

Commonwealth teacher migrants



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This paper provides a short overview of a piece of research into the recruitment of Commonwealth teachers to countries other than their own and their experiences, commissioned by the Commonwealth Secretariat and conducted in the Spring of 2006. It identifies some of the issues and considerations arising from the survey. A fuller account of the research can be found in Reid [2006]. An interview schedule was devised based on an in-depth interview with a group of such teachers in London and the *Commonwealth Teacher Recruitment Protocol* [2004]. Some 66 teachers were identified and interviewed by teacher unions/associations in seven countries – Australia, Botswana, Canada, New Zealand South Africa, the United Kingdom, and the United States. The number interviewed in each country ranged from 5 to 14.

The survey gives a voice to the accounts recorded in interviews by Commonwealth teachers of their experiences. As such it provides many valuable insights into the process of being recruited to teach in another country and what it is like to teach in one. At the same time it has to be recognised that these accounts are not necessarily representative of all such teachers and that the survey is relatively small scale. At the same time this research makes a useful step along the way to a much needed and comprehensive understanding of the recruitment of teachers to teach in countries other than their own and the ways in which the process might be enhanced for the benefit of both the recruited teachers, their host societies and the schools in which they teach.

The diversity of recruited teachers

While the actual scale of Commonwealth teacher migration is not known the survey provides a picture of something of its diversity and a number of its dimensions. The age range of those recruited is perhaps wider than might have been anticipated – 9% were under 26 years of age, 52% between 26 and 45 and 39% 46 years or over. This range reflects the fact that 55% of the teachers interviewed had been recruited before 2001. Similarly the 66 teachers were born in some 20 different countries. A quarter of those interviewed had previously taught in a country or countries other than that of their birth. The diversity of teachers in terms of their country of birth and previous experience in other countries showed variation by recruiting country. Such diversity may well be a challenge for some host educational systems and schools in terms of providing suitable induction, mentoring and support programmes.

A similar diversity was found in terms of recruited teachers' qualifications, [70% had a first degree and teacher training, 14% a BEd and 17% a non-graduate teaching qualification, while 9 teachers also had higher degrees] the type of school they had taught in prior to migration, [58% in secondary, 23% in primary and 15% in both] the post they had held - half had held posts higher than that of assistant teacher - and the subject[s] or age range[s] that they had taught, both overall and country by country. In the latter respect it can be suspected that this reflects the opportunities provided by the recruitment policies of the host countries. In turn, selective recruitment might in some circumstances affect both the supply of particular types of teachers in countries from which they were recruited and the teaching opportunities within the host country.

Factors in the decision of teachers to migrate

The decision to seek a teaching post outside one's own country is most likely a complex matter as is illustrated by the fact that most interviewed teachers gave more than one reason. The majority of reasons given can be viewed as factors which 'pulled' teachers towards working in another country and rather than being professional were personal, for example, seeking a new experience, being attracted to a country or to travel, or relational, for example, following others, or seeking a better future for their children. Others quoted 'push' factors, to escape from a society or to seek economic security. The range of reasons is perhaps wider than might be expected and suggests that there are different types of recruited teachers who have different expectations of teaching and living in another country. In turn these differing expectations may in part account for differing experiences and reactions to them. Such findings perhaps raise the question of how accurate teachers' knowledge is of other countries and their educational systems, or indeed of the availability of such information and the steps taken by recruiting countries and/or recruiting agencies to ensure that potential recruits are appropriately informed.

The role of recruiting agencies

Where used, recruitment agencies can have a key role to play in fully informing potential teacher migrants about teaching in a country, in drawing up suitable contracts and ensuring that they



are kept. The evidence from this survey shows that their performance has varied widely. Where service is poor it is clearly a matter of concern, not only for the teachers involved, but also for the host countries, educational systems and schools. Some system of control over the recruitment practices of agencies would seem highly desirable. This could be either legal regulation or a listing of recognised and recommended agencies. A secondary problem would be to ensure that potential teacher migrants had appropriate knowledge about the agencies. This role might well be undertaken by the teaching unions or associations.

Teachers' contracts

It could be considered that all teachers are entitled to a written contract of employment which covers all essential elements and is robust. Unfortunately not all the interviewed teachers received such a contract, either written or verbal and some found that those they had received were not fully honoured. While there were a number of reasons for this, it is to overcome this situation that the *Commonwealth Teacher Recruitment Protocol* [2004] was drawn up. It is to be hoped that soon it will be widely adopted and implemented.

Promotion in host country

In the survey half of the recruited teachers had held teaching posts above that of assistant teacher before migrating, but only 15% had had such a position as their first appointment in their host country. Only 3 recruited teachers gave promotion as their reason for moving from their first post, while 6 moved to secure a permanent post. The majority of professional movement was then sideways rather than upwards. Some recruited teachers considered that they were disadvantaged in seeking promotion in comparison with home teachers. It would be of considerable interest to know what the comparative chances of promotion were for recruited, as opposed to, home teachers. The main reasons for moving school were recorded as: wanted or needed a change, to gain better education opportunity for their children, to join family and to have easier travel to and from work.

