indicative of what will happen under continuation of present trends. They indicate clearly that the outlook is for gradual increase in diversity of the Australian population and that the anglo-celtic population will remain the majority of the population.

Another area of changing population composition which has important implications for teachers is the massive shifts which have occurred in family composition and functioning in recent decades. Of course the fall in fertility referred to earlier and the ageing of the population has seen a decrease in the proportion of Australian households with children aged less than 15 years. Whereas in 1976, 44.1 percent of households had children by 1991 this had fallen to 39.6 percent and to 35.9 percent in 1996.

Whereas in the 1950s and 1960s an Australian teacher could assume that the bulk of the students in their classes came from a two parent family in which one parent (usually the father) worked outside the home, this now applies to less than one-tenth of children. In 1997 some 18 percent of children aged 0-14 lived in a single parent family. However, around one-third of Australian children can expect to spend some time in a single parent family situation during the period they are aged less than 15 years. The number of single parent families in Australia has increased rapidly, almost doubling over the 1976-96 period, while couple families with children increased by only 12.4 percent. Overall in 1997 of 4.6 million children in Australia aged under 18, 1.1 million (23.9 percent) lived with only one of their natural parents.

The increased diversity of family situations in which Australian children live has not been restricted to the growth of single parent families. A quarter of families with dependent children now include children who are not living with both of their natural parents. Four percent of families with dependent children are ‘blended families’ including children who have different parents and four percent of children live in couple families with a stepfather or stepmother. Table 12 shows that in 53.9 percent of couple families with children both parents were working in 1996. It is disturbing to note, too, that in 14.2 percent of cases both parents were not working. In more than half of single parent families (57.2 percent) the parent did not work and in a further 19.2 percent the parent worked part-time.
Table 12: Australia: Labour Force Status of Families With Children, 1996

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Labour Force Status of Parents</th>
<th>Couple</th>
<th>Single Parent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Both employed</td>
<td>53.9</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Only one employed full-time</td>
<td>25.8</td>
<td>23.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Only one employed part-time</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>19.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither employed</td>
<td>14.2</td>
<td>57.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number</td>
<td>2,308,942</td>
<td>672,857</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Thus far in dealing with the characteristics of the population, we have adopted a theme of increased diversity. However, we could equally adopt a theme of increasing inequality among the households from which Australian schoolchildren come. In OECD nations generally this has been described by Smeeding and Gottschalk (1995: 24-25) as...

a hollowing out of the middle of the [income] distribution marked by an increasing fraction of the population both in upper and lower income groups relative to overall median income.

This growing social polarisation has also been experienced in Australia. Harding (2000:13) points out that...

From 1982 to 1996-97, the average income of the most affluent 10 percent of Australians increased by almost $200 a week. This was three to six times more than for those at the middle and bottom of the income distribution. So although on average everyone was better off, the gap between middle Australians and those at the top increased.

In addition, this social polarisation may have an important spatial dimension i.e. there is an increasingly important distinction between areas with ‘haves’ and those with ‘have nots.’ This spatial polarisation has been noted, especially in Australian cities (e.g. see Gregory 1993; Gregory and Hunter 1995a and b) but also has been identified in non-metropolitan Australia (Hugo 2000). Harding (2000: 13) found that...
...household incomes in the most affluent five postcodes in Victoria rose by almost 20 percent from 1986 to 1996, while those in the five poorest Victorian postcodes fell by 10 percent. An income chasm is growing between the inner metropolitan cities and those living in the outer metropolitan areas. The gap is also increasing between those living within and outside the cities, while South Australia and Tasmania lag far behind the other states.

One way in which this widening of differences between the ‘haves’ and ‘have nots’ in Australian society can be demonstrated is by considering the earnings distribution. Table 13 shows that the gap in earnings of full-time male and female employees at the top of the earnings scale and those at the bottom increased substantially over the 1985-1998 period.

