

TeachFirst

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9th May 2017

Dear Deputy First Minister,

Teach First: a bespoke programme designed in Scotland, for Scotland

I am writing to thank you again for your time at our meeting on 10 January 2017, and to follow up in light of recent contact with your senior officials.

As you will be aware, we have had a number of engagements with senior officials and submitted papers outlining the evidence base for the impact of our programmes, and we are pleased with the positive feedback we have received. I am also pleased you were able to meet our Founder and CEO, Brett Wigdortz, at the recent International Summit on the Teaching Profession in Edinburgh.

We know that tackling the attainment gap and improving leadership in the classroom are at the heart of your reform agenda, a point emphasised during our meeting in January, and that you have already taken a number of steps to address the wider challenges in Scottish education, such as the supply of teachers.

As you will know from our meeting, Teach First has the twin objectives of tackling inequality in educational outcomes and increasing leadership in the classroom. However, we believe that the latter necessitates the former, and this is ultimately what our programmes seek to achieve.

Our programmes provide participants with more than just a teaching qualification - our two year qualification has leadership at its heart, and our participants develop the necessary knowledge, skills and experience required to demonstrate real leadership in the classroom from the beginning of their careers.

We believe that a bespoke Scottish programme, coherent with your policy agenda, tailored to Scotland's needs, and worthy of Scotland's world class system of education would prove to be an effective, new, and additional policy response in Scotland.

In addition, we further recognise your commitment in the SNP manifesto, and subsequent Programme for Government, to explore new and innovative routes into teaching, and your intention to pursue a public tender process to procure this programme.

I am writing to ask whether you might consider an alternative arrangement to this process and consider the timing of such a roll out, in order to deliver a programme that is more likely to meet your policy objectives.

Patron
HRH The Prince of Wales

Vice Patron
Dame Julia Cleverdon DCVO OBE

Chair
Paul Drechsler CBE

Founder & Chief Executive
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Working towards an August 2019 start date

We understand that a tender process for this new programme was being planned for the beginning of this year, when the details of the tender was originally due to be issued. This would have provided approximately six months for the competition and contractual agreement to take place. This is the standard time our experience shows is necessary for this process, followed by a further twelve months for programme design, teacher recruitment and implementation.

We appreciate that there are many reasons for unavoidable delay, but our view is that we should now be aiming towards a programme which trains recruits in summer 2019, starting teaching in schools in August 2019. In our view, this is necessary to ensure any organisation can deliver on your clear vision of a high quality, innovative new route into the profession in Scotland. Given the political importance of this policy area, we feel it's important a new programme can truly deliver your objectives and attract additional high calibre leaders to the classroom, rather than duplicate existing provision, which might be risked with shorter timelines.

Time is required to develop a new and bespoke programme, develop marketing and attract the high calibre of candidates needed to make an impact. We are very keen to work with your Government to deliver this programme but are concerned about our ability to bid or deliver if the process is for a tender issued in the coming months, with a programme starting in 2018. In the instances where a sufficient timeline has not been available in other countries, we have taken the decision not to bid because we did not feel we could guarantee quality. Where rushed timelines have occurred, the outcomes have been below the standard expected and the public relations implications significant. We are concerned this scenario may now be approaching.

Working together to jointly develop a programme

A start date of 2019 would also deliver the additional benefit of enabling much greater collaboration in the development of the new programme. As part of the global Teach for All network, which operates in 40 other countries, we feel we are best placed to lead the delivery of a global leading programme for Scotland.

We are, however, fully committed to this being a wholly new programme, that is designed in and for Scotland, and which draws on local expertise, particularly at current Higher Education Institutions. A 2019 start date would enable us to spend time working with these institutions to learn from their practice, and combine it with our own areas of expertise, to jointly develop a world-class programme.

Furthermore, in our experience, formal public tender processes for these sorts of programmes can lead to a number of issues and risks for those procuring the services.

Often public tenders necessitate a definitive specification of work to be delivered, without any opportunity for those procuring the services to test and refine that specification to ensure it meets their requirements and final policy objectives. Our experience of these processes also leads us to believe that many bidders submit tenders that are unrealistic in both ambition, delivery timescales and resource requirements, as they do not have the track record or experience of delivering such programmes.

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An alternative route

We understand the importance of this particular issue to you personally, and to the Scottish Government's policy agenda. We believe that Teach First has the track record in terms of delivery and impact to meet your ambitions with regards to tackling the attainment gap and bolstering leadership in the classroom. We are committed to delivering quality programmes with our partners - our programmes are very popular, often oversubscribed, and offer an exciting opportunity for talented graduates during a time when the profession is struggling to attract them.

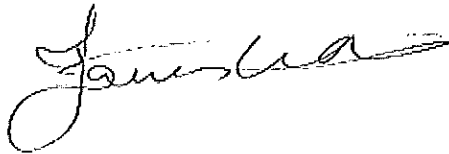
In light of some of the risks we have highlighted above with similar public tender processes for these types of programmes elsewhere, we would like to ascertain your interest in receiving a detailed proposal from us for a two-cohort pilot programme in Scotland starting in 2019 - a partnership between Teach First and the Scottish Government - as an alternative method of meeting your requirements. Furthermore, this would enable us to engage more fully in discussions with a number of Higher Education Institutions, to combine our joint expertise and develop a partnership approach.

We believe a partnership and bilateral arrangement, such as those you announced recently with a number of HEIs in Scotland, would allow for much greater input from the Scottish Government throughout the process and increased trust, ensuring the final programme delivers on your ambition.

We would be happy to discuss this further with your senior officials.

We look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,



James Westhead
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