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

As someone employed in the HE sector, I can only comment on teacher recruitment, rather than retention.

There are several challenges which could be raised in relation to teacher recruitment:

1. For PGDE Primary, and for certain PGDE Secondary subject areas such as PE and Biology, application numbers are very high which makes for a demanding and exhaustive selection process. In PGDE Primary, for example, each year there is usually a ratio of 15 or 16 to 1 in terms of applicants to available places. While this is a positive situation in one sense, it does create significant costs in terms of staff time which has to be devoted to selection rather than teaching per se. It can also be hard for applicants to accept rejection when they are highly motivated and see recurring media reports of teacher shortages.

2. Certain secondary subject areas, which are well known, do not attract sufficient numbers of suitable applicants. Statistics show that even in the hardest to recruit subjects, such as Maths, Physics, and Chemistry, application numbers still outstrip available places. However, for two reasons, such applicants are not always suitable: (a) they do not have the right, or sufficient subject specialism, credits from their first degree to meet the GTCS entry standards; and/or (b), at interview they do not demonstrate the required qualities and skills to indicate that they are suitable for teaching. One action which would help would be for undergraduate degrees, especially in Physics, to place more emphasis on interpersonal and related social skills to enable students to become better suited to professions/employment, such as teaching, where human interaction and relationships are central.

3. There is a continued gender imbalance, especially in primary teaching. While we would wish to focus on the quality of the (student) teacher as the key issue, regardless of gender, we are conscious that the number of males, particularly so in the undergraduate degree course, is very low. There are a number of contributory factors at play here and no one action will address the matter. This is a longstanding, and global, phenomenon.

4. There is a continued under-representation of black and minority ethnic groups in teacher education courses. Again, numerous factors are at play but some of the
issues which would assist are: (1) ensuring that such groups, as school pupils themselves, find their educational experience positive and supportive, free from discrimination or inequity; (2) ensuring that teaching is promoted as a high-status, respected career; (3) ensuring that schools and staffrooms provide a positive and supportive environment for all; (4) that teaching is rewarded financially at a level appropriate for a profession and to attract high-calibre applicants.

5. The SFC and Scottish Government should confirm recruitment numbers earlier in the annual cycle. It is difficult for universities to recruit to target when the recruitment/interview cycle is almost complete by the time of the government releasing the actual numbers. For example, this year we commenced interviewing in December and had completed the vast bulk of this by March. However, it was only on 24 March that we received notice of what the final numbers are to be. It means universities are operating blind, making offers without knowing that the final numbers will be. The SFC and SG should aim to have this information out before the end of the calendar year, which would assist greatly.

- 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)?

Unfortunately, universities do not have access to any data which would be informative on this matter. They rely on government projections of teacher number requirements. However, wild fluctuations in controlled numbers from year to year make it very hard for universities to staff teacher education programmes as they would wish. University finance departments will not sanction fulltime, permanent posts without some guarantee about future demand and so there is a temptation for universities to rely on part-time, hourly-paid, employees which does not provide the sustainable and dedicated provision which should apply to teacher education programmes.

- 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?

It is clear from some parts of the recruitment process, that teaching remains an attractive career for many. In other parts where recruitment is less positive, the following would appear to be important: (a) Levels of pay. We know that many of our BA Childhood Studies graduates do not go into the early years workforce but instead apply for PGDE Primary courses. The pay differential between an early years worker and a teacher is about £10k. That evidence suggests that pay is a factor. Thus, in terms of teaching overall, pay needs to be set at a level which can compete with other professions and the public sector, generally. It is true that we do not want entrants to teaching to be motivated principally by money but nor do we wish to lose potential applicants because pay levels are so unattractive. (b) Employment
prospects. We need to ensure that student teachers can have confidence about the prospects of securing a fulltime, permanent post once qualified. (c) Workload. There is widespread coverage in the media of issues relating to excessive teacher workload and ways must be found to reduce this and the perception of it. (d) Work satisfaction. Issues around pupil behaviour and the physical and emotional stress of teaching need to be addressed, and the perception of this.

- Are there patterns or key reasons why some trainee teachers do not complete courses, or do not choose to go into teaching having qualified?

The most common factor in failure to complete teacher education courses is unsatisfactory performance during school experience/placement. While at undergraduate level such students can transfer to another course or complete an education degree without GTCS status, at PGDE level the only option is to fail or leave (if retrieval placements also prove to be unsuccessful). We do not have further data on any correlated issues but are currently exploring entrants’ levels of qualifications, age, location, and experience to determine if any further patterns can be detected and so measures taken to counter any such.

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

I cannot comment on these issues

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

I cannot comment on these issues

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

I cannot comment on these issues

- What factors influence teachers when deciding whether or not to apply for promotion to senior management/headteacher level?

I cannot comment on these issues

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