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PREMIUM

The most talented maths students avoid becoming teachers



Advanced maths subjects are increasingly concentrated in higher socio-economic schools. Nic Walker

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by Tim Dodd

One of Australia's foremost maths experts has warned of a crisis in maths teacher training because talented maths students are not becoming teachers.

Geoff Prince, director of the Australian Mathematical Sciences Institute (AMSI), said that most maths graduates came from the prestige universities in the Group-of-Eight and "teaching is not on their radar".

Talented maths students at these universities are more likely to look for careers in finance, data sciences or maths research, rather than consider becoming high school teachers.

"Increasingly Group-of-Eight universities are not graduating maths teachers in the way they used to," he said.

Professor Prince last week released an AMSI paper with key priorities for improving Australia's maths performance which said, although Australia had experienced a "severe shortage" of high school maths teachers for two decades, government's were

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not acting to fix the problem.

"It is high time our governments moved on from talking about [education] funding models to decisive action on teacher supply," it said.

Professor Prince said that most teacher registration boards did not record the subject disciplines which teachers were trained in. Nor are records kept of the subject qualifications of graduating teachers.

"How can we deal with this problem if we haven't audited it properly? We need a proper audit," Professor Prince said.

He said one major issue was the the long decline in the proportion of students taking advanced maths in year 12 to prepare them for university-level mathematics.

In 2015 only 9.5 per cent of year 12 students studied advanced maths, compared to 13.6 per cent in 1996.

Professor Prince said an added problem was that advanced maths courses are increasingly concentrated in private schools and public schools in high socio-economic areas, students from these schools were less likely to become teachers.

"It's an irony. The very schools where we expect to get future teachers from don't have maths resources," he said.

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