The government has honoured an election commitment to introduce teacher bursaries aimed at encouraging the best student teachers to stay in the Territory, Minister for Employment, Education and Training Syd Stirling said today.

Mr Stirling said that a world-wide shortage of teachers was making it increasingly difficult to attract and retain teachers.

"The government has moved quickly to introduce the bursaries scheme in time for the 2002 academic year, making available 20 bursaries valued at $12,000 each per year," he said.

"The scheme encourages Territory teaching students to undertake their studies at a local tertiary institution.

"Priority will be given to applicants with the highest Tertiary Education Rank scores who are willing to teach in remote areas and in one or more of the speciality areas – Special Education, English as a Second Language, Information and Communications Technology, Maths, and Science."

A panel, including representatives of the Northern Territory University and Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education, have met to consider applications and an announcement will be made early in March. A total of 52 applications have been received.

"The government is committed to attracting and retaining the best teachers in the Territory to ensure the best education possible for Northern Territory students," Mr Stirling said.