

Analysis of EIS DHT/HT Survey

Background & Methodology

The EIS carried out a survey of EIS headteacher and depute headteacher (henceforth 'headteachers') members on aspects of the Government's proposed bill on education. The EIS has the largest number of headteacher members of any Scottish Education trade union or Scottish professional association.

The EIS wished to seek the views of an occupational group of members that will be directly affected, if not the focus, of the Government's proposed Education Bill (the 'proposals').

There were eleven questions in the online survey, and most questions had a supplementary 'Any Other Comment' section. The last question simply asked respondents if they had any further comments to make in general. The survey was carried out in November 2017 and had a good response rate with over 300 responses.

Results

Question 1

"Do you welcome, in principle, the creation of a Headteachers' Charter?"

Only forty-three percent (43%) of respondees welcomed, in principle the creation of a Headteachers' Charter, with 36% unsure and 21% not welcoming, in principle, the creation of the Charter.

There was no supplementary question.

Question 2

"How do you believe that a Headteacher's Charter, if created, should be delivered?"

The responses indicated an overwhelming rejection of a legislative approach to a proposed Charter, with 85% supporting 'best practice guidance'; 3% supporting 'other'; and only 12% supporting 'legislation'.

Twenty-four responses were made to the supplementary question. There was no statement made in support of the Headteachers' Charter. A few statements referred to lack of information to form an opinion. The following two responses are typical of the responses as a whole:

"I fear that the concept HTs charter is a simplistic and populist response to complex challenges. It is in danger, in my view, of placing yet further pressures of accountability on HTs - who are already subject to a huge accountability agenda - and undermining the place of local democratic control."

"In collaboration with colleagues and it must be collegiate - this Bill does not acknowledge the importance of collegiality in school improvement. The focus on the role of the HT only is detrimental to the progress made through this in Scottish education."

Question 3

“In terms of the role of local authorities, how would you rate your current employer?”

Only a small minority of responses characterised Local Authorities as a restrictive pressure on school operations with 12% stating ‘restrictive’ and 4% stating ‘very restrictive’. 49% of responses said “supportive”, 10% stating ‘very supportive’ and 39% stating ‘supportive’; whilst 35% stated ‘neutral’.

Supplementary responses were mixed and ranged from the Local Authority being very supportive to it being awful. Some responses speculated as to the reason for poor Local Authority support – these included: funding cuts, timid LA leadership, Scottish Government directions, failure to challenge headteachers, social work/education collaborative working not working etc. Some responses suggested that Local Authority support was becoming worse. The following responses are indicative of the range of comments:

“Until recently I would have answered ‘very supportive’ and in many ways this is still how I feel but cut backs at the centre are making everyone’s jobs more difficult and I find this is affecting the support I receive. The individual people are very supportive but the processes are less so.”

“Financial constraints are constantly cited as the reason for limited support.”

“Budget cuts mean all resources are stretched and staffing levels above schools which used to exist and were supportive for HTs no longer exist.”

“There is absolutely no understanding at authority level. of current Primary HT workload. That is unlikely to change with current incumbents in post.”

Question 4

“Do you believe that the proposals around school improvement planning will deliver more autonomy to schools?”

Only 45% of responses believed that the proposals would deliver more autonomy, whilst 55% did not believe that more autonomy would be delivered to schools

Sixty eight responses were made to the supplementary question. A few stated that the proposals may lead to greater autonomy but almost all these comments were caveated e.g.:

“To some extent but I don’t believe that in themselves will guarantee a closing of the attainment gap.”

A large number of responses stated that there was sufficient autonomy at the moment. There were a number of comments that were sceptical of the Government’s reasons for increasing autonomy and putting forward the outcome that central Government control of education would increase. The following comments were typical:

“In my own situation I already feel I have a fair bit of autonomy, but the real constraints are around funding and availability of staff. Unless there is more funding and greater staff availability I do not see my school being able to deliver much more autonomy than we already have. I also believe we have already experienced a shift to a greater centralisation of policy and direction through the Scottish Government and Education Scotland so while there is a notional autonomy in moving away from local authority control the reality is that this will be further replaced by central direction.”

“Again, I already choose my own staffing, including my SLT structure, I am responsible for budget decisions and we have our own Curriculum Design. All of this is supported through the systems already in place in GCC local authority. I have the autonomy but with specialist support to ensure there is no law breaking in terms of employment law etc.”

“I am very concerned that bureaucracy and top-down control will increase as Educational Scotland and RIC assume the responsibilities of LA.”

