Submission from VOICE Scotland

Requirement for Head Teachers to hold the Standard for Headship before appointment

Dear Sirs,

These comments are on the Scottish Government amendment to the Education (Scotland) Bill on a proposed requirement for head teachers to hold Standard for Headship qualification.

Rationale

While we can understand the desire to strengthen leadership and management skills and introduce greater consistency of standards across Scotland, it is important to ensure that the correct balance is struck when setting any requirement for this qualification, to ensure that this does not hinder supply of head teachers to meet demand within local authorities. There is a concern in many local authorities at present (particularly rural ones) around the recruitment of head teachers. For example, we are aware of situations within schools where head teacher posts have been advertised and, of the few applicants who came forward, none were considered suitable for the post.

So on a general level, the development of the programme is to be welcomed as effective and well trained leaders in our schools will enhance the experience of all staff who work there who can expect to be treated with dignity and respect while responding to the legitimate and reasonable expectations of their head teacher to provide the best learning experience for the young people at the school.

However, the policy needs to guard against putting teachers off from applying at a time when, even with no such requirement for qualification, insufficient teachers are putting themselves forward for Headship opportunities. We would also suggest that a systematic review of the recruitment issues and reasons for a low application rate for headship positions is needed. This context must be borne in mind when considering the detail around the design and funding of the programme to ensure that this successfully delivers the head teachers which are needed across the country.

In light of the lack of head teachers available to take up posts, which has contributed in some areas to joint headship arrangements being put in place, and taking into account increased workload pressures, we would consider the ability of many current head teachers to pursue the programme over and above their work commitments will in practice be limited.

Funding
The balance of funding must take into account the supply/demand for head teachers over time. At present, without an obligatory cost to undertake such a programme, insufficient numbers of teachers are applying for head teacher posts. Whilst the programme will be a beneficial step in increasing the confidence and skill of teachers in applying for head teacher roles, great care must be taken to ensure that the qualification itself does not become a barrier to teachers making the transition to head teacher roles at a time when there are insufficient teachers expressing interest in the role. We would submit, therefore, that in the present circumstances placing a financial burden on teachers to enter the programme will further prevent adequate numbers coming through the system to fill required head teacher posts within local authorities. Employers will benefit from receiving thoroughly prepared individuals to fill these posts within their schools. Therefore, we would submit that a balance of funding from employers and from Scottish Government would be more appropriate.

We trust that the above is helpful and we would be most grateful for confirmation of safe receipt of this e-mail.

Regards

Jennifer Barnes
Senior Professional Officer (Scotland)