EDUCATION AND SKILLS COMMITTEE REPORT ON TEACHER WORKFORCE PLANNING: RESPONSE FROM EDUCATION SCOTLAND

OCTOBER 2017

SUMMARY OF KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

RECOMMENDATIONS DIRECTED AT EDUCATION SCOTLAND

To help to remove this distance between certain public bodies and teachers, the Committee recommends that Education Scotland and the SQA should commence a 'back to the classroom' exercise. This should include short placements in schools work shadowing a range of teachers. These teachers can provide the SQA and Education Scotland staff with a deeper understanding of the practical issues with some of the documentation they provide and the time required for teachers to complete the processes the SQA and Education Scotland set in place.

The recommendation above for the SQA and Education Scotland to go 'back to the classroom' should also include a particular focus on headteachers, with the aim of identifying responsibilities that can be removed from headteachers and schools altogether. This is in recognition of the potential impact of a period of transition created by the Government’s education reforms. (p. 48)

Education Scotland welcomes the Committee’s recommendation that our staff work more closely alongside teachers and other frontline practitioners. In line with the Committee’s thinking, we have recently announced a number of radical new approaches to improvement which will bring our staff much closer to schools and classrooms. These new approaches will allow Education Scotland to reach every school, every year. Our educational staff will work alongside teachers and other practitioners through the new regional improvement collaboratives, motivating change and providing specialist support. The new approaches to improvement also include a significant increase in school inspection, moving from 180 to 250 schools per year initially. Education Scotland will use the findings from our expanded inspection programme to strengthen further the content of our leadership and professional learning programmes, ensuring that practical issues inform national support for improvement. We also expect that the responsibilities of headteachers will be further defined through the development of the “Headteacher’s Charter” by the Scottish Government.

The Committee recommends that the information gleaned from the exercises should form the basis of a joint piece of work by Education Scotland and the SQA on ways of streamlining and simplifying processes and documentation. This work should be submitted to the Government’s new Scottish Education Council and must include specific proposals for improvement. A continued emphasis on reducing teacher workload is vital in ensuring the education reforms proposed by the Government, and the Curriculum for Excellence, can be implemented with minimal impact on teachers and, by extension, on children and young people’s education. (p. 48/49)

Education Scotland agrees with the Committee that there is a need for ongoing action at different levels to address any unnecessary workload or bureaucracy within the education system. We have been proactive in providing improved intelligence on this issue, through our review of teacher workload and bureaucracy in 2016. Education Scotland has also undertaken action to streamline and simplify our processes and documentation. In August
2016 the Chief Inspector’s Statement for Practitioners provided clear guidance on what teachers should focus on when planning for learning and assessment. We have also taken action to streamline the advice and guidance on its websites and are currently reviewing our National Qualifications support website. We also continue to collaborate with SQA and the Scottish Government’s Learning Directorate on guidance for teachers on assessment to support transitions from S3 into the senior phase and ensuring appropriate presentation levels for National Qualifications.

OTHER RECOMMENDATIONS

The Committee recommends that the actions to be undertaken in response include an investigation into the extent of the problems raised in relation to literacy and numeracy. This should include assessing baseline standards on all courses for student primary teachers. It should also include an assessment of the entry requirements for these courses and the standards achieved on qualification. The Committee notes that certain issues, including in relation to primary school courses and student entry levels, have been raised previously by the 2011 Donaldson Report and the 2016 STEMEC Report. (p. 31)

Education Scotland welcomes the Committee’s focus on literacy and numeracy standards within Initial Teacher Education (ITE). The Deputy First Minister has recently written to the University Heads of Schools of Education informing them that Education Scotland has been asked to develop a self-evaluation framework to support the universities that provide initial teacher education to evaluate and improve their work. This framework will include a focus on the quality of learning and teaching within initial teacher education and key priorities, including literacy, numeracy, health and wellbeing and Additional Support Needs. The framework will be available in time for universities to start this work during academic year 2017/18.

The Committee recommends that the cycle of revisiting existing courses to renew accreditation should be shorter to ensure course content is responsive to the changing needs of Scottish education. The Committee recommends that the Government considers the benefits of making one organisation responsible for the accreditation of ITE courses and the assessment of the delivery of these courses. (p. 33)

In responding to the Committee’s recommendation relating to the “assessment of the delivery of these [ITE] courses” we wish to make a distinction between accreditation and evaluation. As the Committee has noted, at present the General Teaching Council for Scotland (GTCS) accredits Initial Teacher Education (ITE) courses. The purpose of this exercise is to determine whether course plans fulfil GTCS requirements in respect of professional standards. The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) also has a role in ensuring that courses are set at the correct level and meet the required academic standards and rigour. Both of these processes relate to the accreditation of ITE courses. Evaluation focuses on the outcomes achieved by these courses, including how well ITE meets wider system requirements.

Based on this distinction between accreditation and evaluation, Education Scotland agrees with the Committee that one body should be responsible for the accreditation of ITE courses and also ensuring that these courses are, in fact, delivered as planned. In our view this should be the new Education Workforce Council for Scotland. In relation to the evaluation of these courses, Education Scotland will continue to have an important role. In particular, as noted above, we will work in partnership with ITE institutions to develop a self-evaluation framework to allow each university to evaluate its ITE programmes.
The Committee is concerned that there may be a distance between some education authorities and the schools for which they have a duty of care role. The Committee recommends that education authorities provide details of how each authority collates sufficient information on, and maintains active lines of communication with, schools to ensure they can undertake a duty of care role.

The Committee also requests that every authority provides to the Committee:

- any data it holds on the impacts of teacher shortages or reductions in FTE as detailed in paragraph 188; and
- the education authority’s assessment of the impact of teacher shortages or re-organisation (including to respond to budget pressures) on the quality of education in their area.

The Committee will consider the information received, and whether to take evidence from particular authorities based upon it. The Committee’s prelegislative scrutiny of Government reforms will include a focus on the ability of Scottish education to undergo a period of further change and these responses will inform that work. The Committee intends to share these responses with the Government. The Committee recommends that the Government should assess whether:

- the various education authorities are performing a sufficient duty of care role; and
- certain schools and areas require additional support, either to cope with existing challenges or to implement Government education reforms. (p. 61)

Education Scotland’s Quality Improvement in Scottish Education report published earlier this year noted that the capacity of local authorities and schools to deal with the impact of resource constraints has varied substantially. In response to constrained budgets and the need to make savings, we have seen many local authorities make substantial efficiencies at the centre, rather than in classrooms and front-line services. That has resulted in many authorities having a reduced capacity to undertake key functions such as supporting quality improvement, monitoring and challenging school performance and leading and coordinating professional learning.