“The proposals around school improvement planning are convoluted and contradictory. School Improvement Plans should be consistent with the NIF but Regional Improvement Plans should reflect school improvement plans. The relationship between national, local and school development is not at all clear, and the diagram on p14 only serves to further confuse, suggesting as it does that all planning starts in school and eventually feeds into the NIF. It is also not at all clear by what mechanisms hundreds of school plans can coherently feed into a Regional Plan. There is a danger that HTs become more remote from decision-making as a result of collaboratives than they currently are in terms of their relationship with LAs. The consultation states on page 9 that the Bill 'will ensure' HTs are involved in setting the priorities of the collaborative? How will this be ensured in practice?”

Question 5

“Are you in agreement with the emphasis within the proposal being on greater autonomy for Headteachers rather than on schools?”

Only a minority of responses agreed with the focus on the Headteacher role, with comments revealing much greater support for collegial and collaborative responsibilities and working. The responses showed 21% agreeing, 48% disagreeing with a further 31% unsure.

Forty-six responses were made to the supplementary question. Only one of these responses supported the view that the autonomy (including staffing decisions) lie with the headteacher, and only very few responses supported further autonomy. The majority of the comments reflected the collegiate nature of school and the importance of staff working together. A number of respondents stated that they have enough autonomy at the moment. Typical responses included:

“We are a staff team, not just one person”

“The proposals lack detail and I would be concerned about a significant addition of responsibility placed on HT who are already overstretched due to cuts in essential services i.e. EAL, Ed Psych, general staffing and inability to access suitable training

“It strikes me that Headteachers currently have sufficient autonomy and I am unaware of any grassroots or research driven demands for greater autonomy.”

Question 6

“The EIS assumes that best practice would see school leaders involved in appointment processes, as far as possible. The consultation suggests, however, that the “freedoms which headteachers should have in relation to staffing decisions” will be set out in legislation (although no detail is offered). How critical is such legislation for you?”

There was clear support for Headteachers being involved in staffing appointments. The responses showed that 32% believed it to be 'essential', 39% for it to be 'important', 23% believed that 'no change required', 5% 'not important' and 2% that it was irrelevant.

Fifty-nine responses were made to the supplementary question. A number of responses alluded to uncertainty arising from a lack of detail in the proposals. Most responses expressed a view that headteachers were already involved in the appointments process. A number of points were made around difficulties in finding the right staff and around employment law duties that they wanted the employer rather than the headteacher to exercise. A few responses did want more powers over staffing. Typical responses included:

"HTs already do all our own recruitment/HR in our local authority but we cannot do without employment law, equalities legislation etc, so we need to be in a more guarded situation where our role potentially as the 'employer' is not forced upon us. This is very tricky territory and fraught with legal difficulty - so we need protecting in this with strong legislation."

"There should be no dubiety that HTs should be involved in appointment processes relating to their school."

"Legislation will not tackle the current difficulties we see in appointments. These difficulties are rooted in the need to attract more high-quality candidates into the teaching profession by making the profession more attractive. The legislation should outline the need for HT involvement as a crucial element in appointments along with the involvement of fellow colleagues and stakeholders."

Question 7

"How concerned are you at the prospect of schools assuming HR functions?"

The strongest response to all the questions was in relation to this question with 89% of replies indicating concern at the prospect of Headteachers requiring to adopt HR functions: 69% were 'very concerned', 20% were 'concerned', 4% were 'neutral', 3% were 'not greatly concerned' and 2% were 'not concerned at all'.

Eighty-seven responses were made to the supplementary question, the largest number to any supplementary question. Almost every response outlined concern and opposition to the notion of headteachers doing more administrative work in the appointment process with many saying that this work was already excessive, that they did not have the necessary expertise and that it took away time from pedagogical leadership. The first five responses are representative of typical of them all and are copied below:

"We cannot do more with less. We do not have the expertise in House to safely navigate employment law etc. This is dangerous."

"Far too much time is already spent on HR functions for the advertising, recruitment and retention of staff in a climate of relentless staffing changes and limited applicants in my geographical area. I am concerned because the job title will have to change if much more managerial elements are added or enhanced. Leading learning or even being involved in the development of learning is exceptionally difficult to prioritise when you have to get people in front of pupils. We do not need more."

"HTs should have a role in appointments without being caught up in the entire process."

“This is a total headache already. I cannot assume any more of these functions or I will not be able to do any work on learning and teaching at all.”

“I am not trained within HR and legislation surrounding HR. I am already concerned about my role within HR in school so having extra HR duties, without proper training, would be very worrying.”

