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I welcome the continued discussions that have been taking place through the Scottish Negotiating Committee on Teachers, and I am encouraged by the continued commitment of all parties to reaching a negotiated settlement. I note that the Teachers' Side have formally rejected the most recent offer but I remain committed to try to find a way forward to resolve the pay claim.

I am firmly of the view that the rejected offer represents a strong and fair deal for teachers. It would have seen all teaching staff receive an increase of at least 12% over the period of the deal, with larger increments for staff in post but not yet at the top of the main grade scale, as well as a higher starting salary and faster progression for those coming into the profession.

The Scottish Government is supporting this offer with a contribution of almost £280 million. This is a huge investment of public money and clearly demonstrates that we greatly value the teaching profession.

I am however aware that concerns continue to be raised by teachers around other significant issues such as workload and additional support needs. These issues have also been highlighted to me in a series of meetings I have had with teachers across the country over recent months.

I am convinced that these issues can only be addressed if all parts of an empowered system work together systemically to address the culture and capacity of Scottish education. I am therefore proposing a package of measures, as detailed below, which we would develop in partnership with all professional associations and our partners in local government. I would propose that this package forms the basis of a shared agenda going forward, in tandem with a settlement on pay.

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Joint work on reducing unnecessary workload

We have a shared desire to reduce the workload of teachers. You will know from my speech to the EIS Headteacher and Depute Headteacher Conference, that I believe there is a significant opportunity to reduce unnecessary teacher workload by increasing teacher agency and school empowerment. Indeed your General Secretary made a very similar point in his address to the Conference. Given the good work on school empowerment that has involved the Scottish Government, professional associations and other partners, I would propose we undertake joint activity to assist in reducing unnecessary workload through the full roll-out of the empowerment agenda.

Additional in-service days for professional learning

We would propose providing teachers with two additional in-service days in the academic year 2019-20 to support professional learning. The exact purpose of these in-service days will need to be agreed between the professional associations and employers, principally through dialogue involving Regional Improvement Collaboratives, and I would envisage them focusing on some of the key issues that are at the forefront of current discussions for example, but not limited to, workload, additional support needs and the empowering schools agenda.

The development of new professional learning opportunities for teachers

We would propose to work in partnership with the professional associations and Education Scotland to develop a new programme of professional learning which is focused on teacher health and wellbeing. This could build on the work to support professional learning related to poverty, which Education Scotland is already undertaking in partnership, and seek to build teacher resilience and agency in order to support an empowered system.

The establishment of a Teacher Innovation Fund

The establishment of a union led Teacher Innovation Fund, funded by Scottish Government, to provide opportunities for individual innovative teachers to apply for funding in order to support learning activity that would help them develop and progress in their careers. While detailed criteria would need to be developed in partnership with the professional associations this could include activity that would help develop leadership skills, manage challenging behaviour, minimise workload and help disseminate good practice.

Enhancing the current Teacher Leadership Programme

We would be keen to work with the professional associations to extend the reach of Education Scotland's current Teacher Leadership Programme. This programme is already supporting classroom teachers to develop their leadership of learning and teaching. We think there is an opportunity to accelerate and expand the programme to enable a wider group of teachers to benefit.

Establish a mechanism for independent analysis of pay and conditions of service

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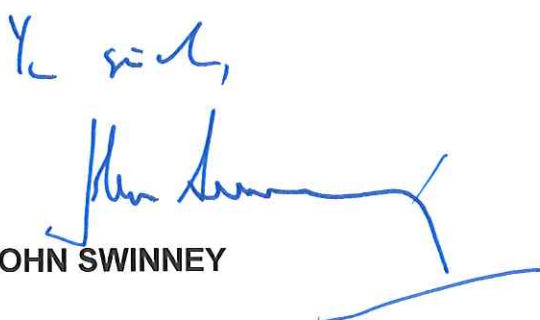


It is our intention that the SNCT establish a mechanism for the provision of independent analysis of teachers' pay and conditions of service. This would provide an opportunity for independent assessment by taking evidence from key stakeholders including the teaching profession and employers, on matters relating to teachers' pay and conditions of service and including workload, recruitment and retention in an empowered system. We remain committed to the SNCT and its role in supporting national terms and conditions of service.

In addition to this package, I have considered again the investment the Scottish Government has proposed to make in reforming teacher remuneration as part of ongoing efforts to improve the attractiveness of the profession and address the challenges we collectively face around recruitment. In the current formal offer, this investment constitutes a 3% increase from January 2019. I am now prepared to commit to increasing this to 4% and moving the effective date from January to April 2019. As the existing offer was made within the context of the now approved Budget for 2019/20, I have to make clear that the cost of this additional element will have to be found from within the existing Education and Skills Budget. As you are aware, the Scottish Government cannot make a formal offer through the SNCT process and all offers must be provided by COSLA as employers. However, this letter indicates my willingness to work with our partners in COSLA to deliver this package as a firm offer as quickly as possible.

Given the importance we place on improving the attractiveness of the profession and addressing the recruitment challenge, this commitment would be contingent on two points: that the professional associations will – in line with its historic role of promoting the teaching profession – commit to work in full partnership with the Scottish Government and local authorities on issues relating to recruitment, retention, workload, support for learning and the empowering schools agenda, and that this shared commitment should remove any threat of industrial action related to these issues for the duration of this settlement. This will enable all partners to focus on delivering excellence and equity in Scottish education.

This letter demonstrates my desire to bring these pay discussions to a negotiated conclusion, and my commitment to address teacher workload issues and support teacher agency and professional autonomy within the system. I would ask that you share this commitment with your colleagues as part of your imminent decision making process. Given that there are implications for the Government's approved Budget, I am obliged to advise Parliament of the contents of this letter. I am copying this letter to the Convener of the Education and Skills Committee of the Scottish Parliament and intend to make this letter public.


JOHN SWINNEY

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