Dear John

Thank you for your response to the Committee’s report *Teacher Workforce Planning for Scotland’s Schools*. The Committee considered the Government's response alongside a number of other responses at its meeting on 22 November. The Committee agreed that I should write to you to on a number of considerations arising from the responses received.

Firstly, I highlighted to the Committee the recommendation on the potential for the GTCS to have an increased role in initial teacher education course evaluation. This recommendation seems to have the support of the GTCS and Education Scotland. I appreciate that the current proposal to create the Education Workforce Council for Scotland that would take over the functions of the GTCS may have prevented the Government from responding in full on this recommendation. However the Committee would appreciate the Government's position on the recommendation to have one organisation responsible for ITE accreditation and evaluation, including insight as to which organisation the Government considers should undertake both roles. Members also wanted to highlight to you the esteem in which GTCS is held and also the Committee's intention to give careful consideration to the Government's proposal to replace it.

Secondly, the issue of workforce planning processes at a local level was raised. The Committee would appreciate further details of the specific data that feeds into workforce planning processes that enable local challenges to be reflected in decisions about the number and type of teacher education places required.

Thirdly, members highlighted the detail provided by ADES in relation to the impact of teacher shortages in certain areas. This was in response to the Committee’s request for details from all education authorities on the ways in which authorities monitor the impact of any shortages on schools. The Committee has agreed to forward this
information, and the submissions from individual education authorities to you. The Committee seeks your perspective on the issues set out in the ADES submission, including in relation to STEM subjects and bi-level and tri-level learning. I have also written to Education Scotland and the SQA for their perspectives on these matters. In addition, as stated in the report (paragraph 51) "the Committee’s pre-legislative scrutiny of Government reforms will include a focus on the ability of Scottish education to undergo a period of further change and these [ADES and education authorities] responses will inform that work."

Finally, as you will see from the Official Report of the meeting the analysis of the responses ended with a discussion on the extent to which the Government appreciates the extent and nature of the concerns raised by the Committee.

I should be grateful for a response by 9th January to allow the Committee to take your response into account during its pre-legislative scrutiny of the Scottish Government's proposed education reforms.

Yours sincerely

JAMES DORNAN MSP
CONVENER
The Convener: The committee published its report on teacher workforce planning at the end of August. The report included recommendations on the workforce planning process, teacher training and different ways to attract and retain teachers both in the classroom and at senior management level in schools.

We have received responses to the recommendations, including from the Scottish Government, the General Teaching Council for Scotland, Education Scotland, the Scottish Qualifications Authority and the Association of Directors of Education in Scotland. The committee also agreed to consider, alongside those responses, research on the turnover intentions of teachers, which is in paper 2 from the Scottish Parliament information centre.

Before I invite comments from members on any further action that the committee might wish to take, I put on record that I think the committee’s work on initial teacher education could lead to real progress on course content. Therefore, I reiterate the committee’s thanks to the hundreds of people who engaged with us on course content and the other issues that are raised in the report.

In terms of action points, as set out in the report, the committee will highlight education authority and ADES responses to the Government. The committee will also take the responses into account as context for its work on proposed education reforms.

I suggest that we write to the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills, highlighting the support from the GTCS and Education Scotland for the assessment of the delivery of initial teacher education courses to be undertaken by one organisation—specifically the GTCS or, potentially, as is proposed by the Government, a replacement organisation called the education workforce council for Scotland. The Government does not comment in detail on that recommendation, so I would like to seek further clarification on its position. Do members have any comments on that suggestion or any suggested action points arising from the responses?

Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I agree with what you have said, convener. It is important that we understand exactly what remit the new body would have and how that would impact on the existing roles that the GTCS and, potentially, Education Scotland, play. I draw members’ attention to the fact that I am a member of the GTCS. It is important that we know exactly where the body would stand. A second and important point is that an awful lot depends on good data collection. Maybe it is just me, but I am not yet convinced that we have a good understanding of what formula is used for workforce planning. There seems to be a bit of conflict in the evidence that we have received between those who have a slightly different approach to the national planning and those who want a bit of local input to the planning. I am still confused about what methodology is being used. It is difficult to set policy unless you are aware of exactly how the data is used.
**Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab):** I echo the important comments on the GTCS. The GTCS is often cited as an exemplar in terms of its status, and making sure that we retain its strengths is really important. I suggest that, when we write to the Government on the ADES response, we highlight in particular the comments that ADES makes on the teaching of science, technology, engineering and mathematics subjects and the teaching of bi-level and multi-level course content. We have heard about the issue anecdotally but, for the first time, we have those comments in writing. It is a serious issue that the Government needs to look at. I also gently suggest that perhaps the SQA and Education Scotland should take heed of the issue. I want to know what all three bodies—the Scottish Government, the SQA and Education Scotland—think in response to what ADES is saying.