Question 8

“Should Headteachers be able to decide how the funding allocated to schools is spent?”

Responses showed that 75% of headteachers believed that headteachers should be able to decide how funding allocated to schools is spent, 7% did not and 18% were unsure.

Seventy-eight responses were made to the supplementary question. Most responses supported this principle. Many stated current limitations of only a small part of the budget being truly delegated, some procurement procedures limited flexibility and that the services needed could not be procured for learners due to cuts. Some concern was also expressed around headteachers needing to have access to accountant or training in accounts to aid in financial accountability if there was further funding allocated to headteachers. A number of responses made it clear that funding decisions need to be taken by the school community or at least wider than the headteacher alone. The responses below are typical of those made:

“I have mixed feelings on this. I think HTs know what the needs of their schools are but worry about being expected to become accountants overnight.”

“In consultation with the school community.”

“In theory yes but if there aren't the staff or ASN support to spend it on what's the point?”

“Head teachers and staff should decide this not just HT. Similar to WTA group setup would work for spending funding.”

“We currently have this under the devolved school budget system although there could still be an element of increased flexibility in this.”

Question 9

“If additional decision making power is granted in relation to funding, should this be:

The sole responsibility of the headteacher OR managed through an inclusive school finance committee OR other?”

There was a significant endorsement in the returns for the notion contained within the democratic school model of inclusive decision making. Responses showed 71% supported the use of school finance committees, 13% supported ‘other’ and only 16% supporting solely Headteachers.

Sixty-six responses were made to the supplementary question. Most responses stated that a collective approach to decision making in relation to funding, with the most common concern expressed being the danger of putting too much power in one individual. A number of models of collective decision making and consultative bodies (to feedback to headteachers) were cited. A large number of responses also stated that schools already had senior management teams, extended

management teams, promoted staff or staff involved in decision making at the moment. A number of responses made the point that if headteachers were to become responsible for financial decisions then they should also make the financial decisions. A number of responses stated that school size would affect the nature of a school finance committee or the way financial decisions are made. Some typical responses are shown below:

“Very risky to give complete power to any individual person?!”

“In partnership with the school community”

“All promoted staff within the school. HTs /other promoted staff have very little financial /business experience and in Primary schools, with no business manager, this will be a huge burden to HTs.”

“ If responsibility and accountability sits solely with the HT, so should the final funding decisions.”

“This will depend on the size of establishment but there should be an appropriate element of professional dialogue around how funding relates to the agreed school improvement priorities.”

Question 10

“How should increased delegated management of resources be managed?”

Responses showed that 41% supported ‘through existing local authority mechanisms’, 55% supported ‘through additional dedicated staffing at school e.g. bursars’ and 4% supported ‘other.

Forty-two responses were made to the supplementary question. The clear theme to most comments is that headteachers feel over-burdened by administrative work, and in the light of cuts to administrative staff and support, wish to have more business manager (or equivalent) support in school. Some comments related to individual experiences with Local Authority support – which is mixed. A number of comments highlighted that some senior management teams already have a business manager (or equivalent) as part of the team. Typical responses are shown below:

“HTs should be ‘Leaders of Learning’ - this is not what is happening in many schools. We need to utilise the expertise in finance available within the local authority and widen their remit/increase numbers of AFO positions. HTs are spending a lot of time on financial issues where there are people much more qualified to deal with matters freeing up HTs to get on with the business of Educating.

“Most schools have Business Managers which are part of the school Senior Leadership Team.”

“Head Teachers will need additional, dedicated admin and accounting support.”

“Don’t want to see additional layer of costs”

“HT’s are not trained to deal with finance systems and would need support with this.”

“School business managers, as per McCrone Agreement, seem to have disappeared. This role should be reinstated to support HTs.”

Question 11

“Are there any further comments you wish to make?”

Eighty-eight responses were made to this question. The vast majority of comments cited current concerns with headteachers/depute headteachers role and workload. It is clear from the responses that many headteachers are working long hours and spent too little time leading on 'teaching and learning'. The majority of comments stated directly, or by implication, that the proposals would not improve things for headteachers, with many saying that it would make things worse by adding responsibilities and workload. It is clear from these comments that headteachers want more support rather than powers. A small number of responses welcomed the proposed headteachers charter. Typical comments include:

"This legislation is extremely concerning. The high-level aims are what we aspire to every day in schools to improve outcomes for our learners. I cannot understand why we require this to be legislative unless it's an attempt to reduce the power of local authorities. My real concern is the capacity of headteachers to undertake the additional admin type duties while managing the main business of learning and teaching."

