nature of teachers' professional work at its best. In judging what is the 'best' professional teaching the ultimate focus should always be on the quality of student learning, rather than some supposed similarity with the work of other professions.

The status and recognition of teachers as professionals should not be an end in itself, but a means to enhancing student learning – especially the learning of those students who come to school with the least advantages. Medical practitioners may have higher public status than teachers, but that is for deep historical reasons, public anxiety about illness and death, the relative scarcity of medical practitioners compared with teachers, and their market power as predominantly private practitioners in a largely publicly funded health system. Much of this teachers would not want to emulate - even if they could.

In important ways good teaching is more powerfully professional than mainstream, discretely individual, episodic medical practice. Let me explain how I understand professional teaching practice. Teaching:

- involves high level professional judgements
- is collective and strategic
- is democratic.

The need for *high level professional judgements* – complex situational judgements - arises from the complex diversity of students, educational objectives, contexts, and teachers themselves. There can be no predetermined 'one right answer', and the rule-based application of knowledge, technique and materials, however sophisticated, is insufficient. Teachers' professional judgements involve the integrated and appropriate application of personal qualities such as sensitivity, flexibility, patience and humour, combined with knowledge and understanding in depth and breadth covering areas such as the content to be taught, general pedagogical knowledge, curriculum knowledge, pedagogical content knowledge, knowledge of learners, knowledge of educational contexts, knowledge of education ends, purposes and values, combined with high level cognitive and social capabilities such as communicating effectively and working in teams (Preston 1996, pp. 248 - 249). Effectively teaching all students to their full potential is very different from instructing highly self-motivated and well-prepared students – the 'easily teachable' or 'already taught' (Schools Council 1990, pp. 29 and 50).

Effective teaching is inherently *collective and strategic*. These characteristics are features of teaching far more than many other professions. Teachers' work is not primarily the aggregation of discrete one-to-one relationships between professional and client. In a classroom teachers are relating to a group of students, and while individualising their teaching much of the time, the complex inter-relationships between all the students in the class and between the students and the teacher is something the teacher needs to

constantly manage. In addition, the education of particular students is dependent on the inter-relationships between the work of many teachers over many years. Some of those teachers have a direct teaching relationship with the students, while others play a part in curriculum development and creating the structure, culture and climate of schools and the system as a whole. These inter-relationships indicate the *collective* nature of teaching. That the education of students through schooling occurs over a period of time, and that the pattern and sequence of inter-relationships between the work of different teachers in part determines the nature and quality of learning, indicates the *strategic* nature of effective teaching. (Preston 1996, p. 252)

Effective teaching is *democratic* because effective learning requires respectful and willing collaboration between teachers and students – the students as active participants in their own learning -, and, in the early years especially, between teachers and parents. These democratic collaborative relationships are inherent to good teaching in a society such as ours – they are not incidental or occasional as they may be in the practice of some other professions. Partnerships with students and parents do not lessen professionalism, but demand a higher level of professionalism to manage. For effective learning partnerships must be democratic, rather than the traditionally understood hierarchical relationship between the elite professional and the submissive client (or patient). In addition, teachers (most explicitly those in the public sector) in democratic societies have a responsibility to educate for democracy, and that involves students experiencing and observing democracy at work around them.

Democratic professionalism is not a contradiction in terms, but it is not easy. A decade ago the OECD, in its report, *The Teacher Today*, noted the difficulties in its discussion of 'open professionalism' (a notion it had developed initially in the 1970s):

The concept 'open professionalism' enshrines the idea that the modern teacher, as the focal point of rapidly changing and highly demanding educational policies, needs to be both open to communal influence and co-operation – with colleagues, the school, on-going research and developments, parents, the community – and to receive respect as an individual professional. Reconciling these two elements in practice may not, however, be straightforward. It would entail an openness to outside influence that enhances, not diminishes, the individual's sense of commitment and responsibility. (OECD 1990, p. 44)

I believe that our understandings of teacher professionalism, and the actual professional practice of teachers, in Australia today are powerful and robust enough for the reconciliation to be generally accepted and easy. However, a strong assertion of the traditional medical model of professionalism as one to be emulated will be a backward step.

I would like now to turn to institutional frameworks of teachers' professional work in a federation such as Australia.

