

~~\$60,000~~ fine over 'bonded' teachers

By Phil Macdonald,
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HONGKONG teachers recruited to work in Australia in exchange for permanent residency will have to pay \$60,000 if they do not remain at assigned postings for two years.

The "bond system" has been introduced to get Hongkong teachers to work in areas unpopular with Australian teachers, such as the western suburbs of Sydney and remote New South Wales.

Hongkong teachers will be given a posting in one of these areas. If they leave within two years they will have to pay the New South Wales Education Department A\$10,000 (about \$60,000).

The bond system had not been applied to teachers in these areas for the last 10 years, but has been re-introduced for foreign teachers taking up teaching positions in the state. The majority of the 100 overseas teachers under this scheme are from Hongkong.

The system was once used in exchange for teachers college scholarships and was all but scrapped in the late 1970s.

Fifty-seven Hongkong teachers will start work in Australia next year following a recruitment drive by the New South Wales Education Department in the territory last March.

They will get their visas in January after wrangling between the Department of Education and the teachers' union, the New South Wales Teachers' Federation. The wrangling at one stage nearly scuppered the plan.

"We have an unusual situation regarding teachers in New South Wales," said Jan McClelland, head of the human resources division at the department.

"Overall we have a surplus of teachers, but there are shortages in certain areas including Sydney's western suburbs and country towns."

"We need to recruit teachers from overseas to fill these positions."

The department hoped to have Hongkong teachers by October, but it was only last week that the union gave approval.

Under the arrangements of group immigration for certain trades and professions, union approval must be given before the federal government will issue visas.

But the Teachers Federation held up approval after it said it was not consulted on the plan.

The Education Minister, Virginia Chadwick, accused the federation of delaying support for the scheme to deter federal government support.

McClelland said the department was hoping to get visas approved in July but the federation held out while they tried to negotiate trade-offs.

Teachers Federation president Phil Cross said: "We have no objections to getting teachers from Hongkong; what we object to is the department not honouring its obligations to Australian teachers."