

**EVALUATION OF THE RURAL AND REMOTE
TRAINING SCHOOLS PROJECT**

FINAL REPORT

For the Department of Education

September 2013

CONTENTS

Executive Summary and Recommendations	i
Introduction	1
The Evaluation	1
Methodology	2
About the Project	3
Role of the project team	3
Role of universities	4
Role of Departmental personnel.....	4
Funding	4
Profile of pre-service teacher participation	5
Views of the project team.....	7
Feedback about the Project	7
Views of principals and school coordinators.....	11
Finding out about the Project	11
Effectiveness of the Project.....	12
Quality	17
Judging the outcomes of the Project.....	19
Benefits and/or disadvantages of participation	20
Views of pre-service teachers and graduate teachers.....	24
Finding out about the Project	25
Effectiveness of support.....	27
The project team	29
Professional teaching skills	31
Benefits and/or disadvantages of participation	32
Views of Mentor Teachers	36
Effectiveness of the mentoring role.....	38
Experience of mentors	40
Views of University Coordinators	41
Evaluation Findings.....	45
Findings against the evaluation questions	45
General findings	50
Conclusions and Recommendations	52
Building partnerships.....	52
Networks	52
Effective support services	53
Achievement of project objectives and general findings	53
Attachments.....	55

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In mid-May 2013, the Department of Education contracted The Nexus Network P/L to undertake an evaluation of its Rural and Remote Training Schools Project (the Project).

The Project commenced in 2011 and specifically targets final year pre-service teachers to promote teaching in a rural/remote school and improve teacher effectiveness by preparing pre-service teachers for teaching in such schools.

This evaluation was designed to:

- assess the extent that the Project has met its objectives
- inform future policy and funding decisions related to the Project to ensure benefits can be sustained over time
- help the Department improve (a) practicum experiences for pre-service teachers and (b) their employment in rural and remote schools.

Information for the evaluation was obtained from various sources including:

- annual Project reports
- interviews with project team members and University Coordinators
- on-line surveys for principals and school coordinators, mentors, and past and present Project participants (i.e. pre-service teachers and graduates).

The evaluation found that the Project has been effective in:

- expanding the number of quality practicum placements available in rural/remote schools
- increasing the number of rural/remote schools prepared to provide practicum placements through a 'training school' approach
- increasing the number (and most likely the quality) of pre-service teachers applying for practicum placements in rural/remote schools
- providing quality support and a positive experience to pre-service teachers who participate in the Project, increasing both their readiness for – and willingness to pursue – a career in rural/remote schools
- improving the employment prospects of graduating pre-service teachers.

Overall, the evaluation found that the Project is highly valued by participants, universities and schools alike. Some recommendations have, however, been made with a view to fine-tuning the program and ensuring it can be sustained over time.

Recommendation 1

The Department should seek approval from the universities for continued departmental membership on the WA School Experience Committee.

Recommendation 2

If successful, the Departmental person appointed to the WA School Experience Committee should have sound knowledge of and experience in rural/remote schools.

Recommendation 3

School principals should be encouraged to strengthen their partnerships with university staff responsible for pre-service teacher practicums in their schools.

Recommendation 4

Community/industry and school partnerships developed as a result of the Project should be acknowledged formally by the Department and used as models for other developments and initiatives undertaken by schools and their local communities.

Recommendation 5

The Department should investigate the feasibility of developing structured on-line/social media support to facilitate communication across the various networks associated with the Project.

Recommendation 6

The Department should, in view of the potential withdrawal of dedicated funding for the project team, consider alternative arrangements for the ongoing provision of effective support services for pre-service teachers undertaking practicums in rural/remote schools.

Recommendation 7

The Department should recognise the provision of appropriate housing as an essential infrastructure component for the continued success of the Project.

Recommendation 8

In light of the evaluation findings, it is recommended that the Department note the achievement of the following Project objectives:

- an expansion of pre-service teacher access to quality practicum programs in selected rural and remote schools
- an expansion of the quantum of rural and remote schools prepared to provide practicum experiences through a 'training school' approach
- an expansion in the quantum of pre-service teachers applying for practicum placements in rural and remote schools
- the provision of support and a positive experience that will leave selected pre-service teachers prepared, ready and wanting to commence a career in a rural or remote school
- a high correlation between pre-service teachers undertaking a practicum through the Project and subsequent employment with the Department.

Recommendation 9

The Department of Education rural stipend for pre-service teachers should be reviewed on a regular basis to accommodate changes to the cost of living in different areas of the State as the result of developments and/or downturns in local business, industry and farming.

INTRODUCTION

The Rural and Remote Training Schools Project (the Project) is a project of the Western Australian Department of Education and a sub-set of the Training Schools initiative within the Improving Teacher Quality National Partnership (ITQNP). The Project commenced in 2011, building on the work of the Remote Teaching Service Support Team in 2010. The Project specifically targets final year pre-service teachers to strengthen the link between the long-term practicum experience and a potential employment outcome. In effect, as well as promoting the desirability of teaching in a rural/remote school, the Project is designed to improve teacher effectiveness by preparing pre-service teachers for teaching in such schools/locations.

A note on teacher effectiveness from a 2010 Grattan Institute report...

The evidence shows that improving teacher effectiveness is the best method of improving student performance. It is more important for a student to have an effective teacher than to be in a class with a few less students. Teacher effectiveness has a greater impact on student performance than any other government school education reform. Initiatives to improve teacher effectiveness not only help students more, they cost much less.¹

The objectives of the Project are to:

- expand pre-service teacher access to quality practicum programs in selected rural and remote schools
- expand the quantum of rural and remote schools prepared to provide practicum experiences through a 'training school' approach
- expand the quantum and quality of pre-service teachers applying for practicum placements in rural and remote schools
- provide support and a positive experience that will leave selected pre-service teachers prepared, ready and wanting to commence a career in a rural or remote school
- improve the employability prospects for graduating pre-service teachers.

The Project is a collaborative venture between the Department of Education and the five Western Australian Universities that provide teacher education. The scope of the Project involves pre-service teachers placed in government schools.

The Department commissioned The Nexus Network to undertake an evaluation of the Project.

THE EVALUATION

The evaluation is to assess the extent that the Project has:

- enabled expansion of pre-service teacher access to quality practicum programs in selected rural and remote schools
- impacted on the quantum of rural and remote schools prepared to provide practicum experiences through a 'training school' approach
- impacted on the quantum and quality of pre-service teachers applying for practicum placements in rural and remote schools

¹ *Investing in Our Teachers, Investing in Our Economy*, Ben Jensen, The Grattan institute, November 2010, p 4.

- provided support and a positive experience that enabled pre-service teachers to be prepared, ready and willing to commence a career in a rural or remote school
- impacted on the employability prospects for graduating pre-service teachers.

As outcomes of the evaluation, recommendations will be provided to:

- inform policy and funding decisions to ensure that identified benefits of the Project can be sustained over time
- assist the Department in determining factors related to the Project that lead to improved practicum experiences and employment of pre-service teacher participants in rural and remote schools.

METHODOLOGY

The methodology comprised:

- a review of the findings from the various reports, reviews and evaluations done by the project team since the Project's commencement in 2011 (see Attachments 2 and 3)
- three on-line surveys seeking quantitative and qualitative information from principals/coordinators and mentors in government schools, pre-service teachers currently participating in the Project from the five universities, and graduate teachers in government schools who participated in the Project previously (see Attachments 4,5,6)
- interviews with five university coordinators and the two members of the project team (see Attachment 7).

Principals, schools coordinators, mentors and pre-service and graduate teachers were invited by email to complete the on-line surveys. A follow-up email was sent and, where possible, project team members reminded people complete the survey.

The numbers of people contacted about the surveys were:

- principals and coordinators 28
- mentors 25
- pre-service teachers/graduate teachers 60

Response rates were as follows:

- principals and coordinators 13 (46.5%)
- mentors 8 (32%)
- pre-service teachers/graduate teachers 33 (55%)

The healthy response rate from the three groups – and particularly from the pre-service and graduate teachers – provides confidence in the results.

ABOUT THE PROJECT

The Project's work focused initially on primary schools in the Kimberley, Pilbara, Mid-West and Goldfields Regions and is now being extended to include secondary schools.

A flow chart showing a summary of the process for placing pre-service teachers in rural and remote practicums is provided at Attachment 1.

Key players in the Project are:

- the project team (employees of the Department of Education)
- the five universities
- Departmental personnel (regional executive directors and principals).

Comments on the roles of the key players follow.

ROLE OF THE PROJECT TEAM

The Project is coordinated by Clint Glendinning and Joanne Allan. As well as having a base in Workforce Policy and Coordination at the Department, team members have an office at Edith Cowan University.

The team works with practicum coordinators across all universities to promote a rural or remote practicum experience to pre-service teachers. Team members have been invited to, and have joined the group of university practicum managers/coordinators who meet regularly as the WA School Experience Committee.

The team liaises with Regional Executive Directors and principals to identify suitable schools with good mentor teachers and support staff in identified schools, particularly with respect to their engagement with pre-service teachers and their capacity to implement a 'training school' approach.

In addition, the team works closely with TeachingWA and the Remote Teaching Service staffing officer/s to market the opportunities for a career in rural and remote schools.

Specifically team members:

- make a presentation to all pre-service teachers in all universities in the year prior to undertaking their final long term practicums to raise the profile, develop understanding of the uniqueness, challenges and benefits of rural and remote schools in regional WA²
- encourage pre-service teachers to consider if they are the right sort of person with the right sort of skills to meet the challenges of a long term practicum in this context and ask interested pre-service teachers to register their interest
- meet with interested pre-service teachers, initially as a group and then individually, recording details about them
- provide one-on-one sessions to support pre-service teachers in making their choices
- provide the list of interested pre-service teachers to university coordinator(s), who review and assess them to determine a final recommended list for placement

² Presentation techniques used include a highly visual and stimulating multi-media presentation with local music and embedded videos of current teachers, community members and former practicum pre-service teachers filmed on location. Visuals of rural/ remote towns, schools, classrooms, pedagogy, housing, lifestyle environment are also included.

- arrange appropriate placements and host schools, working with regional directors and principals
- visit selected host schools to deliver an orientation session on the Project to staff
- maintain regular contact with host schools and pre-service teachers, both before and during the practicum
- recommend all participants for Department of Education scholarship funding through the Rural Teaching Program
- organise a full day orientation program for pre-service teachers a few weeks prior to taking up their placement
- visit all pre-service teachers no matter where they are located
- encourage all pre-service teachers to attend a 'De-Brief' day at the conclusion of their practicums
- keep in contact with participants informally after their practicum, monitoring their progress and often assisting them with employment issues
- assist with the development of local initiatives designed to support the viability of the Project.

ROLE OF UNIVERSITIES

In addition to the standard approach to organising rural/remote practicums for pre-service teachers, the universities have responsibility for selecting suitable pre-service teachers to participate in the Project. Each university approaches this in a way that suits their current operations, but generally select pre-service teachers who are considered suitable for a practicum in a primary school, perform well academically and have performed well in previous practicums. Selection of Graduate Diploma students for practicums in secondary schools is more difficult. Academic records can be assessed, but the lack of previous practicum experience makes an assessment of their teaching potential challenging.

Universities are responsible for recommending quality pre-service teachers for participation in the Project.

ROLE OF DEPARTMENTAL PERSONNEL

Regional Executive Directors and principals provide advice to the team on the selection of host schools for practicum pre-service teachers and teachers who could act as mentors. Criteria for this process include the capacity of school personnel to engage with pre-service teachers and to implement a 'training school' approach.³ Principals also assist with providing advice on accommodation arrangements for pre-service teachers. Principals may take responsibility for coordinating practicums at the school, or may appoint another teacher/school leader to act as coordinator. They select teacher/s to act as mentors.

FUNDING

The Department of Education budget for the project team for 2012/13 is shown in Table 1 overleaf.

³ Training Schools are selected based on their supportive culture and ethos toward developing future teachers. Training Schools provide opportunities for final year pre-service teachers (Interns) to undertake extended practicum placements within a supportive, professional environment.

Table 1: Funding, Rural and Remote Training Schools Project

Cost Code	Description	Total
Activity Implementation Costs - Salaries and Allowances 0010		
	1 x Administrator 5.4; 1 x Teacher	254,000
Activity Implementation Costs - Staff Related Expenses 0060		
	Catering, Hospitality, PD, Inservice materials	10,500
Activity Implementation Costs - Travel 0070		
	Visiting Programs to Prac Training Schools, orientation and in situ support	50,000
Activity Implementation Costs - Communication Services 0100		
	Phone, Internet	3,000
Activity Implementation Costs - Service and Contracts 0110		
	Venue Hire, Conference Fees, Motor Vehicle Lease	6,000
Activity Implementation Costs - Service and Contracts Property 0115		
	Parking, Other	1,500
Activity Implementation Costs - Consumables 0120		
	Stationery, Printing, Resource Materials, Consumables General	5,000
TOTALS		330,000

In addition, the Department provides funding to pre-service teachers through Rural Teaching Program stipends – between \$200 and \$265 (depending on location) per week living allowance for each week of their practicum and the equivalent of an airfare to and from their practicum placement school.

The Catholic Education office provides similar stipends to Notre Dame pre-service teachers who undertake a practicum in rural and remote schools.

PROFILE OF PRE-SERVICE TEACHER PARTICIPATION

Table 2 overleaf shows the profile of the participation of pre-service teachers in practicums in rural and remote schools. The 2011 cohort is the first to participate in the Project. Previous to this year, the Project only related to Remote Teaching Service schools.

Table 2: Profile of pre-service teacher participation in practicums in rural/remote schools

	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
	RTS pracs	RTS pracs	RTS pracs	Rural & RTS pracs	Rural & RTS pracs
Total Practicum placements (3 rd & 4 th Yrs)	1	10	10 (in Term 3)	58	100
Total 4 th (Final) Yr placements	1	10	10	38	86
Post-practicum staffing appointments for eligible 4 th yr pre-service teachers	0 0%	4 40%	10 100%	32 85%	59 70%
Appointments to positions in Regional WA	NA	2 50%	8 80%	28 75%	49 83 %

*RTS – Remote Teaching Service

As of May 2013, 59 of the 2012 cohort of 86 had taken up teaching positions in government schools, seven are currently teaching in private schools in WA, five are interstate or overseas, six are relief teaching until they are able to find a job in a government school, five are still finishing their course for various reasons and the others are un-contactable at present.

2013 has been a more challenging year for final year pre-service teachers to gain employment in the early months of the new school year as there were fewer primary teachers employed at the start of the year. Even so, nearly 70% have gained teaching positions in government schools in WA and many of these are either in rural and remote contexts similar to, or the same as their practicum experience. According to the project team, this fact reinforces previous data that shows a strong correlation between the experience of being involved in the Project and then seeking a teaching position in a rural/ remote school.

Practicum placements continue in 2013 with a cohort of 17 in term 2. Thirty-seven pre-service teachers participated in a practicum in the Kimberley, Pilbara, Mid-West and Goldfields Regions in term 3.

VIEWS OF THE PROJECT TEAM

The project team monitors the uptake of practicum placements by pre-service teachers and has prepared annual reports (in 2011 and 2012) on the Project's achievements against outcomes. Copies of the reports are provided at Attachments 2 and 3.

