

Teach for Australia

By David Knuckey

The number one objective of the Rudd (now Gillard) Government's Education Revolution, is to improve teacher quality. World-wide data proves that teacher quality is the number one in-school influence on student learning.

Of particular importance, is a teacher's knowledge of the subjects they teach. Evidence shows a clear link between a teacher's academic record and student outcomes. This is a crucial factor in South Australia where recent AEU and University research revealed the disturbing statistic that up to 40% of our state's teachers are not qualified in the science subjects they are teaching your children.

The Federal Government sought to address this science expertise dilemma

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by introducing the Teach for Australia (TFA) program. Drawn from similar initiatives in the UK, USA, Germany & Norway, the program targets high-achieving university graduates and entices them into teaching; emulating the practice of the top 25 OECD nations, which recruit their teachers from the top third of university graduates.

The chosen graduates receive accelerated teacher training and are then placed in public high schools; and some of the most disadvantaged schools at that.

These expert teachers work in the classroom for two years, before they are eligible to move on to a guaranteed position in the private sector – where they

were originally bound. However, overseas data reveals that half of these teachers stay in the classroom after their two-year stint is completed.

Teach for Australia – the class of 2010

The Australian program started in Victoria this year. In 2009, nearly 800 elite graduates (called Associates) from all over Australia competed for the initial 45 places:

- 34 from Victoria
- 3 from NSW
- 3 from ACT
- 1 from QLD
- 1 from SA

- 27 'Associates' are women (60%) and 18 are men (40%).
- 21 of these have completed double degrees, many with a high distinction or distinction average.
- Their average TER (university entrance score) was 95.4.

Graduates come from varied academic backgrounds including, law, maths, science, IT, engineering, business and arts. Some are going straight into the program from university, while others are leaving well-paid and promising jobs to join the program, which sees them earn \$45,000 per year as a TFA teacher.

At the end of 2009 (for some just days after completing their degrees), all 45 started their intensive teacher training course at the University of Melbourne. Working up to 70 hours per week over summer, the graduates completed their studies in time to start work in schools, on the first day of this year. During school holidays, these teachers will continue to engage in intensive training sessions and will be subject to ongoing assessment of their classroom activities. Throughout their two year placements, they will work 80% in the classroom with the remainder of their time being spent on learning & assessment with appointed mentors.

All Associates are placed in schools with other TFA teachers and are working in some of Victoria's more disadvantaged and remote schools:

School	TFA teachers
Bayside P-12 College	4
Bundoora Secondary College	3
Copperfield College	7
Horsham College	2
Hume Secondary College	4
Kellor Downs College	3
McGuire College	3
Mill Park Secondary College	5
Mooroopna Secondary College	3
Shepparton High School	2
Stawell Secondary College	3
Traralgon Secondary College	2
Vic University College, Brimbank	2
Vic University College, Deer Park	2

The Graduates

The Teach for Australia class of 2010 are a varied group of dedicated young Australians; Here are just a few of them.

Jane O'Callaghan is a 28 year old lawyer, with a background in commercial litigation, commercial law and intellectual property. Having some experience in teaching in Japan and at university, Jane joined the program to "get in and make a difference". As to the difference in salary, she stated, "It's a pay cut but you only live once."¹

Shoba Singh holds a double degree in arts and law and has returned to teach in her home region in Melbourne's northern suburbs. Bundoora Secondary College is in a disadvantaged area, with a high number of ESL households.²

Shoba is teaching year 11 legal studies, year 8 Humanities and Year 9 & 10 Commerce. Teach for Australia Associates operate in pairs or threes. Shoba told Education Today, "There is a strong sense of camaraderie in the group and an enthusiasm which I think will help us push through what's ahead. The Associates are very committed; some of us have left really well paying jobs behind to do this."

Philippa Williams is teaching at Stawell Secondary College. Like a number of TFA Associates, she only finished her degree (science / law) five days before commencing her intensive teacher training.³

In an interview with Jeanette Hill of the Herald Sun, Philippa defended the TFA program against its critics stating, "Every time you're going to change the status quo there will be

criticism..." She maintained, however, that she and her co-TFA teachers had received overwhelming support, "I have a mentor who has been fantastic and a very supportive staff. I couldn't have asked for a better place to come to."

Stephen Flegg holds an undergraduate degree in finance and a masters in economics. He is now teaching accounting, economics and maths.⁴

Alyce Cleary graduated with degrees in law and international relations.⁴

Shaun Isbister holds a first class honours degree in economics and commerce and is back teaching at a disadvantaged school, similar to the one he himself attended.⁵

After university he took a job as a business analyst before taking a holiday through Europe. He is now teaching at Mill Park Secondary College. In an interview with Natalie Craig of the Sunday Age, Stephen counters teacher union criticism that he and his fellow 'Associates' are "untrained and uncommitted", with his assertion that, "Two years is good, because it gives people an opportunity to find out about themselves and see whether or not they want a career ... Certainly, I plan to stay on." ■

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1 – Amber Stannard: September 22, 2009; Progress Leader
2 – January 2010; Education Today; Volume 10
3 – Jeanette Hill: March 16, 2010; Herald Sun
4 – Dan Harrison: January 22, 2010; Sydney Morning Herald
5 – Natalie Craig: February 2, 2010; Sunday Age