"I think the proposals do not address the correct issues. Children are coming to school unable to speak in some cases, many have experienced trauma, increasing numbers crave nurture, some are mainstreamed for years while we battle through the process of securing more suitable alternative placements and until these key issues are addressed at a far earlier stage than at school level I think we have to accept that closing the gap will forever be a pipe dream."

"The primary role of a Head Teacher should be on learning and teaching. I fear the extra roles and responsibilities in the proposed legislation will impact on the time available to focus on L & T. This is particularly concerning for class committed head teachers of primary school with part time school admin support."

"Too many changes planned in education without proper thought i.e. curriculum for excellence promised much and provided little."

"How can PEF close the gap with staffing crisis and council cuts. Our job is impossible and the current thinking does not put every child at the centre. I feel we are robbing Peter to pay Paul."

"Workload issues for school leaders need to be addressed and not just added to."

"I worry about added responsibility at a time whereby management has been cut severely, staffing is low and SMT regularly cover classes as well as trying to fulfil their own remit. The expectations of staff, parents and the council have not changed even though management has been cut. This has been a real workload issue for SMT in my authority. Management time has also been cut over many years but none of these factors have been reflected in salaries. SMT are spending hours of time dealing with challenging pupils which is another huge factor impacting on the job of the HT. I would not like a model whereby HTs felt isolated with no support. There's not much just now but it's better than nothing."

"In principle this looks very good but concerned about the differences in equity that will come out across the local authorities."

"I think it is naive to think schools/HTs can manage all this ... We are educators and need freedom to educate... some HTs do not understand what they would be signing up to!!!! Hard enough to recruit HTs as it is!"

"The demands on HTs are already huge and the increased workload associated with PEF has not been addressed. The current huge issues with recruitment of teachers is an additional stress for HTs. I am

concerned that the introduction of the HT Charter may be yet another thing which will further increase the workload and stress of HTs and deter younger colleagues from seeking the move into headship.”

Findings

The first section of each question 1 to 10 were answered by around three hundred headteacher/depute headteacher members, whereas as the supplementary questions and question 11 were answered in a range from 41 to 88 members. The conclusions drawn from the first section of questions 1 to 10 are thus the most accurate and representative. It is also clear that the written responses to the supplementary questions to questions 1 to 10, and question 11, tend to focus on current and future problems. The content and tone of the supplementary responses are more negative than the answers to the first question.

Only a minority (43%) of headteachers support a headteachers charter in principle, although a significant number are unsure. It is clear from the supplementary responses to this and other questions that headteachers feel under pressure with their existing role and workloads. The prospect of further responsibilities and powers are not attractive to the majority of headteachers. It is clear from the responses that the Government's proposals are not detailed enough to provide sufficient clarity for a large number of headteachers to decide if they support the headteachers' charter or not.

There is overwhelming support for the headteachers charter to effectively be non-statutory guidance as opposed to being grounded in legislation as planned by the Government. Supplementary responses seem to suggest that in part this is to avoid headteachers having additional statutory duties and thus being potentially liable for them.

The effectiveness of Local Authorities in supporting headteachers (and by implication schools) is explored in question three. The main question had 49% being positive about LA support, with 15% being negative. The apparent positive nature of this result is offset in part by 35% of respondents being neutral about LA support, suggesting significant room for improvement. Whilst the supplementary question responses show a mixed quality of LA support, they are more negative about LA support than the first section, and there seems to be a belief amongst some that LA support has got worse in recent years, possibly as a result of austerity pressures on capacity.

Question 4 showed that a small majority (55%) of headteachers did not believe that the Government's proposals would lead to additional autonomy for headteachers. The supplementary question responses seemed to show that for many Local Authorities headteachers believe that they already have sufficient autonomy, and that the proposals could not deliver more autonomy. A number of responses made the point that the use of current autonomy was restricted by a lack of choices/resources available rather than by restricted autonomy.

Question 5 showed that only 20.6% of headteachers believed that the emphasis of education reform should be on headteachers, with 48% disagreeing and 31% being unsure. Most of the supplementary question answers identified team working or collective decision-making that take place in schools. Some concern was also expressed around putting headteachers in a vulnerable position if they are making decisions alone.

Question 6 looked at the appointments process and most headteachers (71%) were clear that it was essential for them to be involved in staffing decisions. The supplementary question responses

showed that most headteachers were content with their current level of involvement, although practices varied across Local Authorities. It was clear from these responses that there was no support for legislative change, since most Local Authorities facilitated the involvement in appointments that most headteachers wanted.

