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### The Department of Education's (WA) Rural and Remote Training Schools Program

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#### **Abstract**

The Department of Education initiated a pilot of the Rural and Remote Training Schools (RRTS) project in 2011 to promote rural and remote teaching to university students; at that time the Department's records indicated that only 11 students had undertaken a rural or remote practicum during 2010. The program is a key component of the Department's broader attraction and retention strategy and targets the Pilbara, Kimberley, Midwest and Goldfields regions which are areas deemed to be difficult to staff. Attraction and retention of quality teachers in rural and remote locations remain key Departmental priorities.

#### **Program Description**

A key component of the RRTS program involves the manager working closely with Universities to promote the program and to identify high performing pre-service teachers who are interested in undertaking a long term (usually final) practicum in a rural or remote school. The manager also works with schools, regional offices and mentor teachers to ensure that the required conditions are in place within each school to provide the pre-service teacher with a supportive 'training' environment.

Pre-service teachers who enter the program are therefore supported before, during and after their practicum by the manager to help prepare them for, and to encourage them to seek, Department of Education contracts. Since 2011, the program conceptualised and overseen by Christine Porter (Workforce Planning) and managed by Clint Glendinning and Richard Lobb, has supported more than 550 of these students by funding costs and providing a weekly living allowance. Data collected since 2013 show that the majority of pre-service teachers who participate in the program are subsequently employed in either the school or region in which they undertake their practicum, one of the four target rural regions or in another rural region (Figure 1).

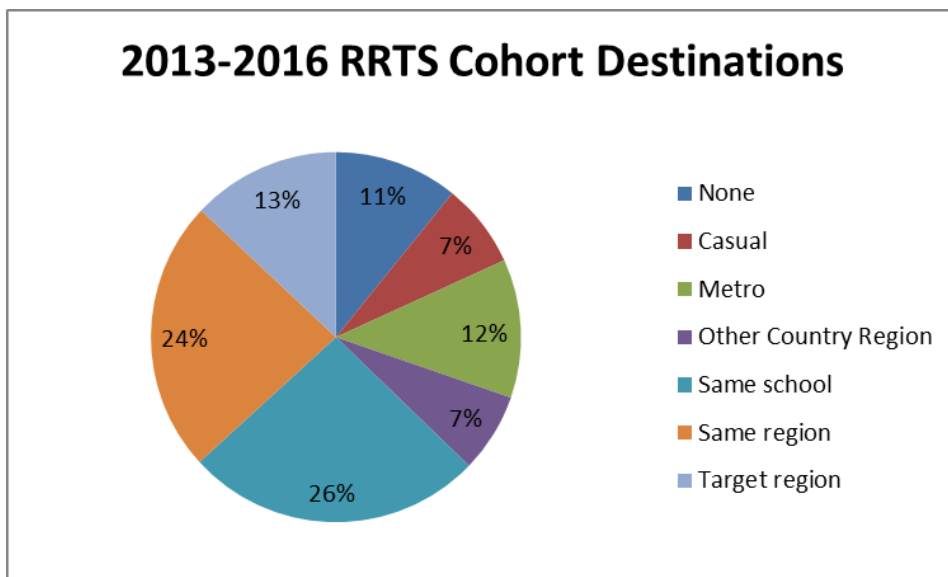


Figure 1: 2013-2016 Destination Data

Data collected through the Department of Education’s Human Resources Management Information System (HRMIS) since 2013 for pre-service teachers who received funding and who undertook their practicum in the Pilbara, Kimberley, Midwest and Goldfields regions shows that the Department employed 84% of participants, with 73% of these having worked in a rural location at some point.

A total of 108 student teachers participated in the project during 2017 and 117 students participated during 2018. This number included 22 pre-service students who travelled to other country areas; these students received a range of support but were not visited at their school site. It also included 26 third year students.

Of the 2018 cohort:

- 86% are currently working in a public school (with some commencing in 2018);
- 8% of the aforementioned cohort are working in a casual capacity (relief teaching); and
- 85% of those who were offered a contract in a public school are working in either the same school in which they undertook their practicum, the same region, another target region or another country region.

Principals consistently cite the program as an excellent means of identifying strong candidates who are willing and able to take on contracts in difficult to staff areas. The project has been widely recognised for its quality processes and outcomes and was a recipient of the 2017 *Australian Rural Education Award* from the Society for the Provision of Education in Rural Australia (SPERA).

The program was also highlighted in the OECD’s recently released *Attracting Teachers to Schools in Rural and Remote Areas in Australia*, highlighting it as a model of best practice (<http://www.oecdteacherready.org/promising-practice/attracting-teachers-to-schools-in-rural-and-remote-areas-in-australia/>)

The project continues to grow, with a record 43 students participating during Term 2 of 2019.