Dear Mr Dornan

Inquiry into teacher workforce planning

Please see below the response of the University of Glasgow to the above inquiry.

1. We welcome the opportunity to provide our views on Teacher Workforce Planning in Scotland. We understand the difficulties for all involved in the Teacher Workforce Planning process and have provided comments below which we hope are helpful and constructive. We are happy to work with colleagues in the Scottish Government and the higher education sector to improve the process. We also note that Ms Moyra Boland, Deputy Head, School of Education, University of Glasgow, is available to appear before the Committee on 24 May 2017.

2. It is our belief that the flow of information about teacher shortages/vacancies to Schools of Education could be improved. There is currently a perceived lack of data about particular kinds of teacher shortages (e.g. Catholic teacher shortages, Gaelic medium teacher shortages, etc) and geographical issues. This restricts planning for future system needs and where universities might specialise to the overall advantage of training across Scotland. Schools of Education are often approached at short notice to help resolve a system shortage by increasing current provision or moving into new provision, which can lead to ad hoc rather than considered planning. This is both frustrating for individual institutions but also wasteful of national resource. We believe that it would help greatly if clearer lines of communication were developed between the Scottish Government and the planning teams at individual universities – which could help with ensuring that overall numbers are met while playing to the strengths of individual institutions.

3. The distinct mission and offer of Scottish universities and their Schools of Education ought to be taken into account in the allocation of ITE student places (e.g. subject specialisations, geographical specialisations, sector specialisations, etc). The recent increase in PGDE Secondary places, allocated pro rata across the sector, and the planned 55% reduction in 2018-19 of PGDE Primary did not appear to take this distinctiveness into account.

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For example, there are areas of undersupply (Catholic primary teachers; Gaelic medium primary teachers) within broader areas of oversupply (e.g. Primary teachers more generally). It would be helpful if the Scottish Government and the sector could take the opportunity to collaborate on a plan for reducing numbers, either progressively over time or in a differential fashion, taking into account different institutional contributions.

4. The current changes with both Primary and Secondary intakes may present a real and timely opportunity to review the current distribution of ITE students among universities, ensuring Scotland continues to produce the right graduates in the right place at the right time.

5. In terms of ensuring appropriate planning on student targets, universities naturally rely on information being provided in advance of recruitment. While what represents an appropriate level of notice will naturally be a subject for discussion going forward, timing of receipt of the most recent SFC targets (on 24 March 2017) was far from optimal, coming a week before the close of the UCAS offer deadline.

6. Previous years' targets have typically been given in January, but a strong case could be made for the Teaching Workforce Planning Advisory Group meeting significantly earlier in the planning cycle in order to provide earlier guidance on student targets. The University of Glasgow would be more than willing to have further discussions with SFC, Scottish Government and other representatives of the HE sector to give our institutional view on what would constitute an optimal time for the provision of information.

7. Ensuring the overall process – and the resulting applicant and student experience – works as well as possible is clearly a priority for all involved at both institutional and governmental levels. We should work collectively to ensure greater harmony between workforce planning, the determination of institutional targets and the admissions process. If institutional targets were set significantly earlier in the process, universities would then be in a position not only to offer the correct number of places earlier in the cycle, but also to deal better with their internal logistics which can often be overlooked – for example, correctly sizing the workforce required to deliver the education and securing the appropriate teaching space within their institution.

8. Indeed, one potential solution is for universities and their Schools of Education to be provided with their student targets on a three-year rolling cycle. This would have the benefit of providing greater certainty for the sector, allowing measures to be put in place to deal with the implications of any fluctuations in student numbers. It would also provide universities with greater opportunity to more proactively plan to meet, and potentially exceed, Scottish Government ambitions.

9. The 'clawback' of funds from Schools of Education for over- and under-enrolment is often a disincentive for them to fully support Scottish Government ambitions. We would welcome a discussion on how the clawback could be reformed to support and protect both the sector and the Scottish Government.

10. On the question of allocating trainee teachers onto work placements, the obvious point is that the ability of universities and their Schools of Education to educate greater numbers of ITE students depends on the availability of placements in schools to accommodate the increased numbers, which is of course an area over which universities have no control.

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11. The move to an ‘opt-out’ central placement system rather than the current ‘opt-in’ system is imperfect but welcome; there is the potential for further improvement. This move could simply be the first step in a new strategy to incentivise teachers and schools to take on more students, particularly at secondary level where incentives for secondary teachers to support more than one student would seem appropriate. Again, we would be delighted to have conversations with the Scottish Government and schools/local authorities on what steps could be taken in this area to ensure their ambitions are met.

12. The Committee has also expressed an interest in any issues with oversubscribed courses for certain specialisms. In our experience programmes that attract high levels of application numbers beyond limits set by Scottish Government targets are typically Primary ITE and some Secondary subject areas (e.g. History and, to a lesser extent, Geography). Programmes that attract applications in numbers below targets are typically in Secondary STEM areas but also in English.

13. While recent increased marketing by the Scottish Government has been very welcome, much of the resulting increased interest in teaching has been focused on areas which were already in high demand, rather than in programmes with increased targets. Those who may otherwise be attracted to teaching in Secondary STEM areas appear more willing to take up other occupations, which is something government may wish to focus on in future, both in terms of marketing and in terms of influencing wider societal attitudes towards teaching. Again, we would be delighted to discuss actions which could be taken in this regard further with the Scottish Government, the Education and Skills Committee and with stakeholders across the sector.

14. As ever, we are more than happy to provide further information on anything raised above – or on any other matter the Committee may consider relevant.