Teacher Workforce Planning Inquiry: Northern Alliance

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

The main challenges across Northern Alliance authorities is the general availability of people coming forward to apply for posts at all levels within the system, with some posts being re-advertised on several occasions and still only attracting a very small number of applicants (frequently below five and often zero). There are particular difficulties in relation to the availability of supply teachers and most of us have seen significant reductions in the availability of supply cover. With some authorities unable to provide any supply cover for the past three years. Vacancies are most acute in primary, with many promoted, non-teaching posts now fully committed to classroom teaching and no capacity for further cover or school improvement/leadership across the sector. There are serious concerns in relation to recruiting certain subject specialisms in secondary schools, particularly in the STEM subjects, Home Economics and Modern Languages and there are serious risks to attainment in national examinations as a result of this. Another serious concern at present is the lack of people aspiring to primary headship. Primary school Head Teachers are central to leading forward improvements in education at a local level and yet many Northern Alliance local authorities are facing serious recruitment problems, with many interim/acting arrangements in place and in some cases, no arrangements in place.

- **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)?**

Considering that only six years ago, there were schools receiving between 20 and 200 applications for teaching posts and there seemed to be a limitless availability of supply cover across the country, it would appear on the face of it that something has clearly gone drastically wrong. It could be argued that the teacher numbers agreement has done nothing to help as some local authorities report an excess of teachers, whilst not being able to “release” them in order to maintain their ratio. Furthermore, additional money in the system through the Scottish Attainment Challenge has resulted in some local authorities vastly over-recruiting, leading to a smaller pool of applicants for other, permanent basic statutory provision, vacancies. To that end, whilst the Scottish Government has increased the number of teachers in training, there have also been additional posts created in some areas, so supply is still not meeting demand and more rural and remote areas feel the greatest impact of this. Many Northern Alliance authorities will have evidence of applicants accepting posts in their local authority only to turn it down days later because they have been offered a post in a more “central” location, at times turning down a permanent role for a temporary one due to location. Another factor in rural areas with a significant number of inefficient small rural schools is one of effective and efficient deployment of staff. It is the case in certain areas, that there are actually enough teachers, but they are working in unsustainable small schools, teaching very small classes. Vacancy factors needs to be taken into account in the national planning formulæ and the allocation of probationers weighted to those areas with very high level of unfilled statutory posts.

- **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?**

There are a number of factors which seem to deter people from entering a career in teaching. Whilst the McCrone Agreement resulted in improved salary scales, particularly for graduates at that time (in 2001), graduate pay has now slipped behind other professions and the workload associated with teaching has also increased exponentially in recent years. Since the start of Curriculum for Excellence reforms in 2004, there appears to have been an
incessant period of change which has resulted in many people feeling confused about the core business of learning and teaching and we have succeeded as a profession in over-complicating our work. Considering one of the major elements of CFE was to declutter the system, we have actually re-cluttered it and then added some more to it and this has had a significant effect on the perception of teaching among those who may have considered it as a viable career option. Secondly, whilst parental engagement and participation is central to improving educational outcomes for young people, the increased demands which appear to be placed on teachers, and the added scrutiny and challenge they face from parents has also led people to question whether this is something they wish to encounter in their professional lives, particularly the increase in “teacher attacks” on social media, being something all local authorities are increasingly having to contend with and it does appear to be putting people off entering the profession. Whilst it is acknowledged that accountability is essential in the system, it could be argued that this is very much being seen as a deterrent at present.

- **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 reasons behind this are complex. Many graduates report that they leave the profession because they are unable to secure permanent posts. The reality is that they are unable to secure permanent posts in certain parts of the country and many are unwilling, or indeed unable, to relocate to where the posts exist. Equally, having undertaken their training and their NQT year, some teachers decide that teaching is not for them, often as a result of some of the reasons cited earlier in this response. Finally, teacher training can often be overwhelming for students as ITE providers try to cram a great deal into the training year (for one year) PGDE courses. This can result in the training being very hurried and not fully preparing trainee teachers for life in the classroom. Within the Northern Alliance, we believe that we can work more collaboratively on the whole “pipeline” of teacher recruitment and education, both initially and throughout their career, and feel this should be reviewed. There is scope for this to be done on a regional basis in partnership with universities and local authorities and this should be developed as a matter of urgency, with national oversight and funding delivered locally.

The teaching shortages are also impacting on those choosing not to go into teaching, many have had placements in schools where there are a high number of vacancies and they are observing high pressure environments, with teachers covering classes regularly and little or any time for planning, professional development and support. This has an adverse impact on their view of a career in teaching.

A regional professional development strategy could be developed across each regional consortia of local authorities to address professional learning, deliver training locally and provide teacher professional learning. This model would support national policy and delivery and ensure layered delivery of policy across Scotland. This model could include partners from national agencies, local providers and institutions thus reducing overlap and creating a more effective tailored model of professional learning.

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

The impact is significant and local authorities can cite an increase in parental complaints, poorer behaviour being reported in schools and an increase in exclusions as well as lower reported levels of parental satisfaction with schools. There is also evidence of poorer inspection reports being published and an impact on levels of attainment and achievement. Centrally based staff are also being used regularly to cover vacancies and to run schools and this is taking them away from their core duties of supporting schools and securing improvements in performance. Given the size of the national agenda at present, this will
undoubtedly have a negative impact on system improvement and pace of change. Children and young people only have one chance at school and at present there are potentially serious risks due to the lack of teachers in the system and this may result in us not getting it right for every child at what are crucial times in their educational and social development. The National Improvement Framework for Scottish Education sets an ambitious agenda for schools and local authorities and the focus on attainment is welcome. However, there are risks around capacity to deliver and evidence from authorities with challenge schools suggests that these schools often have the highest number of vacancies and the greatest difficulties in recruiting staff.

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

All local authorities have taken a variety of measures to cover teacher shortages including use of centrally based staff, encouraging retired staff to sign up to the supply register, promoting programmes for ex Oil and Gas workers and supporting programmes such as DLITE to encourage people to retrain as teachers. Schools have also "swapped" teachers to ensure curricular coverage and where subject specialists have been unavailable, local authorities have run twilight "masterclasses" for certificate students. ICT has also been used for curriculum delivery in the senior phase and in certain subjects. On very rare occasions, classes have had to be sent home due to a lack of cover. Local authorities have also developed housing initiatives and have paid competitive relocation expenses and "golden hellos." New programmes, with a wider range of providers, such as UHI have also been developed in partnership with local authorities, promoting a "train locally" approach. Whilst these have all helped to varying degrees, they are largely short term and are not addressing the systemic issue which is a lack of teachers, particularly in rural and "remote" areas. These are all short term fixes and a more strategic and systemic solution is needed.

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

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

Teachers cite a wide variety of reasons for opting to leave the profession, including salary, workload, a flat career progression structure, increased parental expectations and demands, standards of student behaviour, pace of change, initiative overload and others besides. In terms of applying for promoted posts, anecdotal evidence would suggest that the flaws in teacher job sizing is a major factor. Many teachers report that taking on a promoted post is simply not worth the additional workload and stress for relatively modest financial gain. Many teachers report witnessing the hours their Head Teachers work and the issues and complaints they deal with and they feel this is not something which appeals to them.