The importance of mandatory teacher registration

The collective and strategic nature of teachers' professional work, as well as the historical and likely future development of schools and school systems in Australia, entails the inherent connection between the industrial and the professional, and the significance of the positive roles in teacher professionalism of *both* school authorities and teacher unions (Preston 1996). However, both teacher unions and school authorities have pressures and responsibilities that may work against the best professional practice, and thus optimal student learning. There are institutional arrangements and practical priorities that can lessen

such negative effects, and both teacher unions and school authorities should develop and implement them as much as possible. One such arrangement that is both obvious and topical around Australia is statutory teacher registration, for which governments have responsibility, but school authorities' positions are usually politically decisive.

I was surprised at the position in the Report of the Review of Teacher Education, New South Wales (Ramsey 2000), released late in 2000, on teacher registration. Mandatory registration is opposed as 'an entry barrier to the profession', and a 'voluntary system of professional accreditation' is proposed (p. 148). The report goes on to state that 'parallels for such a voluntary, standards-based system exist in the accountancy, engineering and medical professions'. I think that bemusement would be the response of the medical registration boards around the country, and the ministers responsible for the comprehensive sets of legislation mandating registration for much of the actual professional tasks of engineers. The role of auditors and other members of the accountancy profession in the collapses of HIH and One-Tel, as I understand it, illustrates the high social cost of the self-interested 'self-regulation' of that profession. As Brian West points out in an article in the *Journal of Sociology* (West 1998), the issues involved (especially related to defining and determining 'true' and 'fair' accounts) have been on the accountancy profession's standards agenda for many years (since the company failures of the 1960s), but have been resolved in the interests of the profession, not the interests of clients or the general public. Of course accountants generally perform their work in ways that are in the clients' and public's interest, and involve the skill and judgement we expect of professional work - just like teachers in States such as NSW that do not require registration. But when the pressure is on, the accountancy 'standards' have failed in their content and/or enforcement.

I do not want to directly address the Ramsey report, only to note its position – many of you will know much better than I how these matters are progressing. Rather, I want to outline what I believe are the fundamental reasons why there should be statutory (thus mandatory) teacher registration, which in Australia's constitutional framework must be based in State/Territory, not Commonwealth, legislation.

But first, why is it that teacher registration is not already a statutory requirement for all school teachers in all States and Territories, as it is for nurses, medical practitioners and many other professionals? I believe there are several major reasons.

First, statutory teacher registration may be seen as effectively redundant, at least in periods of adequate teacher supply and where there are responsible school authorities. The argument is that the school authorities that employ teachers are committed to only employing appropriately qualified, competent teachers, and have more or less transparent and accountable mechanism for doing so. This has been the basis for most government and other major systems' lack of concern about registration since the 1970s. The position has some validity, especially for centralised school systems and when there is an adequate supply of qualified teachers. But we must remember that the strong registration systems in Queensland, and in Victoria until the early 1990s, arose out of school authorities employing substantial numbers of unqualified and not competent individuals as teachers from the mid 1960s. The ensuing chaos in schools led to the Victorian Secondary Teachers Association's Control of Entry campaign and union-run registration until the State governments established statutory registration in those and other States (Preston 1996, pp. 255 – 258).

Second, there is explicit opposition to registration, which is seen as an infringement on school authorities' prerogative to employ as teachers those who they choose. This is commonly (and influentially) put by some independent school representatives. Not only is it believed that professional teaching qualifications are not always necessary to be a good teacher, but that those exceptions should be allowed to make the rule. This second element,

that *exceptions make the rule*, is important. It's quite possible that a particular vet or a nurse or a pharmacist could be an effective medical practitioner in some circumstances, and vice versa; or a particular person with knowledge and commitment but not the required formal qualifications could do the work in one of those professions with acceptable competence. But such exceptions are not allowed to make the rule.

There is a superficial sense to the old argument about the great teacher with a PhD in physics but no teaching qualifications. But it is a slippery slope. It appears acceptable when the schools concerned are in a very strong position in the teaching labour market (their choice is between the run-of-the-mill individual with teaching qualifications, and the 'brilliant' person without), and where the student body is easy to teach and highly motivated (and thus the central professional skills of *teaching* are less vital, but an 'instructor' or 'facilitator' with other strong attributes may be quite adequate). It is the slippery slope from this position that takes us to one of the key reasons why there should be statutory teacher registration.

Teacher registration is most important for schools in a relatively weak position in the teaching labour market in circumstances of teacher shortage (as experienced by them, if not by other schools). Without mandatory registration, school authorities (including individual schools when the decision is theirs) can make the easy, short-term decision of employing unqualified 'teachers'. Those who care for the quality of student learning in such hard-to-staff schools (such as students, parents or teachers in the school) may have little power with the decision-makers, who might be primarily concerned with the administrative matters of ensuring there is at least someone covering classes, but the classroom itself is a black box for which they have little concern. Or, on the other hand, a school authority may be strongly committed to quality teaching, but, without mandatory registration, find it difficult to resist pressure to employ an available person without qualifications when no qualified teacher is readily available. Statutory registration forces school authorities to do the hard work of attracting and retaining qualified teachers, and not take the easy, but ultimately counterproductive, way out of any 'warm body'.

