EIS Response to The Education and Skills Committee’s consideration of recruitment and retention of teachers for Scotland’s schools

The EIS, the largest trade union representing teachers throughout Scotland, is pleased to respond to the Committee’s invitation to provide evidence on this topic. Below is a summary of some of the key challenges related to recruitment and retention of teachers and an explanation of the EIS view of a possible change for improvement in determining staffing within Scottish schools.

CHALLENGES

Pay

To ensure that recruitment to the profession remains healthy, the issue of teachers’ pay needs to be addressed.

Teachers pay has fallen behind significantly in real terms since the 2003 element of the agreement “A Teaching Profession for the 21st Century” - 8.1% (CPI) or 16.4% (RPI) - and we believe that this must be redressed, bringing Scottish Teachers into line with average teachers’ salaries across the OECD and graduate earnings across the economy, if teaching is to remain an attractive profession for new graduates.

The issue of retention is equally important in terms of salaries. To ensure teachers stay in the profession we believe that the reward at the top point of the main grade scale needs to be improved, particularly following the decline in career structures caused by the creation of faculties and the impact of austerity cuts.

There is some evidence that a significant number of teachers who secure the Standard for Full Registration, at the end of a probationary period, are leaving teaching. The reasons for this trend have not been established conclusively but anecdotal evidence indicates a number seeking employment outwith Scotland where the rates of pay may be considerably higher than Point 1 of the Teachers’ main grade salary scale.

Workload

Workload is the main issue of concern for teachers and the burdens of excessive workload are felt in schools throughout Scotland. The EIS has campaigned over many years for a reduction in teacher workload. In both sectors and at all levels the issues of workload remain key to teacher morale and retention and perceptions of excessive workload may influence career choices being made by undergraduates.
Workload burdens impact on retention, on willingness to apply for promoted posts and on those considering entering teaching and considering returning to the profession. There is also the issue of end-of-career burnout and the willingness of those retired to register for supply.

Teachers in Scotland have among the highest class contact hours in OECD countries and bringing class contact time of Scottish teachers into line with OECD comparators would help teachers cope with workload demands.

Research carried out for the EIS by Scott Porter in 2014 identified that the factor which created least job satisfaction was that of workload. 84% of members identified workload as their greatest concern. Unfortunately, it is our belief that that workload has become worse over the last 3 years. The same research asked teachers if they would likely to be in teaching in the next 5 years and only 24% of respondents were definitive about staying within teaching.

**Supply Teacher Shortages**

The SNCT has considered issues relating to supply teachers and developed recommendations which were further reviewed in 2017. There has been work towards a national booking system for supply teachers. Even with this ongoing work, however, there are still significant challenges in the recruitment of supply teachers, particularly short term supply. The EIS is firmly of the view that restoration of previous salary entitlements and working hours for short-term supply teachers would improve this situation.

**Workforce Planning**

The current system of workforce planning has attracted some criticisms but the EIS accepts that considerable work has gone into modelling and that the process also attempts to include teacher representatives in the planning process. We are of the view that the annual process should commence before the annual census is published. Adding information on vacancies in the system is helpful when setting numbers of teachers to be trained. However, there is a clear dislocation between national workforce planning which looks at providing training places over a 4-year period whereas Scottish Councils plan annually. In that regard, the EIS is clear that a minimum national staffing standard, as advocated for below, would bring greater certainty to workforce planning.
Class Sizes

The EIS believes that class size reduction provides a key to education improvement and that it would also have a significant impact on reducing teacher workload and improving teacher morale. Smaller classes offer teachers the opportunity to provide greater individual support to pupils, including those with additional needs. Smaller class sizes would also allow opportunity to be more innovative in methodology and to foster positive relationships among pupils and between pupils and teachers. It would also reduce teacher workload associated with tracking, monitoring and reporting of outcomes for large classes of learners. Such positive outcomes would contribute to professional and job satisfaction and an improvement in teacher morale.

CHANGE FOR IMPROVEMENT

Minimum Staffing Standard

Teacher staffing levels across Scotland must be appropriate, fit for purpose and fair. The should provide a secure basis for workforce planning, at local and national level, and budget planning.

The EIS believes that certainty over teacher numbers is a prerequisite for educational improvement and has called upon for the Scottish Government to implement a minimum national staffing standard. We believe that it is unacceptable that staffing in schools should be a postcode lottery across Scotland.

With regard to overall teacher numbers, councils in Scotland (in their capacity as education authorities) have entered into agreement with Scottish Government, since 2011, to maintain teacher numbers and pupil/teacher ratios, ensuring that there is no reduction in the level of teacher deployment on a national basis.

Whilst the arrangement gives certainty about the overall level of teacher involvement in education in Scotland in it has proven to be restrictive for local management and efficient deployment of resources. It can also mask a wide variety of staffing models across Scotland (including very different levels of staffing in different areas) and it can preclude any significant local adjustment when there are changes in pupil numbers within the school year.

An alternative to adopting a national target for teacher number annually, is to develop and agree a minimum staffing standard that would meet all
the requirements of regulation; of teachers’ terms and conditions of employment; and of national policy, providing an assurance that appropriate staffing levels were being applied in every school.

If a national standard were to be adopted, it would have to cater for all the variations of urban, rural, large and small schools that we have in Scotland. It would also have to meet the needs of teachers and learners. An ADES/EIS co-sponsored working group has been in operation and development work has been undertaken but there is currently no agreed proposal.

CONCLUSION

The EIS acknowledges that workforce planning is not an exact science and that there is a need to be cognisant of the danger of training teachers for posts which do not exist whilst also recognising that having an adequate supply of newly qualified teachers is essential to maintain delivery of high quality educational experiences for young people.

Teacher shortages which have emerged in areas such as STEM subjects or in particular local authorities, should serve as an early warning to all of us. Scotland does not currently face the crisis in teacher recruitment which exists south of the border but action is required now to ensure that our schools are fully and appropriately staffed in all areas.