**Johann Lamont (Glasgow) (Lab):** I do not know whether we intend to go through the Scottish Government’s response to the recommendations—we may not—but, to be honest, I did not think that it matched the seriousness of the report. The Government’s response starts by saying: “Scotland is unique in that we have over the years developed a very robust model for workforce planning.”

That did not feel like it matched the evidence. I do not doubt that a lot of work has been done, but I am concerned that there is quite a lot of push-back on the recommendations: “We are actually doing this,” or “We don’t agree with that.” Across the piece, quite a lot of important bits of evidence came out of our conversations with people on the front line, and the Government’s response is, “Well, we’ll take that into account.” There are obvious things that it does take into account, but the Government is saying that, basically, the model is working, yet it seems to me that the model is not working—for example, in relation to the level of vacancies. There are some hidden disadvantages. For example, it is unbelievably challenging for one teacher to teach at X number of levels across a class. On the mentors, the Government’s response says that it provides

“0.1 (FTE) per probationer as part of the teacher induction scheme”, the implication being that local authorities and schools are funded to support probationary teachers through the mentoring process. However, we heard that, very often, that is not the case and that, when teachers are mentoring, they feel that they are doing something extra. Theoretically, the school may have that allowance, but our evidence suggested that the system is not as good as it could be, because the teachers who are trying to do the mentoring also have other unbelievable pressures on them.

**The Convener:** There are a number of issues. With reference to what Johann Lamont has said, in particular, the Government will get the Official Report of this meeting, and we can add to our letter the issues that have been raised by Liz Smith and Daniel Johnson. We will also keep a watching brief, so we can always bring those issues up, particularly when we have people in front of us and we can hold them to account for the practicalities of what is happening on the ground.

**Johann Lamont:** I am not being disrespectful to the people who are managing the process. I am sure that they are wrestling with all of this. I am just a bit concerned that the Government’s implication is that we have a good system that needs to be
tweaked. We had some stronger concerns, and there remain problems even with everybody trying to make the system work. The support for probationers and initial teacher training is one issue, but the suggestion that the system is okay and just needs to be tweaked is at odds with the evidence that we got, which suggested that there are slightly more problems than that. That is not to say that the people on the front line, who are trying to make the system work, are not doing their best. The extra evidence that we got from local authorities, ADES and so on suggests that they are.

**The Convener:** Are we happy to add those concerns to our letter to the cabinet secretary? We have the opportunity, in following any progress, to make sure that those concerns are attended to.

**Members** indicated agreement.
Request from Education and Skills Committee for Information about Impact of Teacher Shortages

ADES Response

Background

In a letter of 28 September 2017 addressed to all Directors of Education, James Dorna MSP, Convener of the Scottish Parliament’s Education and Skills Committee requested a response from each local authority to 5 questions (plus a supplementary query) about the impact of teacher shortages. These questions are listed below.

The Committee requests that each education authority provides any data it holds on the impacts of teacher shortages or reductions in FTE on:

a) existing vacancies in all schools and the likelihood they will be filled in the short, medium or longer term;
b) the reduction in teaching posts and other support staff in schools and the reasons for these reductions;
c) the extent that subjects or services that were previously offered are not being offered as a direct result of teacher shortages (including an inability to find supply teachers);
d) the use of planned new measures such as joint headships and composite classes; and
e) the incidence of ad-hoc cover including the number of lessons that are either cancelled or provided by another member of staff from senior management or a teacher where the subject is not their specialism.

The Committee also requests that each education authority provides an assessment of the impact of teacher shortages or re-organisation (including responding to budget pressures) on the quality of education in their area.

