



Media Release

INTERNS IN SCHOOLS – QUANTITY OR QUALITY?

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In the past weeks several State media outlets have carried reports relating to the recruitment of teachers to overcome the critical shortage of qualified teachers that exists across the country. The thrust of these reports undervalues teachers, trivialises teaching and ignores what it is that makes quality teachers. The shortage of teachers, of science in particular, has been evident for some time but the situation is now in crisis. The theme of the articles that have appeared suggests that unqualified personnel from other professions be offered internships in schools to overcome situations where there are no qualified teachers to fill positions.

Teaching is not a trivial profession. A qualified teacher has intimate knowledge of subject content and more importantly an understanding of contemporary approaches to teaching and learning. Equipped with these two fundamental attributes an affective teacher has a greater chance of supporting the education of our youth in an information economy with diverse emerging technologies. Learning how to learn is as important as what to learn and the internship is not the way to ensure success in the classroom.

The intern model has been tried before and the evidence points to it being a short term, band aid approach that delivers a second rate outcome for money spent. The best way to deliver top quality teachers is to immerse them in a comprehensive teacher education course with all the necessary components delivered by experts in education theory, practise and background knowledge. The intern model advocated focuses on content rather than the purpose and processes of learning and consequently while the interns are “learning on the job” students in their care will be deprived of the experience of a fully qualified practitioner who will deliver superior outcomes for the students in question.

The Australian Science Teachers Association (ASTA) opposes any move to employ unqualified interns to teach alongside qualified science teachers. ASTA urges governments and employing authorities to arrest the shortage of science teachers by putting in place real solutions to the crisis. If education is to be valued, and this country wants to be competitive in a global setting then the engineers, doctors, teachers, technologists, tradespeople of tomorrow need to have the experience of being taught by the best possible teachers of today.

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