

Graduates to chalk up experience as teachers

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The Australian Education Union has condemned a Federal Government plan to put law, economics and science graduates through a six-week training course before putting them into the classroom as teachers. Education Minister Julia Gillard announced yesterday that Victoria would be the first state to trial the new **Teach for Australia** program next year with 90 university applicants from non-education disciplines signing up. The graduates will undergo an intensive course over the Christmas holidays before spending the next two years in the classroom. While the graduates will receive ongoing teaching instruction and mentoring from business partners sponsoring the scheme, they will carry an 80 per cent teaching load and will be placed in largely disadvantaged schools.

After their two years are up they will receive a teaching qualification and will be free to move into careers with the business sponsors, including Boston Consulting Group, Microsoft, Freehills, Stockland and Corrs Chambers Westgarth Lawyers or to remain in the classroom. While the scheme is funded through the \$550million National

Partnerships Agreement between the Commonwealth and the states and territories, corporate sponsors will also be providing donations, in-kind support and mentoring. Ms Gillard said the program was designed to lure high-performing graduates into teaching and would be rolled out nationally after the Commonwealth undertook consultation with the other states and territories. But the union said the scheme was a "quick-fix" attempt at filling the nation's teacher shortage. The union's ACT branch secretary, Penny Gilmour, said, "Our history is dotted with failed attempts at quick-fixes to teacher supply and attraction issues. "In the '80s there were some celebrated failures of attempts to accelerate teachers into areas such as maths these mickey mouse teachers had 10 weeks' training and for most this was an insufficient preparation for competence as a teacher. "**Teach for Australia** actually proposes even less preparation." Ms Gilmour said the new teachers would no doubt carry good content knowledge for senior secondary school subjects from their specialisation, but noted disadvantaged schools presented significant challenges even for experienced teachers with years of student-management practice under their belts.

"I consider the TFA scheme a proposal that sets the participants up for failure and disillusionment, and uses the students in our schools as experimental fodder in an increasingly politicised approach to education." Ms Gillard, however, described the scheme as the start of an exciting new social entrepreneurial approach that would see top graduates from around the nation taking on the challenges and rewards of educating our young people. She conceded that after two years, "many [of the graduates] will then go on to begin careers with the corporate employers who partner **Teach for Australia** and importantly, many will continue their involvement with education, helping to create new solutions and strengthen community support". But Ms Gilmour questioned how many graduates would stay in the classroom given that they had chosen non-education oriented undergraduate degrees and would be tempted by much larger corporate salaries. The graduates will earn just below a teacher's starting salary about \$45,000. The Australian program follows Teach First in Britain and Teach for America in the United States, which Ms Gillard said had been shown to deliver better student outcomes and help raise the status of the profession.