

# TRANSCRIPT

## LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL LEGAL AND SOCIAL ISSUES COMMITTEE

### **Inquiry into the State Education System in Victoria**

Melbourne – Thursday 9 May 2024

#### **MEMBERS**

Trung Luu – Chair

Ryan Batchelor – Deputy Chair

Michael Galea

Renee Heath

Joe McCracken

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Lee Tarlamis

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David Ettershank

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Sarah Mansfield

Richard Welch

## WITNESS

Leo Fieldgrass, Head, Government Relations, Teach for Australia.

**The CHAIR:** Welcome back to the Inquiry into the State Education System in Victoria. Joining us for this session is Leo Fieldgrass from Teach for Australia. Welcome, Leo. Before we continue, I will just read through this important information.

All evidence taken is protected by parliamentary privilege as provided by the *Constitution Act 1975* and further subject to the provisions of the Legislative Council standing orders. Therefore any information you provide during this hearing is protected by law. You are protected against any action for what you say during this hearing, but if you go elsewhere and repeat the same things, those comments may not be protected by this privilege. Any deliberate false evidence or misleading of the committee may be considered a contempt of Parliament.

All evidence is being recorded. You will be provided a proof version of the transcript following the hearing. The transcripts will ultimately be made public and posted on the committee's website.

So, Leo, thank you for coming in. I will quickly introduce myself: I am the Chair, Trung Luu. My Deputy Chair is Mr Ryan Batchelor. Mr Joe McCracken and Ms Melina Bath are to my right. Mr Richard Welch and Mrs Moira Deeming are to my left, and Dr Renee Heath should pop back in again shortly. And Mr Lee Tarlamis is joining us on Zoom.

Let us continue with this session. I know you made a submission, but I would like to invite you to make an opening statement before we open up the questions from the committee. Could you please state your full name and your organisation for recording purposes, thank you.

**Leo FIELDGRASS:** Yes, I am Leo Fieldgrass. I am Head of Government Relations for Teach for Australia. I thank the committee for the invitation to present at today's public hearing. Teach for Australia is a pioneering not-for-profit organisation. Our mission is to grow a community of leaders committed to equity for children by recruiting and developing more high-calibre teachers and leaders for schools with the greatest need. We have been proud to work with successive governments in Victoria for the last 14 years to boost the state's supply of high-quality teachers and school leaders with a focus on critical subjects such as STEM. Since 2010, Teach for Australia has placed and supported 861 new teachers – we call them associates – in more than 120 schools across the state, who have taught and inspired over 120,000 young Victorians. There are currently 162 Teach for Australia associates at Victorian government schools, with around half of them teaching in regional communities. Our alumni continue to make a positive impact at these schools and other schools throughout Victoria, and we are now seeing a huge leadership dividend, with 29 Teach for Australia alumni in principal-class positions and another 75 in lead and executive roles. No other initial teacher education program has had the same impact on Victoria's school leadership pipeline.

Unfortunately, over the past two decades Australian school students' performance has trended downwards, and children experiencing disadvantage are three years behind their peers from higher socio-economic backgrounds. Currently around one in four teachers of core subjects do not hold qualifications to teach those subjects. They are teaching what is called 'out of field'. With research showing that the quality of teaching is the most important in-school influence on student learning, Teach for Australia is pleased to play a part in improving outcomes for young Victorians and our wider community by bringing more great people into teaching and school leadership.

As per our submission, I would be very happy to talk about our experience in recruiting and retaining teachers, training and professional development of teachers and our suggestions for improving measures to recruit and retain more teachers and to answer any questions the committee may have.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you, Leo. I will quickly ask one question before I move on and open it up to the panel. The quality of teachers is vital from my perspective, and I feel the committee would say the same. With the teachers we have got now – and you mentioned how students have had a downward trend in recent years – what might be your recommendations regarding the quality of teachers? What can we change to ensure our teachers are higher quality than we have at the moment?

**Leo FIELDGRASS:** Yes, it is a great question. I mentioned earlier the challenge that we have around out-of-field teaching. If we can bring more people who have subject expertise into the profession, including more career changers from other professions, who not only have that subject expertise but who have contemporary industry experience, then that helps develop the skills that businesses need and that young people need for the jobs of the future, but it also gives young people a chance to see the relevance of what they are learning in school and to stay engaged in their education and thrive in their education.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you. Thank you for that. Deputy Chair, if you would like to go first.

