Dear Professor Irwin,

I am writing in my capacity as Convener of the Education and Skills Committee to highlight to you evidence heard yesterday at a Committee hearing on its workforce planning inquiry. The Committee heard from a panel of trainee teachers and this session highlighted the variety in the content and structure of teacher training courses at university. The Committee agreed that I should write to all universities to seek further information on the content and structure of courses and also assurances that some subject matter is being covered in courses and in a manner that prepares students for the classroom.

Firstly, the Committee heard the value that the trainee teachers place on time in schools on work placements, and that there are different approaches to the number of placements students get, the time taken in placements and the stage of their course when these placements are timetabled. I appreciate your university may provide a number of courses of different lengths and forms but would appreciate if you could provide, for each course, details of the number of work placements each student receives, the time taken on each (including proportion of overall study time used for practical experience) and details of the stage in the course that placements happen. Also in relation to placements, the Committee heard there are different approaches to covering travel and accommodation expenses, including where students are travelling large distances. The Committee would be interested in details of whether your university provides students with funding and the timing and terms of payments to students. For reference, the Committee also intends to raise issues raised by students in relation to work placements with education authority representatives and also the General Teaching Council for Scotland.
Secondly, the Committee was interested in evidence on the importance of teacher training that prepares students for practical experiences in the classroom. The Committee heard evidence to suggest a variation in the amount of time dedicated to different issues that the Committee consider crucial in preparing student teachers for the classroom. Specific examples included additional support needs, behaviour management and online safety. Again, I’d be grateful if you could provide details of the amount of time spent on each of your university’s courses on each of these topics and the type of training provided (for example the balance between theory and more practical training).

Thirdly, the Committee heard evidence to suggest that the requirements for primary school teaching entrants in relation to numeracy may potentially be too low and that this can be combined with limited assessment and focus during teacher training. I should be grateful for details of your perspective on this matter, again with details of the time spent on numeracy during any primary school teacher sessions that you provide.

Finally, a number of the trainee students suggested that while there is focus on the importance of literacy and numeracy, there is not necessarily sufficient focus on the practical techniques of how to deliver them. I should be grateful for the perspective of your university on this statement and any accompanying details of courses you wish to provide to substantiate your position.

If there is any other information that your university considers relevant to the Committee’s inquiry please feel free to provide this in your response. For example I understand that Education Scotland and the GTCS have undertaken a review of ITE which is soon to publish so if there is any information collated for that exercise that you consider may be useful context to the Committee, please feel free to provide it in your response.

For reference, the Official Report of the evidence session should be available on our website on Friday evening:

http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/CurrentCommittees/99746.aspx

In addition, the video of the session is available now following this link:

http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/CurrentCommittees/100050.aspx

The Committee would very much appreciate this information to inform its evidence session with the teacher workforce planning advisory group members on 24th May and so would be very grateful for a response by 18th May. Please do contact the Clerk to the Committee if you wish to discuss the timescale or for further context on the Committee’s work, Roz Thomson is on 0131 348 5222 or at roz.thomson@parliament.scot.
Yours sincerely

JAMES DORNAN MSP
CONVENER