Response to the Scottish Parliament Evidence and Skills Committee Inquiry into Teacher Recruitment and Retention

Introduction

The committee requested evidence in relation to eight areas regarding teacher recruitment and retention. As the focus of the Council is on Higher Education we would like to make several general remarks in relation to Teacher Education programmes in Scotland and then respond in detail to the two questions which link directly to our provision:

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

General Remarks

1. Course validation and accreditation: All Initial Teacher Education (ITE) programmes in Scotland are internally validated by each of the awarding institutions and accredited by the General Teaching Council for Scotland (GTCS). The professional and academic integrity of each programme is subject to scrutiny through an exhaustive and forensic examination of their quality. These validation and accreditation events involve examination by relevant members of the internal and external academic communities, local authority representatives, as well as by members of the General Teaching Council for Scotland.

2. Entry qualifications: All ITE institutions in Scotland, base their minimum entry requirements for teacher education programmes on the GTCS Memorandum on Entry Requirements to Programmes of Initial Teacher Education in Scotland http://www.gtcs.org.uk/web/files/about-gtcs/memorandum-on-entry-requirements-to-programmes-of-ite-in-scotland-0413.pdf

Within the Memorandum, the GTCS sets entry standards in relation to literacy and numeracy for all ITE students – a minimum pass in Higher English and in National 5 Mathematics, or their equivalent. These are high tariffs and there is nothing in the primary curriculum, for example, that represents anything of a challenge to these levels of attainment. There is no research evidence to support the view that increasing the entry tariff to Higher Mathematics would make any difference to improving teaching and learning in the classroom. Work by Day & McKechnan (2010), for example, found that student teachers’ subject knowledge showed no significant difference between those with a Higher
Mathematics and those with Standard Grade Credit. Students with an Intermediate 2 pass were less secure but that qualification no longer exists. http://www.scotedreview.org.uk/media/scottish-educational-review/articles/2015/2015_47-2_Nov_06_McKechan.pdf

The Council does not support the proposal to raise the numeracy requirement for entry to Teacher Education programmes to Higher Mathematics. Raising the entry tariff to Higher Mathematics would reduce the recruitment to all initial teacher education programmes.

3. Evidence of quality and student satisfaction: There is ample and extensive evidence of the quality of ITE programmes from such sources as The National Student Survey. The rankings in The Complete University Guide 2018 - where five of the top ten places in the UK (n=77) are held by Scottish providers of ITE. The evidence from the Complete University Guide show five of the top ten places in the UK (n=77) are held by Scottish providers of ITE. The evidence from the Complete University Guide also shows the massive increase in entry tariffs for students on education courses. For the Scottish institutions listed, the average entry tariff is 423 (equivalent to more than 5 A passes at Higher) and more than what many UK universities require for entry to law, accountancy, or architecture. Students entering ITE courses have very high academic qualifications, and for entry to the majority of Professional Graduate Diploma (PGDE) and Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) programmes an honours degree is now a requirement for consideration for selection. https://www.thecompleteuniversityguide.co.uk/league-tables/rankings?s=Education

There has been no indication hitherto of any disquiet from the GTCS, Scottish Government, or any other stakeholder about the internal structure and content of these courses. We are all part of partnerships with local authorities. These partners would not hesitate to comment on the content of our courses or the calibre of our students if there were concerns.

4. Role of schools and local authorities in student selection and assessment: Assessments of students on these courses, and judgements of their meeting the criteria for GTCS registration, are carried out in collaboration between university staff and local authority and school colleagues. In all institutions, local authority partners are involved in the recruitment and selection process, sitting on interview panels with university lecturers. This is an important aspect to ensure that seasoned practitioners’ views are taken into account. Typically such staff will be primary headteachers and depute headteachers or, in the case of secondary courses, subject specialists such as principal teachers. This selection process is challenging with PGDE primary programmes receiving 12 to 15 applications for each place available.

These colleagues are also involved in assessing performance on school placement. In all institutions, this is a joint activity between university and schools. This means that experienced practitioners are involved with university
tutors in judging student teachers’ performance in the classroom. This, again, adds to the quality assurance rigour of these programmes.

