

Question on Notice
No. 1089
Asked on 9 June 2006

MS LEE LONG asked the Minister for Health (MR ROBERTSON)—

QUESTION:

What is the Government doing to increase the number of qualified dentists working in the Queensland public hospital system?

ANSWER:

Like other areas of the health workforce in Australia, there is currently a national shortage of dentists. Retention of staff also remains a challenge, as it is difficult for Queensland Health to compete with the more lucrative private sector.

A number of initiatives have been undertaken by Queensland Health in recent years to attract and retain dentists, including:

1. Recruitment activities as follows:

- (a) recruitment campaigns by Queensland Health targeting dental students across the nation and in New Zealand on an annual basis for the purpose of attracting new graduate dentists to Queensland Health.

In the second half of 2005, these campaigns resulted in 66 expressions of interest from final year dental students from New South Wales, Victoria, South Australia, Western Australia and New Zealand. From this initial pool, 37 new graduates were appointed to positions commencing in early 2006 in Cairns, Fraser Coast, Gladstone, Gympie, Mackay, Rockhampton, Redcliffe-Caboolture, Sunshine Coast, Toowoomba and West Moreton District Oral Health Services;

- (b) recruitment campaigns by Queensland Health in the United Kingdom at the *Opportunities in Australia* UK Expo in October 2005 and April 2006.

Queensland Health Oral Health Services were represented with the attendance of a UK-trained Queensland Health Principal Dentist, and were part of a collaborative Queensland Health recruitment approach at this year's Expo in April 2006. Significant interest was generated and consequently approximately 28 formal expressions of interest from dentists have been received;

- (c) engagement of United Kingdom and New Zealand based recruitment agencies; and
- (d) the Oral Health Unit participation in the *International Association of Dental Research Conference* in Brisbane in June 2006 and the *Queensland on Show* regional jobs expo in Sydney in August 2006;

2. The proposed *Dental Officer Enterprise Bargaining Agreement* is awaiting certification, and includes improvements in conditions and increases in remuneration in order to better attract and retain dentists, specifically in rural and remote areas; and
3. Development of the *Public Sector Dental Workforce Scheme* to help alleviate workforce shortages in the public sector, particularly in rural and remote areas. Under this scheme graduates from some dental programs in Canada, Hong Kong, Malaysia, Singapore, South Africa and the USA will be eligible to participate. Those eligible will be granted an exemption from the Australian Dental Council Preliminary Examination and a form of restricted registration to enable them to practice in the public sector for a period up to three years during which time the Australian Dental Council Final Examination must be undertaken. In order for the Dental Board of Queensland to offer this scheme the relevant legislation will need to be amended.