**Ryan BATCHELOR:** Thanks, Chair. Leo, thanks for coming in. For 14 years Teach for Australia has been working here in Victoria. There has been quite a bit of change in the system over the time. Obviously at the moment we are facing a pretty severe teacher shortage. The committee has received a lot of evidence about that. Based on that experience, what do you think are the biggest challenges that the state and the system are facing with respect to attracting professionals into the teaching profession, and in your experience what are the best ways to retain those professionals once they are attracted?

**Leo FIELDGRASS:** It is a huge challenge for Victoria and right around the country at the moment. One of the biggest problems is around the status of teaching, and I am sure you have seen this in the submissions that you have had and the work you have done already on the committee. What we try and do at Teach for Australia is to attract people into teaching with a mission to tackle education inequity, so to use their skills, their own training, their own backgrounds, their own opportunities that they have had, their own privileges in life, and give that back to the community by coming into teaching. So we are portraying teaching as a really rewarding, vital profession that is important for individuals' personal development but also community development. Improving the status of teaching will help attract more people into the profession.

We know that there are a lot of barriers to enter teaching for different groups, and career changers in particular weigh up the opportunity to move into teaching against their current careers. We know that the biggest barrier to career changers at the moment is financial security and worrying about interest rates or worrying about being able to continue to provide for their families in a lot of cases or their own personal financial responsibilities if they move into the profession. So raising the status of the profession and helping more people overcome those barriers, particularly around financial constraints, will bring more people in.

Then when it comes to retaining people in the profession, again, I am sure you will have heard a lot of evidence and seen a lot of submissions around the workload that teachers have and the career prospects and the career trajectories that teachers have currently and would like to see more of. We bring people into our program who are seeking, in a lot of cases, leadership careers in schools. They are very interested in moving through into leadership roles and helping colleagues and mentoring colleagues and having system impact. So creating more opportunities within the profession for people to progress in their careers while having wraparound supports would help to retain and keep people job satisfied.

**Ryan BATCHELOR:** Interesting point you raise about the people in your cohort attracted to leadership. For your associates, as you call them, what is the balance or proportion between those who go into leadership positions and those who stay in classrooms?

**Leo FIELDGRASS:** Yes, so we have got around about 40 per cent of those that have come through the program and are currently working in schools are in Victorian leadership positions at the moment. Leadership is a quality that we screen for when we are recruiting into the program, and we have a wide concept of leadership. So, yes, we are looking at trying to help close that looming gap of school principals and principal class positions but also positioning leadership as leadership in the classroom, leadership within the school, leadership within the wider community. That has to be balanced with humility as well. We are not trying to bring people into schools who think they know it all straightaway but those who want to learn from other leaders within the school – much more experienced teachers, whether or not they hold leadership roles, mentors within the school, as well as the principals.

**Ryan BATCHELOR:** Great. Thanks, Chair.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you. Mr McCracken.

**Joe McCracken:** Thanks very much for your time here today. I am interested – it is a well-known and established fact that teaching quality is the number one indicator that impacts student outcomes. So given that there is a tight market in Victoria at the moment – in some districts in the state, for every one job advertised, there is less than one job application for that position – that has resulted in some teachers probably getting roles that in normal circumstances they would not normally get, and the teacher quality has decreased across the marketplace. What do you think the solution is to improving that again so that teacher quality is increased?

**Leo Fieldgrass:** If we can create more opportunities for initial teacher education to train incoming teachers – it sounded like you were referring there potentially to some people who are teaching perhaps on permission to teach, who are either training up to be a teacher or hold other qualifications. If we can keep a very high standard of initial teacher education for every entrant into the system, that includes building relationships with young people to keep them engaged in their education, which we know is a huge factor to contribute towards education outcomes and success for a young person, alongside having a very good understanding of brain development, of teaching strategies, instructional coaching – so the core skills. There has been a lot of work done at the national level. I am sure you have probably seen the teacher education expert panel report of the quality initial teacher education review, so the science of teaching needs to be present in all of that education. What we also add in our programs are wraparound supports from mentors, so we train people within the school who are current teachers to mentor other teachers. They are mentoring them, yes, around their teaching practice, which is vitally important, but also mentoring them to settle well into the school community and the wider community, and to understand the context and the needs of their classrooms and their schools. Having a very high standard of initial teacher education coupled with wraparound support for that on-the-job development would be really helpful.