Findings from the 2012 report were as follows:

- Since 2010, there has been a significant increase in the number of supported practicum placements to rural and remote schools through the Project: 10 in 2010 to 100 in 2012.
- There is a high correlation between pre-service teachers undertaking a practicum through the Project and subsequent employment with the Department: 100% of the 2010 cohort and 85% of the 2011 cohort are currently employed with the Department.
- The remainder of the 2011 cohort currently not employed with the Department are not necessarily 'lost' to the system, as many of this sub-set are traveling and have indicated they may be seeking positions in the future.
- A high proportion of the cohorts undertaking practicums through the Project have chosen to teach in rural and remote schools: 100% of the 2010 cohort; and 75% of the 2011 cohort. A number of the 2011 cohort currently in urban environments has indicated they wish to take up rural and remote positions in the future, citing current family/personal circumstance as a restrictive factor.

Risks facing the ongoing delivery of the Project were identified as:

- the capacity of schools to provide local accommodation solutions for pre-service teachers
- ongoing funding for the Project should Commonwealth funding be withdrawn, particularly for school-based visits which are regarded as a key component in the provision of support for pre-service teachers, principals and mentors.

In discussions with the project team, additional data of relevance to this evaluation was obtained. In 2010, when remote practicums were the responsibility of the Remote Teaching Service Support Team (and therefore limited to remote schools only), eight schools provided practicums. In 2011 – the first year of the RRTS Project – the number of participating schools expanded to 33 rural and remote schools. In 2012, the number increased further to 45 schools.

FEEDBACK ABOUT THE PROJECT

The team has also conducted informal surveys of the perceptions of pre-service teachers of their practicum experiences and the associated information and support services provided as part of the Project. Some of the feedback from Curtin University pre-service teachers who completed a rural/remote practicum earlier this year is provided below.

An incredibly positive experience for my final prac. Great to receive support and to network with members of the department.

The school and Learning Area included me in every aspect of school planning such as meetings, PD, parent information night and plied me with endless resources.

The RRTS has been invaluable in helping me decide whether to pursue teaching in a remote and regional area. Although it was a relatively short

experience, it has given me the confidence and enthusiasm to start applying for regional teaching.

I am so glad I had this experience throughout my learning journey. I was nervous at first, but it honestly was the most amazing experience. I learnt so much about myself as a teacher but also myself personally.

My school and mentor were incredible. So supportive and nurturing throughout the whole pre-placement process.

Some case studies provided by the project team indicate the way the Project has served rural and remote schools and the Department.

Case study – Attracting secondary pre-service teachers to take up a practicum in regional WA

Due to factors such as the half cohort and year 7 primary students switching to high school in 2015, a Departmental priority is to attract secondary pre-service teachers to a long term practicum in regional WA, particularly in certain specialist areas such as science (physics/ chemistry), maths and design and technology where recruitment is traditionally very difficult.

In January 2012, the project team made a presentation to Grad Dip Education pre-service teachers at one university and asked the 160 participants to indicate if they were studying in any of the specialist areas. Eight pre-service teachers indicated they were and were then asked if they were prepared to undertake a practicum in regional WA as part of their course. One pre-service teacher indicated he might the following year if his family agreed. This story highlights the difficulty in attracting participants in these specialist areas. In actual fact, no pre-service teachers participated in a science (physics/chem) practicum in regional WA through the project in 2012.

During late 2012 and early 2013, however, the team put in a concerted effort with the universities to try and identify, motivate and place some pre-service secondary teachers. The team placed three pre-service teachers with specialist qualifications in physics and chemistry in Regional WA in 2013.

In addition another three placements were arranged for pre-service teachers with a minor secondary specialist qualification in science and two in the area of mathematics. Other secondary placements were made across secondary areas including special need areas in psychology and special education. These placements were made in key senior high schools in the Kimberley, Pilbara, Mid-West and Goldfields Regions. Although the numbers may not seem exceedingly high, given, for example there is one senior high school in the Kimberley, four in the Pilbara Region and one in Kalgoorlie itself, any additional specialist area teacher who undertakes a long-term practicum is significant.

Case study – Broome Senior High School

In term 2, 2013 a physics/chemistry pre-service teacher was placed at Broome Senior High School in the Kimberley. This pre-service teacher completed a strong practicum which resulted in appointment to a position as a physics/chemistry teacher at Hedland Senior High School in the Pilbara Region four weeks after completing his final practicum in Broome. This was a great result for all. The school and Department benefitted from the

appointment of a highly capable and motivated young teacher in a key area of specialist need in regional WA.

Through his practicum, the pre-service teacher experienced the challenges and context of regional WA and has taken up a teaching position prepared, wanting to be there and knowing the context.

Another secondary science chemistry pre-service teacher has taken up a practicum at Hedland Senior High School in term 3. The new teacher will be a valuable contact and support for the pre-service teacher on practicum in addition to the mentor teacher, university and project team support.

Case Study - Hedland Senior High School

Hedland Senior High School has been a very proactive and highly supportive school for cohorts of secondary pre-service teachers through their staff sustainability strategy. Mentor teachers are trained, mining companies and the community support the strategy through human and financial resourcing and the school is in the process of considering a renovation program that would see the conversion of an old hostel block into pre-service teacher accommodation.

This is visionary and will enable Hedland Senior High School to act as a regional hub for the local network of schools (primary and remote), regularly taking in cohorts of pre-service teachers on extended practicum and driving their staffing and sustainability strategy into the future. The project team has been able to work closely with the school to complement their staff sustainability strategy and to facilitate the network achieve its longer term goals.

Case Study - Staffing the Ngaanyatjarra Lands School

The Remote Teaching Service is a key beneficiary of a number of pre-service teachers participating in the Project. However, in spite of increasing numbers of applications being received by the Remote Teaching Service Pool, the number of successful applicants wanting teaching positions in the Ngaanyatjarra Lands School did not match the number of vacancies available.

This shortfall of teachers resulted in the Executive Principal of the Ngaanyatjarra Lands School seeking suitable teachers at the beginning of the school year. A consequence of this last minute urgency to fill vacancies was that under prepared teachers were being appointed to the school. These last minute appointees often had no contextual understanding of the school and community that led to staff vacating their positions during the school year with all the associated flow on effects from this kind of upheaval.

Up until 2011 the Ngaanyatjarra Lands School had not been involved in hosting pre service teachers. Prepared, oriented, motivated, high quality pre-service teachers could be a source for staffing in the year following their final practicum. There were no established relationships with universities and no process, personnel or funding was directed to promote this opportunity. In reality, due to sheer logistics, the possibility/perception of hosting a pre-service teacher seemed to be unachievable, impossible ... "in the too hard basket".

In response to this situation the project team:

- *established a partnership and processes with the Executive Principal and relevant Phases of Schooling Coordinators in the Lands School*
- *promoted the Lands School to pre-service teachers as a possible location for their extended practicum, stressing that such placements offer a unique, challenging and rewarding experience*
- *identified, in conjunction with the Phases of Schooling Coordinators, suitable mentors for practicum pre-service teachers*
- *identified, along with university practicum coordinators, pre-service teachers who were interested and suitable to take up the challenge of a practicum in a remote location*
- *linked selected practicum placement pre-service teachers with Teaching WA so they could apply for and receive a stipend to help defray the expenses associated with the cost of living*
- *conducted supportive site visits during the practicum*
- *alerted pre-service teachers to the process of application to the Rural Teaching Service pool*
- *conducted a debriefing for pre-service teachers upon completion of the practicum.*

The project team provided significant additional support through the delivery of streamlined orientation programs for pre-service teachers going to the Lands for their practicum. The orientation provided essential contextual information regarding the location e.g. what to take, what to wear, day-to-day life in an extremely remote location.

This was in addition to the general orientation held with all pre-service teachers undertaking a practicum under the mantle of the Project. This orientation targeted areas such as cultural understandings, behaviour management and curriculum input including the Aboriginal Literacy Strategy.

As a result of this intervention in 2011 all three (100%) of the pre-service teachers who undertook their practicum in the Ngaanyatjarra Lands School, received contracts at the school for 2012 and beyond. This number of placements represented nearly 50% of the staffing needs for the Ngaanyatjarra Lands School in 2012 - a significant contribution to their local resourcing need with people who were coming contextually prepared and wanting to be there. To date all three teachers are still in situ.

This success can be directly attributed to the intervention of the project team. Under the mantle Project candidates chosen were highly motivated, prepared and up for the challenges of teaching in this environment.

Another pre-service teacher in 2011 undertook her practicum as part of the Project, in an Aboriginal Community School in Kalgoorlie. She too, chose to take up a position in the Ngaanyatjarra Lands School in 2012. The challenges that her practicum afforded her and the success she experienced in this practicum, ensured that she was indeed ready to take up a position in the Ngaanyatjarra Lands School. She too is currently still in the Lands.

VIEWS OF PRINCIPALS AND SCHOOL COORDINATORS

An on-line survey was conducted for principals and school coordinators possessing direct, recent experience with the Project (see Attachment 4). It addressed:

- access to information about the Project
- views on the effectiveness of the Project
- views on the quality of support services
- the judgement of principals/coordinators of the outcomes
- benefits and/or disadvantages of participation in the Project.

Of the 28 principals and school coordinators invited to participate in the survey, 13 (or 46.5%) responded to the survey. Of those, six were from rural primary schools, three from rural secondary/district high schools and four from remote schools. The table below shows the distribution of principals and coordinators across the different school types.

Table 3: School supervisor as a function of school type

Position	School Type	Rural Primary	Rural Secondary/District High	Remote	Total
Principal		3	2	4	9
Deputy Principal		2	0	0	2
School Coordinator		1	0	0	1
Unofficial Coordinator		0	1	0	1
Total		6	3	4	13

FINDING OUT ABOUT THE PROJECT

Overall respondents rated the quality of official information as either satisfactory (92.3%) or very satisfactory (61.5%) with only one person lodging a neutral response. The results are shown in the table below.

Table 4: Quality of official information

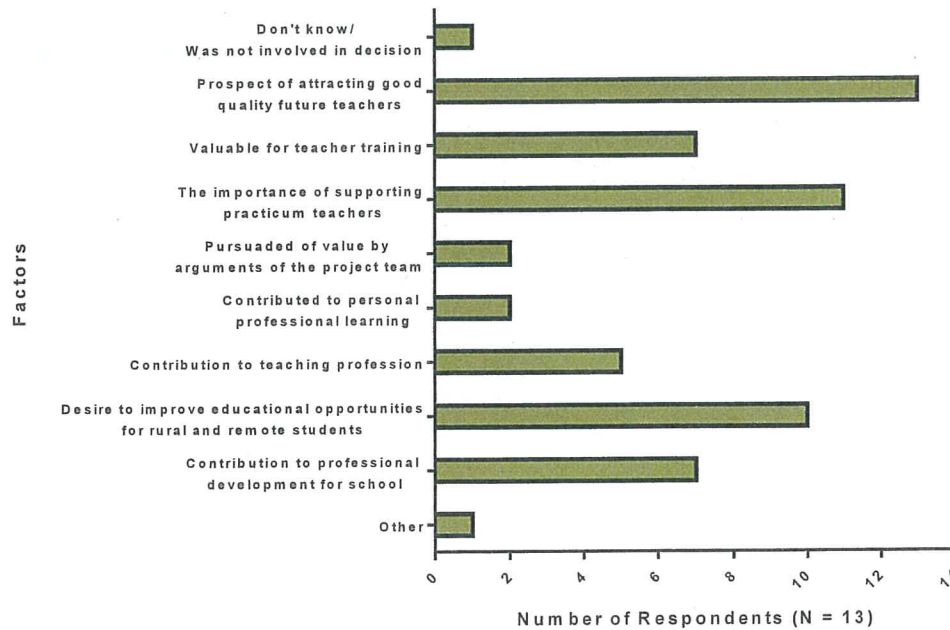
Rating	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Very satisfactory	8	61.5	61.5
Satisfactory	4	30.8	92.3
Neutral	1	7.7	100.0
Total	13	100.0	

All respondents replied that it was easy to have their questions about the Project answered. One person commented that “the information is easy to absorb” and another stated that there was “easy access to project staff who have good knowledge of remote schools”. Another comment was that the “organisers were always able to provide appropriate information and

support us throughout the practicums”.

The responses to the question of what influenced their decision to have their school participate in the project are shown in Figure 1 below. One person commented that “we were not officially participating (this year) due to changes going on at the school’. Another comment was “It is important that we have pre-service teachers come to the country. Most enjoy their stay and are highly competent young people who are more than willing to become full staff members whilst here”. Another comment was “I saw an opportunity for quality practicum pre-service teachers to have a lengthy experience in a remote context and be better able to make and informed decisions about returning”.

Figure 1: Factors that influenced the decision to participate in the Project



EFFECTIVENESS OF THE PROJECT

Questions in this section related to the effectiveness of the Project in encouraging pre-service and graduate teachers to teach in rural and remote schools.

In response to the statement that the Project has contributed to an increase in pre-service teachers applying for practicum placements in rural and remote schools, 38.5% strongly agreed, 46.2% agreed, 7.7% were neutral and 7.7% did not know. The results are shown in the table overleaf.

Table 5: Contribution of the Project to students undertaking a practicum in a rural/remote school

Response	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly agree	5	38.5	38.5
Agree	6	46.2	84.6
Neutral	1	7.7	92.3
Don't know	1	7.7	100.0
Total	13	100.0	

In response to the statement that the Project contributes to the retention of pre-service teachers in rural and remote schools following graduation, 53.8% strongly agreed, 30.8% agreed and 15.4% did not know. The results are shown in the table below.

Table 6: Contribution of the Project to the retention of students following graduation in rural and remote schools

Response	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly agree	7	53.8	53.8
Agree	4	30.8	84.6
Don't know	2	15.4	100.0
Total	13	100.0	

Six respondents took the opportunity to provide additional comments/observations about the program – the comments reflect strong support for the Project and for it to continue.

- *Most of our prac teachers have brought an enthusiasm and breath of fresh air into the school and have fully engaged in the school community. Parents of students are more than willing to treat the praccy as a qualified teacher.*
- *It provides a sense that young teachers are interested in coming to work in our school.*
- *Most pre-service teachers we have had have been very keen. We have benefited by being able to offer these quality people a position in our school.*
- *Projects such as this are essential for the attraction and retention of quality staff in rural, remote and regional areas. Having pre service teachers in the school gives leadership and mentoring skills to existing staff as well giving the pre service teacher a hands on experience of living in a place such as ours.*
- *Last year we had a pre-service teacher who should never have got this far. We felt disappointed and frustrated that we were able to have a person of that calibre in our school and the damage was immense.*

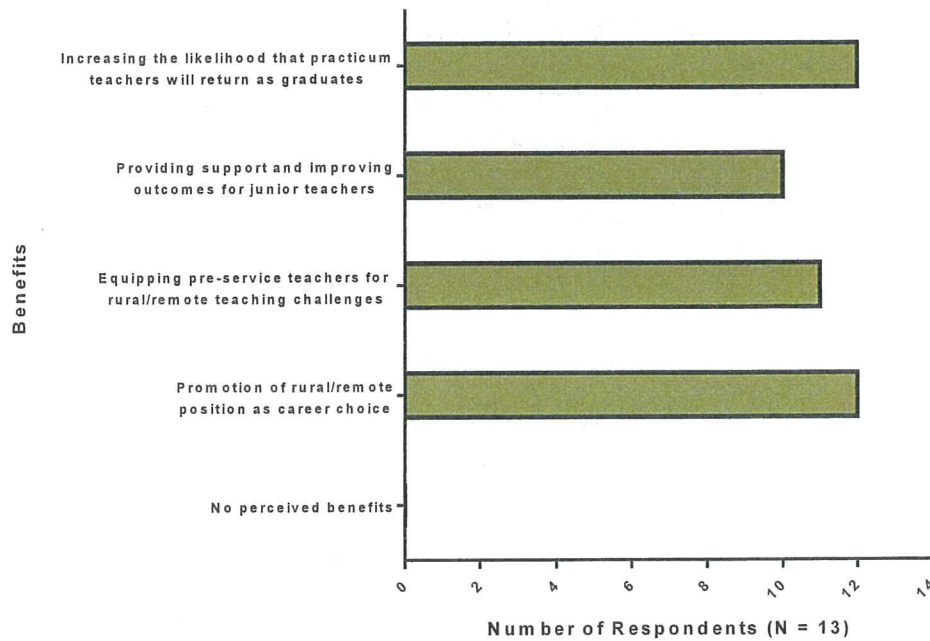
This year we accepted another pre-service teacher and our faith in this project has been revived well.

