

EIS response to Argyll and Bute's 'Empowering our Educators' consultation

March 2022

The EIS Argyll and Bute Local Association surveyed members in mid-March 2022 on the Council's collective leadership proposals. Over 52% of EIS members responded to the survey. **Only 4.9% of respondents support the proposal whilst 85% of respondents do not support the proposal with 9.6% remaining undecided.** 35% of the respondents stated they were in a promoted post, with the rest being main grade class teachers. Several hundred respondents elaborated on their views with comments. A snapshot of the comments is below.

"I have watched and read all materials promoting this new model from Argyll and Bute. The last thing teachers and pupils need is more people who do not work or spend time in classrooms telling people what should go on inside a classroom. I am STRONGLY against the proposals."

"A money-saving plan. No improved career plan for teachers. Reduces numbers of promoted posts. No sound educational basis for plan."

"I am currently a Headteacher - here are some of my concerns: - No evidence base presented for such a radical change to indicate how it will improve outcomes for children. - Seems to oppose the Empowerment Agenda. - I have asked which duties would be taken off my remit commensurate with the drop in salary and status. This was unanswered. - I have asked what 'sharing of resources' specifically refers to. This was unanswered. - This is not about my job title as such but rather being a head teacher is my occupation- in the same way that someone might feel about being a doctor. I think such a fundamental change to my job should not be considered with such woolly rationale. - Parents, staff and pupils within my school unanimously reject the proposal. - I have concerns around the consultation- very skewed and wrong information being used during consultation sessions. Misleading with no counterbalance. - Many of the issues stated over recruitment, retirement etc do not apply within our area of Argyll and Bute. - I think the loss of regular meetings and access to meetings with members of the central team for 'Heads of School' would be to the detriment of schools and could lead to loss of accountability and central leaders becoming out of touch. - All of the proposed benefits refer to things that already happen to a significant extent within our school cluster. These are well established and embedded practice."

"Having spoken to a number of Senior Education colleagues in various authorities I am convinced this proposal is nothing short of ludicrous."

"There is no way this will recruit more staff. It'll fragment the staff we already have as they WILL feel undervalued and not listened to. Lastly the collectives idea has never been done, there is no basis for this and success (or otherwise) will take many years to measure. Just trying to get back to pre covid teaching styles is difficult, all of this on top is not wanted and not needed."

"I'm really not sure how the executive head post adds value. I can see the benefit for heads in very small schools, but I'm not sure how it will work with non- teaching heads of larger schools. I can't see that it supports the Scottish government's empowerment agenda and I really don't understand how it can help solve recruitment, when you're taking away the role of head teacher yet essentially leaving someone the same job."

Ultimately, I don't understand how it positively impacts on the education of our pupils to have someone not wholly dedicated...in charge of the strategic direction of their school."

"Need to know more specifics about our own establishment before making an informed decision. Too many unknowns at the moment."

"We don't need another layer of management, we need more teachers and ASN assistants. Head Teachers regardless of current or proposed remits are and would be regularly covering for lack of staffing availability."

"I feel that it could be beneficial to some schools and a good way for Argyll & Bute to encourage people to take on Acting HT/ HT roles knowing that they have someone above them to guide them. I suppose I am also suspicious that it might not be good for schools!"

"A big part of school life is building relationships and trust with families. This will be very difficult as the executive head would hardly have anytime in each school they are overseeing. The workload for deputies and heads of schools are already very high. This workload won't change but their pay and job status would. Why is there a need for another 'head' needed to oversee what deputies and heads of schools already do. If executive heads are 'needed' then what will happen to quality improvement officers who should be supporting and overseeing schools?"

"I am in an acting promoted post, and will return to my main grade post in August. There is no way that collective leadership proposal is the best option for schools going forward, or better than schools having their own leadership in the building at all times."

Many of the comments referred to this proposal as a cost-cutting exercise.

The EIS reaction to the 'Empowering our Educators' presentation is included within this consultation response and the comments made therein continue to reflect the EIS position.

Of key concern for the EIS is that the proposed roles of Executive Head and Heads of Schools fall outwith SNCT definitions and job-sizing toolkit. This will have an impact on the working conditions of school staff: a reduced management capacity within the school building will always equate to increased workload for other teachers, either through having to substitute themselves or to keep paper trails for a distance accountability model.

It is the EIS view that the legislative framework for Headteachers in Scotland does not envisage a Headteacher of a collective of establishments, potentially consisting of primary, ASN, secondary and early years settings. Ultimately that is a matter of statutory interpretation which can only be tested by legal action. Nonetheless, the EIS believes that the fundamental weakness of the Council's proposal is in the transposition of a multi-establishment Headship or Headteacher of a single 3-18 school model, often borne out of necessity, applying it (wrongly in our view) to 'a collective of schools' as if it had established educational rationale.

The consultation on the reform of education led by Professor Ken Muir, which the local authority referred to in their rationale for this proposal, has now concluded – 'Putting Learners at the Centre: Towards a Future Vision for Scottish Education'. Relevant recommendations, accepted by the Scottish Government, state "The Scottish Government should initiate a national discussion on establishing a compelling and consensual vision for the future of Scottish education that takes account of the points made in this report, in particular the importance of placing the learner at the centre of all decisions." The EIS sees no benefit in Argyll and Bute Council making sweeping and radical changes to working practices within schools prior to this 'national discussion' taking place. Furthermore, the EIS believes this proposal runs counter to the fundamental recommendation that the learner should be the centre of all decisions as the educational rationale for this proposal is entirely insufficient.

The EIS maintains this proposal would require to be equality impact assessed. At that juncture it is highly likely that the assessment would highlight many impacts (on teachers, other school staff, pupils, and potentially families in the community) which would cause the local authority to fail in their public sector equality duties if the proposal was implemented.

If the local authority is interested in what EIS members consider to be their foremost concerns and suggestions for educational change then we refer to the Local Association's local election manifesto demands, enclosed with this response.

We urge Argyll and Bute Council to take heed of the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skill's advice when she was asked about this proposal and the current consultation in the Scottish Parliament on 17th March 2022 **"It is then for the local authority to pay very close attention to their responses."** – **Shirley Anne Sommerville.**

Should the local authority fail to take account of the views of education staff, then the title of its consultation can only be viewed as deeply ironic. On a very serious note, any move to impose such a model on school communities to which parents, teacher and other school staff are firmly opposed, would be directly contrary to the empowerment agenda and emblematic of a culture within Scottish Education that Ken Muir's report clearly identified as needing to change.