Submission author

Richard Holme is a former primary teacher who taught in England, and now lecturers in education at the University of Dundee. He is submitting this in a personal capacity, informed by professional experience. He is currently completing doctoral study investigating informal or teacher-led professional development.

This research article, covering motivations of teachers moving in to teacher education, co-authored by myself may be of interest: http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/02619768.2016.1194391

This research article covers how long it takes for teachers to develop to be fully effective: http://science.sciencemag.org/content/335/6072/1118.full

This article by Christopher Day covers teacher lifecycle: http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ977354.pdf and builds on the work of Michael Huberman through the later 1970s, 1980s and beyond.

Executive summary

Teacher retention is clearly a problem in Scotland but this is not unique e.g. England is facing similar challenges. A comprehensive research project in to recruitment and retention across the UK would be beneficial.

Career advancement can be an issue for some with the perception that promotions are allocated on ‘time served’ rather than capability. A further issue that may influence retention is that professional development is apparently not valued in the same way by all teachers and school leaders.

The support of student teachers on school placement varies wildly across schools and authorities. It is well known that some schools use student teachers as supply cover. A further challenge is that the mentor support, provided in schools, also varies widely.

General challenges to recruitment and retention

It is my personal opinion that the main challenge is changing the view of education across society. Many people enter education with an overly simplistic view of what teaching is like and that it can be emotionally and intellectually challenging. There can also be issues of personality clashes amongst teachers (and on rare occasion examples of bullying), which means people leave the profession, as in Scotland there are limited opportunities to move to other jobs and other schools.

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)

Having quality, accurate data on teacher retention/attrition rates is vital – the data should be collected and published on a regular basis. It would also be useful to track which teacher education providers and which courses were most successful at retaining students in the profession. However it should be stressed that just because a teacher remains in the profession does not mean they are the best teachers. Similarly the best option, for teachers who are struggling, may be to leave the profession.
Factors that influence whether teaching is considered an attractive profession, compared to other professions by those that might consider a career in teaching

The over-riding reason for people entering teaching is to make a difference to the lives of young people. However people also enter teaching because of the terms and conditions (e.g. holidays, pay). Some of these entrants do not realise the complexity of being a capable teacher although these initial motivations clearly do not preclude them from becoming good teachers later.

One approach worth considering would be to make substantial changes to teacher education. For example teaching could become a Masters-level profession, with an extended training and probation period. This would have the impact of raising the overall status of the profession. The undergraduate courses could be changed to general education studies (without qualified teacher status) then anyone wanting to become a teacher could complete this degree (over 3 or 4 years) then undertake the PGDE qualification although it would be essential that numbers of places were carefully monitored to support this change. PGDEs could span a year and a half or two years, including a joint supported induction 6 months to a year between university and school/local authority. Of course it would be extremely difficult to predict the impact of such a change. A number of new routes for teacher education are being trialled which is welcomed and it is essential these are carefully monitored for effectiveness.

There is little opportunity for changing roles and school, so secondments out of teaching for short periods may be attractive, and beneficial, for some teachers.

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

The reasons for not completing courses are varied but usually focus on students not realising the challenges associated with teaching and struggling to cope with the depth and breadth of the workload. Alternatively some decide to leave because of poor experiences, which could involve challenging classroom environments.

Many people will not chose a career in teaching/education as they will have a view which is represented in wider society. Teaching as a profession has a mixed image within wider society and challenging this could be one of the most important objectives of dealing with wider issues of retention and recruitment.

Impact of teacher shortages in certain parts of Scotland or in specific disciplines

Locality of jobs and vacancies (especially rural areas) is problematic, anecdotally it seems many qualifying teachers want to live and work in Glasgow or Edinburgh, or remain in their home location. For some new teachers Edinburgh is seen as an attractive option because of the half day Friday finish.

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

Measures to deal with teacher shortages do not appear to have been effective so far, and long serving teachers report the perception that there is a lack of jobs at certain points, then not enough teachers a few years later. Teacher absence in some schools seems to be high with schools/local authorities struggling to manage this effectively. However it should be noted that teacher recruitment is a problem in other countries, such as England. The ability of schools to manage absence may be something to consider in future.
Factors influencing teachers staying in the profession

Many people stay in teaching because they love the job and find it highly rewarding. Personal issues (such as fitting with family life etc) are another factor for remaining in the profession. Unsurprisingly when a school has a good level of management support, and morale is high, staff turnover appears to be lower.

During the probation year mentoring can be an issue with the pastoral role and formal sign off roles having merged (although these were intended to be separate, see p.52 Teaching Scotland’s Future, The Donaldson Report http://www.gov.scot/Resource/Doc/337626/0110852.pdf). However this is an issue of perception, and so having quality, reliable evidence of this issue of mentor support in schools is essential.