- *We have found a greater demand for placement requests from graduates and existing teachers are willing to stay longer to further their skills while working with pre service teachers. It is a win—win for all, school, community and pre service teachers. It is a pity the department does not realise the positive impact it has had.*

Of the 13 respondents, 11 rated the feedback they had received as positive and two rated it as OK.

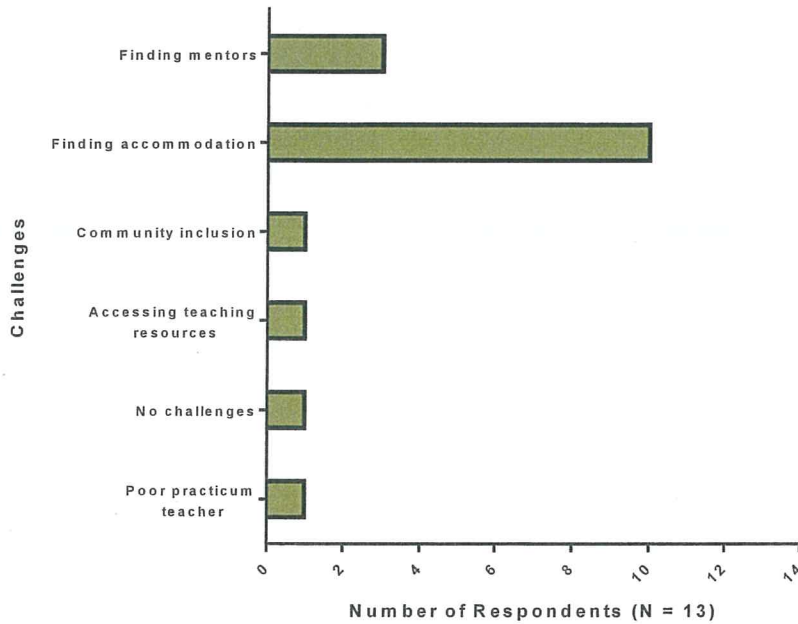
Ratings for the aspects that people thought had benefited their school communities are shown in the figure below. The ratings are very positive, with all respondents indicating that their school communities benefited from the Project.

Figure 2: Perceived benefits of the Project to rural/remote schools



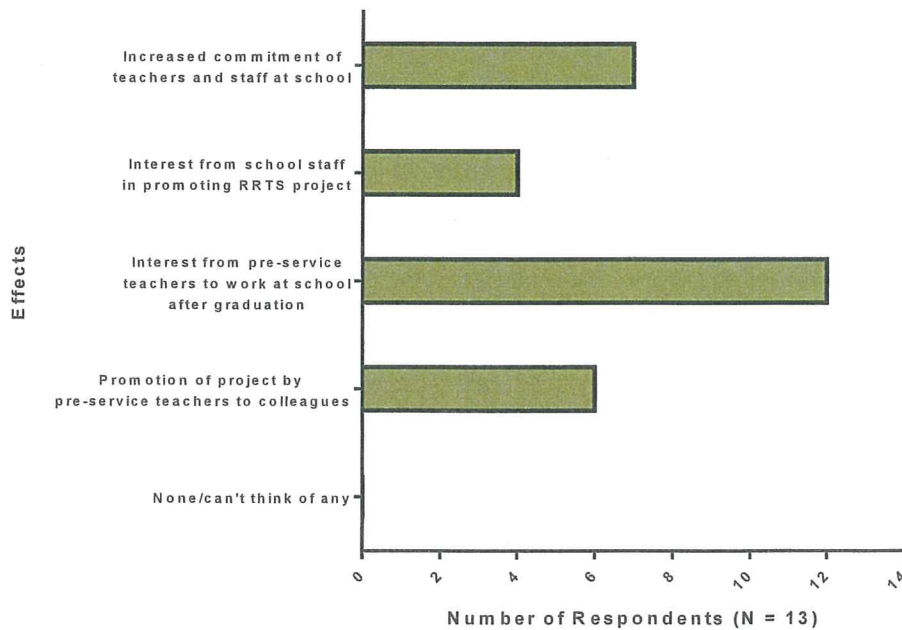
Respondents were asked to rate a range of challenges facing host schools participating in the Project. Accommodation is by far the greatest challenge, with finding mentors the next most difficult. Ratings are shown in the figure overleaf.

Figure 3: Challenges in hosting a long term practicum placement



The flow-on effects of the Project for school communities were assessed, with the most positive being the interest from pre-service teachers in working at the school following graduation. Ratings are shown in the figure below.

Figure 4: Flow on effects for school communities



Five people responded yes to the question whether new initiatives (local and systemic) have been developed and implemented as a result of the Project. Four provided further information.

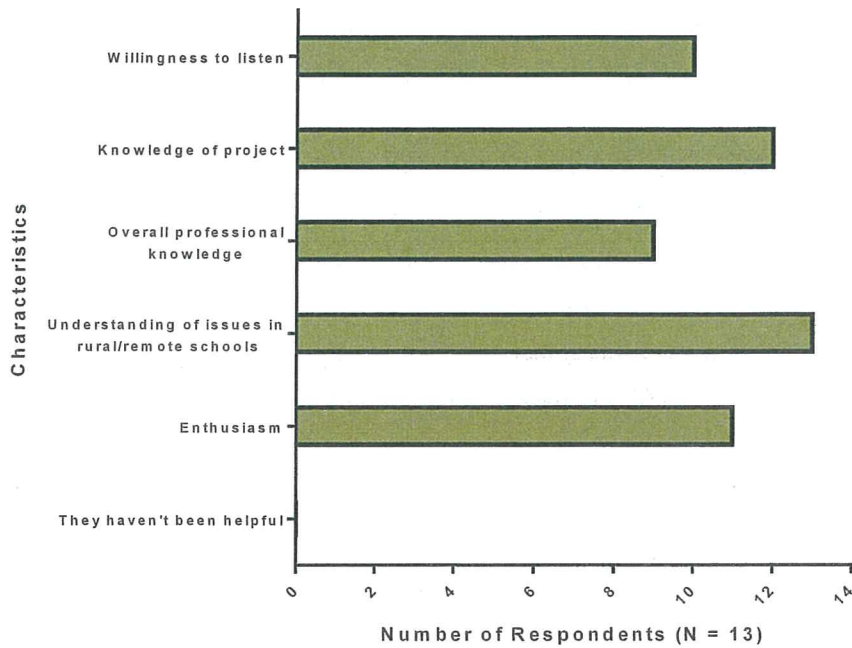
- *Through funding by the North West Shelf Project to the school, an attraction and retention project has been implemented which has attracted significant funding.*
- *Community approach to supporting pre service teachers and the profession in general.*
- *The network of schools has a coordinated approach to pre-service teacher placements as well as a strong commitment to educating our mentor teachers. Interns are established in one school.*
- *We have continued to build on the experiences of the pre service teachers to further promote practicum opportunities in our regional centre.*

Respondents commented on the effectiveness of the support provided during the practicum (11 respondents only):

- 69.2% found the orientation visit to schools by the project team useful
- 53.8% found project team meetings with principals and mentor teachers useful and 15.4% found these to be OK
- 92.3% found the procedures for matching pre-service teachers with host schools to be useful
- 46% found visits from University coordinators to be useful and 15.4% found these to be OK
- 53.8% found the additional support/advice provided during practicum to be useful with 23.1% rating it as OK.

The role undertaken by the project team is emerging as critically important to the success of the Project. Respondents were asked to rate the characteristics of the team members that they found to be most helpful. The results are shown in the figure overleaf.

Figure 5: Characteristics of the project team found to be most helpful



QUALITY

As described above, the project team provides a wide range of support and services. Respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement with eight major services as shown in the table overleaf. Overall most either agreed or agreed strongly with the statements, although there are some ratings worth noting.

Only 7.7% (one person) disagreed with the statement that orientation visits from project team members to host schools informed school staff of project expectations effectively, with 15.4% (two people) having a neutral opinion.

The ratings for statements 7.2, 7.4 and 7.5 indicate scope for improvements in the selection of good quality candidates, finding schools placements and matching pre-service teachers to host schools.

Table 7: Quality of support and services

Statement (N = 13)	Response					
		Strongly agree n (%)	Agree n (%)	Neutral n (%)	Disagree n (%)	Don't know n (%)
7.1 The quality of the relationship between the project team and University staff contributes to the success of the Project.		4 (30.8%)	6 (36.2%)	1 (7.7%)	-	2 (15.4%)
7.2 The project team works with University staff to select good quality candidates.		4 (30.8%)	7 (53.8%)	1 (7.7%)	-	1 (7.7%)
7.3 Site visits from project team members make an important contribution to the Project's success.		6 (36.2%)	4 (30.8%)	3 (23.1%)	-	-
7.4 The process for finding school placements for selected students is effective.		3 (23.1%)	9 (69.2%)	1 (7.7%)	-	-
7.5 The process of matching students to the host school works well.		4 (30.8%)	8 (61.5%)	1 (7.7%)	-	-
7.6 Orientation visits from project team members to host schools effectively inform school staff of Project expectations.		4 (30.8%)	4 (30.8%)	2 (15.4%)	1 (7.7%)	2 (15.4%)
7.7 The orientation (induction) program is effective in preparing pre-service teachers for their practicum.		5 (38.5%)	6 (36.2%)	-	1 (7.7%)	1 (7.7%)
7.8 The members of the project team respond quickly to ad hoc requests for information and advice.		8 (61.5%)	3 (23.1%)	-	-	2 (15.4%)

Five respondents provided additional comments. Again, most of the comments are very positive, indicating good support for the Project to continue.

- *This project has provided us with some really innovative ways of us looking at staffing our school in areas of need.*
- *Interestingly, I don't have any problems with the team, in fact they are fabulous, my issue lies with how the project is run in this community and how one school is the 'go to'. Our school has not been visited by the team, nor do we get any say about placements, this is all done by one school. There needs to be greater consultation with all schools.*
- *Always helpful and available.*
- *As I said we have had good experiences mostly and the couple of bad ones we have overcome. We don't seem to have orientation visits and the visit during the prac is sometimes very late into the prac. When we have need to contact the team we have usually had prompt response.*

- I highly commend the service provided by the RRTS. I have been involved with four prac students and all have been placed successfully in our school A very positive program that needs to continue.

JUDGING THE OUTCOMES OF THE PROJECT

Respondents were asked to rate the effectiveness of the Project in four areas as shown in the table below. Overall the ratings are very positive.

Table 8: Effectiveness of the Project

Statement (N = 13)	Response	Excellent n (%)	Very good n (%)	Good n (%)	Adequate n (%)	Don't know n (%)
8.1 Preparing pre-service teachers for rural/remote service.		8 (61.5%)	5 (38.5%)	-	-	-
8.2 Comparison to teachers with no access to RRTS Program.		10 (76.9%)	3 (23.1%)	-	-	-
8.3 Contribution to school professional development.		3 (23.1%)	7 (53.8%)	1 (7.7%)	1 (7.7%)	1 (7.7%)
8.4 Contribution to school as a whole. ⁴		3 (23.1%)	8 (61.5%)	1 (7.7%)	-	-

Respondents were asked to agree or otherwise with the comment that "RRTS pre-service teachers in my school have developed the following skills to function effectively in the classroom". Details are provided in the table overleaf. While good, the ratings indicate some scope for improvement.

Respondents were also asked to express their confidence that the Project had provided:

- access to the professional support they needed - 76.9% strongly agreed and 15.4% agreed⁵
- access to the resources they needed - 76.9% strongly agreed and 23.1% agreed.

⁴One respondent did not provide a response.

⁵One person did not provide a response.

Table 9: Skills development of students during practicum

Statement (N = 13)	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral
	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)
9.1. Engage their students in purposeful an appropriate learning experiences.	3 (23.1%)	10 (76.9%)	-
9.2. Monitor, assess, record and report student learning outcomes.	3 (23.1%)	10 (76.9%)	-
9.3. Reflect critically on their professional experiences in order to enhance their professional effectiveness.	3 (23.1%)	9 (69.2%)	1 (7.7%)
9.4. Participate in curriculum policy and program teamwork at the school level.	4 (30.8%)	8 (61.5%)	1 (7.7%)
9.5. Establish partnerships with students, colleagues, parents and other caregivers in the school community.	4 (30.8%)	8 (61.5%)	1 (7.7%)

Four respondents provided additional comments:

- *Most are fantastic and we would want them in our profession. There should be none that slip through the scrutiny.*
- *We have been more than happy with the teachers we have had in our school thus far.*
- *Generally high quality.*
- *They have generally been of a high quality but we do have rigorous procedures in place to support all teachers and monitor their needs at every opportunity.*

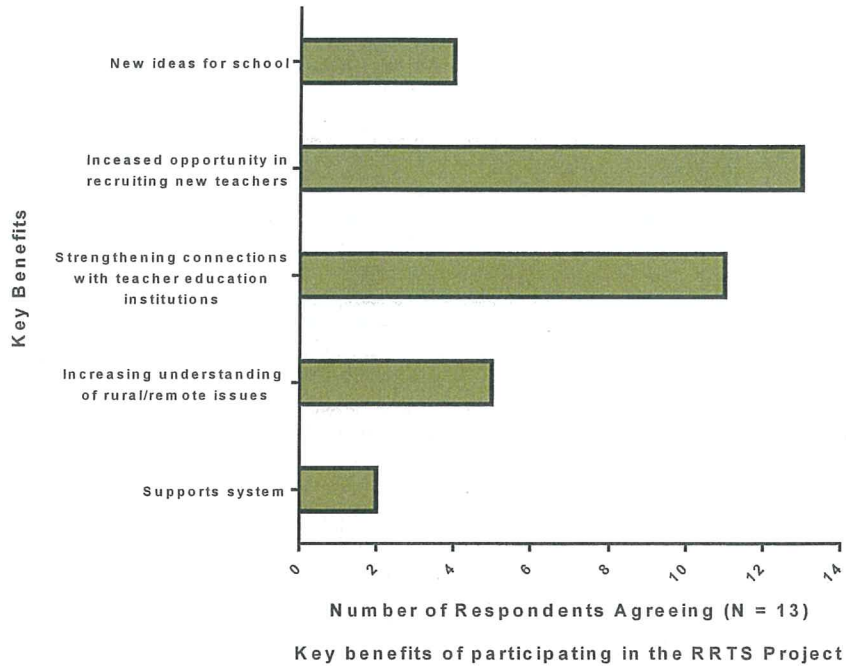
BENEFITS AND/OR DISADVANTAGES OF PARTICIPATION

As shown in the figure overleaf, respondents saw the major benefits to be:

- providing rural and remote schools with increased opportunities to recruit new teachers
- strengthening the connections with teacher education institutions.