**Joe McCracken:** This is not meant to be a gotcha question, but do you think that teacher training is high-quality at the moment? Because the evidence would suggest that perhaps it is patchy.

**Leo Fieldgrass:** Well, that is what the teacher education expert panel has found, and they are trying to improve the quality of initial teacher education. We were very pleased that the prior Australian government review, quality initial teacher education review, pointed out Teach for Australia as having a very high quality initial teacher education. We have made offers to the Victorian government, which we work very closely with, and also the Australian government to share more of our expertise around initial teacher education and to help other programs get up to the same speed as well.

**Joe McCracken:** What do you guys do in your leadership development program that is different or value-adds that is currently not in the mainstream system?

**Leo Fieldgrass:** We are bringing people into the program with the expectation that they are going to go into a classroom sooner, and we are frontloading them with intensive support. They already hold at least an undergraduate qualification – many of them also hold other postgraduate qualifications – and they do around 20 per cent of a master of teaching before going into a classroom, so they are very well prepared, and then we have this unique wraparound support model. So not only are they completing the rest of their master of teaching over two years with academic mentoring support –

**Joe McCracken:** Can you describe the wraparound? What does that look like?

**Leo Fieldgrass:** Absolutely. There are three parts to it. There is a Teach for Australia employed teaching and leadership coach, so that person works with our associate, our program participant, on their instructional coaching and on their classroom teaching. They will visit and observe classroom sessions or observe them online in some cases. Then we have an in-school mentor. That person is a current teacher who receives training from Teach for Australia to be a good school mentor. That is one of the other benefits of our program, the system impacts. As a free part of our program for schools, we are training other teachers as early career teacher mentors. Then the third part of support is an academic mentor. We partner with the Australian Catholic University to deliver our Master of Teaching, and ACU provides an academic mentor who makes sure that our participants are progressing against the Australian professional standards for teachers.

**Joe McCracken:** Good. Thanks.

**The Chair:** Thanks, Joe. Lee.

**Lee TARLAMIS:** Chair, the questions I had have been asked, so I will pass over to someone else.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you. Dr Heath.

**Renee HEATH:** Thank you so much for coming in, and thanks for your presentation. What are the biggest gaps you find with your mentees, the biggest areas of need?

**Leo FIELDGRASS:** Probably one of the biggest challenges currently in the system is for mentors to have the appropriate amount of time release to be able to support mentees appropriately. The challenge, as you would know through your work on this committee, is that there is a great shortage of teachers, so there are a lot of teachers being asked to cover classes, therefore there is not always the time release for some mentors to spend with their mentees. So that is probably one of the biggest things that would need to change to have a better mentoring experience.

**Renee HEATH:** What is a solution you can see for that?

**Leo FIELDGRASS:** Investment in time release for mentors. Of course it is a bit of a chicken and egg situation, because for a mentor to have the release from their normal teaching duties, there needs to be another teacher who can come in and teach that class, so we again need to boost the supply of teachers generally into the system to help that.

**Renee HEATH:** You mentioned something before, and I sort of missed it, about brain development – the different stages of brain development. Could you explain that a bit more?

**Leo FIELDGRASS:** It is not an area of expertise that I have, but I do know it is part of the science of teaching and it is something that generally we look at in our initial teacher education, and that is how young people learn and how they learn best. We also look at trauma-informed teaching practices as well – so making sure that young people that have been through traumatic episodes, and of course you were talking about trauma earlier – understanding how best to teach them, how best to keep them in school, because again, we know that if we are engaging young people in education, if teachers are building positive relationships with them, then they are going to want to come into school. A lot of times in some very challenging school environments, school is one of the best protective factors for a young person, so want to keep them in there as much as we can.

**Renee HEATH:** Yes. I agree. I think that the best way, in a sense, that you can break that cycle of disadvantage is by bringing their education level up. Have there been any specific examples where you have really seen success stories with kids like that?