<p>| Table 13: Australia: Earnings Distribution Rates for Full-Time Adult Employees, 1985-98 |
|-------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source: ABS 2000c: 145</th>
<th>10th Percentile/ 50th Percentile Ratio</th>
<th>90th Percentile/ 50th Percentile Ratio</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Males</td>
<td>1985</td>
<td>0.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>0.62</td>
<td>1.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difference</td>
<td>-11.4%</td>
<td>8.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Females</td>
<td>1985</td>
<td>0.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>0.70</td>
<td>1.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difference</td>
<td>-10.3%</td>
<td>3.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1985</td>
<td>0.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>0.65</td>
<td>1.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difference</td>
<td>-9.7%</td>
<td>5.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The increasing evidence of spatial polarisation within Australia has some important educational implications. This is evident, for example, in Figure 15 which shows the proportion of Year 12 students in Adelaide government high schools who progress to tertiary education. The circles in the diagram are proportional to the size of the 1999 Year 12 population and the shading indicates the proportion who proceeded to a tertiary institution in 2000. There is a clear spatial distinction in evidence with high proportions being characteristic of the southern, eastern and coastal suburbs which are high income areas. On the other hand, there are very low rates of continuation to university in the north western, northern and southern lower
Figure 15: Adelaide Metropolitan Area: Percentage of 1999 Year 12 Students from State Secondary Schools Enrolling or Deferring in a Tertiary Institution, 2000

Source: DETE 1999 and SATAC
income suburbs. This points to a widening gulf between the education systems and schools used by higher income groups and those used by lower income groups. In addition to the obvious negative equity implications of these patterns, they must also be of concern to a nation wishing to maximise its human resource potential in an increasingly competitive world.

Figure 16: Australia: Proportions of 16 Year Olds Attending School, Non-Metropolitan Areas, 1996
Source: Haberkorn et al. 1999
Educational inequalities are not restricted to within Australia’s metropolitan areas. A major issue in non-metropolitan Australia relates to differential access to educational opportunities compared with those enjoyed by children in metropolitan areas. This is of particular relevance when it comes to secondary education. Figure 16 shows the proportions of 16 year olds attending school in Australia’s non-metropolitan areas. Whereas 82.9 percent of metropolitan 16 year olds attend school this is the case for only 75.8 percent of those living in non-metropolitan areas. Figure 16 shows that the more remote areas of Australia have low levels of school participation.

**CHANGING SPATIAL DISTRIBUTION OF STUDENTS IN AUSTRALIA**

In examining the demography of Australia’s school age population it is important to consider not just the numbers involved but where they actually live. This is because the distribution of the population is constantly changing and whereas private schools are less tied to the numbers in particular suburbs or communities than their government school counterparts the changing distribution of potential students does have some implications for them. The dynamic and changing nature of the distribution of the population in Australia is reflected in the fact that Australia has one of the most residentially mobile populations in the world. Between the 1991 and 1996 censuses 42.9 percent of the total population changed their place of residence. Nevertheless, many of these movements are compensating movements so the extent to which there are actual shifts in overall population distribution have been limited. There certainly is some redistribution of population between the states for example. Figure 17 shows the main population movement between states in the 1991 and 1996 periods. Clearly there are significant net movements into Queensland and, to a lesser extent, Western Australia and a movement out of the southeastern part of the country. On the other hand, Table 14 shows that migrants arriving in Australia in the past have shown a strong tendency to settle predominantly in NSW, Victoria and Western Australia. Indeed, in 1996, 50.5 percent of migrants who had arrived in Australia between 1991 and 1996 had settled in Sydney and Melbourne which contained 52.8 percent of the total population. Nevertheless, limited redistribution of the population has occurred in Australia.
Figure 17: Australia: Interstate Migration Flows, 1991-96
Source: ABS 1996 Census

Table 14: Australia: Distribution of Population, Overseas-born and Settler Arrivals Between States
Source: ABS 1996 Census; DEIA 1999

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NSW</td>
<td>33.9</td>
<td>35.6</td>
<td>41.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vic</td>
<td>24.9</td>
<td>26.6</td>
<td>21.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qld</td>
<td>18.2</td>
<td>14.2</td>
<td>19.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SA</td>
<td>8.1</td>
<td>7.7</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WA</td>
<td>9.2</td>
<td>12.2</td>
<td>12.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tas</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NT</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACT</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>0.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There is a change occurring in the distribution of population between Australian states. Over the present century Table 15 indicates that...

