

Teaching snub signals future shortage

EXCLUSIVE

NATASHA BITA
NATIONAL EDUCATION
CORRESPONDENT

A 9 per cent drop in the number of school-leavers applying to study teaching this year will spark a shortage of classroom teachers, universities warned yesterday.

The Australian Council of Deans of Education said the num-

ber of Year 12 graduates choosing teacher education as their first preference for a university course this year had fallen 9 per cent.

ACDE board member Christine Ure, who heads the School of Education at Deakin University, said Australia would not have enough trained teachers to support the 21st-century baby boom.

"We need to be mindful of the upsurge in terms of population growth," she said yesterday.

"There will be further shortages

in hard-to-staff areas like maths, physics, chemistry and languages."

Professor Ure said students in remote parts of Australia would be worst affected by shortages.

The chairman of the federal government's Teacher Education Ministerial Advisory Group, Greg Craven, said the number of students beginning a teaching degree in NSW this year had plunged 12 per cent.

He said education ministers

and the media had turned students away from teaching by portraying "all teachers as idiots".

Australian Education Union president Correna Haythorpe said the current glut of trained teachers looking for permanent work had discouraged school leavers from choosing a career in teaching.

"They don't see teaching as an attractive option," she said.

Ms Haythorpe said teachers wanted permanent work but too many schools were hiring them on

short-term or casual contracts. "Workforce planning is an issue that needs to be tackled," she said.

"There are already shortages in some curriculum areas, particularly maths, science and technology."

South Australian Education Minister Susan Close yesterday said the state's schools had hired only a third of the new teachers who graduated last year.

"It suggests we're in a buyer's market," she said.

"We would rather people not study teaching if they're not going to end up being really good at it."

The Australian Council for Educational Research has predicted a shortage of specialist teachers within 10 years, based on Australian Bureau of Statistics data showing a "baby boom" began in 2008.

The council calculates that Australian schools will need to accommodate 400,000 extra students in the next decade. It has

found one in five mathematics and physics teachers and one in four history teachers are teaching out of field — meaning they specialised in a different subject area, such as art or physical education.

This week *The Australian* revealed the nation's smartest school graduates were shunning teaching courses, preferring degrees in information technology, agriculture and creative arts.

Teaching courses are the most likely to accept Year 12 students

with a low Australian Tertiary Admission Rank score.

Federal Education Department data shows only 5.3 per cent of students accepted into teaching courses this year scored an ATAR above 90, putting them in the top 10 per cent of performers.

The smartest students were three times more likely to choose a creative arts degree than a teaching course.

INQUIRER P19