

London schools recruit 10 teachers from Australia amid school staff shortages

Monday, December 16, 2019 - 11:35

QA Education caught up with Stuart McLaughlin, Principal, Bower Park Academy after his trip to Australia where he interviewed teachers there in a bid to ease school staff shortages back in London Borough of Havering. Here, he tells us about the decision to go to Australia, who funded the trip and the results now he is back in the UK...

Why is there a surplus of teachers in Australia?

There are several factors contributing to the high number of qualified teachers in Australia. Firstly, there are many attractive routes into teaching, with qualifications available at most universities in Australia. Options include:

- A specialist undergraduate four-year Bachelor of Education degree which provides trainees with at least four student teaching placements to develop their skills
- A Postgraduate Diploma and Master degrees which can be completed in 12-18 months

To add to this, Australia's low birth rate in the last decade has affected primary pupil numbers in certain regions, resulting in more trained primary teachers than available roles. In 2017, Australia's total fertility rate (TFR) was 1.74; to maintain its population a country needs a TFR of 2.1.

Finally, Australian teachers are in the top ten of the world's highest-paid teachers according to the World Economic Forum², making it an extremely attractive profession to candidates.

Nonetheless, there remain exceptions. Maths and science teachers are in huge demand nationally and there are areas (including regional, remote and metropolitan locations) which struggle to recruit enough teachers for their schools.



Whereabouts did you go to recruit teachers in Australia?

My trip began in Brisbane where I stayed for two days before flying to Sydney for the next stage of my trip. I am currently in Melbourne where I'll remain until returning to Brisbane for my flight home.

What are the main differences in teacher recruitment between the UK and Australian schools?

Unlike the UK, recruitment for government schools in Australia is run by a centralised body in every state or territory. New graduates join a list or are fast-tracked into government school vacancies. It is a points-based system.

Hard to staff schools will have the opportunity to recruit up to 50% of their candidates directly and faith and independent schools will use agencies when needed to support their recruitment process.

What are Australian schools doing in terms of teacher retention?

Packages are offered to teachers who commit to working in schools based in areas which are difficult to staff. Incentives include higher salaries, relocation expenses and subsidised housing.

To attract new graduates to regional and/or remote parts of the country, they are offered a three year posting in exchange for either their university fees being cleared or a role in a preferred location once their contract is complete.

Like the UK, a high number of teachers leave the profession within the first five years. In response to this, the government is now holding an inquiry into the status of teaching in Australia. To attract the highest calibre candidates, there is currently a plan for high achieving teachers to earn \$40,000 more a year (approximately £21,691) as "instructional specialists." The plan proposes that school leavers with high scores in their final exams will be offered scholarships worth \$10,000 (£5,427.50) per annum to enter the teaching profession.



Could you describe the recruitment process which Supply Desk used to sign up Australian teachers?

Supply Desk kicked off the process with Havering Education Services (HES) by identifying recruitment needs in the borough.

Our overseas recruitment team is Teach In, the Australian branch of Supply Desk – who coincidentally funded my trip. The Teach In team is made up of ex-teachers and they are in charge of screening CVs and applications – around two in three candidates pass the process. Supply Desk evaluate these candidates using their specialist knowledge of UK schools to ensure we secure a good match and provide a teacher who meets all their requirements.

Now you are back home in the UK, could you tell us about how successful the trip was?

Teach in and HES organised 26 interviews for me: 13 secondary and 13 primary. Most of the recruits were available to come to the UK on a two-year visa but a few would require sponsoring to be employed in the London Borough of Havering.

The interviews were mainly face-to-face, with some Skype interviews built into the schedule. The quality of candidates was high – only four were deemed not ready for a post in Havering.

When I travelled to Australia, there were 20 vacancies in Havering across all sectors. My role was to match potential recruits with the requirements of my colleagues in the Borough.

A Havering primary headteacher also interviewed the primary candidates after me in order to double-check their suitability for our schools. It was reassuring to know our judgements were aligned!

Most of the primary candidates were qualified to teach all Key Stage 1 and 2 year groups, while secondary candidates were qualified in two or three subjects. Unfortunately, there weren't many maths and science candidates (the post most in demand across Havering) as these are subjects for which there is a shortage in Australia too. However, there were excellent English, music, history and geography teachers available – many of whom have been snapped up by Havering schools.



Altogether 10 new teachers have been appointed – so the trip was a great success. Should we choose to recruit from Australia again next year, I would recommend that a primary and a secondary headteacher travel together, so they can pool their expertise and agree jointly which candidates should go forward .

The new recruits have already started arriving; at Bower Park Academy we have welcomed a maths and English teacher into our school with great excitement.

One of Stuart's Australian interviewees Charlotte talks us through her interview:



Day 3 of Interviews - Stuart answers the main question from the candidates, "What support will they get when working in Havering?".



Day 4 of interviews in Melbourne - Australia.



Hannah - Melbourne interviewee speaks about her time working in England previously and her interview with Stuart





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