- The proportion of the national population living in NSW, Victoria, Tasmania and South Australia has declined (from 81.8 percent to 69.1 percent).
- The proportion in Queensland, Western Australia, the Australian Capital Territory and the Northern Territory has increased from 18.9 percent to 29.9 percent.

Again while there has been redistribution it has only resulted in a small overall shift in the population distribution toward the north and west.
Table 15: Australia: Distribution of Population Between States and Territories, 1881-1998

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source: Rowland 1982, 25; ABS 1999</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1881</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New South Wales</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victoria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Queensland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Australia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western Australia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tasmania</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern Territory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australian Capital Territory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total percentage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number (million)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

With respect to the future, one can comment that Australia has in general experienced less decentralisation of its national population away from its major cities of Sydney and Melbourne and their immediate hinterlands than has occurred in many developed countries. This would suggest that there are elements which could lead to a greater overall change in population distribution in Australia over the coming decades. These include...

- The development of information technology which means that people and industry are less tied to location in major urban areas than in the past.
- The shift in economy away from employment in manufacturing and agriculture to employment in service industries.
- The increasing cost differential in housing, land and infrastructure between different parts of Australia.
- The growing evidence of environmental stress in heavily population areas like Sydney.

This may result in locations such as Adelaide which have been seen as peripheral being more able to compete for people and companies with larger, more centrally located cities.

Griffith Taylor (1947, 44) writing over half a century ago contended that Australia’s future population distribution would be one which would see the population concentrated in the areas settled by 1860 and in many ways he has been proven correct. However, while the fundamental pattern of settlement of the continent has remained the same, there have been some important changes in the details of the distribution.
First of all, dealing with Australia’s major metropolitan areas⁻ these were home to 62.7 percent of Australians in 1996. Although it is apparent from Table 16 that they have slightly reduced their share of the national population since 1976, they remain the main areas of population growth in the nation. However, population distribution within the major cities is changing to some degree. While it is an overgeneralisation the main pattern of population change in the post-war years, at least until the 1980s, was the classical ‘doughnut’ pattern with population decline in inner and middle suburbs grading to moderate population growth in the middle suburbs and rapid growth on the urban fringe. While elements of this are still evident, the 1996 census series of Social Atlases of population change in Australia’s major cities show a different pattern. Figure 18 shows that in Adelaide, for example, areas of population growth are certainly found on the expanding urban fringe but there is also growth in several inner suburbs and in a scattering of older inner and middle suburbs especially along main transport routes and coastal areas. This reflects movement of young people into older established housing areas due to...

- Gentrification which has seen the movement of well to do, often two income couples into attractive older housing areas and inner and middle suburbs.

- Urban consolidation activities of state, local and city governments which have seen development of land in established suburbs formerly occupied by factories, schools and other extensive uses developed for medium density housing.

- The ageing of the massive cohort which moved into new housing in the 1950s and 1960s which has seen many die off or move into specialised elderly accommodation which has seen unprecedented numbers of houses in the middle suburbs come on to the housing market. This has offered possibilities for younger people to move in as individual house blocks or groups of them are redeveloped for housing.

It is argued here that these trends will continue and in the case of the latter will become more evident in the next decade or so which will see vast areas of the middle suburbs developed in the 1950s and 1960s come onto the land and housing market. This will both increase opportunities for housing development in established areas to

---

¹⁰ Those with 100,000 residents or more.
Table 16: Australia: Population Growth by Section of State, 1976-96


