Dear James

Thank you for your letter of 12 December regarding a number of considerations arising from the responses received to the Committee’s report - Teacher Workforce Planning for Scotland’s Schools. I would like to thank the Committee for their consideration of this issue and I want to make it clear that teacher recruitment and the quality of the teaching profession is a significant priority for this Government. I would like to reassure the Committee that the Scottish Government fully appreciates the extent and nature of the concerns the Committee has raised.

I note the Committee’s view that the General Teaching Council for Scotland (GTCS) should have an increased role in the evaluation of courses of Initial Teacher Education (ITE). As the Committee is aware the functions of the proposed Education Workforce Council for Scotland (EWCS) currently form part of a consultation on the forthcoming Education Bill. I will of course consider responses to the consultation including any commentary that supports the view that the EWCS should take a lead responsibility for the on-going evaluation of ITE programmes. In the interim I am pleased with the comprehensive approach GTCS have developed in terms of accreditation. I look forward to the completion of Education Scotland’s work, which involves GTCS, on ITE self-evaluation.

The intention of creating the Education Workforce Council for Scotland is to offer the opportunity to recognise the role and status of all those working to support learning and teaching as part of a coherent education workforce in Scotland. It is also intended that it will offer the opportunity to have a national system to ensure the full range of practitioners have the support, skills and expertise required to do their job effectively.
On the issue of the teacher workforce planning system I believe it is soundly based and responsive to local needs. The Scottish Government actively works with partners to improve the process. This has been made clear by the range of actions we are taking to help increase student teacher numbers:

- We have committed continued investment of £88m to make sure every school has access to the right number of teachers with the right skills;
- Over £1m is going from the Attainment Scotland Fund to universities to help develop 11 new routes into teaching, including a focus on increasing the STEM numbers;
- We will also offer bursaries of £20,000 for career changers to do teacher training for certain STEM subjects where the demand is at its greatest (From August 2018);
- The next phase of our “Teaching Makes People” recruitment campaign launched on 30 August; and
- We are creating a further new route into teaching, designed to attract high quality graduates in priority areas and subjects. We issued the tender specification on 3 October and received bids on 16 November. Bids are being assessed with a view to awarding the contract later this month.

Student teacher numbers rose by 7.5 per cent from 3,591 in 2016 to 3,861 in 2017. With these measures now in place we expect to see the number of people training as teachers continuing to rise.

ADES, COSLA and all representatives of the Teacher Workforce Planning Advisory Group (TWPAG) work with the Scottish Government in the teacher workforce planning exercise to feed in local data to inform national decisions on teacher education provision. While the Teacher Census is the primary source of data which informs the exercise, with information such as the demography of teachers and leavers and returners to the profession, TWPAG representatives bring their on-the-ground knowledge of teacher education, recruitment and the employment situation within the profession to the exercise. Their local knowledge helps determine the level of additional staff needed for supply cover and provides information on which secondary subjects should be treated as a priority as they face difficulty in recruitment. As you are aware, teacher vacancies reported by local authorities also feed into the process. We will be working with COSLA to consider how we can improve the data currently collected on teacher vacancies so it can better inform the workforce planning process.
In relation to the issues set out in the ADES submission, we do understand that some local authorities have faced challenges in relation to teacher recruitment. These issues can impact on the variety of subjects available in the Broad General Education (BGE) and the Senior Phase curriculum, and we recognise efforts local authorities are making to recruit and attract teachers to their areas. As highlighted in the ADES submission, a number of schools and local authorities are taking innovative approaches to ensuring greater opportunity and choice for their young people. In the Senior Phase we are seeing schools doing this through: creative timetabling; partnership approaches; on-line learning; and multi-level teaching. In the BGE we know of schools which already teach STEM rather than individual sciences and which are making greater use of interdisciplinary courses rather than a focus on narrow subject disciplines. These approaches are very much in keeping with the spirit of Curriculum for Excellence. The STEM Education and Training Strategy, published in October 2017, reaffirms the Government’s commitment to attract STEM talent into the teaching profession and our “Teaching Makes People” recruitment. These issues campaign focuses on this subject area. We are also working on a delivery model to offer up to 100 bursaries for career changers to enable them to undertake PGDE courses to teach maths, physics, technological education and computing science. We expect applications to open in the Spring.

JOHN SWINNEY