University of Dundee Response

Teacher Workforce Planning for Scotland’s Schools Consultation

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

There are many challenges in relation to some aspects of student teacher recruitment. For many years Universities, have been able to recruit candidates for primary teaching and for some secondary subjects without any difficulty. Secondary subjects, particularly in the STEM area, have traditionally been difficult to recruit to; this situation has become increasingly critical over the last 10 years. Many of the STEM graduates can secure greater salaries going into industry or other graduate employment. Not all graduate applicants with a science or engineering background meet the GTCS Entry Requirement for Higher English. Another barrier to recruiting STEM graduates may be the STEM subject curricula. As part of the GTCS accreditation Universities must identify applicants with appropriate interpersonal and academic skills. It may be that more emphasis in the development of the interpersonal ‘softer skills’ within STEM curricula would encourage more applicants into careers such as teaching. Accessibility to relevant ITE programmes may also be providing barriers, particularly for those who are moving from one career to another. The frequent negative reporting in the press in relation to secondary schools and pupil behaviour might deter potential applicants from applying from a career that can be perceived as challenging and unrewarding.

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)?

It would be extremely beneficial if Universities could receive target intake figures over a rolling three period rather than just year on year. This would help identify specific subject areas and ensure appropriate levels of staffing within the University.

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?

Several factors make a profession attractive. Clearly the obvious is salary and conditions of service but careers which offer challenge also attract interest. Traditionally teaching was attractive to those who have a sense of public duty and who want to support young learners. Those who see teaching as a vocation rather than a job or a career are still attracted to the profession.

Are there patterns or key reasons why some trainee teachers do not complete courses, or do not choose to go into teaching having qualified?
There are several reasons why student teachers do not complete their initial teacher education programme. In our experience these have remained pretty constant over the last decade or so. Despite high expectations of experience with children and knowledge of the school system before beginning the course, students’ perceptions do not always meet the experience and reality of the classroom. The actual process of managing a class and teaching a lesson is not something achievable by all. Some students recognise this themselves, other need to be guided toward that decision. Financial and challenging personal situations also results in students unable to continue with their studies.

For some students passing the course successfully does not mean moving into a teaching post. Some students recognise part way through their degree that teaching is not for them but they recognise the value of a teaching degree and qualification in the market place and choose to complete to use this to move forward with an alternative career.

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

The short-term impact of teacher shortage is that it adversely impacts on offers of placements for current student teachers. There is also a longer-term impact in relation to fewer teachers of STEM subjects, with fewer pupils taking these subjects in school the pool of candidates becomes increasingly smaller for taking up STEM places in teacher education programmes.