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Census Year</th>
<th>Metropolitan Number</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Non-Metropolitan Number</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Other Urban Number</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Rural Number</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Australia Number</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1976</td>
<td>8,654,328</td>
<td>63.9</td>
<td>4,900,703</td>
<td>36.1</td>
<td>2,997,043</td>
<td>22.1</td>
<td>1,888,602</td>
<td>13.9</td>
<td>13,555,031</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>9,202,318</td>
<td>63.2</td>
<td>5,364,012</td>
<td>36.8</td>
<td>3,287,438</td>
<td>22.6</td>
<td>2,063,600</td>
<td>14.2</td>
<td>14,566,330</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1986</td>
<td>9,817,933</td>
<td>62.9</td>
<td>5,784,223</td>
<td>37.1</td>
<td>3,517,360</td>
<td>22.5</td>
<td>2,266,863</td>
<td>14.5</td>
<td>15,602,156</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>10,461,964</td>
<td>62.1</td>
<td>6,388,576</td>
<td>37.9</td>
<td>3,877,950</td>
<td>23.0</td>
<td>2,510,626</td>
<td>14.9</td>
<td>16,850,540</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>11,221,393</td>
<td>62.7</td>
<td>6,671,030</td>
<td>37.3</td>
<td>4,161,498</td>
<td>23.3</td>
<td>2,509,532</td>
<td>14.0</td>
<td>17,892,423</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: A. Each section of state as defined in the report of each census.
B. Based on the section of state as defined in the report of the 1991 census. Non-metropolitan includes migratory population.
Figure 18: Adelaide Statistical Division: Percentage Change in Population, 1991 to 1996

Source: ABS 1997b: 11
an unprecedented level and reduce pressure on the fringes of our cities. While to some extent our suburbs have had a degree of age homogeneity about them in the past they are more diverse now and this will increasingly be the case in the future. This of course makes small area population projection in cities even more problematical than in the past but does raise the possibility of less dramatic swings over time in demand for age specific services like schools in suburbs as has characterised the half century since the war.

There has long been a recognition of a distinctive zone around large cities in MDCs which is distinctly rural or non-metropolitan in appearance but contains many functions which are strongly associated with the nearby metropolis and whose residents maintain strong regular (often daily) contacts with the metropolitan area (Spectorsky 1958; Friedmann and Miller 1965; Pahl 1965). This zone is distinctive in function and population composition but also is seen as being transitional between metropolitan and non-metropolitan areas by some and by others is best considered to be part of the metropolitan region focused on the major city because of the strong functional linkages maintained with the city proper. This region has been referred to as ex-urban (Davis 1990, McKenzie 1996), Peri-Metropolitan (Burnley and Murphy 1995), Technoburbs (Fishman 1990) and Exurbia (Nelson and Duinker 1990). Burnley and Murphy (1995, p.245) have described these areas as comprising urban centres set in a matrix of rural land where the traditional agricultural and associated service functions have been invaded by uses associated with the nearby metropolitan area including the development of low density residential areas for commuters to metropolitan areas and retirees. In the United States this has been recognised as a new settlement form housing some 60 million people or a quarter of the total population (Nelson and Duinker 1990). In the US the term rural-residential has been used to describe new developments of housing of various densities of people predominantly commuting to the metropolitan area (but not necessarily the CBD or inner city) with some having hobby farms and others residential allotments only. Hence it is a distinctive landscape with particular land use and planning issues and problems often arising from clashes of urban and rural functions and values.

In Australia Burnley and Murphy (1995) have argued that ex-urban areas are not as well developed as they are in the US because of the stronger planning system in Australia. Nevertheless, increasing attention is being focused on the ex-urban regions surrounding major cities in Australia. Maher and Stimson (1994) and McKenzie
(1996) for example, have shown that these regions are the fastest growing in the nation in terms of expansion of population. O'Connor and Stimson (1996) show that these areas are attracting increasing shares of not only dwelling construction investment but also of investment in commercial construction. Undoubtedly these areas will increase in significance as a distinctive and important type of settlement in Australia of the next twenty years.