In response to this request, the ADES President raised concerns with the Committee Clerk about the workload implications for local authority staff and the risk of duplication of effort, given that the system is currently in the middle of the annual census exercise. Consequently, it was agreed that individual local authorities would not be required to respond to the request; instead, ADES would collate a more general response by 1 November to the questions, a response which would attempt to reflect the various positions across the country.

ADES Response

ADES is very concerned about the current teacher shortage. It first raised concerns over 3 years ago when it became clear that teacher shortages were having a detrimental effect on educational provision, especially, although not exclusively, in the north and north-east of the country and in the island authorities. Indeed, the Northern Alliance was established as the first Regional Collaborative specifically in response to this issue.
For several years, there has been a significant tension between the Scottish Government’s expectation that teacher numbers across the country would be maintained and the extreme difficulties being experienced by local authorities in filling vacancies.

It has also been particularly frustrating that the shortage of teachers has coincided with the injection of significant additional sums of money into the system through initiatives such as the Scottish Attainment Challenge (SAC) and Pupil Equity Funding (PEF). Many local authorities and schools would have chosen to spend a proportion of their SAC and PEF funding on the recruitment of additional teachers but were unable to do so because these teachers simply did not exist or were only available in very small numbers.

Some local authorities report that the increasing demand for flexible working arrangements and the legislative and cultural drive towards more family-friendly work patterns (while admirable in principle) are further exacerbating the teacher shortage problem. If five teachers request a reduction in hours from 1.0 to 0.5 FTE, then ten teachers are required to fill those 5 FTE posts. Some authorities, despite supporting the principle of flexible working, are therefore being forced to refuse requests for a reduction in hours in order to ensure that there are sufficient teachers for all classes.

A further worrying aspect of the current situation is that there is also a growing recruitment crisis in relation to head teacher posts, especially in the primary sector. ADES has taken the lead on this issue by undertaking research on the scale and causes of the head teacher recruitment issue and has been working with the Scottish Government, COSLA, SCEL and others to attempt to address the problem.

It should be noted that, while all local authorities are experiencing recruitment and retention difficulties in relation to both teachers and head teachers, the problems are more pronounced in certain parts of the country, most noticeably across the Northern Alliance and in authorities with a largely rural demographic. Also, in some parts of the country, the recruitment issues for both teachers and head teachers are greater in denominational (Catholic) schools than in non-denominational schools.

Many reasons have been postulated for these shortages. The teacher unions have argued strongly that the main causes are: reductions in salaries in real terms over a number of years; teacher workload; excessive bureaucracy; and (in relation to head teacher vacancies) a perception that the job is simply too difficult and very small pay differentials (especially in the primary sector) between the posts of Depute Head Teacher and Head Teacher.

Local authorities from outside the central belt have also argued that there is a structural reason for the fact that some areas of the country are experiencing more severe shortages. Because the majority of student teachers train in universities in the central belt, they tend also to seek permanent employment there. Consequently, local authorities in rural areas and the north-east have tried for the last 4 years to implement a “Grow your Own” scheme by working with universities to encourage teachers to stay in the area in which they were educated themselves. This has had some success, although numbers remain low in relation to need.
It is perhaps worth noting that this is far from the first time that there has been a teacher shortage in Scotland. The first significant post-war shortage occurred in the late 1960s and early 1970s and led the Scottish Office and local authorities to introduce a number of emergency measures. These included the creation of “Designated Schools” offering enhanced salaries to attract teachers to schools in areas of deprivation; the introduction of the Teachers’ Special Recruitment Scheme, offering enhanced grants to mature students to re-train as teachers; and housing incentives, including the offer of council houses at reduced rents.

Since then, there have been other issues with teacher workforce planning in Scotland, with further periods of shortage (albeit less severe than the shortage in the ‘60’s and 70’s) alternating with periods of significant teacher surplus, e.g. in the early 1980s, when many newly qualified teachers who had been trained in Scotland had to go elsewhere in the UK or abroad to secure teaching positions.