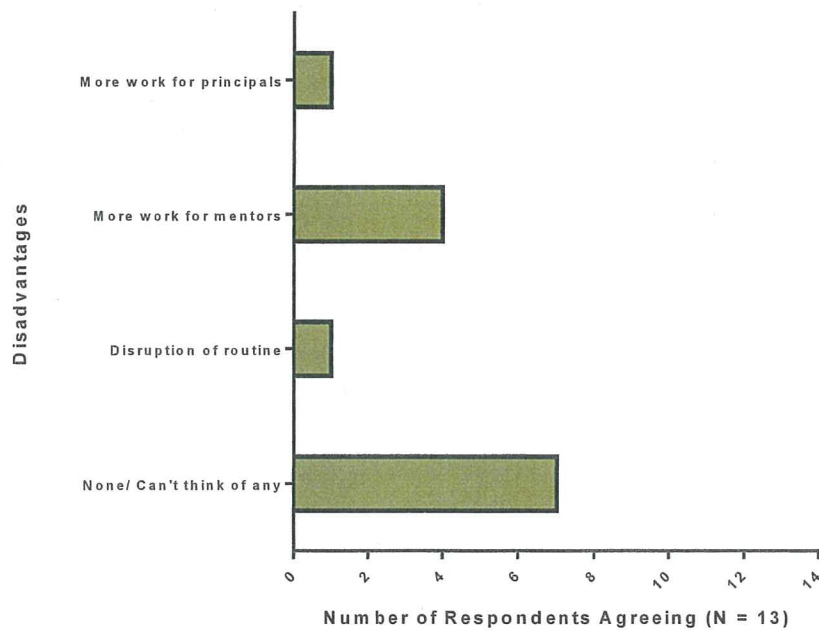
Less important was the adoption of new ideas for schools and increasing the understanding of pre-service teachers of rural and remote issues. Respondents saw little benefit of the Project to supporting the system.

Figure 6: Benefits of participating in the Project



As shown in the figure below, people generally rated any disadvantages quite low. About half of the respondents could not think of any disadvantages and more work for mentors was the only disadvantage that rated more than one response.

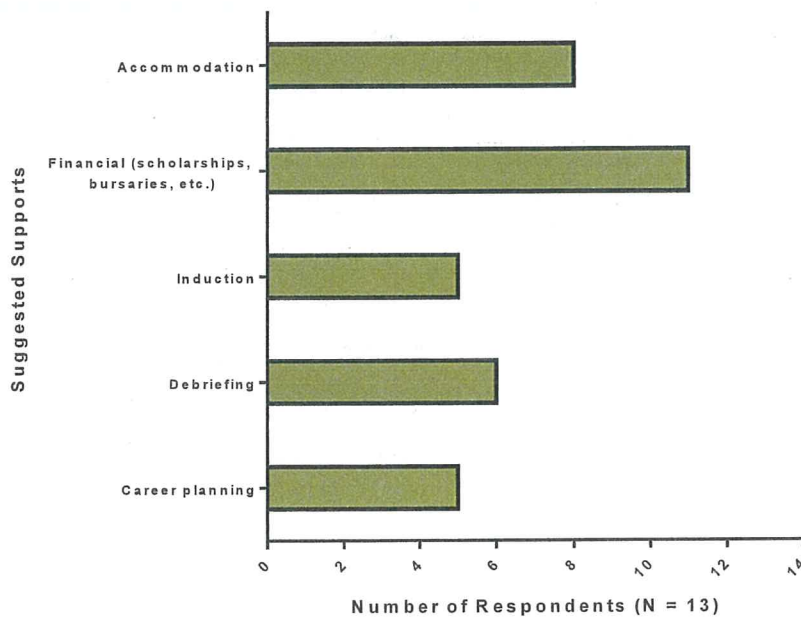
Figure 7: Disadvantages of participating in the Project



76.9% of respondents rated the overall value of the Project as very good and 23.1% rated the value as good – a 100% approval rating.

Respondents were asked to comment on other supports they thought might be helpful in the development of pre-services teachers. As shown in the figure below, financial support and accommodation figure strongly.

Figure 8: Additional support that would be helpful in the development of students



Respondents provided additional comments on the program overall:

- *Accommodation for pre-service teachers - either funds to support it or DET provides furnished housing. More support for underperforming students.*
- *An awesome team who really understand the need for quality pre-service and graduate teachers. Great to work with these colleagues and always a pleasure when they visit us!*
- *Ensure the long term functioning of the project with sufficient funds for a stipend for students and give it a long term commitment.*
- *It is important that we continue to have quality prac teachers in our country schools and that they know what they are in for. I still think for some, the issue of being away from home/mum/dad/special friend or party life is not made clear. Perhaps one can't comprehend until one experiences that.*
- *Great opportunity to ensure quality educators for our future generation.*

Evaluation of the Rural and Remote Training Schools Project

- *I have been thankful for the positive response and lines of communication we have established through the RRTS.*
- *The project is fabulous and should be sustained. I love the connection between the department, schools and the university. As a network of schools working with this project however, there needs to be acknowledgment that individual schools work differently and a one size fits all does not work. Thanks for your support and enthusiasm Jo.*
- *I am very happy with the project and wish to be involved for many years to come as I believe in its success.*
- *Pleased to be involved.*

VIEWS OF PRE-SERVICE TEACHERS AND GRADUATE TEACHERS

An on-line survey was conducted for pre-service teachers currently participating in the Project from the five universities, and graduate teachers in government schools who participated in the Project previously (see Attachment 5). It addressed:

- getting information about the Project
- views on the effectiveness of the support provided to participants
- the impact of the Project on the development of participants' professional teaching skills
- the benefits/disadvantages of the Project
- possible future improvements.

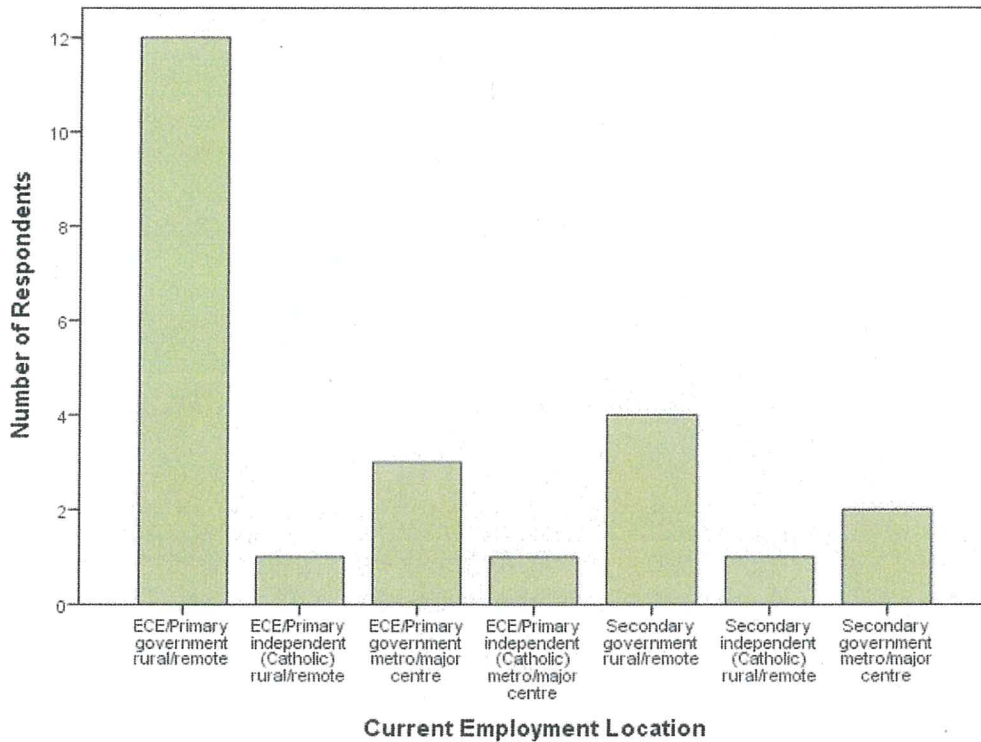
Of the 60 pre-service teachers/graduate teachers eligible and invited to participate in the survey, 33 (or 55%) responded. Nine (27.3%) were from pre-service teachers involved in the Project, 23(69.7%) were graduates of the 2012 cohort and one was not identified. The years the respondents graduated and their home universities are shown in the table below. Most respondents were 2012 graduates and about one third were graduates of Edith Cowan University.

Table 10: Distribution of students by university

University	Year Graduated					Total
	2011	2012	2013	2014	2014+	
Edith Cowan	1	12	0	4	5	22
Murdoch	1	7	1	0	0	9
Notre Dame	0	2	0	0	0	2
Total	2	21	1	4	5	33

Twenty-four respondents are currently employed, with half achieving employment in a rural or remote ECE/primary government school and four in a rural or remote secondary government school. The spread of employment is shown in the figure overleaf.

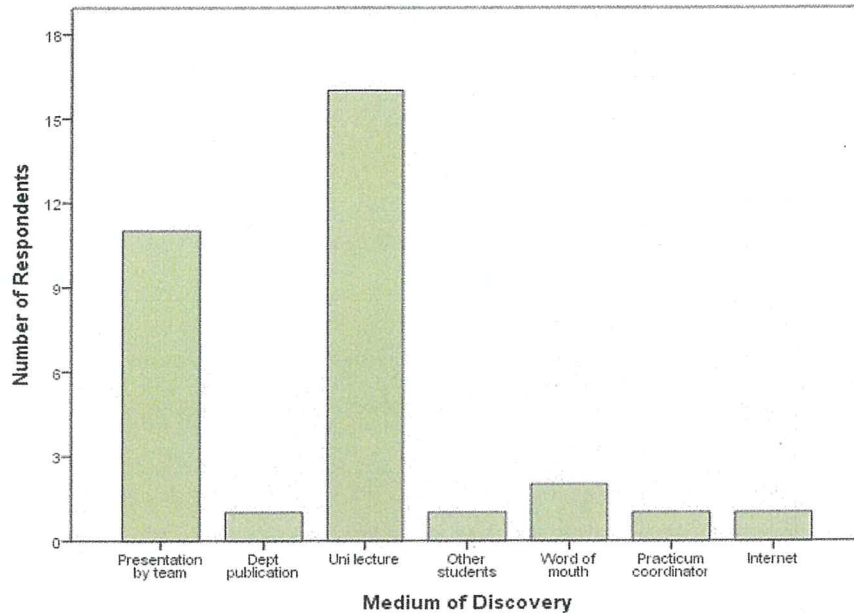
Figure 9: Employment location of respondents



FINDING OUT ABOUT THE PROJECT

The figure overleaf demonstrates the important roles played by the project team and universities in informing pre-service teachers about the Project. It is interesting to note that about half the respondents were informed by their universities, with about a third being informed by a team member. Both parties clearly have a key role in getting the message out and any reduction in their roles could have a serious impact on the continued success of the Project.

Figure 10: Medium through which respondents first heard about the Project



Respondents were asked to rate the information provided to them. The table below shows positive ratings overall with only three respondents having no opinion.

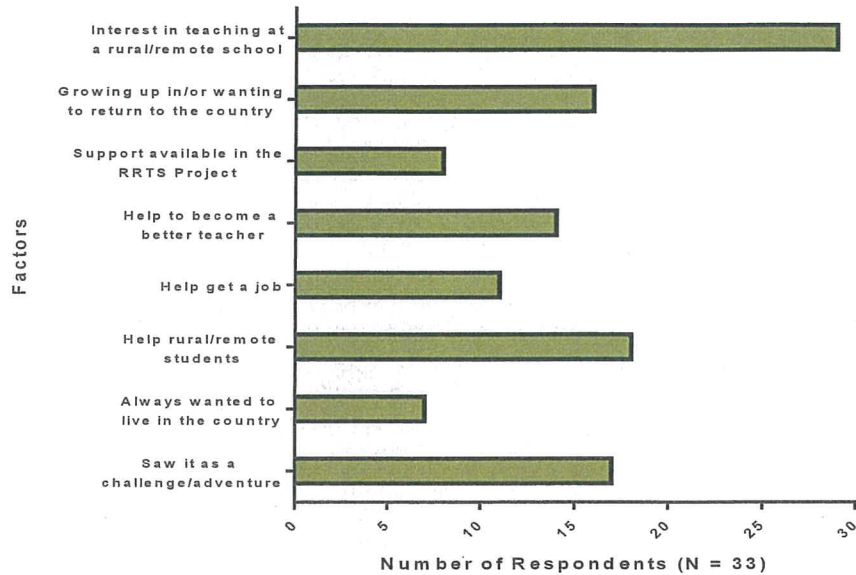
Table 11: Value of Information to participants

Statement (N = 33)	Strongly agree n (%)	Agree n (%)	Neutral n (%)
11.1. It was relevant and useful.	17 (51.5%)	16 (48.5%)	-
11.2. It was in a useful format.	16 (48.5%)	16 (48.5%)	1 (3.0%)
11.3. It was sufficient.	16 (48.5%)	17 (51.5%)	-
11.4. It was timely.	14 (42.4%)	19 (57.6%)	-
11.5. It was clear and easy to read.	16 (48.5%)	16 (48.5%)	1 (3.0%)
11.6. It answered all or most of my questions.	15 (45.5%)	17 (51.5%)	1 (3.0%)
11.7. Overall it was satisfactory.	19 (57.6%)	14 (42.4%)	-

In response to a question about the ease of having questions about the Project answered, 75.8% responded yes and 24.2% responded most of the time. There were no negative responses to this question.

Factors that influenced people to participate in the Project are shown in the figure overleaf. Apart from the high number of participants who identified interest in teaching in a rural/remote school, the other factors of interest are growing up in or wanting to return to the country, wanting to help rural/remote students and seeing it as a challenge or adventure.

Figure 11: Factors that influenced the decision to participate in the Project



Almost 100% of respondents (90.9%) responded yes to the question whether the Project had increased their knowledge and understanding of the nature and challenges of teaching in rural and remote schools. Two respondents did not know/weren't sure and one response was missing.

EFFECTIVENESS OF SUPPORT

As described above the project team provides a significant amount of support for pre-service teachers, before and during their practicums, as well as following up and tracking their employment once they graduate. The value of these services for pre-service teachers is demonstrated in the ratings shown in the table overleaf.