5. **“Initial” Teacher Education**: These ITE programmes prepare students to meet the standards for provisional GTCS registration. They are specifically named as “initial” teacher education programmes, to be supplemented by career-long professional learning, as anticipated by the Professional Update process initiated and run by the GTCS. It is not anticipated that students progressing from ITE will be expert in every area of professional practice and feelings of being not sufficiently prepared is to be expected. It could be said that this awareness is welcomed, in the sense of indicating a desire, and an acknowledgment, for the need for continuing development. However, all students who pass these courses must meet the GTCS Standards for Provisional Registration. They then continue to develop their practice during their induction year to meet the Standard for Full Registration by the end of the two or five year process of qualification and registration.

6. **Responding to earlier committee evidence**: We were pleased to hear many positive comments back about students’ university experience. We found it useful to reflect on what students have shared and we will use some of that to enable continuous improvement. However, we wish to add a strong note of caution as well. While the views of individual students at the Committee hearing on 10th May need to be acknowledged, it should be noted that these were subjective, individual perspectives and need to be seen within the very positive context indicated above, where Scottish providers of ITE are held in high esteem. Some of the information offered was factually incorrect such as the statement by one student that his institution was changing their postgraduate course from a one year to a two year and that any extra time would be spent within the university. In the case of another witness, the historical context should have been noted: in past years a student of PGDE Secondary Technology would have had no input on literacy; while he claimed that this was only one week, it is a substantial time commitment in the context of a total of 18 weeks’ coursework.

It is only since literacy, numeracy, and health and wellbeing, the cross-cutting themes of *Curriculum for Excellence*, became the responsibility of all teachers, that a secondary specialist in Technology, for example, would have had any ITE input on these curricular areas. It is very common for students to feel insecure about curriculum provision and classroom management. This is simply a level of maturity and experience mitigates the issue in 99% of cases. While it is wise to listen to the student voice – and each ITE provider listens extensively to student feedback, getting caught up in the anxiety of beginning student teachers as a policy initiative is inadvisable. Teacher education addresses topics and theories that will continue to influence students years into their profession, and a restrictive and simplistic focus on hours devoted to numeracy and literacy, or hours of apprenticeship in schools, fails to grasp the complexities of education.

7. **Embedding cross-cutting themes; not discrete, timed ‘training’**: As *Curriculum for Excellence* developed, ITE providers were encouraged to see
literacy, numeracy, and health and wellbeing, as cross-cutting themes and so these curricular areas were embedded within and across programmes. The recent demand to have these unpicked, and their individual "inputs" quantified in terms of hours and minutes, is misguided and simplistic. Such data represents one very small facet of what happens on ITE programmes. This data has recently been provided in response to the evidence collected for the National Improvement Framework. The Council do not judge this to be an adequate way of measuring the quality of our programmes.

All universities in Scotland are committed to the concept of ‘teacher education’ rather than ‘teacher training’: the latter suggests preparation for routine, repetitive, predictable activity, whereas the former captures much more fully the deeper professional development, and critical reflection, required to enter the dynamic and challenging world of teaching. Initial teacher education programmes, therefore, are designed in a complex way where students engage with the different elements of the curriculum, for example, in different ways at different times and with different levels of intensity, as appropriate to context. Students’ development in the key areas of literacy, numeracy, and health and wellbeing, for example, which are ‘crosscutting themes’ of Curriculum for Excellence, is promoted in an integrated manner where student engagement and progression are advanced and supported through the many different inputs, activities, assignments, school experiences, and assessments, which our ITE programmes provide. In such a context, it is neither possible nor informative to attempt to quantify their nature by simply counting the minutes students spend in class or the minutes allocated on university staff workloads. ITE programmes are complex, professional courses whose quality cannot be assessed by timetable calculations but require much more nuanced and advanced evaluation. We are confident in the quality of our provision and that our successful students enter schools as well equipped and prepared as the best of our international counterparts.