The last two years have seen some controversy about non-metropolitan Australia with the success of the One Nation party in the 1998 Queensland elections. Considerable attention has been focussed upon the economic and social situation of people living in rural and regional Australia. Analyses of population change in non-metropolitan areas in Australia have shown that while overall population growth outside of Australia's capital cities has exceeded that in capital cities there are some stark contrasts in population trends in non-metropolitan Australia (Hugo 1994). Structural change in the large metropolitan areas has seen manufacturing being replaced with tertiary and quaternary industries, especially the knowledge-based, information and tourist industries as the main employers in large cities. However these structural changes, together with the revolution in transport and communication technologies, shifts in lifestyle preferences, and the growth in the numbers of people whose income is based on transfers of various kinds which are not tied to living in a specific location, have made it possible for some parts of the non-metropolitan sector to experience sustained population growth through immigration. These areas are quite restricted in their distribution and are typified by one or more of a number of specific characteristics...

- proximity to large metropolitan areas;
- attractive, scenic environment (eg coastal, riverfront, mountainous area);
- areas of tourist potential.

However other parts of the non-metropolitan zone especially the wheat-sheep belt and pastoral zones have continued to experience the rural depopulation, dominated by school leavers which characterised the early post-war years. However there are substantial areas in the better-watered and more accessible parts of non-metropolitan Australia which are continuing to experience significant and sustained net immigration and population growth. Hence population change in non-metropolitan Australia is likely to become more diverse and perhaps much less predictable in the next decade or so. Indeed it would appear that a divergence is occurring in non-
next decade or so. Indeed it would appear that a *divergence* is occurring in non-metropolitan Australia between areas of population growth in the areas indicated above and of stability or decline in the dry farming and pastoral zones. This is apparent in Figure 19. There may be an increasing spatial polarisation occurring in non-metropolitan areas which is not only demographic but which is similar to the social polarisation occurring in the major cities.

**Figure 19:** Australia: Population Change (Percentage Change), 1991-96  
**Source:** ABS 1991 and 1996 Censuses
Table 17: Australian Non-Metropolitan Areas: Population Growth by Level of Accessibility
Source: Glover et al. 1999

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of Accessibility</th>
<th>Rate of population growth 1991-96 (%)</th>
<th>Population density Persons per km²</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Highly accessible</td>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>77.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accessible</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>4.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderately accessible</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remote</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very remote</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Australia</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 20: Australia: Population Change in Country Towns, 1991-96
Source: Australian Censuses of 1991 and 1996
A contrast in population trends within non-metropolitan Australia is evident when we examine growth in areas according to their degree of accessibility. Table 17 shows the rates of population change in five accessibility sectors of non-metropolitan Australia. This shows that only in the highly accessible areas close to major cities are population growth levels above the national average. There is a decline in the rates of growth with increasing distance away from the large cities except that the very remote areas had a slightly faster growth rate than the ‘remote’ areas. It will also be noted that there is an association between rates of population growth and population density.

Turning to an examination of population growth trends in country towns, Figure 20 shows the location of urban areas experiencing growth and decline. Again a clear spatial pattern is in evidence. Centres with relatively rapid growth are clustered around the nation’s largest cities and strung along the eastern and southwestern coasts. On the other hand, the wheat-sheep belt area tends to have urban places which are experiencing decline. In the more remote areas there is a greater variation with both centres experiencing growth and those recording decline.

THE TEACHING WORKFORCE

Thus far we have focussed on the implications of demographic change in Australia for the school age population. However, in conclusion it is also worth mentioning that these changes have important implications. The age-sex distribution of the Australian teaching workforce is depicted in Figure 21 and it is apparent that it differs most markedly from the composition of the Australian workforce as a whole. Most striking is the domination of the teaching workforce by women who make up two-thirds of all teachers compared with 43.6 percent of the total workforce.