Table 12: Effectiveness of support

Task effectiveness (N = 33)	Response	Strongly agree n (%)	Agree n (%)	Neutral n (%)	Disagree n (%)	Don't know n (%)
12.1. I had a supportive and positive experience during the practicum.*		21 (63.6%)	10 (30.3%)	1 (3.0%)	-	-
12.2. My initial contact with the project team and their assistance with decision-making was satisfactory.		19 (57.6%)	14 (42.4%)	-	-	-
12.3. The orientation presentations and other sessions provided relevant and useful information about teaching in rural and remote schools.		17 (51.5%)	12 (36.4%)	2 (6.1%)	1 (3.0%)	1 (3.0%)
12.4. The orientation (induction) program is comprehensive and relevant and effective in preparing pre-service teachers for their practicum.		15 (45.5%)	12 (36.4%)	4 (12.1%)	1 (3.0%)	1 (3.0%)
12.5. The presenters demonstrated sound knowledge and experience in their presentations.		18 (55.4%)	12 (36.4%)	1 (3.0%)	-	2 (6.1%)
12.6. The relationship between the project team and University staff seemed to work well.		18 (55.4%)	12 (36.4%)	3 (9.1%)	-	-
12.7. Mentor teachers gave me useful support during my practicum in a rural/remote school.		24 (72.7%)	8 (24.2%)	1 (3.0%)	-	-
12.8. Site visits from project team members are useful.		19 (57.6%)	10 (30.3%)	2 (6.1%)	2 (6.1%)	-
12.9. I appreciated opportunities (through the orientation program) to network with others involved in the Project.*		15 (45.5%)	15 (45.5%)	-	1 (3.0%)	1 (3.0%)
12.10. I am satisfied with the helpfulness of the support I received in undertaking my practicum in a rural/remote school.		19 (57.6%)	12 (36.4%)	2 (6.1%)	-	-
12.11. The final debriefing program was useful (if you have had one).**		5 (15.2%)	10 (30.3%)	4 (12.1%)	1 (3.0%)	5 (15.2%)

* One respondent failed to answer this question; ** Eight respondents (or 24% of the sample) did not answer this question (see below).

Responses to the statements above were generally positive, with stronger responses to the following statements:

I had a supportive and positive experience during the practicum.

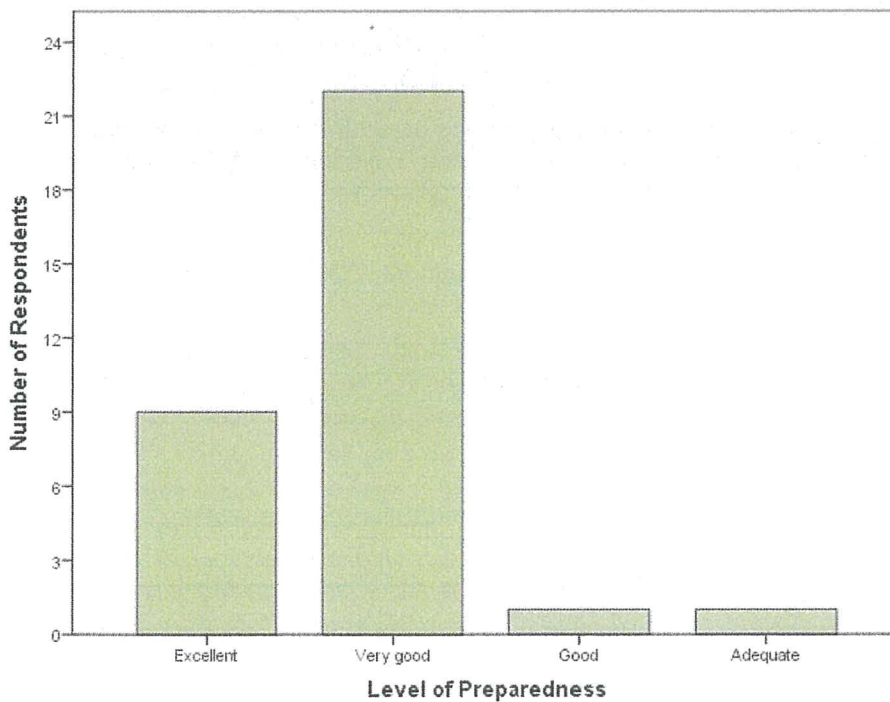
The presenters demonstrated sound knowledge and experience in their presentations.

Mentor teachers gave me useful support during my practicum in a rural/remote school.

I am satisfied with the helpfulness of the support I received in undertaking my practicum in a rural/remote school.

Overall respondents were very positive about their preparedness for teaching as a result of their participation in the Project as shown in the figure below. Areas where some minor improvements could be made include the orientation program and opportunities to network. The only issue appears to be with the final debriefing, with eight respondents not answering this question, four respondents providing a neutral response and five not knowing. However, the project team advised that the eight who did not respond had not attended the debriefing as they had already gained employment or were travelling.

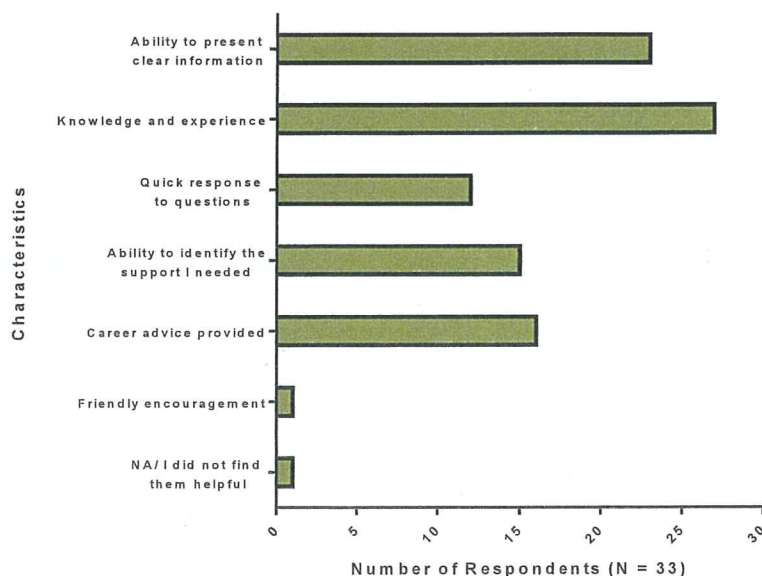
Figure 12: Rating of preparedness for teaching in rural/remote schools from participating in the Project



THE PROJECT TEAM

Respondents were asked to identify the characteristics of the project team members that they found to be the most helpful. The figure overleaf shows their responses. The knowledge and experience of the team and their ability to present clear information were the things people found most helpful – things that reinforce the importance of the team members to the success of the Project.

Figure 13: Helpful characteristics of the project team



Respondents were asked to provide suggestions on additional things the team might do to help them. Nine provided comment and three declined, indicating that they thought the Project was excellent as is (similar comments have been amalgamated).

- *I found the most helpful aspect was having a past student teacher talk to us - so perhaps a couple more talks from previous teachers - perhaps one from each major region.*
- *I am yet to have the school visit with someone from the program; this is in week 8 and quite late in the term. This could be done earlier to get support early on when it is most needed. Emails and queries were responded to straight away from the team and with excellent information and support.**

“Being from the country and having experienced the life style, the advice and information given at orientation was very basic and not as helpful as I had hoped. I did not receive a site visit so I cannot comment as to whether their advice would have been helpful once I was in the school.”⁶

- *More financial support i.e. more funding or cheaper living expenses (rent).”*
- *I am unsure if this should fall under the Project Team tasks, but I would have liked to of known more about how housing and relocation was going to work if I was employed in a country school. Otherwise I feel most questions I ask where well answered.*

**Note: Site visits for some current pre-service teachers had not taken place at the time the survey was conducted.*

⁶Note: Site visits for some current pre-service teachers had not taken place at the time this survey was conducted.

PROFESSIONAL TEACHING SKILLS

In response to the statement that participation in the Project had enabled respondents to develop a range of skills, ratings were almost all positive, with only one providing a neutral response to two items. The results are shown in the table below.

Table 13: Skills developed as part of the Project

Skills developed as part of the Project (N = 33)	Response	Strongly agree n (%)	Agree n (%)	Neutral n (%)
13.1. Engage with students in purposeful and appropriate learning experiences.		18 (54.5%)	14 (42.4%)	1 (3.0%)
13.2. Monitor, assess, record and report student learning outcomes.		11 (33.3%)	22 (66.7%)	-
13.3. Reflect critically on my professional experiences in order to enhance my professional effectiveness.		16 (48.5%)	16 (48.5%)	1 (3.0%)
13.4. Participate in curriculum policy and program teamwork at the school level.*		11 (33.3%)	21 (63.6%)	-
13.5. Establish partnerships with students, colleagues, parents and other caregivers in the school community.		18 (55.4%)	15 (45.5%)	-

*Missing 1 response.

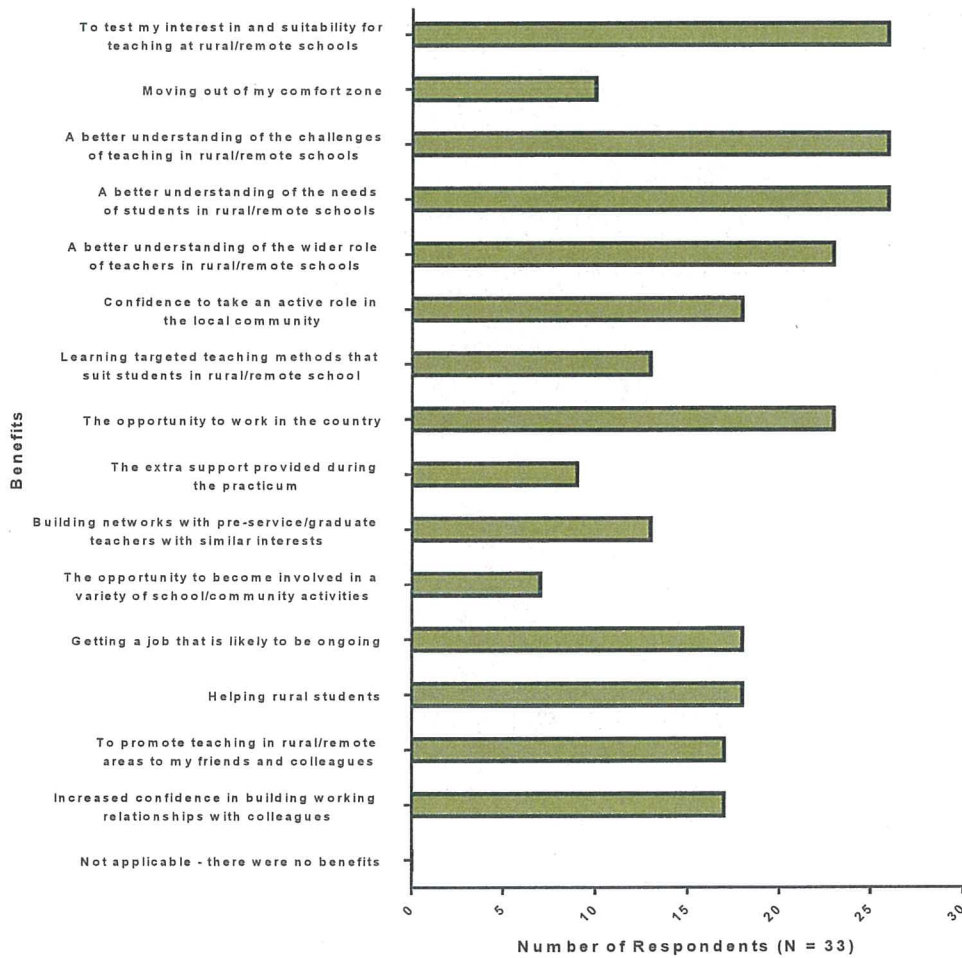
Six respondents provided additional comments on the development of their professional skills and knowledge.

- *I found the biggest help was in regards to behaviour management and the unique challenges that are specific to country schools.*
- *The training day was based on literacy and numeracy. I don't teach these.*
- *I had a lot of experience with aboriginal students and felt the orientation to be a bit repetitive. I would have enjoyed a session where we were able to get some deeper information (maybe broken into regions and spoken about the people from those areas).*
- *Having the experience to complete both my ATPs at rural schools was a fantastic opportunity to network in other communities, experience different lifestyles and see beautiful WA.*
- *I was unsure about taking the step to move to the country away from my family and this allowed me an insight into country teaching I would not have otherwise had.*
- *I thoroughly enjoyed the experience! It reinforced my love of the country and my want to teach there. Without the finding the scholarship provided, this experience would not have been possible. Thank you!*

BENEFITS AND/OR DISADVANTAGES OF PARTICIPATION

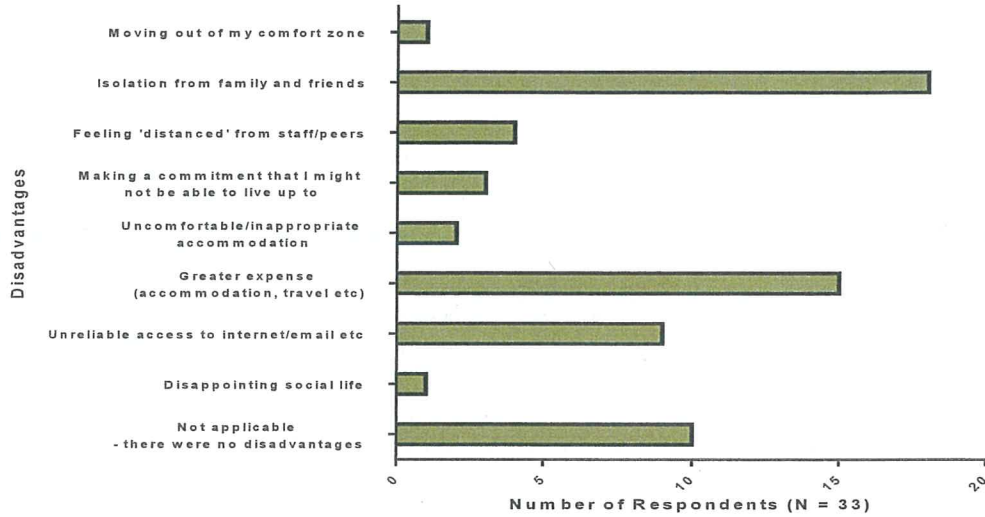
The advantages of participation identified by respondents are shown in the figure below. There were strong responses to having the opportunity to test interest and suitability in teaching in a rural/remote school, gaining a better understanding of the challenges, the needs of students and the wider role of teachers and having an opportunity to work in the country. No one saw there being no benefits.

Figure 14: Benefits of participating in the Project



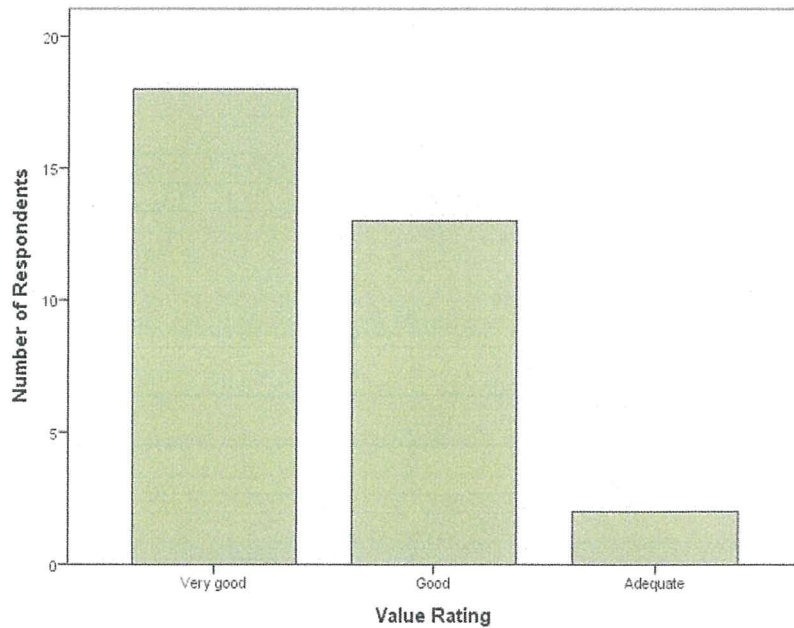
The disadvantages identified by respondents are shown in the figure overleaf. Isolation from family and friends figured strongly, as did financial matters. Less important was unreliable access to the internet/email. About one third of the respondents noted there were no disadvantages.

