COSLA Response to The Education and Skills Committee inquiry into the recruitment and retention of teachers for Scotland’s schools.

Introduction

1. COSLA welcomes the opportunity to comment on this inquiry. Given the investment that Scottish local government continues to make in the future of its communities, councils have demonstrated a long track record of seeking the highest standards of education to take place in their schools and other learning establishments. To continue to do that requires the maintenance of a high-quality teaching workforce.

2. COSLA and the Association of Directors of Education in Scotland (ADES) has worked over the years with Scottish Government and predecessor administrations to ensure that there is provision of sufficient training opportunities for young people embarking on teaching as a career, to maintain the workforce. Equally efforts have been made to encourage those trained as teachers but working in other jobs to return to teaching or to consider teaching as a second career. More will be said about this later in this response.

3. In the last ten years or so, workforce planning for teachers has become more rigorous in monitoring the age profile across promoted and unpromoted staff, early years, primary and secondary and across subjects. In addition, monitoring has taken place on the availability of supply teachers both on permanent and temporary contracts, to provide cover for vacant posts. This has been done in conjunction with monitoring of demographic trends across Scotland. In recent years, attempts have been made to manage the training places more effectively, to ensure that previous experiences of a surplus of teachers without access to school employment in Scotland were not repeated. Regrettably, however, trends have reversed in the take up of teacher training in Scotland and while not at a crisis level, for all councils there is now an ongoing pressure to fill teaching posts across a widening number of pressured subjects, including but not only STEM subjects.

4. COSLA trusts that the comments below assist the Committee to understand better our perspective on this matter, what is happening to address this issue and how COSLA, the Society of Personnel Directors in Scotland (SPDS) and ADES are supporting this agenda.

The main challenges in relation to teacher recruitment and retention.

5. It could be suggested that recent public rhetoric on the quality of education outcomes in Scotland has had a part to play in influencing those who may have previously considered teaching as a career, to be less inclined to do so. Those who see themselves as having a strong vocation for teaching will not be deterred, however to convince young people who have yet to make their career choices, it can often be difficult to look past such rhetoric. Nor will it support the confidence of existing teachers that they are valued for their contribution to education outcomes. The press has a role to play in this respect and often there is no media recognition of the wider role of a teacher and how that influences the learning outcomes of children and young people, and this can add to negative influences. Equally the narrative of teaching unions, often focused on negative matters such as workload, can have similar influences.

6. The age profile of the teaching workforce is also changing and this has a bearing at either end of the profile, in terms of a greater interest in part-time working either when coming to the end of a teaching career or beginning one with accompanying family commitments.
7. Budget pressures on councils are now beginning to affect education, which has hitherto been largely protected in terms of budget cuts – COSLA has made it clear in communications with Government Ministers that continued cuts in funding for local government will impact on education service provision, despite funding going direct to Headteachers, as it will begin to erode other services that support education services. The continued focus of Government on teacher numbers as a key performance indicator of councils’ commitment to maintaining and improving education outcomes is also unhelpful. It skews the issue of recruitment to fulfil a national staffing ratio, rather than allow councils to seek to recruit the most appropriate numbers of teaching staff to meet the needs of children and young people in their schools.

8. The process for recruiting the right number of teachers to satisfy the demand for teachers in Scotland’s schools

8. The system as currently set up allocates trainee teachers from the centre, once students have completed their initial teacher training. The system also considers the requests made by councils at the beginning of the year for trainee teachers. However, trainee teachers have the capacity in the allocation process to indicate a preference for where they wish to be placed. Given the location of the 8 teaching universities, many teacher trainees unsurprisingly do not wish to relocate from where they currently stay, due to costs of travel and variance in cost of living across the country. In addition, it could be argued that not all teaching universities have, in the past, made the best use of data in workforce planning to ensure that there is an increased focus on pressured subjects and instead have allowed student intake in courses where there is a known surplus of existing teaching staff. While we recognise that this is changing and there already appears to be slight increase in student numbers in the pressured subjects, whether because of specific campaigns or a change in attitude to the teaching profession, the fact remains that we need more good quality teachers.

9. In response to the rising costs of recruitment advertising for councils, COSLA has worked with developers to establish the recruitment website MyJobScotland. Clearly, this deals with the whole of the local government workforce, but it is acknowledged that teacher recruitment is a significant part of the MyJobScotland transactions.

10. In recent months, we have engaged with Scottish Government in terms of supporting its teacher recruitment marketing campaign. The MyJob Site is being re-configured to place a greater emphasis on teacher recruitment and have agreed a means by which contacts through the Government campaign with an interest in teaching will be signposted to the MyJob site. The emphasis of the MyJob campaign is on qualified teachers returning to teaching or seeking employment in Scottish schools for the first time. ADES and SPDS have both played a part in advising the MyJob team on the material for the refreshed website.

11. In addition, in response to the increased pressure in supply teacher recruitment, the COSLA MyJob team has been working with developers to introduce an online Supply Recruitment and Booking Portal, to assist both councils and supply teachers. A pilot project is due to begin soon with several councils.

The factors that influence whether teaching is considered an attractive profession compared to other professions by those that might consider a career in teaching

12. Conditions of service will be a factor, but there are other matters in terms of the attractiveness of professions in the private sector, particularly for those who have STEM qualifications. Work/life balance and the management of workload against a backdrop of increasing pressure on teachers in terms of outcomes will be factor too, as the job is not just about classroom teaching but the additional work in preparation, the personal maintenance of continuing professional development and engagement with colleagues on
pupil support, ex-curricular school activities etc. To encourage more to consider teaching as a career, more flexible routes into ITE, especially for returners or those wishing to pursue a second career would be worth further consideration. Perhaps there is an opportunity here also to examine the quality of ITE, in terms of a perceived deterioration in the quality of non-qualified teachers beginning probation.