**Leo FIELDGRASS:** There have. I cannot recount any now. I guess one of the challenges for our program is that it is hard to pinpoint particular students that have been impacted because of course the school has a cumulative role in helping any student. What we do know is that we have a number of teachers currently in our program or who are alumni of our program who they themselves were taught by a Teach for Australia teacher and that teacher was the inspiration for them to enter the teaching career. So we have had this wonderful cycle now where we have seen Teach for Australia teachers inspiring students in less advantaged schools to go into teaching themselves, who then go on to teach other students.

**Renee HEATH:** That is fantastic. It seems there has been a very common theme through these discussions that we have got to use the science of learning – these real evidence-based teaching methods, if you like. When I first started thinking about it I was thinking about the benefits for the children, but there seems to be a benefit for the teachers that teach with these practices potentially.

**Leo FIELDGRASS:** I would say there is. Again, I do not have expertise in that area that I could share. I do know that if we can make things easier for teachers to teach and to teach well and, as you mentioned, there is a great evidence base out there for what works in teaching, and that is what we use within our initial teacher education is that evidence base to help people understand and understand quickly how they can teach well.

**Renee HEATH:** Thank you so much. I think that is all my questions.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you, Dr Heath. Ms Bath.

**Melina BATH:** Thank you. Thanks very much for coming, Teach for Australia. You are bucking the trend. You are actually swimming upstream in a flow of exiting teachers. I see from your report there, and we have heard as evidence, that 51 per cent of undergraduates complete mainstream training. You have got a higher percentage success rate, and I am assuming that you are longitudinally keeping track of some of those associates who are now in the system?

**Leo FIELDGRASS:** Well, we are, and actually we are the only initial teacher education provider that is required to produce data each year on the pathways of our alumni. No other initial teacher education provider is asked to do that. We are very happy to do that, and we are very proud of the results that we have. We have got nothing really to benchmark it against, and we would love to be able to compare our long-term data against other programs.

**Melina BATH:** Who would do that, the learning institutions themselves or the education department potentially?

**Leo FIELDGRASS:** There is the Australian teacher workforce data project, which is part of the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership. It is still in its earlyish days, and it still has not quite landed on getting the longitudinal pathways of initial teacher education programs, more looking at the data of people who are registered teachers staying in the system.

**Melina BATH:** I think it is important to track that data, because you can understand where people are going. And also I think we have heard at this inquiry about exit polls, we will say – if teachers are leaving the system, ‘Why are you leaving?’ Apparently that is not the case. They are not investigating that.

You have a partnership with the education department, with the Victorian government. Can you expand on that? What is the nature of that partnership? What funding do you get? You know, we are looking for – I will give you a lead here – recommendations. What do you need us to recommend to the state government?

**Leo FIELDGRASS:** We have a very collaborative relationship with the Department of Education. We have been working, as I said, with Victoria, with successive governments, for the last 14 years. We are currently contracted to provide our teachers through to what we call our 2025 cohort, so we are already recruiting them now and they will start teaching in term one, day one 2025, as part of the two-year program. So we would be really pleased to enter into a new contract agreement with Victoria into the future.

**Melina BATH:** When do you need that contract for your sustainability model?

**Leo FIELDGRASS:** We would ideally want to agree on something by the end of this calendar year, because we will start recruiting teachers who will teach in 2026 at the start of 2025.

**Melina BATH:** So a recommendation for our committee could be that Teach for Australia has an ongoing contract with the Victorian government.

**Leo FIELDGRASS:** We would be very pleased to see that recommendation. One of the challenges that we have as a not-for-profit organisation is funding uncertainty into the long term, and if we could have some longer term funding certainty, that would certainly help in terms of our recruitment efforts, but it would also give our partner schools certainty – they would know that ‘Great, I am going to have Teach for Australia as an opportunity for my workforce into the future’ and not just ‘Maybe it is a 50–50’.

**Melina BATH:** Two-year by two-year potential.

**Leo FIELDGRASS:** Two-year minimum – yes. That is right.

**Melina BATH:** Minimum. Yes. That is right. And have you interviewed those schools? Are they positive about a rollover of this program, would you say?

**Leo FIELDGRASS:** We are really proud of the support that our schools have. We work very much in partnership with all of our schools, and we have got a lot of letters of endorsement and support from our school principals that speak to that.

**Melina BATH:** One of the parts of your submission talks about barriers to mid-career professionals from other backgrounds entering teaching. Can you just expand on that for us?