Schooling is compulsory through most of childhood – students and their parents have no choice. If the state is going to require attendance at school, then its reciprocal obligation is to ensure that the quality of schooling provided is adequate and appropriate. Ensuring teacher quality through registration (and other mechanisms) is part of this.

As we move into a period likely to be characterised by an increasingly tight teaching labour market, registration will become more and more important for the actual quality of teaching and learning in schools, especially the hard-to-staff schools of the most disadvantaged students. It will not be some abstract debate about an apparently redundant mechanism. Already hard-to-staff schools in several states have engaged unqualified people as 'teachers'. The chaos experienced thirty years ago may return, if on a lesser scale, without the constraint of registration.

Statutory registration is a way for governments to show their commitment to quality schooling, and, especially, to the entitlement to quality teaching of the already disadvantaged students in hard-to-staff schools. It is a message to the whole community that teaching is valued and important professional work. The employment of unqualified teachers must be expected to indicate that governments and school authorities do not see teaching as significant professional work. If they do not respect the teachers and their work why should the rest of the community? Why should young people see teaching as a career to aspire to?

This takes us back to the intimate relationship between teacher shortages and teaching standards. If standards are allowed to slide through the employment of unqualified teachers,

shortages are exacerbated, especially in the long run. Registration is a crucial mechanism for ensuring teaching standards are maintained, and for a clear public statement of the importance of those standards and the value of the professional work of teachers.

A professional standards body or a representative body?

What, then, should be the nature of a body responsible for teacher registration and related matters of professional standards?

The discussions around the proposed Victorian Institute of Teachers, the Ramsey report recommendation for the establishment of an Institute of Teachers in NSW, and other discussions around the country, indicate the need for clarity about the nature, role, responsibilities and function of professional representative bodies and standards bodies. The reluctance of many to acknowledge the role of the teacher unions as professional representative organisations (paralleling the industrially registered Australian Medical Association, for example) adds to the confusion.

I was struck last year by the difference between the fundamental objectives of the Ontario College of Teachers (a body that registers teachers, among other functions, and whose chair and accreditation manager were visiting Australia) to 'serve and protect the public interest' and that being considered by the Ministerial Advisory Council for the Victorian Institute of Teachers to 'promote the profession'. I strongly believe that any body responsible for teacher registration (and deregistration) and other aspects of professional standards should have as its ultimate purpose the quality of teaching for optimal student learning – in the public interest. Promoting the profession may be associated with the ultimate purpose of quality teaching, but is not to be an end in itself for a standards body (though it may be a legitimate purpose of the professional representative organisation). We would be concerned if an objective of a medical registration board or similar standards body had as an objective 'the promotion of the medical profession', as distinct from the promotion of good medical practice. It is condescending to teachers, as well as inappropriate, for a standards body to have as an objective the promotion of the teaching profession.

I tabulated characteristics of professional representative organisations compared with professional standards organisation (as I saw them) some years ago (Preston 1995, p. 32), and the following is based on that tabulation:

	Professional representative organisation (for example, teacher union or subject association)	Professional standards organisation (for example, registration board)
<i>Basic nature and purpose</i>	Of the profession, for the profession.	Professional expertise, for the public interest.
<i>Mission and responsibilities</i>	Represent and promote the interests of the profession; speak for the profession; negotiate on behalf of the profession. Ultimate responsibility is to the profession – to its members,	To ensure high standards of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • professional capability/attributes • practice/conduct

