

Save Our Teachers

Using the long-term
unemployed as cheap
labour is not the way to
deliver quality education

Briefing Paper No.3

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Introduction

Renfrewshire Council's proposals for a Revised Model for the Delivery of Primary Education have, rightly, met with widespread opposition from parents, teachers, unions, the churches and many others.

Quite correctly, there has been considerable focus upon the proposal to reduce teaching time by 10% per week and the resulting detrimental effect upon the education of our children.

The removal of teachers for 10% of the school week has been viewed as a major diminution of the quality of education in Renfrewshire.

However, as if the removal of teachers was not bad enough, the proposal to replace them with non-qualified, non-teaching staff only serves to compound the recklessness of the Council.

Recruitment

As things stand, the Council is proposing to recruit around 120 additional Educational Support staff in order to deliver the 'enrichment programme' to every primary pupil for 2.5 hours per week. According to the Council's Director of Education, the enrichment programme will comprise, "...learning experiences focussed on the themes of enterprise, health and well-being, and citizenship..." (Letter to all Renfrewshire teachers, 27 January 2011)

Cheap labour

These Educational Support staff will cost around £14 per hour, including on-costs. This is likely to result in an hourly pay rate of around £10; the comparative cost for a qualified teacher is just under £30 per hour. It is this difference that is intended to save the Council £1.1m per annum.

Educational Support staff will be 'employed' (there is some confusion as to their legal employment status) for up to 16 hours per week.

Europe

The Council are proposing to utilise European funding to support the delivery of the 'enrichment programme'. This will include European Social Funds (ESF) and monies through the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF).

It should be noted that Renfrewshire Council's Education department has a very limited experience of administering and successfully delivering European-funded programmes. This is, at least in part, due to the fact that projects which seek to deliver statutory education have not hitherto been eligible for European monies.

These European funds are administered by ESEP (www.esep.co.uk). According to ESEP:

The **European Social Fund** (ESF) aims to address social inequalities within and across regions by improving the general performance of the labour market, in particular in relation to marginalized groups.

and

The **European Regional Development Fund** (ERDF) is a vehicle for promoting the economic development and regeneration of defined areas within the Member States of the European Union.

In essence, both ESF and ERDF funds have, since they were first introduced into Scotland over twenty years ago, been utilised to assist job creation and help unemployed people into work.

According to ESEP, for ESF funding:

“The seven key challenges are:

- Reducing the acute levels of worklessness in certain groups and areas
- Improving employment rates in those groups facing multiple barriers
- Increasing the ability of the low-waged and low-skilled to remain in, and progress through the labour market to achieve financial security
- Tackling gender representation in key occupations and sectors of under-represented groups
- Increasing the skills of entrepreneurs and new managers
- Providing social enterprise managers and workers with greater skills to sustain their organisations
- Increasing lifelong learning participation rates among the most disadvantaged groups.”

It is highly questionable whether such funds can properly be used for the purposes of delivering statutory education provision.

The long-term unemployed

In order to be eligible to receive these funds the Council will require to recruit persons who fulfil strict eligibility criteria. This includes, primarily, those who are

long-term unemployed, or the so-called NEET group, i.e. those Not in Employment, Education or Training.

ESF Priority ONE states:

“Some groups of individuals face multiple barriers to entering employment and retaining jobs. Priority will be given to the hardest-to-reach, workless groups, those experiencing multiple disadvantage and those in the former NEET group, as well as:

- **Long-term unemployed/inactive people**
- **16-19 year olds not in education, employment or training**
- **Young people identified as being at risk of not entering education, employment or training on leaving school**
- **Unemployed/inactive lone parents and other carers**
- **Unemployed/inactive people with mental health problems, long-term illness, disabilities or learning difficulties**
- **Older people seeking to re-enter the labour force or requiring re-skilling to enable them to remain in the workforce**
- **Other disadvantaged unemployed/inactive groups such as prisoners prior to release, ex-offenders, people with drug or alcohol problems, homeless people and refugees**
- **Unemployed/inactive people from ethnic minority groups**
- **Individuals experiencing persistent part-time/seasonal employment**
- **Employers who recruit from the above groups and who need support in retaining and developing these employees.**

ESF-funded Projects should target these hardest-to-reach groups, notably those with multiple deprivations; at-risk youngsters, especially those not engaged with the worlds of work or learning, and employers who recruit from such groups.”

Most people would agree that assistance for people in these categories is welcome and that such intervention is a legitimate role for national and local government.

However, it is difficult to envisage the circumstances where such a programme would be appropriate for the delivery of Curriculum for Excellence and the teaching of primary children.

Training

The Council has been vague and inconsistent as to the specifics of the training that the Educational Support staff will undergo.

It appears that staff will be required to be trained to a minimum of SVQ Level 2. This equates to Standard Grade.

Notwithstanding the suggested, though unconfirmed, role of Reid Kerr College in the training, it is also unclear as to how adequate training for 120 (still to be recruited) staff would be delivered prior to the programme's intended commencement in August 2011.

Lack of continuity

The rules of ESF and ERDF funding also stipulate a maximum time that individuals can participate in projects. Normally, this is for a period of no more than SIX months.

Unless, at the end of the six months, the Council employs each individual Education Support person, it is therefore likely that any staff recruited on this basis will change at least once during each academic year. In other words, it would be difficult for the Council to guarantee that children will have an appropriate degree of continuity in terms of the individuals delivering the 'enrichment programme'.

This has particular implications for some children with additional support needs.

It would reasonably be anticipated that this would cause difficulties for head teachers and others with responsibility for managing the programme.

Duration

European funding is also only awarded for a maximum of **three years**. Again, it is unclear, particularly given the likely staff 'churn' on the programme, what arrangements will be in place post 2013.

So little time, so many children

Finally, notwithstanding all of the above issues, there are concerns regarding the time availability for the Education Support staff.

The Council have been unable or unwilling to answer the question as to how many children each member of Education Support staff will have responsibility for.

However, a calculation can be made on the basis that each staff member works 16 hours per week and does six 2.5 hour sessions in different schools per week (with one hour weekly preparation time (it is not known if travel time will be included)); and that the average class size is 30.

This would mean that each member of Education Support staff would come into contact each week with:

6 sessions x 30 pupil = 180 pupils.

Again, in addition to the obvious child protection issues, it is difficult to see how any individual could provide and sustain a meaningful learning experience for children in these circumstances.