It is also important to note that the teaching workforce is a considerably older one than the workforce as a whole. Whereas 17.1 percent of teachers are aged less than 30 years old, some 32.1 percent of the total workforce are in these ages. Moreover, there is an especially heavy concentration of teachers in the over 40 ages in 1996. Some 55.8 percent of teachers are aged over 40 compared with 42.2 percent of the total workforce. Clearly this presages the fact that there is to be a significant loss of Australian teachers through retirement over the next two decades when more than half of the current workforce are likely to retire. This has implications for teacher training.
Figure 21: Australia: Age and Sex Distribution of Education Professionals and the Total Labour Force, 1996
Source: ABS 1996 Census One Percent Sample File and ABS 1996 Census

POPULATION POLICY

Australia’s future demographic patterns will be shaped by a myriad of factors which cannot all be anticipated. One of the important elements in this will be government policy although it is little considered in Australia where population is generally considered as a static backdrop against which economic forces are played out and which governments and others have little or no opportunity to influence. However, populations are dynamic and while changes in them tend to be incremental rather than sudden or dramatic, they have important and direct impacts on economic, social and political development. Moreover, policies of government and the private sector can and do exert considerable influence on the directions which population changes take.

Australia’s future demographic trends will be influenced by policy. Attention in this area is almost exclusively focussed on policy in relation to international migration and future levels of net migration gain will be influential in determining future levels of population growth. There have been a wide range of views voiced
about Australia’s level of international migration. These range from the zero net migration views espoused by the One Nation Party to Malcolm Fraser (The Australian 20 December 1995, 13) arguing for much higher levels than have been achieved previously “...to become a nation of 50 or 60 million”. McDonald and Kippen (1999) have shown how extremely low or very high levels of immigration sustained over a considerable period of time provide undesirable outcomes in terms of the age structure of the population and the balance between working and non-working age groups. They point out that a level of net annual migration of around 80,000 with a fall in the TFR down to 1.65 in the next decade would lead to an achievement of zero population growth in about 25 years and a stabilisation of the Australian population at around 24-25 million.

It is unrealistic to argue in terms of a zero net migration level for Australia. This is partly because of the deleterious imbalances it would create in the national age structure but it also does not take account of the reality that some elements in Australia’s intake are not really amenable to total control by the government. These include...

- Flows from New Zealand under the Trans Tasman agreement.
- Some extent of family reunion for Australia’s overseas-born population.
- An intake of refugee and humanitarian settlers.
- An intake of people with particular skills, either on a long-term or temporary basis as part of the nation’s involvement in the global economy.

Equally, however, the claims for intakes well above 150,000 persons per annum also appear quite unrealistic against the historical record of absorption of immigrant arrivals in to the Australian economy and society. McDonald and Kippen (1999) argue that a desirable range of net international net migration gains over the next four decades is likely to be in the band of 80,000 to 120,000 and this would appear to be the most likely scenario on which to plan for the future.

In Australia, government influence on future population outcomes is seen to be synonymous with immigration policy. However, there is a growing body of opinion that fertility levels are also amenable to policy influences. Moreover, in this context it is important to point out that it has been shown (McDonald and Kippen, 1999) that realistic increases in immigration levels over the next two decades will have less affect on overall population growth than shifts in the level of fertility.
Certainly this is true of the impacts on numbers of school age children. On the one hand, if Australian levels of fertility fall to those of some contemporary European nations it will hasten the onset of a situation where deaths outnumber births and increase the ageing of the population while on the other hand, relatively small increases in fertility or even stabilisation of it will delay these processes. The concentration on immigration and neglect of fertility in the contemporary public population debate is partly a function of a lack of understanding of the role of natural increase but also a widespread feeling that fertility levels are not able to be influenced by policy in a liberal democracy while immigration can. This has not been the case in Europe where there has been widespread concern about low fertility and where the role of government policy in stabilising or even increasing fertility is widely discussed (Hugo forthcoming). In these contexts crude pro-natalist measures have been replace by interventions which seek to change the environment in which decisions by couples about the number of children they intend to have are made. These are sometimes referred to as ‘family friendly’ policies.

The latter have attracted some attention in the Australian context. The focus is on policies which facilitate the participation of mothers in the paid workforce outside of the home and promote gender equality in the workplace, home and in society generally. McDonald (1997) has argued that one can recognise a positive relationship between fertility in MDCs and the extent to which those countries facilitate employment of mothers and gender equity:

The countries which through their social institutions make it difficult for unrewarding for women to combine work and family, or which provide incentives for mothers to stay at home rather than to be employed are the countries that have very low fertility. Faced with the choice between an uninterrupted career or having a child and withdrawing from the workforce for an extended period, women in those countries often make the decision not to have the child. In short, where countries continue to support or promote the male bread winner model of the family, fertility falls to very low levels.

