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1

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Mass exodus of poached teachers to UK

More than 10 400 have deserted SA

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More than 10 400 South African teachers have emigrated to the United Kingdom for better working conditions and salaries since 1997, a University of Pretoria study has found.

The study, aimed at gauging the exodus which has left South African classrooms wanting, found that the UK, in particular England, was the country sourcing more teachers from South Africa than any other.

This comes as the Department of Education toys with the idea of recruiting teachers from Zimbabwe to fill vacant maths and science posts.

The Council of Education Ministers has also explored the recruitment of maths and science teachers in India, Singapore, Malaysia and Uganda.

An estimated 10 000 Zimbabwean teachers are now living in SA, with 4 000 of them fully-trained maths and science teachers.

Recruiting them "will be a short-term solution".

A thorough screening of these teachers would be needed to assess their outcomes-based education train-

ing, it said.

Dr Rian de Villiers of the Tuks education faculty said the Office of National Statistics in the UK had recorded 10 474 South African teachers who had migrated since 1997.

South African teachers were favoured for their loyalty, hard work and dedication, he said.

The demand for them in the UK was the main reason why South Africa lost hundreds of trained teachers annually.

This had not been received well by Commonwealth countries, he said, especially as South African education officials had in the past warned the UK government not to poach local teachers because the government invested substantially in training them only for them to be recruited abroad.

The study found that teachers emigrated for various reasons, including being dissatisfied with the teaching environment, seeking career changes and mobility.

Many recruitment agencies have

set up offices in South Africa to poach sought-after and experienced teachers. That "causes great challenges in replacing these teachers", the study found.

Teacher shortages in specific subjects in the UK such as maths, science, design and technology have caused concern about teacher shortages in SA.

The South African government does not keep records on numbers of its teachers recruited internationally. It also has no formal policy on teacher migration.

The Education Department says there is no general shortage of teachers in the country.

While the government was initially in favour of "brain circulation", the study found that it had become necessary to regulate outward migration as recruitment may "cream off" more effective teachers.

Only 6 000 newly qualified teachers graduate each year. But research shows that between 17 000 and 20 000 new teachers are needed annually.

But in 2005, 27.4% of the samples of final-year student teachers were planning to teach abroad, the study found.

Migrating has not been as easy for many teachers as recruiting agencies seemingly have been guilty of gross unethical conduct.

Recruited teachers are not always informed of the high cost of living, taxation, the long wait to obtain a Qualified Teacher Status and the difficulties in UK schools.

The study also found that 54% of teachers indicated that they were misled or not told the truth about conditions in UK schools. Some found their experience abroad "demanding, lonely and difficult".

The study recommended that teacher recruitment agencies should be closely monitored and migration and recruitment times regulated.

Also, that South African agencies and schools in the UK co-operated more closely and for UK schools to refrain from employing teachers without proper educational qualifications.

It also suggested that teachers in South Africa serve at least one year's practical experience at home.

The study suggested the introduction of perks for teachers abroad to lure them to return home.