In relation to the specific questions posed by the committee’s Convener (see above), ADES would offer the following observations.

a) The numbers of vacancies will vary from school to school and authority to authority, with the highest proportion of vacancies likely to be in the Northern Alliance (Aberdeenshire, Aberdeen City, Highland, Moray, Orkney, Shetland and Western Isles) and in rural authorities. National and local figures for vacancies should be clear from the annual census returns. However, response to recent FOI requests suggest that there were around 600 vacancies nationally at the start of school session 2017/18, although it is unclear whether these were full time vacancies with no teacher in place; some may have been part-time vacancies and some were almost certainly being covered by temporary supply teachers.

Again, there will be significant variations across the country as to how long a post remains vacant. Recruitment to difficult-to-fill posts, especially in remote areas is often a matter of chance (e.g. a qualified teacher moving into a particular locality). It is therefore extremely difficult to predict how long a vacancy will remain unfilled. Directors report some positions being advertised 3 or 4 times but still attracting no applicants.

The issue of quality also arises. In many ways, it is preferable to leave a vacancy unfilled and to cover the classes affected by other means rather than appointing a teacher of poor quality to a permanent post simply because he/she is the only applicant. However, leaving a vacancy unfilled can make it difficult for schools to offer the full range of subjects.

Some local authorities also report concerns about quality in relation to student and probationer teachers, with an increase in the number of requests from Universities for local authorities to accept “retrieval” students and probationers who, in the opinion of their host school supporter and mentor, do not meet the required standards.
b) Committee will be aware of the significant savings which all local authorities have been required to make every year since 2008. Throughout this period, councils have endeavoured to protect schools and nurseries from the worst effects of such cuts, generally choosing to reduce central services rather than school budgets. Consequently, most councils now have extremely lean central teams. However, Education spending constitutes by far the largest proportion of a council’s budget, and many councils have had to look at school budgets over recent years simply to balance their books.

Nevertheless, the requirement to maintain teacher numbers, and the threat of financial penalties if councils fail to do so, have been powerful incentives to councils to avoid cutting the numbers of teachers wherever possible. Where councils have cut teacher numbers as a budgetary measure, this has been as a last resort. It should also be remembered that teacher numbers are sometimes reduced for reasons other than a simple requirement to make a saving. Such reasons include: falling school rolls; school estate rationalisation and modernisation; and a restructuring of promoted posts. It should also be stressed that the inability to recruit teachers is the predominant reason for any reductions in teacher numbers.

An interesting side effect of the shortage of subject teachers in secondary schools is that some schools struggle to offer places to student teachers and probationers, since there is a shortage of experienced teachers to mentor them.

It is perhaps surprising to find a reference to support staff within this question, given that the Convener’s letter concerns teacher shortages and difficulties in recruitment. While it is true that many councils have reduced the number of support staff in schools (partly because the requirement to maintain teacher numbers necessitates the achievement of savings elsewhere), it is worth noting that in most parts of the country there are no significant issues with the recruitment of school support staff and numbers of applicants for such posts remain high.

c) Again, the answer to this question will vary from school to school and from area to area. However, it is well documented that there are particular problems in relation to some STEM subjects in the secondary sector.

Where there are shortages of teachers in specific subject areas, head teachers will do everything they can to maintain as high a level of provision as possible, especially in relation to courses leading to qualifications in the Senior Phase. To do so, they adopt a range of measures, including: highly efficient timetabling; the timetabling of S4-S6 as a single cohort (it should be noted that this approach is taken by some schools who do not have vacancies, since it is an arrangement which can also have educational advantages for students); use of consortium arrangements in the Senior Phase; an increase in bi-level or multi-level teaching in the Senior Phase; use of technology to enable distance learning; and a reduction in the number of direct teaching periods for Advanced Higher courses, where students are expected to undertake significant amounts of self-directed study. While some
of these measures are introduced reluctantly, they are preferable to the alternative of courses not being offered.

Similarly, local authorities work with schools to mitigate the effects of shortages in certain subjects, by, for instance: deploying specialist teachers across a number of schools; developing agreements with local Further Education Colleges for College staff to deliver certain courses, either at College or in school; and developing arrangements with Higher Education Institutions to deliver Advanced Higher courses at a central location. Some local authorities have also used recruitment agencies to address the problem of teacher shortages; however, this is an expensive option and has resulted in very limited success.