Conditions of employment in host country

Obviously the conditions of employment for teachers vary country by country and in some, area by area. Asked to compare their conditions of employment with those of teachers within the same school, some 30% of recruited teachers said they were not the same, mostly because they were paid less, or had unqualified or supply posts, while others because of lack of support or induction or poor relationships in school. It would seem undesirable that teachers recruited, or coming, from abroad should not enjoy the same conditions of service as local teachers.

Difficulties experienced in host country

A large proportion [85%] of recruited teachers reported that they had had difficulties – predominately professional ones – in their first year in their host country and almost half reported having these at the time they were interviewed. Interestingly enough, given that some of the teachers had moved between contrasting

societies, only 5 commented on difficulties in adjusting to a different culture. These findings suggest that apart from attempting to ensure that teacher migrants have an acceptable knowledge, attention needs to be given to ensuring that adequate induction, mentoring and support is provided for them as necessary in at least the first months following arrival. Given that the majority of interviewed teachers had families, similar information, support and advice would ideally be provided in respect to children and spouses or partners, for example, concerning educational, medical and social services, employment opportunities, and so on.

The recognition of teaching qualifications

One very clear issue that is highlighted in the survey is the extent to which teaching qualifications are recognised in countries other than the one in which they were obtained. This may be a more general issue, but it was writ large in this survey in the case of the UK, where all 12 of the recruited teachers were regarded as unqualified on arrival. Neither did they find gaining Qualified Teacher Status either easy or straightforward. The UK has an all graduate entry to teaching policy and this obviously causes problems for those overseas teachers holding certificates or diplomas. Again there is a clear need to attempt to ensure that potential teacher migrants are fully informed of the qualification requirements to teach in the country in which they aspire to work.

The role of the Commonwealth Teacher Recruitment Protocol

It is clear from this research and from the emergent issues noted above that this protocol is both highly desirable and timely. Where appropriately implemented it would regularise the process of recruitment and enable recruited teachers to avoid some of the unfortunate experiences recounted in the interviews. The responses to the protocol by recruited teachers teaching in South Africa recorded in the survey indicate that it will be extremely attractive and highly valued by those who follow them to teach in a country other than their own.

The need for further research and its nature

In order to meet the constraints of the funding and the time available, the present survey lies between quantitative and qualitative research. As such it is limited in the extent to which it provides figures related to the number of recruited teachers who had certain types of experience and to the extent to which it presents a detailed account of the recruited teachers' experiences who were interviewed. In essence then, like any piece of research, the present study raises questions that can only, or need to be, answered by further research.

Such research could take a number of directions and it is to be hoped that at least some of these will be taken up, because of the importance of the issue to both the teachers involved – and particularly those that follow them – and the Commonwealth



educational systems that they leave and join. The findings of such research would also be invaluable to the Commonwealth Secretariat in monitoring the use and effect of, and perhaps developing further, its *Commonwealth Teacher Recruitment Protocol* [2004].

The present survey is, in research terms, an excellent pilot study that would serve well as the basis for more detailed and specific surveys. A modified form of the interview schedule could be used to provide more extensive and valuable information than that presently gathered. In particular it could be used to ascertain the extent to which the teachers' stories are truly representative of recruited Commonwealth teachers, both generally and in specific countries. Ideally, and where, or even if, suitable data bases exist, a representative sample could be used to reflect for example, the gender, age, qualification and teaching experience and country of birth of Commonwealth teachers recruited to teach in a given country. Such a representative sample would enable an accurate picture of both the typical experience and the range of experiences of such teachers being recruited and teaching in a country other than their own.

Just as importantly and more straightforwardly would be to extend the locations of recruited teachers interviewed in their host countries. For example, all of those interviewed in the survey in the UK were working in London and identified by one of the UK's teacher unions. Whether or not recruited teachers teaching in cities, towns and districts in other regions of England, in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland would tell the same or similar stories remains an open question. Obviously this factor applies to other countries as well. It would be interesting and useful to know how typical or not the findings of this study are in respect to Commonwealth countries overall.

Since interviewing typically involves relatively high time and financial costs, which would be greatly heightened by encompassing factors such as recruited teachers' locations and increased sample size, consideration could be given to devising a suitable questionnaire from the present interview schedule.

It is also suggested within the present study that the recruitment of teachers to particular countries is likely to be affected by either or both local and/or national educational policy and specific type

or general teacher shortages. Hence future research should seek to encompass these factors. A further direction for future research might be the pursuit of greater depth, detail and understanding of recruited teachers' experiences than can be gained from structured interviews. In this respect relatively unstructured and in-depth interviews or focus groups would commend themselves as the methods for gaining such knowledge.

The research outlined above could be undertaken by a range of institutions, including The Commonwealth Secretariat, national education ministries, regional or local education authorities, teaching unions or associations, as well as academic researchers.

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Biographical notes

Professor Ivan Reid has published extensively on British social inequalities and educational opportunity, the sociology of education, teacher education and conducted evaluations of education policy initiatives. He has experience in some ten countries worldwide, and is an Executive Editor of two international academic journals.