Figure 15: Disadvantages of participating in the Project



More than half the respondents rated the value of the Project to their careers as a teacher as very good, with over one third rating it as good.

Figure 16: Value of the Project to career



As shown in the figures overleaf, two thirds of respondents rated their participation in the Project as having a positive effect on their view of working in rural/remote schools – and close to 90% were likely to recommend participation in the Project to other pre-service teachers.

Figure 17: Impact of the Project on views of working in rural/remote schools

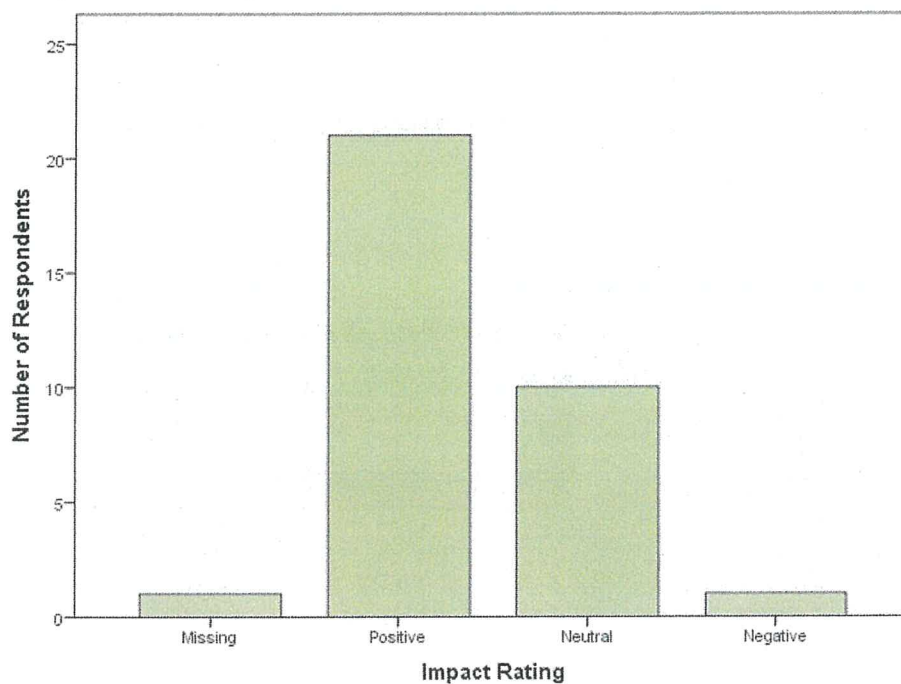
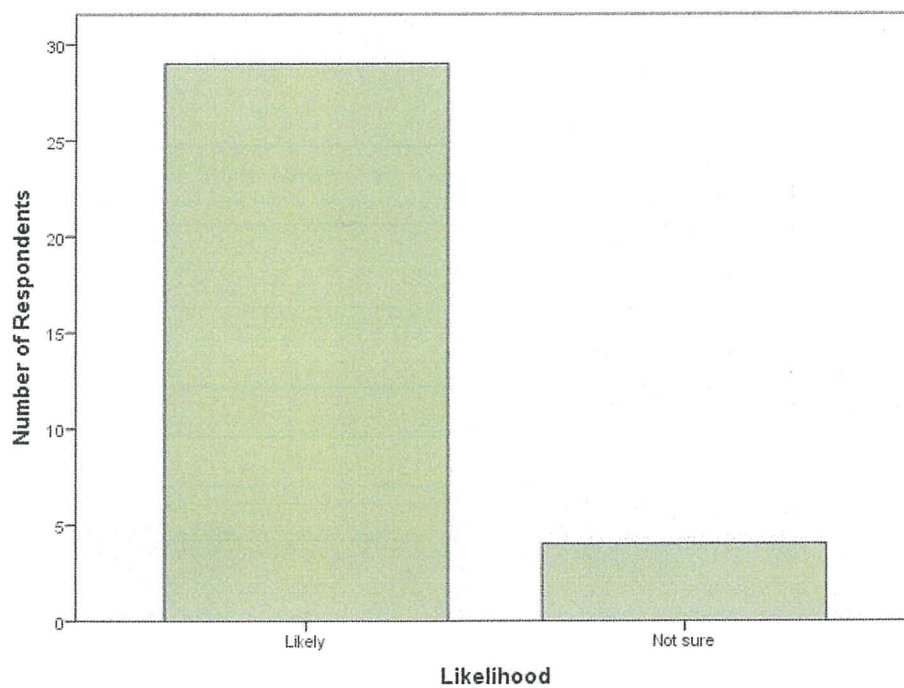


Figure 18: Likelihood of recommending participation in the Project to other students



Eleven respondents took the opportunity to provide further comments:

- *Loved the orientation we had. It gave me so much more information than I expected and really prepared me for the differences in rural/remote schooling. Would recommend this program to everyone!*
- *I had to personally seek info on this it was easily accessible for me. Make a push for everyone to complete one!*
- *Visit from staff was wonderful. Great encouragement and support. Thank you for providing me with the opportunity to come back to my home town. I now have a graduate position down in Esperance and I am loving every bit of it. Without being down here and getting my name out in the community it would have been hard to get a job.*
- *Amazing experience.*
- *Additional financial support for graduate students.*
- *Thanks to the RRTS Project as soon as I finished my practicum I was offered a job (Term 4 2012) and since then have been offered a permanent contract with the school. All I could recommend is that this project be advertised more thoroughly so that every university student is aware of it, and how advantageous it can be for them! It is highly recommended.*
- *I would definitely recommend to current pre-service teachers that a rural/remote practicum would be something to really consider as it assists you as a teacher in many ways. The support is awesome and the experiences are great.*
- *Thank you*
- *It would be good to be able to put a preference for locations you would like to work in the rural and remote areas - not just the Pilbara, the Kimberley, etc.*
- *It was a great opportunity, I would recommend to all my pre-service teaching friends.*
- *Thank you for introducing me to such a positive experience with a career opportunity at the end.*

VIEWS OF MENTOR TEACHERS

An on-line survey was conducted for mentor teachers with direct, recent experience of the Project (see Attachment 6). It addressed:

- the mentor teachers' motivation and training
- their views on the effectiveness of the mentoring role
- the mentor experience
- the impact of the Project on the profile of rural/remote schools.

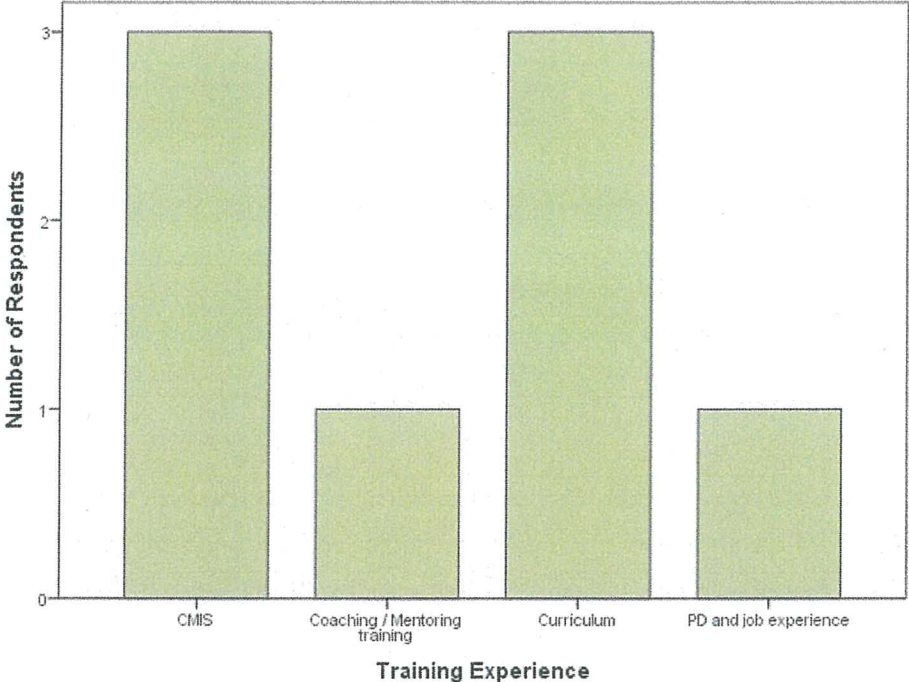
Of the 25 mentor teachers invited to participate in the survey, eight (or 32%) responded, three of whom worked in a rural school, three in a remote school and two in a rural secondary/district high school.

Seven of the eight commented on the factors that influenced their decision to participate as a mentor teacher.

- *Part of my duties as a senior teacher.*
- *I have mentored in the past and really enjoyed the experience. I love those coaching type roles so I put my hand up to mentor again.*
- *My experience has been found to be valuable by young, graduating teachers. I am committed to developing effective teachers for our schools. I feel students coming to the country need extra support as they are experiencing a whole new environment in which to complete their practicum.*
- *Wanted to provide support for the next generation of teachers and provide an experience of remote teaching to inspire future remote teachers.*
- *The idea of sharing information and ideas.*
- *Being able to give a positive remote experience to a per service teacher.*
- *Have participated many times in the past. Pleasurable to help starting out teachers and demonstrate value of regional teaching.*

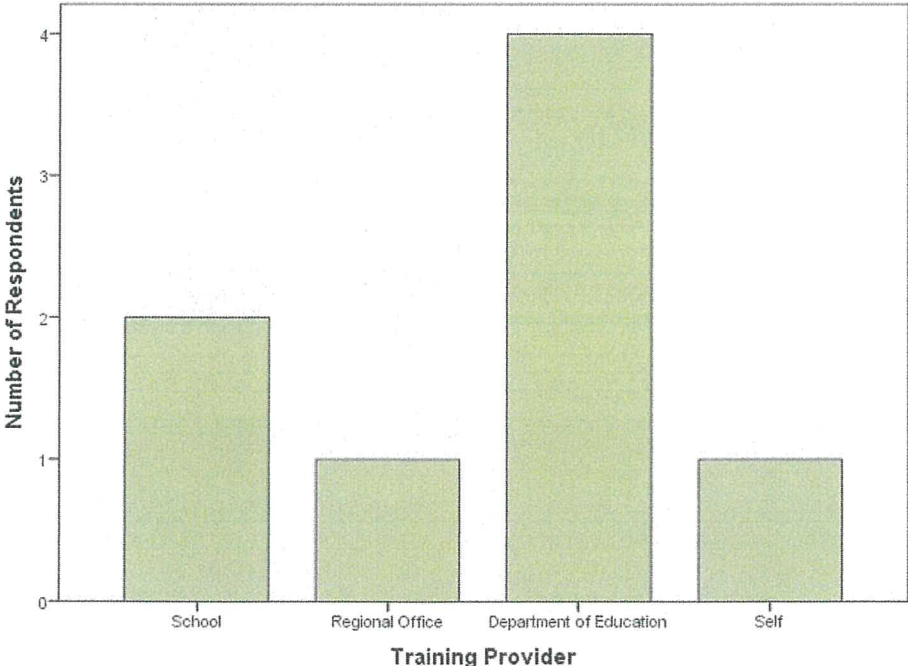
Respondents were asked to identify any training they might have had that helped them to be an effective mentor teacher. The figure overleaf shows their responses.

Figure 19: Mentoring training experience



They were also asked who had provided their training. The results are shown in the figure below.

Figure 20: Mentor training providers



The table below shows a matrix of mentor training type by training provider.

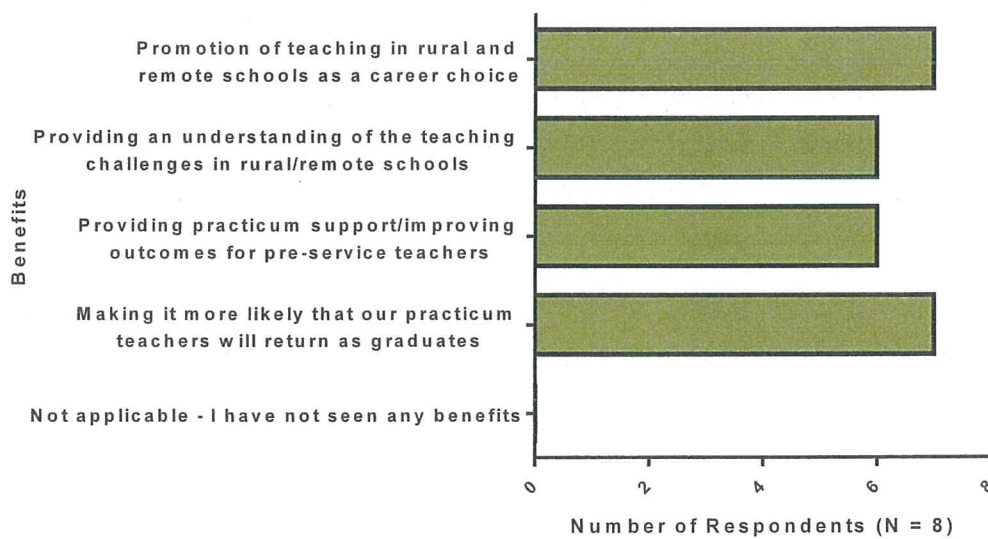
Table 14: Mentor training type by training provider

Training Type	Training provider				Total
	School	Regional office	Department of Education	Self	
CMIS	1	1	1	0	3
Coaching/mentoring training	0	0	1	0	1
Curriculum	1	0	2	0	3
Professional development and job experience	0	0	0	1	1
Total	2	1	4	1	8

EFFECTIVENESS OF THE MENTORING ROLE

Respondents were asked to identify the key benefits for rural and remote schools from their participation as a mentor for a pre-service teacher. Their ratings are shown in the figure below. All respondents saw some benefits, with slightly more seeing the promotion of rural and remote teaching as a career choice and the likelihood that practicum pre-service teachers would return as graduates as key benefits.

Figure 21: Key benefits of mentoring to rural/remote schools



Responses to the question of benefits were reinforced by responses to questions about the contribution made by practicum pre-service teachers to a school. See the table overleaf.

Table 15: Contribution of students to a school

Statement (N = 8)	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral
	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)
15.1. Practicum students contribute to the life of a school.	4 (50.0%)	3 (37.5%)	1 (12.5%)
15.2. The hosting of practicum students in rural and remote schools contributes/will contribute to an increase in pre service teachers wanting to take up teaching positions in a rural or remote school.	4 (50.0%)	2 (25%)	2 (25%)

Respondents were asked to rate the performance of pre-service teachers in terms of their capacity to handle their practicum. Overall the ratings from respondents were very positive as shown in the table below.