	<p>current and future.</p> <p>Generally, a responsibility to the profession currently and into the future will entail a commitment to the highest professional standards and performance (individually, and collectively by the profession as a whole, including non-members). However, there may be times when there are inherent conflicts between the interests of the profession and those of clients of the profession and/or the public interest. Ideally the organisation should work to transcend and overcome such conflicts. But that may not always be possible – this is where the need for a professional standards body, or independent mechanisms for arbitration are essential.</p>	<p>from</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • individual professionals (through formal processes such as registration), • the profession as a whole (through professional support activities, policy recommendations to professional representative organisations and school authorities, and collaborative work with professional representative organisations and school authorities). <p>Ultimate responsibility is to students, their families and communities, and the wider society (including employers, further and higher education institutions, and other civil, political, cultural and social institutions).</p> <p>Standards of professional capability (or attributes or ‘competency’) for most beginning practitioners would, ideally, be (or be related to) the standards for graduation from an appropriately approved or accredited program of initial teacher education (see Adey 1998). There may be other formal requirements (concerning, for example, criminal records or health status, if these have not been part of the graduation standards). Those who are not recent graduates of approved/accredited institutions would need to be assessed against comparable criteria.</p> <p>Additional assessment could be required at the end of a probationary or induction period, and, perhaps periodically though out a career (ideally this should be inherently related to good practice, and not require tasks or activities that are not cost-effective in terms of good professional practice).</p>
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		<p style="text-align: right;"><i>continued . . .</i></p> <p><i>Mission & responsibilities continued:</i></p> <p>Standards of practice and conduct would need to take account of the actual circumstances of the practice/conduct involved. This might involve consideration of school authorities' deployment practices (whether an individual has appropriate specialist qualifications, or the necessary experience and skills for the actual position), and matters of professional support and health and safety (including stress).</p>
<p><i>Social role and status</i></p>	<p>The body which governments, employers, client organisations, community organisations, the media turn to when they want the views of the profession.</p> <p>High public profile helps effective representation.</p>	<p>Provides assurance to the community that high professional standards operate.</p> <p>The profession, school authorities and the general public should see the organisation's work as effective and legitimate.</p>
<p><i>Membership</i></p>	<p>All members of the profession are generally eligible for membership, and a high level of membership is importance for credibility and general effectiveness. Membership will usually be voluntary, and not necessary for professional practice.</p>	<p>Membership of decision-making bodies (the governing council or board) should include major stakeholders in the work of the profession.</p> <p>For school teaching this would include, at least, representatives from:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the school teaching profession, • school authorities, • teacher educators, • parents, • the wider community. <p>As a high level of professional expertise is essential, and legitimacy in the eyes of the profession important, usually members of the profession will make up a large proportion of the</p>

		<p>governing body.</p> <p>Membership of the decision-making bodies is distinct from the categories of registered members of the profession, who are not strictly 'members' of the body by virtue of registration. The term 'member' is misleading because those who are registered will not have the genuine membership status of members of representative professional organisations and other such voluntary associations. Being registered does convey formal, public recognition that the individual is a member of the profession (of teaching), but not a member of the particular 'board of registration'.</p>
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<p><i>Legal status</i></p>	<p>Legal status as appropriate to protect the interests of members and officers, especially regarding matters such as legal or financial liability.</p>	<p>Statutory status is essential so that only registered professionals practice, and employers cannot employ unqualified individuals. Statutory status also ensures that professional (or employer) self-interest does not override the interests of the clients of the profession (students and the wider community)</p> <p>The statutory status should ensure clear protection from the whims of the government of the day. The governing body must be at arms distance from the government, and the views of the government taken up in the same way as those of other stakeholders.</p>
<p><i>Principles of decision-making</i></p>	<p>Democratically, according to the constitution and existing policies.</p>	<p>Decisions are made according to professional expertise (research, experience and informed judgement), within the policy framework determined by the governing body.</p>

<p>Structure</p>	<p>Democratic structures that ensure participation by members is necessary for legitimacy as a representative organisation in the eyes of both members and those to whom members are being represented. Proper 'representation' requires a central place for the views of members of the profession.</p> <p>Decision-making processes should be transparent and accountable to the membership – in accord with its basic purpose to serve its membership.</p>	<p>Structure should be appropriate for its expertise-based role and to ensure the views of all stakeholders are heard. The views of members of the profession should not be privileged over other stakeholders (such as students, parents, or school authorities), though their professional expertise is essential.</p> <p>Decision-making processes should be transparent and ultimately accountable to the wider community – in accord with its basic purpose to serve the public interest.</p>
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The characteristics are quite consistent with the Queensland Board of Teacher Registration (and teacher unions and professional associations in Queensland), similarly in South Australia. It is also consistent with medical and nursing registration boards (and the Australian Medical Council that accredits initial medical education programs and examines immigrant medical doctors), and the representative organisations of the AMA and ANF. However, the specialist medical colleges do combine the roles – and there are problems there. The distinctions tabulated are de facto broadly consistent with professional regulation in engineering, where the actual registering body has its own governing structure incorporating representatives of relevant ministers and others external to the profession.