**Leo FIELDGRASS:** Yes, absolutely. One of the big challenges, as I mentioned earlier, is around financial security, and people from other backgrounds often –

**Melina BATH:** Do not want to go back to zero income.

**Leo FIELDGRASS:** Exactly right. A lot of the time they do not want to go into a program where they are going to have to study full time or go into a program where they are going to have to study for an extended period before they can start earning a salary or before they actually have some responsibility. They are coming from roles where they have a lot of responsibility in most cases.

**Melina BATH:** And quite possibly a much greater income.

**Leo FIELDGRASS:** That is exactly right, and we have to do a very compelling pitch for them on why they should leave that higher salary.

**Melina BATH:** The value of being a teacher in education et cetera, which they are already cognisant of.

**Leo FIELDGRASS:** Absolutely.

**Melina BATH:** If you have got any of those testimonies, I think it might be interesting for us to see those. I do not know if they are publicly available or if people are allowed, but you know, it gives weight to the value of this sort of not-for-profit organisation.

**Leo FIELDGRASS:** Absolutely. As it happens, this morning in the *Herald Sun* one of our alumni was featured, Alice Hu. Alice came to Teach for Australia from teaching in higher education and came to teach science and maths at Elevation Secondary in Craigieburn. She has been a driving force in girls' STEM activities, encouraging all young women to participate in STEM. In her second year of teaching, in the second year of our program last year, Alice was awarded Outstanding Early Career Secondary Teacher in Victoria. So this is the calibre of person that we bring into our program who we are convincing to move from other professions, and they are persuaded by our mission, they are persuaded by the support model that we have and the opportunities that our program offers.

**Melina BATH:** Leo, did we priorly organise that?

**Leo FIELDGRASS:** It was serendipitous, I guess. My colleague sent it to me this morning and said, 'This will be perfect for you today.'

**The CHAIR:** Thank you, Ms Bath. Richard.

**Richard WELCH:** Hi, Leo. I think that sounds actually an amazing program. Can you just expand on the wraparound mentoring, the in-school mentoring? That is a fellow teacher within the school – it is not a separate appointment coming in?

**Leo FIELDGRASS:** That is correct, yes. That is a current teacher who is in our partner school who is interested in mentoring other early career teachers, and we train them around mentoring. That is not just for our Teach for Australia associate, the new teacher in the school, it is for other early career teachers in that school and in other schools as well. There is a system impact.

**Richard WELCH:** Are they doing it out of the goodness of their heart, or are they getting remunerated for that extra responsibility?

**Leo FIELDGRASS:** We are not teacher employers, and I cannot talk to if there is extra remuneration for the mentors. We do know the reason that people want to go into a mentoring role is for their own careers. It gives them attachment, and it allows them to come out of the classroom for a bit and to share their own expertise, being able to help and develop their peers.

**Richard WELCH:** Yes. A bit of bigger thinking as well.

**Leo FIELDGRASS:** Absolutely.

**Richard WELCH:** I guess what I am curious about is the scalability of what you do. Do you have an idea of cost for the program? Is it a cost to the school? Where is the cost borne for the program? Where does that spread out to, and who pays?

**Leo FIELDGRASS:** That is a great question. Just to clarify our funding model, we receive around about 60 per cent of our funding from the Australian government and we receive about 20 per cent in Victoria's case from the Victorian government, and then we source the other 20 per cent through philanthropy.

**Richard WELCH:** Right. So there is no impost on the schools themselves?

**Leo FIELDGRASS:** No. They employ the beginning teachers, the associates, or the Department of Education would employ them.

**Richard WELCH:** Have you found across the program that there is any particular skewing of skill sets, or people coming out of mid-career into particular topic areas? Are they aligning with our needs in terms of where we have got particular skilled teacher shortages, such as STEM and things like that?

**Leo FIELDGRASS:** We do focus a lot on STEM, and we bring in each year nationally between 30 and 50 per cent of our entire cohort who are qualified to teach STEM subjects. We know that they are critical subject areas because not only are there a lot of people teaching out of field but those are the skills that are really going to help young people prepare for those jobs of the future and to boost our productivity as a state and a country into the future.

**Richard WELCH:** Do you find the people who do that mid-career change are always going into the areas of teaching that reflect their career, or are they actually segueing into – they might have been a bio mechanist but they actually want to teach English or something like that?