We note that in the evidence session on May 17th that the committee suggested that there must be aspects where it was ‘training’ and not simply education. We would repeat that the education of teachers is complex, it is not linear and with the complexity of learners in the classrooms, there are now increasing elements of unpredictability of what is needed to ensure that we get it right for every child. That being the case, ‘training’ someone will not meet the challenges of the diverse demands of the job. The ability to adapt and think on your feet (and to know why you are choosing one approach as opposed to another) becomes even more essential. In our programmes, we provide theoretical frameworks to take practice forward, offer opportunities to consider the ‘how’ and ‘why’, open students up to develop inquiry and research skills to evaluate for impact, and grow the confidence to be agentic and pro-active professionals. We work with our partners such as schools and local authorities to take this huge agenda forward.

The committee asked
What are the main challenges in relation to teacher recruitment and retention?

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)?

As the context of the SCDE is the Higher Education sector, our comments are focused on teacher recruitment, rather than on retention. There are several challenges facing institutions in relation to teacher recruitment:

A. The timeline used by the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) and the Scottish Government to confirm the controlled numbers of places on ITE programmes, this year published in March 2017 for entry in August 2018, does not align with the university recruitment/selection cycle which is normally almost concluded by that point in the academic year. Thus for 2017-18 entry, university prospectuses, advertising, and marketing will have been in place prior to the summer of 2016, with selection and interviews normally running from November/December 2016 until March 2017. With numbers only being confirmed on March 24, 2017, this was far too late for universities to accommodate.

In addition, the varying of numbers from year to year, sometimes significantly, makes it difficult for universities to plan, particularly around staffing costs, although also in relation to accommodation, timetabling, and resources. For entry to programmes in August 2017 there has been a substantial rise in secondary postgraduate places and the SFC forecast suggests a 55% drop in PGDE Primary numbers for the year 2018-19. This will have radical implications for the budgets of Schools of Education, taking nearly £3.5m out of the sector. To address this, the Council would prefer the setting of numbers on a three or five-year cycle. This would enable a phasing of increases and reductions in places and enable universities to plan their provision. This would help budgeting and stability for the sector and would also remove the earlier issue of late confirmation of numbers.

The Council is about to jointly chair a new Teacher Workforce Planning Advisory Group with the Learning Directorate, and will be making those points to that group.

B. Certain secondary subject areas, such as Maths, Physics, and Chemistry, do not attract sufficient numbers of suitable applicants. The Government often ‘addresses’ this by raising the target numbers for universities, but this does not engage with the fundamental societal, and professional, issues which affect recruitment, such as career status, comparative sector pay, conditions, workload, and stress. In addition, there are further complicating factors relating to geography and varied costs of living across the country.

The Council worked together to introduce a range of new programmes, commencing August 2017; to address recruitment shortages, with
structures such as telescoped courses, and concurrent degrees. The Council believes that time must be given for these to work though, and their success evaluated, before any further sectoral action is taken.

C. There is continued gender imbalance, especially in primary teaching. This is a long-standing issue: in the 1950s some 73% of the primary teaching force was female; it is now around 90%. This change is reflected in the profile of the cohorts entering primary teaching programmes at Scotland’s universities. While universities, and government initiatives, have attempted to attract more males into (primary) teaching, there remain considerable difficulties and these are reflected across the globe in most national contexts. Our priority remains the quality of the teacher and we would not wish to compromise that by having to meet quota targets based on gender alone.

D. There is continued under-representation of black and minority ethnic (BME) groups in teacher education courses, and in the teacher workforce, generally. There may be a common issue with the gender problem in that perhaps schools and teaching are not seen as supportive or appealing environments for male and/or BME applicants. There are many other factors at play but some actions, or changes, which would be helpful would include: (1) ensuring that BME school pupils have a positive and supportive educational experience, free from discrimination or inequity, thus encouraging them to see teaching as an attractive option; (2) ensuring that teaching is promoted as a high-status, respected career; (3) ensuring that schools and staffrooms provide a positive and supportive environment for BME (student) teachers; (4) that teachers’ pay is aligned with professional expectations and so attracts high-calibre applicants.

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