However, notwithstanding all of these measures, it is certainly the case that some schools have been forced to reduce the provision of certain subjects within the Broad General Education and to place more stringent restrictions on the minimum class size required before running a course in the Senior Phase.

d) Joint headships of primary schools have been a feature of rural authorities for many years. However, they have become more common in urban, semi-urban and central belt authorities in recent times, often in response to the head teacher recruitment issue mentioned previously. In some cases, the creation of a shared headship is the only solution when repeated advertisements have failed to attract any applicants to a post. In some cases, the increased salary level which a joint headship post attracts mitigates the disincentivising effect of the small salary differential between a Depute Head post in a medium sized school and a Head Teacher post in a small school.

It is worth noting that joint head teacher posts are not generally created for budgetary reasons. In many cases, it is more expensive to create a joint headship than to run small schools with their own head teachers, given the fact that it is frequently necessary to boost the staffing levels in schools which are led on a joint headship basis. It should also be noted that joint headship arrangements are often seen to work well and can offer advantages to pupils and staff in small schools by, for instance, creating greater opportunities for collaborative working.

With regard to composite classes, it should be noted that composite classes have been a feature of primary schools in all local authority areas for many years and there is no evidence that they are detrimental to the education of children who are placed in such classes. The maximum class size for a composite class is 25 pupils, smaller than the maximum for single stage classes in middle and upper primary. It is therefore unlikely that teacher shortages have led directly to the creation of more composite classes.

However, as previously stated, it is likely that teacher shortages in specific subjects have led to there being a larger number of bi-level and multi-level classes (e.g. N4/N5; N4/N5/Higher and Higher/Advanced Higher) in the Senior Phase in secondary schools.
e) It is certainly the case that members of school senior management teams increasingly find themselves having to provide cover for classes, either because of teacher absence and a shortage of supply teachers or because it has not been possible to fill a vacancy. Specifically, those primary head teachers who should not routinely be class committed report that they are required to spend a greatly increased amount of time covering classes, to the detriment of their key roles as leaders of learning and as providers of quality assurance. Indeed, this trend is almost certainly a further disincentive for teachers who may be considering applying for a head teacher post.

Classes have always been covered in secondary schools on an ad hoc basis by teachers who are not subject specialists in the subject being delivered in the classroom. This is not a problem in instances of short term absence or, for example, to cover attendance by teachers at an in-service course, where appropriate work can be provided for the class by the Principal Teacher of by the class teacher her/himself. However, it becomes a genuine problem where there is a long-term absence and a qualified supply teacher cannot be found or where there is a long-term unfilled vacancy.

Again, head teachers use a range of measures to ensure that classes are not disadvantaged in these circumstances, including the temporary re-timetabling of classes so that no class is left without the services of a specialist teacher for a significant length of time.

With regard to the final question posed in the Convener’s letter, on “the impact of teacher shortages...on the quality of education within their area”, this will also vary across the country and from school to school. At a national level, however, there is continuing evidence of a slow but steady improvement in performance in National Qualifications and a growing evidence base of increased achievement by young people in wider achievement awards and “vocational” qualifications. Evidence also shows continuing high satisfaction rates by pupils and parents with the quality of education provided by their schools. These facts could be seen as evidence of the effectiveness of the efforts of schools and local authorities to mitigate the negative effects of teacher shortages.

Local authorities and the Scottish Government have also been taking action to address the issue. Efforts have been made to recruit teachers from the rest of the United Kingdom and from abroad; some local authorities have offered incentives to teachers to come to work in their area. However, the scope for offering incentives is limited by the existence of national agreements on teachers’ salaries and conditions, agreements which ADES supports. In addition, alternative routes into teaching are currently being explored, with Higher Education Institutions and the GTCS playing prominent roles in this work.

However, there is certainly no room for complacency and there are significant ongoing reasons for concern. If this issue cannot be effectively addressed, teacher shortages are almost certain to have a negative effect on teacher and head teacher morale and on head teacher recruitment. Unless solutions can be found as a matter
of urgency, it is difficult to see how a negative impact on the quality of education in Scottish schools can be avoided.

ADES is ready and willing to work with the Scottish Government, SCEL, the GTCS and other partners to help to address this very important issue.

Association of Directors of Education in Scotland
October 2017

Link to the Education and Skills Committee web page, with the responses from local authorities to the Teacher workforce planning for Scotland’s school report.