**Leo FIELDGRASS:** It is usually the former, where schools have a very clear need for a science or maths teacher, so we would bring somebody with that background, perhaps an industry background in STEM, into that position. That said, often we will have schools who are looking for a science or maths teacher who they also want to teach a humanities subject or they want to assist with PE. We have folks who come in, and they are very driven and they want to be a part of the whole school community. As well as teaching their subject, they might be volunteering with the footy team after school as well.

**Richard WELCH:** Yes, right. Just a random question: do you find that there is any particular skewing towards males or females?

**Leo FIELDGRASS:** Interestingly, although we have a very diverse group, it is skewing in our case more towards men who come into the program at the moment. Interestingly, that is actually counterbalancing teaching being a majority female profession at the moment, so we are increasing diversity in a way by bringing more men into those roles.

**Richard WELCH:** Great. Thank you, Leo. Cheers.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you. Mr Batchelor, would you like to continue with some questions?

**Ryan BATCHELOR:** I would. How many associates do you recruit a year? You mentioned you are about to do it. How big is the cohort coming through?

**Leo FIELDGRASS:** In Victoria it is around about a hundred each year for each tier, cohort.

**Ryan BATCHELOR:** So each year for the two years – okay, I understand. My other question was: you mentioned you partner with schools. How do you choose which schools? Obviously you are not doing it with everyone. How do you decide where to go? Is it based on schools? Is it something you do? Is it something that the government makes suggestions about?

**Leo FIELDGRASS:** Good question. We have a requirement in our federal contract that we can only partner in 90 per cent of the cases with schools that meet agreed definitions of disadvantage, and those agreed



definitions are usually that the school has an ICSEA value – index of community socio-educational advantage value – of a thousand or below, which determines that they are disadvantaged. Ninety per cent of the schools that we can partner with meet those definitions. The other 10 per cent may have a slightly higher ICSEA value, but they have to meet other requirements, such as that they are in a rural or regional area. We can only partner with schools that have demonstrated need. In Victoria we have got a great relationship with the department where we can contact schools directly or schools can contact us directly and say, ‘Hey, I know from another school that you bring in really great people. Can we have someone next year? We’ve got a maths position. Can you bring someone in?’

**Ryan BATCHELOR:** So it would get to identified need within a school – trying to really fit the school’s need with what you may have in your cohort to do that kind of matching up?

**Leo FIELDGRASS:** That is right. We play a matching role, both with the subject eligibility – so a school sometimes may have quite tricky subjects, where they want a humanities teacher who can also teach drama, and we will say, ‘Okay, well, we’ll see if we’ve got someone in our national pool who can do that.’

**Ryan BATCHELOR:** ‘We’ll see what we can do.’

**Leo FIELDGRASS:** But if we can match – and most of the time we can match – the subject eligibility requirements, then we will work with the principal or the HR lead at the school on what kind of person the school needs. As well as having that subject expertise, what kind of role are they going to play within the school community? How are they going to settle into the wider local community? So we really want to work with principals to understand their schools’ needs and find the right person for all of them.

**Ryan BATCHELOR:** What are you finding are the reasons that people leave – that have come through your program do not stick around in teaching? Other than the Member for Greenvale, why do people then not stick around?

**Leo FIELDGRASS:** The Member for Greenvale is a really good example of someone who came into our program and spent a good period teaching and then found other ways to work towards education equity and social equity in other roles. We are bringing people into the program who are ambitious, who do want to see change, and a lot of our alumni who are not currently teaching express an interest in going back into teaching in the future. A lot of times people who have left the profession will not see it necessarily as a linear career path. We are encouraging young people at school today to think about having seven careers over their own working lives, so why should it be any different for young teachers who are coming in?

**Ryan BATCHELOR:** Last question for you: I assume you have had a program evaluation done at some point in the recent past.

**Leo FIELDGRASS:** We have had three evaluations, all successful.

**Ryan BATCHELOR:** It might be useful just to send the latest one to the committee so that we can have a bit of a read of that.

**Leo FIELDGRASS:** I would be very pleased to.

**Ryan BATCHELOR:** That is all, Chair.

**The CHAIR:** Thanks, Ryan. Just a final question in relation to schools seeking your service: they are paid by Education, correct?