In European countries with so-called ‘family friendly’ policies, there are definite indications that fertility decline has not been as great as it has in countries where there are low levels of gender equity in the labour market and other institutions and where there are limited supports for those women who chose to have children as
well as have substantial work careers. There would seem to be a strong case that where governments and industry pursue policies and practices which make having children and working outside the home a real option for women through wide availability of childcare, significant maternity and parenting leave arrangements, preservation of seniority and promotion prospects during such leave, etc. fertility levels are likely to stabilise at TFRs between 1.5 and 2. They certainly contribute to the strengthening of the two-child family size norm in those societies.

However, one would not wish to argue for the implementation of family friendly policies in Australia purely on the basis of their fertility effects although such effects are undoubtedly tangible and positive. One would rather stress that policies and activities that are supportive of women combining work and family should be instigated from the perspectives of improving equity and productivity in Australia. It would appear that young Australian women who wish to work outside the home in present circumstances are faced with the following choices:

- To have children and withdraw from the workforce for at least a substantial period and lose income and security.
- To decide to concentrate fully on career and maximise income and promotion possibilities and not have children.

Young women who attempt to combine work with childbearing and child raising are faced with a number of barriers. In effect, whereas for men having children is not seen in any way to inhibit career activities and prospects, this is not the case for women who want to do the same. There is a clear gender inequity here which in any society professing to subscribe to equality of opportunity needs to be addressed.

It can be argued that Australia in recent years may have seen a shift back toward a male-breadwinner model of the family. For example, it has been reported (Advertiser, 10 August 1999, p9) that childcare fees in Australia rose 56 percent between 1991 and 1998. McDonald and Kippen (1999) also indicate there has been a withdrawal of employment conditions favourable to families with young children in industrial agreements and the modification of the tax-transfer system to provide greater benefits to parents who do not work. While women must have the choice of withdrawing from the workforce to bare and raise children, they must also have the choice which men have, that is to have both a full career of working outside the home and having children. For this to occur there are a number of initiatives that are needed
in government, in industry as well as in the family (sharing of household tasks between partners, etc). If this were to occur it almost certainly would lead to at least a stabilisation of Australian fertility at a level higher than that among many European countries and thereby reduce the overall ageing of the population and allow a less disruptive transition to a demographically stable population. The progress of these debates in Australia and the response (or lack of response) to them by governments will play a major role in shaping the numbers of school age children in Australia over the next two decades.

CONCLUSION

Future trends in the school age population of Australia are to some extent shaped by past trends in demography. A continuation of present trends in fertility and migration will inevitably see a decline in primary school age children in the next decade and a small increase in the numbers of secondary age children. However, it must be borne in mind that these trends are not totally inevitable. Certainly future levels of immigration will influence the numbers of school age children. Immigration levels and composition remain an area of lively debate in Australia and the outcomes of that debate will affect the numbers of schools and teachers required over the next 20 or 30 years. However, it is not commonly realised that it is shifts in Australian fertility levels over this period which will have a much greater effect on the numbers of school age children. Moreover, it is not realised that policies adopted by governments do influence fertility. If Australian fertility continues to fall and reaches European levels there will be even less children entering primary school than is projected. There is an increasing feeling in Australia that there is a need for a population policy which has a vision for what the Australian population should be like in the next few decades. Part of this vision must include a consideration of fertility. Several have argued that the current declining levels of fertility are in part a function of Australia not adopting family-friendly policies. That it is the result of women not being given a real choice to have a family and career as well but having to choose between the two. The extent to which Australia adopts conservative male-bread winners models of the family in policy development in the private and public sectors and the extent to which it moves toward policies which enable women to have both a career and a family like their male counterparts will be an important determinant of how many children will be in Australian schools over the next couple of decades.
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