

Private schools to train their own teachers with new classroom cadetship

By Jordan Baker

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The headmaster of St Andrew's Cathedral School is worried. Schools are facing a looming teacher shortage, but he finds the quality of graduates from teaching degrees "somewhat unpredictable".

John Collier's counterpart at The Scots College, Ian Lambert, also thinks graduates are not as "classroom-ready as they could be". Both have signed their schools up to a ground-breaking teacher-training program they hope will offer a solution

The Scots College principal, Dr Ian Lambert, with students. The college will participate in a ground-breaking teacher training program next year.

In partnership with Alphacrucis College, members of the Teaching Schools Alliance – which also includes Blue Mountains Grammar and William Clarke College – will hand-pick the school leavers or career changers before they begin their degree.

The students will be paid to work as teacher's aides at their respective schools for one or two days a week, with the aim of working there full-time once they graduate.

"In schools, it's pretty much a lucky dip, where you put out a job ad and hope the right person turns up," said David Hastie, Associate Dean of Education Development at Alphacrucis – a Pentecostal college in Parramatta.

"This is really about taking more agency over workforce planning. [The schools] wanted to be able to have much more guarantee of quality of teachers coming into their workforce. They wanted to be able to map out the design of staff coming in.

"It's like a cadetship in a large accounting firm."

When they are not working at the schools, the students will do their coursework: involving online study, intensive lectures and masterclasses from experienced leaders including departing Shore headmaster Timothy Wright. They will also swap schools from time to time.

Some universities use this so-called clinical model; at the University of NSW, masters students work in nearby schools throughout their degree. But

Alphacrusis' model was unique because it lets schools choose the students, Dr Hastie said.

"Teacher training has been very centralised," he said. "But different schools have different needs. Far western public schools, city selective schools – they have different needs and different cultures.

"It also helps workforce planning. Schools might predict that their head of history is going to retire in a few years, when they'll move another teacher to the role. So let's get some new [history] teachers in the pipeline through the Teaching Alliance."

Dr Collier said a teacher shortage loomed as the population grew and older teachers retired. More than 1500 teachers will be needed over the next 10 years within the 39 Anglican schools in Sydney

"[The Teaching Schools Alliance] gives us some sense of quality control, so we can in some sense home-grow them," he said. "We are not expecting this to replace all other forms of teacher education."

Dr Lambert said education needed reinvention to meet future needs. "If we continue to do education in the same way it has always been done, we will continue to get the same results," he said. "The same applies to teacher training."

Graduates were not as classroom-ready as they should be, because they had not had "sufficient exposure to the day-to-day realities of teaching such as interaction with parents, problem-solving and student conflict resolution", he said.

"With this pilot, we will put into action much of the research from around the world that shows the clinical training model overcomes many of the limitations of the dominant existing model."

A spokesman for the Independent Education Union said academic knowledge was crucial for teaching, and the union would seek feedback from the profession to ensure the Alphacrusis model did not diminish academic rigour.