

NITC SUBMISSION TO THE WORKFORCE REVIEW WORKSTREAM OF THE STRATEGIC FORUM

This submission has been prepared on behalf of the NITC and focuses on the need to consider work flexibility as an important element of a teacher's professional development.

1.CONTEXT

1.1 The NITC recognises that there is rigidity within the Northern Ireland school teaching workforce, with little movement between schools, school types or sectors. It is a concern that the increased autonomy within the Education Bill may exacerbate this rigidity to the detriment of the profession, pupils and systemic performance.

1.2 The NITC also proposes that an agreement on Professional Development should be negotiated through the recognised negotiating machinery and should form part of a teacher's Terms and Conditions of employment.

2.CAREER FLEXIBILITY

2.1 The NITC proposes that introducing employment flexibility would allow opportunities for teachers, including principal teachers, at all stages of their careers to opt for different types of employment within the wider education service, thereby gaining knowledge and skills that would benefit their career development pathway.

2.2 Career flexibility has operated in a limited way in the past through secondment opportunities where teachers were appointed for varying periods of time to carry out advisory teacher posts within the Education and Library Boards. Unfortunately such

secondments have become less available as the Education and Library Boards have contracted in the lead into ESA.

2.3 The NITC believes that this type of opportunity should be encouraged within ESA and should certainly be taken into account by those drafting the new structures for Continuous Professional Development (CPD).

2.4 NITC would encourage increased use of secondments and exchanges to allow teachers extended periods of professional practice in another school, school type or sector. NITC would particularly seek to encourage talented and ambitious teachers to teach and practice in challenging schools within areas of social disadvantage.

2.5 The NITC also believes that such secondments should be extended into other areas within ESA where teachers could get experience of a variety of administrative functions. For example, a period within the Human Resources Directorate would allow teachers to encounter a variety of industrial relations scenarios, thus preparing them better to deal with future such issues in their management role in schools. This could be applied in a similar way to many of the administrative areas within ESA such as special education, school re-organisation or school funding.

2.6 The NITC would also propose that there should be a pool of centrally employed teachers, along the lines of the current peripatetic specialist staff, upon which schools could call in order to provide specialist help. This pool should also be staffed on a secondment basis to allow teachers to share experience that they have already gained within their schools and to learn from others as they travel from school to school.

3.LEADERSHIP

3.1 For those teachers aspiring towards leadership roles in schools there should be an extended and meaningful opportunity to work-shadow leaders in schools other than their own as part of the requirement to gain a PQH-type qualification.

3.2 Indeed, the NITC would suggest that the PQH structure should be reviewed to ensure that the alternative forms of employment placements suggested within this paper should form part of a career development portfolio.

3.3 NITC does not support any movement towards fixed term Principal posts, but would encourage the secondment of suitably qualified aspirant leaders for Principal posts as a

means of providing leadership opportunities and as a means of widening recruitment pools in hard-to-fill posts.

3.4 The NITC believes that teachers should also be able to add to their career portfolio through secondment to the Education and Training Inspectorate for a fixed period of time. This would ensure that the best practice in schools can be brought back into the teacher's school on completion of the secondment, but more importantly it would ensure that those who are current practitioners, with recent and relevant experience (and thus realistic expectations of what is appropriate) would be carrying out school inspections.

4.PRE-RETIREMENT OPTIONS

4.1 The NITC also believes that there may be opportunities for teachers nearing the end of their careers to avail of opportunities to contribute to specialised project work providing the school is prepared to appoint a recently qualified teacher to their post.

4.2 There may be scope to make the appointments of the recently-qualified teachers on a permanent basis if a scheme could be drawn up to ensure no detriment to teachers' pensions and indeed it could be devised in such a way as to allow for phased retirement for those teachers who wanted it.

4.3 This could apply equally to classroom teachers and to those in senior management roles.

5.TEACHER-TRAINING & CPD

5.1 The NITC would also suggest that serving teachers should have an opportunity to contribute to the work of Initial Teacher Training by secondment to the training institutions for a fixed period of time. This would ensure that those training teachers would be current in their thinking and practice and it might also allow those teachers to update their own knowledge of current academic research.

5.2 This type of secondment could be extended to provision of Continuing Professional Development for serving teachers within the teacher training establishments.

5.3 The logical consequence would then be that teachers could be encouraged to provide training for others within their own school, or be involved in developing teacher expertise and initiatives across a number of schools, including across phases.

The NITC recognises that these are only some of the ways that flexibility could be introduced to support career development and hopes that this paper might be discussed at the next meeting of the Workforce Review Workstream to stimulate discussion, with a view to it being included in the final report to the Minister for Education.