Response from School of Education, University of Strathclyde

What are the main challenges in relation to teacher recruitment and retention?

There has been much discussion about the timing of the indication of target intake figures. While there are initial figures which are communicated in late December, confirmation does not come until late February. Even then, there have been changes since then. Receiving the letter re final numbers on 24 March this year was much too late. Notification needs to come much earlier.

We would request that Scottish Government / Scottish Funding Council set targets on a 3-year basis and on a rolling timescale to allow universities to make plans for staffing and for teaching space, as well as placement requirements. The SPS timeline does not fit well with the recruitment process in terms of submitting requirements.

Applications through UCAS are problematic. Potential applicants find it hard to navigate the system – e.g. they have to search in the Undergraduate section, rather than Postgraduate or Teacher Training sections. The UCAS system is not conducive to making and confirming offers in good time. Despite raising various issues with UCAS, universities have been told that there is little / no scope for adjustments. The Scottish Council of Deans is considering processing our own applications as an alternative if UCAS are unable to agree changes.

The Scottish Government publicity campaign has led to an increase in enquiries but not in applications for STEM subjects.

In England and Wales, there are numerous schemes offering bursaries, golden handshakes etc. for students in certain subjects. We cannot compete with this and so we lose potential applicants from Scotland and RUK.

Do you have views or insight into the process for recruiting the right number of teachers to satisfy the demand for teachers in Scotland’s schools (including the availability of up to date information such as on supply and demand)?

We work to the figures we are given by Scottish Funding Council. At times, this message does not match what we are being told by schools and local authorities. For example, we have been informed that there is to be a marked reduction in the number of primary students from next year onwards. However, we are told by colleagues that there are no
supply teachers to be found at all, so clearly there remains a need to maintain primary numbers. It is not clear to us that Scottish Government is using accurate data re teacher numbers, types of contracts, demographics of the teaching population and/or changing work practices (e.g. part-time, job share etc.)

We have some concerns that the increased numbers of secondary students, and the ‘opt out’ arrangements may lead to students being placed with ‘weaker’ teachers – with resulting need for increased support from universities.

One suggestion is that Scottish Government might consider increased funding – for example could schools be given money to cover 1 hour of support per week, per student to allow mentors to provide quality, focussed support?

**What are the factors that influence whether teaching is considered an attractive profession compared to other professions by those that might consider a career in teaching?**

There is still a perception that teaching is a very tough profession that gets limited support. Workload issues are raised regularly. Often when students are in schools for placement, they feel that the atmosphere among staff is not positive.

Public perception of teaching and teachers could be more positive. While response to the Donaldson Report is moving the profession to a Masters one, there is much work to be done – both in terms of support for teachers who wish to undertake further study but also to recognise that this is a culture change which will take time. There are still many teachers in the profession who do not regard Masters level study as valuable.

Financially teaching is not always seen as rewarding.
Are there patterns or key reasons why some trainee teachers do not complete courses, or do not choose to go into teaching having qualified?

Of the students who have left the course this year, some have stated that teaching was just not for them. While we have a requirement for entry that students have some prior experience in school, it is only when they actually begin to plan, teach and reflect that they gain a true understanding of what is involved. The reality of the job is often very different to what they had expected.

We do have some concerns about the number of students who identify as suffering from stress and anxiety. Resilience is an issue. This is not particular to Strathclyde – colleagues in other universities are seeing the same thing.

Occasionally students have a bad school experience and this causes them to question whether they are suitable for the professions. A few have left as they had a very poor school experience which was not all their fault, sometimes caught up in existing problems in school. Some schools are not good schools for students but it is not easy to guarantee that they will be as fully supported as we will and they would wish. At the University of Strathclyde, we continue to develop our partnership working with schools and local authorities and this is beneficial, since expectation and criteria are both clear and agreed.

What is the impact of teacher shortages in certain parts of Scotland or in specific disciplines?

We are aware that there are areas of the country where the situation is challenging. We are contacted regularly every year asking if we know of any former student seeking employment.

At Strathclyde, we have a number of RUK and international students. Many of them wish to remain in the country. However, the fact that they cannot access the teacher Induction Scheme makes it less attractive. We have worked with agents to try to help them gain employment, but an agreement to include these would help us to recruit more, particularly in shortage subjects. This year, for example, we have a few international students in
shortage subjects but despite wishing to stay, the employment situation is difficult for them. We would be happy to work with relevant local authorities and with certain subjects to explore ways of offering a guaranteed one year post.

How effective are the various approaches taken to cover shortages of teachers in schools?

This is a major problem. Schools report regularly that they cannot find supply teachers and our students tell us that they are often used as cover teachers. In fact that is becoming regular practice despite our courses stating that it should not happen. Often students are unwilling to refuse to cover classes as they feel it may lead to a negative view of them and their performance by school staff. This puts them under unacceptable pressure.

What factors influence teachers deciding whether to stay in the profession or to leave?

In early career teachers the culture and ethos of the schools they serve their initial years in have a huge influence in terms of whether they stay in the profession (so a focus on support and relationships). This can also be the case with those in later stages of their career. Positive relationships within a school culture are more important than the type of school (or community served by a school) that a teacher is serving in.

Opportunities to develop helps people to decide to stay. Being treated as a valued member of staff and being able to get on with the job without interference is important. Often wanting some autonomy makes teachers apply for other posts.

What factors influence teachers when deciding whether to apply for promotion to senior management/head teacher level?

There appears to be a view (outdated) that teachers have to have a “certain number of years’ experience” before applying for promotion. This puts many off that may well be ready to take on more senior roles but are of the opinion they will not be taken seriously.
The culture of many Local Authorities in Scotland in appointing to senior roles is generally in line with that of outdated public sector leadership in that “years of experience” come before quality of experience. The demands of those in public sector leadership have changed therefore how we recruit to them should also be updated in terms of quality of experience, skills and attributes rather than “time-served”. This can lead to frustration in talented teachers that are not given opportunities to progress. Due to re-structuring of many Senior Teams (the removal of depute posts) there is a lack of “training posts” for those with potential to reach Head teacher level. Some local authorities do create “acting pools” and this does give many a chance to try the role out. However, these pools are recruited solely from within the Local Authority and issues again are raised re my comments above in terms of who is “allowed” into the pool. Many teachers “see” the workload their senior leaders undertake and are put-off by the thought of giving up even more of their personal time to their carer. What is often not made clear to them are the rewards and huge positives of working at that level. The Scottish Qualification for Headship will become compulsory for any “new” Head teacher applying for a role in 2018. This had a negative impact on Head teacher recruitment when this decision was made in England. Again, Local Authorities act as the “gate-keepers” to who gets the opportunity to complete this course. This will rule out anyone not already in a middle/senior role in a Scottish Local Authority,