

SSTA meeting with Deputy First Minister

SSTA meets Deputy First Minister

The SSTA met with John Swinney, Deputy First Minister (DFM) on 19 December and discussed a number of the Association's motions from our Annual Congress in May. The SSTA delegation was led by Kevin Campbell (President), Elaine Henderson (General Treasurer), John Guidi (Vice-President), and Seamus Searson (General Secretary). The following issues were discussed:

Workload

The SSTA focussed on the continuously increasing teacher workload despite the best efforts of the Minister since his appointment in May 2016. The late changes to National 5 without time set aside to make the changes, the introduction of Bench Marks and Pupil Equity Fund accountability processes had all increased teacher workload.

Benchmarks had been intended to raise awareness but had become another imposition with schools under pressure from local authorities and inspectors. Teachers had faced demands to incorporate bench marks into schemes of work and into tracking and monitoring process with inadequate time to undertake the tasks.

National 5 changes had been introduced too late for school to implement in a reasonable way and many changes have increased workload and unnecessary stress for teachers and students. The pressure applied through multi-course classes had meant teachers were teaching two or three different courses at the same time. This was compounded by SQA expecting each course to be 160 hours when in reality students were being squeezed through the system in less time. It was suggested that for many students a 'two year' course should be the preferred option but schools needed direction and confidence to make such a decision.

Local Authority Inspections on Teacher Workload

The SSTA sought a review and further action of the Inspection of Local Authorities undertaken by Education Scotland in August 2016 into teacher workload. Both Education Scotland and Local Authorities need to ensure that teacher workload is managed within the teachers' contract.

The overriding message on workload from the SSTA delegation to the Minister was to stop further changes as teachers do not have the capacity for more changes. Time is teachers' most valuable commodity, and there is very little time for teachers in secondary schools.

Teachers' Pay Survey

The initial findings of the SSTA Pay survey were shared with the DFM. The survey showed the unhappiness of teachers at the erosion of teachers pay over the last ten years and the expectation of a **substantial pay increase in 2018**. The survey highlighted the large number of teachers who have considered or are considering leaving the profession (68%) and the **priority must be retention** in preference to recruitment. The Scottish education system could not afford to lose the experienced teachers it has now.

Career Structure

One element of the recent publication of 'Education Governance: Next Steps' by the Scottish Government was The SSTA had welcomed the intention to address the lack of a teachers' career structure as this reaffirmed the SSTA position that the current system needs to change. We were reassured that detailed discussions on the career structure are about to begin. **The lack of recognition and salary of teachers in pupil support and guidance roles was highlighted as an important part of the career structure discussions.**

Additional Support Needs (ASN)

The SSTA asked for a review of ASN and pupil support provision. The reduction of staff is leading to more disillusioned young people whose needs are not being met and consequently causing problems in schools. There was an urgent need to support these young people. The delegation urged a commitment to invest in ASN as the years of education cuts had seen a decimation of this essential part of the education service. The cuts were having a severe impact on those pupils who in many cases are the neediest to access the curriculum.

Regional Improvement Collaboratives (RIC)

The SSTA had welcomed the formation of the RICs as they had the potential to provide for improved access for teacher Professional Development opportunities. The SSTA saw the potential of subject specific and sector specific groups to promote and share good practice across local authority boundaries. However, the lack of engagement with the teacher trade unions in the direction of travel and the lack of supply teachers will hinder these developments. Teachers need to be involved in the construction of these groups and given the opportunity to participate.

Education Workforce Council and the General Teaching Council Scotland (GTCS)

The SSTA has concerns over some of the functions of the GTCS but is opposed to its removal in the interests of simplifying the regulation bodies. The need to accredit and regulate the profession is as important now as when the GTCS was created more than 50 years ago. If there is a deficit in the system for other education professionals that is a decision for those professionals. The GTCS was created by teachers to protect and maintain the highest standards of teaching and must continue to do so.

SSTA Congress

The SSTA delegation made an invitation for the Deputy First Minister to attend the SSTA Annual Congress in Crieff on Friday 17 May. The Minister would hope to confirm his attendance in the near future.