Table 16: Performance of students

Performance statement (N = 8)	Excellent	Very good	Good	Adequate
	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)
16.1. They demonstrate flexibility.	6 (75.0%)	1 (12.5%)	1 (12.5%)	-
16.2. They demonstrate resilience.	5 (62.5%)	3 (37.5%)	-	-
16.3. They are co-operative.	6 (75.0%)	1 (12.5%)	-	1 (12.5%)
16.4. They support peers and colleagues.	6 (75.0%)	2 (25.0%)	-	-
16.5 They use initiative*	1 (100%)	-	-	-

* This was the added (other) rating by one mentor teacher.

Additional comments from the respondents are provided below.

- *The children enjoyed the experience of having a male teacher. The children enjoyed the energy of a young teacher. The prac students, coming from a different world, exposed the children to life beyond our country town. Another pair of hands is always welcome in the class and playground.*
- *It was a huge part of building stronger partnerships with parents.*
- *Most usually become ""part of the team"" very soon.*

EXPERIENCE OF MENTORS

Respondents were asked to rate their experience as a mentor to pre-service teachers participating in the Project. Five (62.5%) rated the experience as very good, two (25%) as good and one (12.5%) as adequate.

The table below shows the responses to the request to identify the main skill developed as a result of being a mentor teacher.

Table 17: Skills developed from role as a mentor teacher

Skill (N=8)	Frequency (n)	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Re-thought my own delivery/pedagogy	4	50.0	50.0
Identified new classroom techniques	1	12.5	62.5
Expanded my networks	1	12.5	75.0
Makes you more observant.	1	12.5	87.5
Missing	1	12.5	100.0
Total	8	100.0	-

Two respondents provided additional comments on other things that might help them in their role as a mentor teacher.

- *Some moderation would be valuable. The rubrics are very good.*
- *No handbook ever arrived - luckily our practicum students could access forms on-line.*

Seven (87.5%) rated the quality of feedback they had received as positive with one responding to the "NA/received no feedback" option.

In response to the following comment, six (75%) respondents agreed strongly, one (12.5%) agreed and one (12.5%) was neutral.

- *Encouraging pre-service teachers to undertake a practicum in a rural or remote school will raise the profile of these schools and of teaching career opportunities in regional Western Australia.*

A final comment from one respondent was:

- *Appropriate housing whilst on practicum is essential to the continued success of these programs. Quite often remote schools have limited housing. It would be good for schools who take pre-service teachers yearly to be provided with additional appropriate housing so the student does not have to board with existing teachers or bunk in small cramped dongas.*

VIEWS OF UNIVERSITY COORDINATORS

Five of the six university coordinators were interviewed for the evaluation. They represented four of the five universities involved in the Project. Ten questions were asked of each coordinator (see Attachment 7). Their responses are summarised below.

The extent to which the Rural and Remote Training Schools Project has raised the profile of rural and remote schools

All coordinators felt that the Project had significantly raised the profile of rural and remote schools amongst pre-service teachers. The project team “showcases” rural and remote schools and makes the schools “more tangible”. Project team members are “motivating” and “able to describe schools, show photos, and tell stories about the experiences of others, making the schools less abstract for pre-service teachers”. One coordinator stated that in 2009 before the Project began, only 29 pre-service teachers were placed in rural and remote schools (most of whom were returning home), but by 2012, 75 pre-service teachers had been placed.

Interest from pre-service teachers in applying for practicum placements in rural and remote schools

The coordinators were unanimous in their view that the Project had resulted in “noticeable improvements” in interest from pre-service teachers in rural and remote practicum placements and there is no longer an “air of desperation” about “going bush”. One coordinator made the point that the project team members are, however, careful not to try to appeal to everyone. He said “they pitch it right – as a special opportunity for special people.”

The project team instills confidence in the pre-service teachers. Their presentations expand the pre-service teachers’ understanding of rural and remote schools and emphasises the support available to them.

Several coordinators made the point that they work collaboratively with the project team to promote the Project. One coordinator also claimed that the interest generated in rural and remote schools has spilled over to schools in regions not covered by the Project, thereby benefiting country schools in general.

A supportive, positive experience for participants

University coordinators were confident that the Project prepared participants well for teaching in a rural or remote school. The information sessions and inductions, combined with the support provided during placements, ensure that pre-service teachers are as prepared as they can be for life as a teacher in a rural or remote school. The inductions are relevant and practical – and the pre-service teachers are well taken care of during their placements by both the project team and the whole network. As one coordinator said, “The students feel special and cared about”.

Pre-service teachers appreciate the fact that they have regular contact with project team who are “not there to judge them”. They can “chat without fear of being marked”. One coordinator stated that “the liaison/support role provided by Clint and Jo is essential – the university simply doesn’t have time to provide this”. Another stated that all the pre-service teachers sent on a rural and remote practicum from her university rated it “9/10 for learning and overall teaching experience”.

The experience also serves to build resilience and confidence. As one coordinator said, “They (the pre-service teachers) don’t go in with the idea that it will be all beer and skittles. It takes them out of their comfort zone and makes them think on their feet.”

Preparation for a teaching position in rural/remote schools

The coordinators were asked if there was any evidence that pre-service teachers who participated in the Project were better prepared for teaching positions in rural/remote schools than others who had not participated. They offered only anecdotal evidence in support of this hypothesis (suggesting that Departmental statistics would tell the full story) but were nonetheless confident it was true. One coordinator reported that returning pre-service teachers described their experience as “incredible” and, as a group, coordinators believed that participants develop a first-hand appreciation of small communities, together with the resilience and self-reliance necessary to survive in rural and remote teaching posts.

Even though the experience can be confronting, every effort is made to support the pre-service teachers. One coordinator made the point that having a mentor during the placements guarantees a level of support that is not necessarily available to graduates who take up a teaching post in rural and remote schools. Another coordinator had noticed a flow-on effect, with pre-service teachers who have had a rural/remote practicum often taking on the role of mentor to incoming practicum pre-service teachers.

Key benefits of participation in the Rural and Remote Training Schools Project

All coordinators were of the view that the Project is valuable for all involved – pre-service teachers, schools and universities. Their reasons can be summarised as:

- participants get jobs and schools get teachers
- the experience builds confidence and resilience amongst the pre-service teachers
- participants are better prepared for future teaching jobs in rural and remote schools
- participants glean a good understanding of rural and remote communities and schools
- the Project helps secure quality housing
- participants learn about Aboriginal communities and gain experience working with Aboriginal children
- the Project broadens pre-service teachers’ horizons
- universities benefit from access to an expanded range of well-supported placements.

One coordinator summed up her views on the benefits to pre-service teachers by saying, “The Project offers young pre-service teachers the opportunity to test the waters – to face their fears about working in the country and to find out if rural and remote teaching is a career path for them. It is a safe way for them to investigate this.”

Another summed up the benefits to schools and ‘the system’ by saying, “Of the 800 schools in WA, half are outside Perth. The Department needs people with a vision, like Clint and Jo, who know how important it is to get pre-service teachers into rural and remote placements. Catching people when they are young and starting out on their teaching career has been an important outcome.”

Sustaining the Project

The coordinators all thought it essential that the Project continue. Excellent foundations have been laid for the future, but continued success would depend on several factors:

- the provision of ongoing, sufficient funding (recognising that the cost of rural and remote practicums is far higher than metro/regional centre placements and that pre-service teachers are often ‘broke’ and cannot afford additional expenses)

- the provision of adequate time and human resources – rural and remote placements take a lot of time to organise
- the retention of skilled, dedicated, experienced staff like the current project team is critical (the potential loss of either or both of the Team members was repeatedly cited as a significant risk for the Project)
- flexibility is needed to ensure planning processes for all parties are integrated
- continued pre-service teacher tracking and quality control of mentors is required
- availability of suitable accommodation in rural and remote areas is critical
- the capacity to secure suitable mentors and principals who are willing and able to provide sufficient, high quality support, is fundamental.

Relationships and partnerships between the Department and the universities

One coordinator summed up the views of the group by saying “The RRTS project is an easy partnership for all concerned because of the mutual benefits – it is equitable as everyone benefits.” The high quality of the relationships and partnerships forged between project team members and the universities were viewed by all coordinators as a key strength of the Project.

There are open lines of communication: the project team is very accessible and responds quickly to queries. There are regular meetings involving University practicum managers/coordinators and the project team, and the presence of the project team on-campus is extremely helpful for both pre-service teachers and lecturers.

Another coordinator stated, “I have enjoyed thoroughly all interactions with the Department in relation to the RRTS. I feel that this is both a practical and productive partnership that provides mutual benefit to all stakeholders. I cannot think of any areas for improvement.” Similarly, a third coordinator said, “I’ve had a great relationship with Clint and Jo and with the Department. Someone thought long and hard about it and has put the right people in place to drive it and get good teachers in schools WA-wide.”

Infrastructure supports

The coordinators viewed Clint Glendinning and Joanne Allan as instrumental to the success of the Project. Their work is considered outstanding. Consequently, all coordinators had concerns about how the Project might fare without them. As one coordinator said “The Project will only be as good as the people running it.” While the Project might survive the loss of one of them, there was doubt it could survive the loss of both. Their passion for the Project and their deep understanding of rural and remote schools is regarded as critical to the Project’s success.

One coordinator argued, “The program is about relationships and these need constant attention, particularly in rural and remote schools where the staff can be transient. The knowledge and experience that Clint and Jo have here is invaluable. Having project staff with contextual knowledge is essential.” Similarly, another coordinator stated “I wouldn’t be confident that the program would be as good if Clint and Jo were to leave. That’s not to say others couldn’t do a good job, but any replacements need to have been in those situations – particularly remote schools. They have to be able to talk the talk and walk the walk. They need to understand those small towns and communities and how they work.”

The Coordinators were therefore interested in whether there were hand-over arrangements and a ‘Plan B’ in place, in the event that either or both of the project team members might leave.

Possible improvements

There were very few suggestions for Project improvements. One coordinator suggested that 3rd year students be included as there is considerable interest from them. Another commented that the current focus on promoting practicums for Grad. Dip. students creates some difficulties for the selection process as the students come from a range of disciplines with little or no teaching experience, making it difficult to assess their suitability for a rural and remote practicum. A third coordinator said that the only possible improvement would be the expansion of the Project, complete with more resources and a higher profile.

There was a suggestion that the process for selecting pre-service teachers could be reviewed, particularly Grad. Dip. students, with a view to making it more consistent across the universities.

There was also a suggestion that the current rule limiting funding to one practicum be re-considered, given that 3rd year students have a five-week practicum and at least one university has two seven-week practicums (although this is likely to change shortly when the university moves to a 10-week practicum arrangement).

One coordinator stated that from a university perspective the reduction in funding for rural teaching scholarships will mean the university will send half the number of pre-service teachers (from the number sent in the past) to rural schools for practicums. The restriction in funding for rural teaching stipends this year has impacted on the number of pre-service teachers keen to pursue a rural placement in schools outside of the Project. It was therefore suggested that rural teaching stipends support all pre-service teachers keen to experience rural schools, not just those in the Project.

Conclusion

The coordinators were overwhelmingly supportive of both the Project and the project team. They were convinced the Project delivers positive outcomes for pre-service teachers, schools and universities – and their only significant concern to ensure the Project's continuation.

EVALUATION FINDINGS

FINDINGS AGAINST THE EVALUATION QUESTIONS

The evaluation aimed to assess the extent to which that the Rural and Remote Training Schools Project has:

- enabled expansion of pre-service teacher access to quality practicum programs in selected rural and remote schools
- impacted on the quantum of rural and remote schools prepared to provide practicum experiences through a 'training school' approach
- impacted on the quantum and quality of pre-service teachers applying for practicum placements in rural and remote schools
- provided support and a positive experience that enabled pre-service teachers to be prepared, ready and willing to commence a career in a rural or remote school
- impacted on the employability prospects for graduating pre-service teachers.

The findings against each of these evaluation questions are provided below. They reflect all information obtained through the course of the evaluation from the various sources, including reports compiled by the project team, interviews with university coordinators, interviews with the project team members, and the three on-line surveys with principals/coordinators, mentors, and pre-service teachers.

1. To what extent has the Rural and Remote Training Schools Project enabled expansion of pre-service teacher access to quality practicum programs in selected rural and remote schools?

The number of rural and remote practicum placements has demonstrably increased since the introduction of the Rural and Remote Training Schools Project in 2011. In the three years preceding 2011, a total of 21 rural/remote placements were available through the Remote Teaching Service (one in 2008, 10 in 2009 and 10 in 2010). Those numbers increased with the introduction of the RRTS Project to a total of 158 in 2011 and 2012 (58 in 2011 and 100 in 2012). A further 54 placements have been arranged thus far in 2013, bringing the total for the past three years to 212. This total for the past three years (since the Project's inception) represents an increase of 910% in the number of placements available for the three years preceding its inception.

2. To what extent has the Rural and Remote Training Schools Project impacted on the quantum of rural and remote schools prepared to provide practicum experiences through a 'training school' approach?

Since the introduction of the RRTS Project in 2011, there has been a significant increase in the number of rural and remote schools providing practicum experiences through a 'training school' approach. In 2010, when such practicums were the responsibility of the Remote Teaching Service Support Team (and therefore limited to remote schools only), eight schools provided practicums. In 2011 – the first year of the RRTS Project – the number of participating schools expanded to 33 rural and remote schools. In 2012, the number increased further to 45 schools. This represents an increase of 312.5% in the first year and 462.5% in the second year (over the 2010 figures).

It is important to acknowledge that not all schools are suited to being 'training schools' and therefore there is a limit on the potential expansion of the Project. The process for inclusion as a

'training school' typically involves the project team assessing potential schools' capacity to provide quality practicums and then approaching suitable schools. By far the most significant factor limiting schools' participation in the Project is the lack of suitable accommodation in certain areas. Ten of the 13 principals and school coordinators surveyed identified this as a limiting factor, as did some mentors. The following quote from a mentor reflects this concern:

Appropriate housing whilst on practicum is essential to the continued success of these programs. Quite often remote schools have limited housing. It would be good for schools who take pre-service teachers yearly to be provided with additional appropriate housing so the student does not have to board with existing teachers or bunk in small cramped dongas.

Another significant factor limiting the number of 'training schools' is the capacity of schools to provide quality mentors for pre-service teachers.

It is a matter for the Department to determine whether more schools are capable of meeting the established 'training schools' criteria and whether the criteria can and should be relaxed to incorporate additional schools. That said, this evaluation has shown that the Project has established an excellent reputation amongst stakeholders – and pre-service teachers in particular – for the provision of high quality practicums and that there is considerable value in maintaining a clear focus on the continued delivery of such practicums.

Access to appropriate housing for practicum pre-service teachers will be an ongoing challenge for participating schools and needs to be addressed by the Department as an essential infrastructure component for the continued success of the Project.

3. *To what extent has the Rural and Remote Training Schools Project impacted on the quantum and quality of pre-service teachers applying for practicum placements in rural and remote schools?*

The quantum of pre-service teachers applying for – and taking up rural/remote placements – has increased demonstrably since the introduction of the Project in 2011, as shown below:

- 1 placement in 2008
- 10 placements in 2009
- 10 placements in 2010
- 58 placements in 2011
- 100 placements in 2012.

Note: The number of applicants is virtually identical to the number of placements. It is extremely rare for the Department not to provide a placement for an applicant.

Of the 13 principals and school coordinators who responded to the on-line survey, 85% reported that the Project had contributed to an increase in pre-service teachers applying for practicum placements. School-based mentors also felt that the Project positively affected rural/remote schools' capacity to attract practicum pre-service teachers and graduates. Indeed, the two key benefits of the Project from their perspective were "promotion of teaching in rural and remote schools as a career choice" and "making it more likely that our practicum teachers will return as graduates". 75% of the mentors believed that hosting pre-service teachers via the Project would result in an increase in pre-service teachers seeking teaching positions in rural/remote schools.

