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MEDIA RELEASE

NSW AUDITOR-GENERAL'S REPORT Ageing Workforce - Teachers

This morning the Auditor-General of New South Wales, Peter Achterstraat, released a report on the ageing workforce. The report examines how the Department of Education and Training is managing the impact of an ageing workforce on the educational services it delivers.

Key Findings

The Department of Education and Training is faced with the loss of large numbers of retiring teachers and their associated skills", said Peter Achterstraat. "While the overall impact of the ageing workforce is likely to be gradual, there is still a risk of teacher shortages."

Statistics show that 41 per cent of school teachers are aged 50 years and over. The Department estimates that in the next five years (to 2012) more than 16,000 or 33 per cent of permanent school teachers will be reaching retirement age. TAFE is in a similar situation, with some Institutes expecting 30 to 40 per cent of teaching staff to retire in the next 5 years.

The Department has focused considerable effort on recruiting and retaining younger teachers", said Peter Achterstraat. "But a continuing reliance on the recruitment and retention of younger workers may not be sustainable, given the ageing population and an increasingly tight labour market."

The Department's aggregate projections indicate a state-wide oversupply of school teachers. However, we consider that this could mask shortages at specific schools and in specific subject areas, such as mathematics and science. Projections for TAFE NSW Institutes typically only look forward a year.

Importantly, the NSW Government's Mature Workforce Policy and Guidelines recognised the need for strategies for a mature workforce as early as 1998. There is good guidance material available from the Department of Premier and Cabinet on workforce planning and mature aged retention strategies.

I was encouraged to see that the Department has increasing focus on retaining the critical knowledge and skills of staff who are about to retire", said Peter Achterstraat. "There are also moves to introduce phased retirement. I see this as a positive step towards addressing the challenges of the ageing workforce."

The Department needs:

- a clearer picture of how big and where its shortages are likely to be, such as by:
- conducting more frequent on-line retirement intentions surveys
- conducting more localised impact studies, as this is where shortages will first be identified
- new measures to address potential shortages in the workforce, such as by:
- targeting the recruitment of mature age workers from industry with accelerated teacher training programs
- increasing focus on knowledge continuity, where critical skills are mapped and mature workers take on a mentoring role to support younger staff
- ways of encouraging mature aged teachers to stay on, particularly in targeted areas of shortage, such as by:
- facilitating a phased retirement
- keeping in touch with retired staff and drawing upon their skills, knowledge and expertise in filling short term vacancies.

Further information

Please contact Barry Underwood, Executive Officer on 9275 7220.

The full report is available on the Audit Office's website www.audit.nsw.gov.au