Quality and quantity intertwined

Registration is a necessary, but not sufficient condition for a dynamic and effective teaching profession. So, too, is ensuring that there are a sufficient number of qualified teachers available to meet demand. The number available will not, alone, ensure quality teaching, nor the status of the teaching profession. However, if there is not effective policy in place to ensure the orderly provision of adequate numbers, the effectiveness of many initiatives to promote and ensure quality will be undermined.

Earlier in 2001 the then Commonwealth Minister, David Kemp, put out a media release headed 'The status of teaching: quality not numbers' (K27, 19 February 2001). There are quite a few problems with the content of the statement that I will not go into here (especially in relation to PELS). I just want to address the clear implication that, currently and in the near future, the quality of teaching can be addressed while putting aside any consideration of 'numbers'.

Any tightness in the teaching labour market will affect some schools more than others, and some specialisations more than others. A generally tight teaching labour market forces school authorities to be less selective in employing teachers than they would like to be, taking on those with less than adequate competence, qualifications or commitment. The tighter the general labour market, the more severe those particular effects will be. Addressing the problems of hard-to-staff schools, shortage specialisations and general quality must always be two-pronged: ensure adequate overall supply, and deal with the

specific problems with targeted strategies. The targeted strategies cannot work without adequate overall numbers.

Ensuring adequate numbers provides the 'room to move' to address distribution, specialisation matching, and quality. Adequate numbers provides the freedom for teachers to take time off for professional development – whether for a day or several years. When the situation is tight, school authorities are loathe to promote shortage specialists away from classroom teaching, and individual specialists, being committed to their students' education and knowing that they will be hard to replace, will be inhibited from seeking positions beyond the classroom. A lack of readily available positions encourages student teachers and graduates to think beyond their automatic first choice, and to prepare and apply for hard-to-staff locations or shortage specialisations. With attractive locations and schools readily employing graduates and others seeking teaching positions, there is little special recruitment campaigns for hard-to-staff schools can do if there are not even teachers out there looking for positions.

Exactly what ratio of 'supply' to 'demand' is an optimal balance will depend on the circumstances. While a surplus provides plenty of room to move, it also means that potential teachers will be discouraged because they perceive poor employment opportunities. The academic standard of teacher education students will fall, and consequently so might the standard of future teachers (especially if the surplus is followed by a shortage, and universities are under pressure to pass students they may not otherwise have passed, and school authorities cannot be very selective when recruiting).

The impact of shortages on the quality of ongoing teaching in schools was discussed earlier: students' learning is disrupted by unfilled vacancies, series of relief teachers without appropriate specialist qualifications, and their regular teachers and school leaders being overloaded and unable to give proper time to their primary professional duties because they have to perform the tasks of relief teachers. Teachers cannot take time for their own professional development or other out-of-school professional work because there are not relief teachers available to take their classes, and so on.

Dealing with shortages have other opportunity costs, taking time and resources from initiatives and programs directed to, for example, teacher quality. School authorities may put personnel and financial resources into emergency recruitment activities and dealing with problems with hard-to-staff schools and particular specialisation shortages, rather than other initiatives to improve the quality of teaching. Universities may have to give priority to the development of special courses in response to current shortages, rather than developing courses and providing research and developmental support for new areas (such as VET in schools). Professional associations and teacher unions may have to give priority to supporting members who are forced to teach out-of-field or who are overloaded, rather than developing and supporting new initiatives in quality teaching and enhanced professionalism.

Note

Much of this paper draws from 'Conditions for a dynamic and effective teaching profession', an address to the Independent Education Union NSW/ACT conference, 15 June 2001, and 'Workforce needs to 2010', a chapter by the author in the Australian College of Education Year Book 2001, *Beyond the Rhetoric: Building a teaching profession to support quality teaching* (Kerry J. Kennedy ed.)

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Appendix 1:

All Australian teachers; all those with teaching qualifications; all in the labour force; all not in the labour force; and all persons - percentage of those aged 25 to 64 in each five year age range, 1996

	Teachers %	All with teaching qualifications %	All in labour force %	All not in labour force %	All persons %
25-29 years	13.4	11.8	16.1	11.2	14.7
30-34 years	12.4	12.4	15.9	13.0	15.1
35-39 years	18.1	17.6	16.6	12.2	15.4
40-44 years	22.4	19.9	15.9	10.2	14.3
45-49 years	17.5	16.0	15.0	10.3	13.7
50-54 years	10.3	10.8	10.6	10.7	10.7
55-59 years	4.7	7.2	6.8	13.7	8.7
60-64 years	1.3	4.4	3.2	18.6	7.4

Source: ABS 1996 Census, custom tables.