Patterns or key reasons why some trainee teachers do not complete courses, or do not choose to go into teaching having qualified

13. Anecdotally, for some student teachers and those that move into the probationer stage (particularly in STEM subjects), there can be an attraction in completing the teaching qualification, then taking up employment in the private sector, with a longer-term plan of coming back to teaching at some point in the future. Monitoring of ‘drop outs’ from teacher training after qualification do not illustrate a large impact, but there remains a cost of the training which cannot be recouped.

14. COSLA participates in Scottish Government’s Teacher Workforce Planning Group with other key stakeholders such as representatives from the teaching universities, ADES and the teaching unions. This group only meets once or twice after the publication of the teacher census, to discuss and agree with other stakeholders, the number of places that should be made available for primary, secondary and early years teaching posts. This Group, until last year, has only been meeting once to discuss possible intake models for teacher training, however, it had been acknowledged that this did not give sufficient time to look at the census publication in December and make judgements based on the findings of the census. In 2016, an initial meeting of the Group considered the findings of the teacher vacancy survey conducted by COSLA and Scottish Government and how the findings could impinge on teacher training placements.

The impact of teacher shortages in certain parts of Scotland or in specific disciplines

15. As mentioned above, COSLA undertook a survey of councils in partnership with Scottish Government in 2016, to determine the extent of vacancies at a given point in September that year. This coincided with the completion of the teachers’ census in September 2016. This is the first time such a survey has been carried out for several years and as such was mindful of the clash with the census return deadlines. In view of this, the survey was not as detailed. It should also be recognised that the responses of councils to this survey could at best, represent only a snapshot in time. The information returned by councils indicated vacancies across subjects and education levels. Much of this has already been in the public eye in relation to ongoing difficulties with teacher recruitment in certain parts of the country.

Effectiveness of the various approaches taken to cover shortages of teachers in schools

16. Councils follow the guidance of the General Teaching Council for Scotland as well as take guidance from the Scottish Negotiating Committee for Teachers (SNCT) handbook, in terms of the standards expected of teachers working in Scotland and the agreed principles in teacher recruitment, relating to terms and conditions. That said, there is anecdotal evidence that several councils have sought for some time to employ teachers from countries such as the Republic of Ireland, Canada and Australia. In other situations, councils have sought to encourage appropriately qualified council staff to consider re-training as teachers. Efforts have also been made to encourage workers in the oil and gas industry to re-train as STEM teachers, given the current downturn in the economic activity in the oil and gas industry in North East Scotland.

17. No doubt the committee will be aware of Scottish Ministers’ agreement earlier this year to support several pilot projects to be delivered by teaching universities in conjunction with local partnerships of councils under the New Routes to Teaching programme. COSLA and other stakeholders have supported the principle of the pilot schemes, however, in the
longer terms, aspects of these pilots will require agreement by COSLA, representing the employers’ side, along with the teachers’ representatives.

Staying in the teaching profession and seeking promotion/headship posts
18. Matters such as work/life balance, remuneration, and workload have and continue be the issues flagged by teaching unions and may be factors influencing recruitment. COSLA, as part of its ongoing dialogue with partners on the SNCT, has played its part in issuing guidance to councils in the matter of reducing workload and bureaucracy.

19. The impact of the McCrone Agreement in 2002, introduced a new structure in schools, which has over the years, reduced promotion opportunities. Part of that agreement brought in Chartered Teacher status, which offered opportunities for staff who wished to seek promotion, but wished to remain in the classroom. The committee will be aware that the Chartered Teacher scheme was discontinued in 2012 by the then Cabinet Secretary for Education.

20. There are still difficulties in attracting applicants for promoted posts, especially headteacher posts, especially (though not exclusively) in rural areas, where councils have had to consider shared headships across principally primary schools. There are a small number of instances of this occurring at secondary level also, where difficulties with recruitment have required interim measures. Confidence in managing staff can be one of the deterrents to applying for HT posts.

21. The committee may also be aware that ADES undertook a survey of schools and Headteachers and reported in early 2017 on the problems associated with the recruitment of headteachers. A working group to examine the report and agree a plan of action for Scottish Ministers has been underway since the report was published. The group, chaired jointly by Scottish Government and COSLA, is looking at the matters raised in the report, including career pathways and preparation for headship, support for headteachers, terms, conditions and incentives and promotion of the role of headteachers. SPDS has also offered further help to support headteacher recruitment.

Conclusion
22. Scotland has always valued its education system and councils have taken their responsibilities in this regard very seriously. The education workforce play a vital part in the preparation of the workforce of tomorrow and the continued viability of Scotland’s communities. However, pressure on this workforce, amplified by media and demands of the introduction of new systems and strategies on education attainment will not necessarily encourage new entrants to the profession, neither will the financial pressures being placed on local government that place a greater burden on the workforce locally.

23. COSLA continues to value the whole of the local government workforce, of which teachers are a part and will continue to play its role alongside its partners in the SNCT to address the terms and conditions of the teacher workforce. COSLA will also work through MyJobScotland and the development of the Supply Portal to promote the role of teaching in Scotland.

COSLA Employers’ Team
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