**Leo FIELDGRASS:** Sorry, the school is paid?

**The CHAIR:** No, the schools pay for the teacher to come in?

**Leo FIELDGRASS:** Yes, the school employs the teacher, and the salary is paid either by the school or by the department. We have a contract with the Victorian Department of Education to provide the teacher, so the Victorian department pays us for placing the teacher.

**The CHAIR:** So those placements – does the school need allocations for a certain amount of money? Even though they need the service, they need those teachers, they must meet the costs of allocation as well. So does the school have a certain amount of teachers allocated to their budget, or do they just –

**Leo FIELDGRASS:** Unfortunately, I do not have the expertise when it comes to school budgets, so I do not feel qualified to answer the question around school budgets, but I am happy to talk more about the agreement that we have with the department.

**The CHAIR:** I just need to know in relation to – say a school might need your assistance and need the service but it applies somehow to fit the costs in the other budget as well.

**Ryan BATCHELOR:** I think you are asking: who pays for you?

**Leo FIELDGRASS:** Yes, thanks. It is the department. The school would not have an impost on their own budgets to bring one of our teachers in – only to employ that teacher.

**Ryan BATCHELOR:** Other than the cost of their salary?

**Leo FIELDGRASS:** Exactly right, yes. Only to employ the teacher.

**The CHAIR:** All right. I think the mentoring program is fantastic. I think that is across the board – accountants, teachers or any other profession as well. We do have a little more time left. Would anyone else like to ask a question? Ms Bath.

**Melina BATH:** Thank you. I do not in any way wish to reframe what the – we had the Australian Education Union in yesterday, and I am doing this from memory, but I think they raised some concerns around having basically your institution or like that, in that they would prefer teachers to come through the system and know that they are very well trained via the university sector. They did not mention you at all, so I am not trying to cross-reference that, but I guess just about the quality assurance of the education principles: you said that your teachers do intensive masters degrees, but could you speak to that? As I say, in no way am I trying to verbal them, I am just trying to understand: do you feel there is that quality there in relation to the pedagogy and the understanding of education principles?

**Leo FIELDGRASS:** Absolutely. We have got a lot in common with the AEU; we both believe in high-quality pedagogy, high-quality teaching, high-quality initial teacher education and high-quality supports for early career teachers. I can understand 14 years ago there may have been some reservations about a new program that was coming in and disrupting the sector and doing things a little bit differently. We are 14 years down the line, we have had three successful evaluations of our model, we know that the program produces high-quality teachers, and we are bringing it to people who are staying in the system and in school leadership roles as well.

**Melina BATH:** Thank you. Thanks, Leo. You mentioned disadvantaged schools, and country schools are part of that framework. Is there any evidence – do we have somebody who lives in metropolitan Melbourne who said, ‘Well, yes, I’ll go out to the country for my rounds,’ or that Teach for Australia experience, and actually stayed there? Do you have any anecdotal evidence? Or are they all from that region initially and just transferring to the next town? I am seeking to understand any migration of that expertise and those professionals out into the regions.

**Leo FIELDGRASS:** Yes. So part of our program is persuading people to move to regions where there are critical teaching needs, and we know that if they enjoy that experience and they settle well into the school, and we work with the school, who is the employer, to give them really great teaching experience and connect them to the local community, they are more likely to enjoy living in country Victoria and to stay there longer term. Equally we know that if we can recruit more people who already live in country Victoria, then they are also likely to stay longer term in the school. That balances of course with aspirations of any young professional. There are a lot of doctors or other professions who move out to the regions and perhaps will not stay for more than a few years, because they have personal or family responsibilities.

**Melina BATH:** A different pathway.

**Leo FIELDGRASS:** A different pathway, that is right.

**Melina BATH:** But this can be part of it, and it is a bit like you have got to be in it to win it – you have got to experience this to know the value of it. I guess I am seeking an understanding whether some of those people early on are still in those regions. That might be something that you could –

**Leo FIELDGRASS:** There are. Well, we can certainly find some case studies of those people and share them.

**Melina BATH:** Thank you. That is fabulous. Thanks very much.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you, Ms Bath. Thank you, Leo, for coming in and for your submission and your information. Hopefully all the information you provided us – were there any questions on notice for Leo? Hopefully you get that information. When we do our recommendations, hopefully your program can move forward as well. Thank you so much for your time.

**Witness withdrew.**