Submission from Association of Headteachers and Deputies in Scotland
Education (Scotland) Bill: Proposed amendment to introduce obligatory HT qualification

I am writing on behalf of the Association of Headteachers and Deputies in Scotland (AHDS) to comment on the proposed amendment to the Education (Scotland) Bill set out in Kit Wyeth’s letter to the committee dated 12 May 2015.

AHDS fully supports efforts to better prepare candidates for the role of Head Teacher in advance of appointment to the role. The ‘Into Headship’ qualification as developed by the Scottish College for Educational Leadership (SCEL) promises to deliver candidates who are well prepared for the rigours of leading Scotland’s schools. For a long time we have argued that the widely accepted importance of effective school leadership and the positive impact it can have on pupil outcomes should be matched by efforts to support and enhance school leaders. In short, while we have some reservations about supply of candidates, we support this development and are very positive about the ‘Into Headship’ programme developed by SCEL.

However, as the Scottish Government has not yet made clear their expectations in this area other than a basic timescale for implementation, there are a number of points which need clarification:

1. Availability of candidates – There is a problem with recruitment of Head Teachers. There are fewer and fewer applicants for Head Teacher vacancies. Local authorities often have to re-advertise posts. This shortage of HT applicants is unlikely to be improved upon by putting more hurdles in the way of application for headship. So while we support the efforts to provide good training and development to prospective HTs other efforts will be required to reduce the disincentives to pursue the role. Without such action we will risk reaching a point where there are no appointable candidates in some areas. If this came to pass with the legal obligation to only appoint those with the qualification, what then?

2. Exemption – It is clearly stated that the obligation to undertake the qualification would be for those taking up their first headship post. What about those who have been performing successfully in Acting HT roles for some time? What about those who have stepped back from headship (now or in the future) or have moved into an Education Officer or Education Scotland role and want to return to a HT post?

3. Numbers participating – There are over 2000 primary schools in Scotland. What workforce planning has been done to identify the number of vacant posts arising each year? If it was established that approximately 10% of school leaders needed to be replaced each year then the ‘Into Headship’ qualification would need to supply not just 200 successful candidates but enough candidates in the right areas of Scotland to ensure the availability of a number of candidates for the selection process in each area. To achieve this there will have to be more candidates achieving the qualification than posts available. What level of over-supply is planned? This has implications for providers, candidates and budgets.

4. Funding – While the funding model for this training is not explored in My Wyeth’s letter it is a crucial element in the success or otherwise of this development. The Government’s decision for the first cohort of the ‘Into Headship’ programme was that it would fund 2/3 of the cost and the candidate would have to pay the remaining 1/3 (with the expectation that this would be approximately £1000). This seems wholly unreasonable in the circumstances. Not only does it further reduce the apparently inadequate financial incentives to take on headship (there was a lack of applicants prior to this development) but it may, when combined with the study requirements, raise equality concerns. Will there be
equality of access for single parents, sole earners and possible candidates living in different parts of Scotland.

5. Desirability of the role – As we have mentioned above, there is currently a problem recruiting Head Teachers. The reasons for this are threefold. Many who might otherwise be candidates for headship see the range of tasks Head Teachers are faced with that have little to do with learning and teaching or engagement with pupils and are put off. They also see the hours worked by school leaders and are put off – while it is by no means a reliable assessment of average working hours for school leaders a recent AHDS snapshot of 80 HT members suggested an average working week of over 55.5 hours. Finally, the relative remuneration of Head Teachers is not sufficient to overcome these disincentives. Even if the other factors of workload and focus of work are addressed, if there are not adequate financial incentives available it is likely that the other efforts will have little impact on the level of applications. To do this the job-sizing toolkit used to arrive at school leaders salaries must be revised to create meaningful financial incentives and clear differentials between salaries for Deputes and Head Teachers.

I hope this is useful.

Best regards

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