Similarly, the university coordinators reported that the Project had significantly raised the profile of rural and remote schools amongst pre-service teachers. In their view the Project "showcases"

rural and remote schools and makes them “more tangible”, resulting in “noticeable improvements” in interest from pre-service teachers in rural and remote practicum placements. One university coordinator summed up the views of the group by saying “there is no longer an air of desperation [amongst pre-service teachers] about going bush”.

Moreover, information obtained from the project team demonstrated the important contribution of the Project to meeting the staffing needs of rural/remote schools. A small, but significant number of positions that had traditionally been very difficult to fill, were filled in 2013 via the Project. This included positions in subject shortage areas (e.g. physics/chemistry).

In respect of the Project’s impact on the quality of pre-service teachers applying for practicum placements, it is not possible to assess this due to a shortage of useful comparative data; there were so few pre-service teachers undertaking rural/remote practicums prior to the Project’s inception. That said, it is possible to comment on the perceptions of the quality of pre-service teachers participating in practicums since 2011.

University coordinators and members of the project team indicated that not all pre-service teachers are well-suited to rural/remote practicums and that care is taken to select only good quality, suitable applicants. School mentors rated the performance of pre-service teachers highly, with 100% reporting that the pre-service teachers used their initiative, demonstrated flexibility and resilience, and were supportive of their peers and colleagues. Some 85% of principals and school coordinators agreed that the universities select good quality candidates, although more respondents only ‘agreed’ rather than ‘strongly agreed’ to this statement, suggesting that there may be limited scope for improvement in the selection process.

A related survey question indicated that there may also be scope to improve the process of matching pre-service teachers to host schools. In one region the matching process appears to be managed by one school, with limited input from other participating schools. That said, although the vast majority of schools were satisfied with the process, most only ‘agreed’ (rather than ‘strongly agreed’) that it works well.

4. *To what extent has the Rural and Remote Training Schools Project provided support and a positive experience that enabled pre-service teachers to be prepared, ready and willing to commence a career in a rural or remote school?*

Data collected by the project team shows that, since the inception of the RRTS Project, there have been increases in both the number of pre-service teachers seeking rural/remote practicums and the number of those pre-service teachers ultimately employed in rural or remote schools (see sections above and below for relevant data). The pre-service teachers’ interest in rural/remote practicums and their willingness to pursue a rural/remote teaching post suggests that the Project has developed a good reputation amongst pre-service teachers and that the ‘practicum experience’ is both positive and supportive, resulting in an increased interest in employment in rural/remote schools.

In addition to this quantitative evidence, the qualitative data from comments collected via the on-line surveys and interviews paints a similar picture. Principals and school coordinators reported that the main reason for their schools’ participation in the Project was the prospect of attracting good quality future teachers to their schools. And 85% agreed that the Project did contribute to the retention of pre-service teachers in rural and remote schools following graduation. One principal commented that “*We have found a greater demand for placement requests from graduates and existing teachers are willing to stay longer to further their skills while working with pre service teachers. It is a win-win for all, school, community and pre service teachers.*” Similarly, when asked what the main benefits of the Project were to rural/remote schools, the two most common responses from principals and school coordinators were “increasing the

likelihood that practicum teachers will return as graduates” and “promotion of rural/remote position as career choice”.

Principals and school coordinators were also very positive about the Project’s effectiveness in preparing pre-service teachers for rural/remote service, with 61.5% rating it “excellent” and a further 38.5% rating it “very good”. Three out of four felt that the Project resulted in participants being better prepared for rural/remote service than non-participants.

Likewise, university coordinators were confident that the Project prepared participants well for teaching in a rural/remote school. They argued that the information sessions and inductions, combined with the support provided during placements, ensure that pre-service teachers are as prepared as they can be for life as a teacher in a rural or remote school. One coordinator stated that all the pre-service teachers sent on a rural and remote practicum from her university rated the practicums “9/10 for learning and overall teaching experience”.

Similarly, the coordinators were confident that pre-service teachers who had undertaken a rural and remote practicum were better positioned for a career in rural/remote teaching than others without this experience, primarily because it builds their understanding of small communities and their resilience. As one coordinator said “*They [the students] don’t go in with the idea that it will be all beer and skittles. It takes them out of their comfort zone and makes them think on their feet*”.

The coordinators also expressed the view that the project team provides high quality support and the pre-service teachers “feel special and cared about”. They added that the role of the project team is essential – “*The liaison/support role provided by Clint and Jo is essential. The university simply doesn’t have time to provide this.*”

In their surveys, 91% of pre-service teachers and graduate teachers indicated that the Project had increased their knowledge and understanding of the nature and challenges of teaching in rural and remote schools. They were very positive about their level of preparedness for teaching in rural/remote schools, with 94% saying they felt their level of preparedness was either “excellent” or “very good”.

Pre-service teachers and graduate teachers were similarly positive about the support they received during their practicums, with 94% saying they had a “supportive and positive experience”. There was strong support for the project team amongst pre-service teachers and graduates. In particular, they valued the relevant knowledge and experience of the project team members.

The site visits by project team members were considered very useful – and the small number of pre-service teachers who had not yet had a site visit were eager to have one. Pre-service teachers and graduate teachers also valued their school-based support, with 97% of them saying their mentor teachers had given them useful support.

All the pre-service teachers and graduates identified various benefits from their participation in the Project, with none reporting “no benefits”. The most commonly cited benefits were:

- the opportunity to test my interest in, and suitability for, teaching at rural/remote schools
- the opportunity to gain a better understanding of the challenges of teaching in rural/remote schools
- the opportunity to gain a better understanding of the needs of students in rural/remote schools.

Two-thirds of the pre-service teachers and graduates reported that their participation in the Project has had a positive impact on their views of working in rural/remote schools. An even

higher number – 88% – said they were likely to recommend participation in the Project to other pre-service teachers. The following two quotes capture the views of pre-service teachers/graduates about the Project's value:

"Thanks to the RRTS Project as soon as I finished my practicum I was offered a job (Term 4, 2012) and since then have been offered a permanent contract with the school. All I could recommend is that this project be advertised more thoroughly so that every university student is aware of it, and how advantageous it can be for them! It is highly recommended."

"I would definitely recommend to current pre-service teachers that a rural/remote practicum would be something to really consider as it assists you as a teacher in many ways. The support is awesome and the experiences are great."

5. To what extent has the Rural and Remote Training Schools Project impacted on the employability prospects for graduating pre-service teachers?

The Project appears to have had a positive impact on the employment prospects of graduates. Thirty-two (85%) of the 2011 cohort gained post-practicum employment and 66 (77%) of the 2012 cohort gained post-practicum employment, with further appointments likely to be made from the 2012 cohort (as ten members are either still completing their studies or travelling). Of further significance to the Department of Education is the fact that there is a high correlation between pre-service teachers undertaking a practicum through the Project and subsequent employment with the Department.

Of the 38 final year members of the 2011 cohort, 32 (85%) are currently employed with the Department and, of those, 28 (75%) are teaching in rural/remote schools. The figures for the subsequent 2012 cohort are still emerging and 2013 has been a more challenging year for final year pre-service teachers as there were fewer primary teachers employed at the start of the year, but nonetheless, of the 86 pre-service teachers in 2012, 59 (70%) have already been employed by the Department and, of those, 49 (83%) are teaching in rural/remote schools.

It is not possible to compare these employment rates against those of graduates who did not participate in the Project as data for non-participants is not available. However, qualitative feedback from other sources suggested strongly that employment outcomes for participants were high – and better than those of non-participants. University coordinators, for example, were confident that the Project contributed to pre-service teachers' employability.

One of the key benefits they identified were *"participants get jobs and schools get teachers"*. Similarly, as outlined above in response to Evaluation Question 4, pre-service teachers, graduates, principals and school coordinators also believed that the Project improved pre-service teachers' employability.

Interestingly, graduates and pre-service teachers were not especially motivated to apply for a rural/remote practicum in order to secure employment. Of the eight motivators identified, this ranked only sixth. Similarly, when reflecting on their participation in the Project, the potential for it to contribute to securing a job ranked only seventh on the list of 15 potential benefits. Nonetheless, participants considered it valuable to their teaching careers, with 55% considering it had a "very good" value and an additional 39% considering it had a "good value".

GENERAL FINDINGS

In addition to the findings of specific relevance to the five evaluation questions, there were some other general findings of interest and relevance. These are summarised below.

- The project team has been instrumental in the Project's success. Their credibility with rural/remote schools and universities, combined with their passion, commitment and enthusiasm for the Project, team members are highly regarded. The loss of more than one team member would jeopardise the Project and represents a significant project risk requiring careful management.
- The official information provided about the Project to schools, universities and pre-service teachers is highly regarded.
- Pre-service teachers/graduates tend to find out about the Project from their universities and the project team.
- A small number of pre-service teachers participating in the Project may have a misunderstanding about the role of the project team vis-à-vis the roles of other staff (e.g. mentors, university coordinators).
- There are positive flow-on effects of schools' participation in the Project – and no negative flow-on effects – with the most positive flow-on effect being the interest from pre-service teachers in working at the schools after graduation.
- Schools believe the Project gives them an opportunity to strengthen their connections and relationships with teacher education institutions.
- Schools see few disadvantages attached to the Project – and participants see even fewer. When pushed to identify disadvantages, principals/school coordinators mostly say “more work for mentors” and participants say “isolation from family and friends”, “greater expenses” and “unreliable access to internet/email etc”.
- The additional supports that pre-service teachers would most appreciate are extra financial supports and improved accommodation.
- The mentors of pre-service teachers develop skills from the experience of mentoring, most notably the capacity to reflect and re-think their own delivery and pedagogy.
- The planned expansion of the Project into secondary schools raises short-term questions about ascertaining the suitability of Graduate Diploma students for a rural/remote practicum, given the limited exposure of these students to those who make the selections, but it is noted that the Graduate Diploma will soon be converted to a two-year Master of Teaching, which will resolve this issue.
- There is an appetite for extending the Project to include third year students. In the event that this happens, quality control and adequate resourcing must be assured.
- The quality of support provided by mentors is highly regarded, but their training is not consistent and the universities and the Department may have different expectations of mentors. The application of the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership's on-line mentoring module could be helpful in addressing these issues.
- There are early signs of valuable community/industry partnerships being developed to meet the needs of local communities, schools and the Project/Department (e.g. the potential for company sponsored housing in the Pilbara.)

- In the short time since the Project's inception it has evolved to meet the changing needs of the Department, and it is expected that it will continue to do so.
- The rural pre-service teacher stipend (and the distribution of the two levels) needs to be reviewed on a regular basis to accommodate changes to the cost of living in different areas of the State as the result of developments and/or downturns in local business, industry and farming.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The success of the Project is largely attributable to the dedication and commitment of the key players in building partnerships, communication networks and effective support services for pre-service teachers, school staff and schools. The three years of funding for the project team has enabled the two officers concerned to focus on ensuring these three things work effectively. The strong support for the continuation of the Project came through clearly during the evaluation process.

As ongoing funding for the Project cannot be assured, some recommendations to promote its self-sustainability are provided below. These recommendations assume that the funding for the central office coordination role undertaken by the project team at present may not be available in the long term.

BUILDING PARTNERSHIPS

The partnerships that have developed between the Department and the universities at the operational level, i.e. with university staff responsible for organising practicums, needs to be retained. The membership of the project team members (as the Department's representatives on the WA School Experience Committee) is valuable in this context.

Recommendation 1

The Department should seek approval from the universities for continued departmental membership on the WA School Experience Committee.

Recommendation 2

If successful, the Departmental person appointed to the WA School Experience Committee should have sound knowledge of and experience in rural/remote schools.

Anecdotal information collected during the evaluation indicates that partnerships between the universities and the training schools have been strengthened during the Project. For example, as a result of the project team's early identification of any difficulties during their regular contact with practicum pre-service teachers, team members have been able to bring such difficulties to the attention of the relevant parties in a timely manner.

Recommendation 3

School principals should be encouraged to strengthen their partnerships with university staff responsible for pre-service teacher practicums in their schools.

Project team members have described several partnerships to support rural/remote practicums that have been developed between local industries and communities and schools. Such ventures should be supported strongly by the Department as a key strategy supporting the sustainability of the Project. Project team members have assisted in the development of these relationships where they can.

Recommendation 4

Community/industry and school partnerships developed as a result of the Project should be acknowledged formally by the Department and used as models for other developments and initiatives undertaken by schools and their local communities.

NETWORKS

The project team has facilitated the development of networks among pre-service teachers

through the orientation and de-briefing programs.

Through their own networking activities, project team members themselves have built an extensive network across the universities, the regions and the rural/remote schools. The value of these networks cannot be emphasised enough. Apart from being a conduit for the sharing of information (a clearing house role), among other things they provide a vehicle for ongoing monitoring of developments, for facilitating solutions to problems as they emerge and for ensuring there is a central coordinating presence. These networks are vulnerable at present because they are owned by project team members and are not necessarily recorded.

Recommendation 5

The Department should investigate the feasibility of developing structured on-line/social media support to facilitate communication across the various networks associated with the Project.

EFFECTIVE SUPPORT SERVICES

The project team has played a key role in “being there” for pre-service teachers before, during and after their practicums and to a lesser extent, for principals. The evaluation has shown that the support they provide is highly valued and respected and that the ease of access and prompt responses from team members, highly appreciated. This support is one of the key factors contributing to the success of the Project. The team has been able to provide this level of service because of dedicated funding and it is unlikely that without dedicated funding the same level of support can be provided. This poses a significant risk to the ongoing success of the Project.

Recommendation 6

The Department should, in view of the potential withdrawal of dedicated funding for the project team, consider alternative arrangements for the ongoing provision of effective support services for pre-service teachers undertaking practicums in rural/remote schools.

Access to appropriate housing for practicum pre-service teachers will be an ongoing challenge for participating schools.

Recommendation 7

The Department should recognise the provision of appropriate housing as an essential infrastructure component for the continued success of the Project.

ACHIEVEMENT OF PROJECT OBJECTIVES AND GENERAL FINDINGS

Recommendation 8

In light of the evaluation findings, it is recommended that the Department note the achievement of the following Project objectives:

- an expansion of pre-service teacher access to quality practicum programs in selected rural and remote schools
- an expansion of the quantum of rural and remote schools prepared to provide practicum experiences through a ‘training school’ approach
- an expansion in the quantum of pre-service teachers applying for practicum placements in rural and remote schools

- the provision of support and a positive experience that will leave selected pre-service teachers prepared, ready and wanting to commence a career in a rural or remote school
- a high correlation between pre-service teachers undertaking a practicum through the Project and subsequent employment with the Department.

Recommendation 9

The Department of Education rural stipend for pre-service teachers should be reviewed on a regular basis to accommodate changes to the cost of living in different areas of the State as the result of developments and/or downturns in local business, industry and farming.

ATTACHMENTS

1. Placement Process for Rural/Remote Training Schools
2. RRTS Annual Report 2011
3. RRTS Annual Report 2012
4. Survey of Principals and Schools Coordinators
5. Survey of Pre-service Teachers and Graduate Teachers
6. Survey of Mentor Teachers
7. Interview questions for University Coordinators

