



THE SUNDAY AGE

Career of education should be a pooled resource

GIVEN that many of us will have two or more careers in our lives — such is the nature of modern work patterns — it is heartening to see that many people are choosing to switch to teaching. And they're doing it, according to a Monash University report, because they are attracted to doing something more meaningful with their lives — they believe educating young people is valuable and rewarding.

There are many benefits in older teachers entering our classrooms: they bring with them expertise from previous careers and valuable life experiences that inform what and how they teach.

This is good news. But several classroom problems remain, including the shortage of teachers, particularly in certain rural areas and in subjects such as maths, science and foreign languages. The predicted shortages are especially worrying at secondary level, a situation that urgently needs to be addressed. Perhaps professionals in the areas of language, maths and science need to be specifically targeted in helping retrain teachers to redress this shortage.

Luring people to teaching from other professions is just one potential solution. There will no doubt be plenty of people who see

great value in educating young people and would be happy, providing they could cope financially with changing careers.

But more than that (and this is where it becomes more difficult), public education in particular needs to undergo an image makeover. There are some great state schools with excellent teachers in Victoria, with high-achieving and happy students and we need to hear more about them. At the same time, the long-awaited projects such as capital works upgrades for schools need to happen more quickly, so that more parents feel that state schooling is the best option for their children.