Question 7 followed up on schools assuming HR functions as a consequence of the government's proposals. Almost 80% of headteachers were concerned or very concerned with this potential development. It was also clear from the supplementary question responses that headteachers do not want to become involved in the administrative elements of appointments, preferring for them to be dealt with by HR professionals. Some expressed the fear this was a technical area with employment law duties that they were not equipped to deal with.

Question 8 showed that a vast majority (75%) of headteachers believed that headteachers should be able to decide how the funding allocated to schools is spent. The majority of responses tended to focus on the collective nature of schools, and that staff work as a team. Some concern was expressed at the training implications for headteachers with some responses stating that they would need accountants to support them.

Question 9 asked 'If additional decision making power is granted in relation to funding, should this be: the sole responsibility of the Headteacher OR managed through an inclusive school finance committee OR Other?' The responses showed that 16% supported solely headteachers, 71% supported the use of school finance committees and 13% supported 'other'. These results seemed to reflect the supplementary responses to Question 8 rather than the first section of Question 8. Whilst some supplementary question responses made it clear that headteachers should make spending decisions if they become responsible or accountable for spending, the majority concentrated on the collective nature of schools and distributive nature of decision making.

Question 10 showed that 41% of headteachers supported managing increased delegated management of resources 'through existing local authority mechanisms', 55% supported 'through additional dedicated staffing at school e.g. bursars' and 4% supported 'other'. The supplementary question responses highlighted the differences in support provided by Local Authorities to headteachers. There is a small majority (55%) of headteachers in support of having additional administrative/professional support in schools as opposed to relying on staff based centrally in Local Authorities. Whilst a number of responses stated they were happy with LA support, others cited current difficulties with that approach.

Question 11 was an open-ended question that allowed respondents to set out their views on the government's proposals. In general, responses outlined their current problems and the challenges that they face on a day-to-day basis. It is clear from this section that headteachers feel over-worked, under-supported and do not welcome the government's proposals. A number of responses set out ways of resolving current issues as alternative to the government's models.

Looking at the survey as a whole, it is clear that headteachers do not welcome the government's proposals and do not see them as a way of delivering better outcomes for pupils. A number of responses state that the poverty attainment gap will not be closed by the government's proposals, and put forward the view that they are designed to increase central government control at the expense of local government. It is also clear that most headteachers do not want more autonomy, but do want more services and resources that they can procure/arrange with their existing autonomy. In other words, the lack of resources (especially teachers and other education staff) is the biggest issue for most respondents and increasing autonomy alone will not address this. Whilst a

few headteachers welcomed the proposals, and wished further decision-making powers, most headteacher responses stressed the collective way in which they work in schools. Most headteachers supported the notion of school finance committees, i.e. the democratic school. Some headteachers also stated that the proposals could make headships less attractive which would exacerbate current shortages.

Conclusion

The majority of headteachers surveyed do not support the principle of the Headteachers' Charter. The majority of headteachers surveyed believed that any headteachers charter, if introduced, should be based on best practice guidance and not grounded in legislation.

Whilst there is significant concern over the standard and consistency of Local Authority support to headteachers and schools, 49% of surveyed headteachers were positive about LA support whilst only 15% were negative.

A large number of surveyed headteachers stated in supplementary question responses that they have autonomy within their Local Authority. A majority of headteachers surveyed stated that the government's proposals would not deliver increased autonomy. Many headteachers wanted more resources to use with their current autonomy, rather than increased autonomy.

A large number headteachers responded that they were involved in appointments and a majority (71% stated that it was important or essential to be involved in staffing decisions. The supplementary question responses also showed that a large number of the headteachers surveyed wished to maintain existing employment relationships and the use of specialist LA staff such as HR professionals.

Most headteachers disagreed that headteachers should be the emphasis of the government's proposals on school reform. Headteachers repeatedly cited the collective nature of teaching, the team approach, with collective and distributive decision making within schools. A clear majority of teachers supported the use of school finance committees.

Headteachers set out their current problems and challenges, including heavy workloads, long working hours and excessive administrative duties that took time away from leading on teaching and learning. The reduction in support, resources and services available from Local Authorities was also cited as a major concern. Most headteachers surveyed believed that the government's proposals would not address these issues and may even exacerbate them.

It is clear that most headteachers are concerned at the adverse effects of Local Government funding cuts have had on schools and pupils, and many set out that this needs to be addressed rather than focussing on the role of headteachers as proposed by the Headteachers' Charter.

EIS

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