

# STAND

Argyll and Bute Council  
School leadership transformation

## Consultation findings

August 2022

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## Introduction

**Argyll and Bute Council have proposed transformative change to school leadership in the authority to address the challenges its schools face due to their unique breadth of different settings.**

The proposal is based around collective leadership, grouping schools into small collectives, each with a shared collective leadership team.

The proposal has been under public and professional consultation for 11 months, to present the benefits and rationale for the school leadership transformation and capture concerns and feedback.

We facilitated a comprehensive, inclusive and transparent consultation process to inform every interested person in Argyll and Bute about the proposals and provide them with a clear pathway to input and respond.

Understanding gleaned will be used by The Education Transformation Board to inform and drive their recommendations, before its presentation to Argyll and Bute Council for decision.



## Respondents and responses

**Argyll and Bute has an active, engaged community both in and out of its schools. Staff, pupils and Pupil Councils were especially keen to be involved in the discussion.**

Overall there were 804 individual responses to the consultation.\* The majority of these (93%) were consultation form responses which were received through the Empowering our Educators online portal (748).

In addition, there were 60 email submissions that did not follow the consultation form structure. These responses ranged in length from individuals writing an email through to organisations producing a report.

Finally, there was direct engagement with 68 Head Teachers through group workshop sessions.

The response to the proposal was overwhelmingly negative, especially from Community Councils and Parent Councils. That should be balanced with the knowledge that those audiences were open to heavy influence from pressure/campaign groups.

Respondents communicated mistrust in the Council and thus in the proposal. The consultation itself was heavily criticised, with almost all respondents voicing concern that not enough detail on the proposal was being provided.

Head Teachers are the key group for engagement, and having spent more time working with them, they have a deeper understanding of the proposal and as a group they are more positive about it. Most Head Teachers ultimately believe the proposal is flawed, but has potential. They are open to further discussions.

\* Calculated by every single response, including anyone who responded more than once that came in via the dedicated website forms and emails to [support@empoweringoureducators.co.uk](mailto:support@empoweringoureducators.co.uk)

## Comments on the consultation process

**There are two distinct strands of criticism on the consultation process.**

Firstly, the lack of detail in the proposal. Respondents wanted to know about individual school collectives (which have not yet been decided), to see detailed remits for new roles (which have not yet been written) and to see alternative proposals (which do not exist).

Secondly, a perceived positive spin on the way the proposal has been shared. By focusing on the projected benefits of the proposal, the proposal has appeared one-sided to many respondents.

Failing to clearly set out current shortcomings in Argyll and Bute's schools has led to respondents questioning the need for any change at all, making the proposal seem like a waste of time and money.

Combined with deep-rooted mistrust of the Council, this leaves a gap for people to insert their own theories on why change is proposed. For most respondents, that means Council cost-cutting and defunding of education.

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## Overview of findings

**Recruitment challenges and education reform are not resonating with any of our audiences as reasons for change. For most respondents, they certainly don't make the case for a significant change to the way we run our schools.**

Most respondents (except Head Teachers) believe the current system 'isn't broken'. Any perceived issues with schools are blamed on funding and resources - not on school leadership, workloads, or individual remits.

There is considerable mistrust in the proposal, with a commonly held view that this is a budget cutting exercise. The lack of evidence or workings shared alongside the proposal allowed space for respondents to question the rigour of its modelling.

All respondents, from Head Teachers to pupils to communities, are asking for much more detail - the sort of detail they can only get when actual collectives are planned and shared.

Almost all respondents are extremely strongly against removing or changing the 'Head Teacher' title. There is no specific dislike of 'Head of School', but rather there is a complete dismissal of any title that is not 'Head Teacher'.

Many respondents believe that the existence of the Executive Head Teacher role will inevitably lead to the homogenisation of schools and dilution of their individual identities.

However, both primary and secondary pupils were very positive about the idea of collectives, shared resources and collaboration between schools. But they worry about losing local identities - every pupil feels their own school is unique and special.



## Conclusions

**The response from both professionals and public has shown that consulting on a 'theoretical' model results in a high level of distrust. It has also shown that reasons for change are unconvincing if they are not supported by clear evidence.**

Until the Council is able to present a compelling case for change and a tangible model with fully described roles and clear information on what individual school collectives would look like, further engagement with public/community stakeholders is not recommended.

Our firm recommendation is to work exclusively with Head Teachers at the next stage, to shape a tangible model. Only then should this be taken back to wider audiences for consideration.

Head Teachers appreciate the challenges of their own positions and the wider education system. They can help co-develop the model to best fit their needs and ensure their individual contexts are considered. Head Teachers need to see a clear reason for their change of title, and they need to be meaningfully engaged in the next stage of development.

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# INTRODUCTION

## BACKGROUND

**In June 2021 a paper for educational change was submitted for Council approval, consisting of cluster working proposals for Argyll and Bute's schools beginning with the development of three pilot clusters.**

Significant negative press coverage and pushback from action groups resulted in a decision from the Council to conduct community consultation on the proposal before making a decision.

The consultation process was initially set for 12 weeks beginning 29th November 2021. This was extended to 1st March 2021, and then finally to 31st March 2022, to allow a greater level of understanding to be delivered by educational leaders directly to school staff and community groups.



## THE PROPOSAL

### **Argyll and Bute schools face a number of challenges due to their unique breadth of different settings.**

A high percentage of smaller schools, Head Teachers with heavy teaching commitments, falling school rolls, and difficulties in recruitment - particularly in school leadership.

Argyll and Bute Council have proposed transformative change to school leadership in the authority as one way to address these challenges.

The proposal is based around collective leadership, which would be achieved by grouping schools in small collectives, each with a shared collective leadership team.

Head Teachers would become Heads of School with each collective team of Heads led by one Executive Head Teacher. The Heads of School would each take on a specialism, with responsibility for leading knowledge on that subject within their team. School leaders would be non-teaching, freeing up their time for collaborative working. (Heads of the very smallest schools would retain a reduced teaching commitment.)

The proposal was under public consultation for four months. Stand has facilitated consultation across Argyll and Bute with both the education profession and the general public.

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# THE CONSULTATION



## THE CONSULTATION

**This public and professional consultation was conducted to gather feedback and input on the existing drafts of the leadership change proposal.**

The Education Transformation Board will act on these findings from Head Teachers, education professionals and the public when shaping its recommendations, which will then be presented to Argyll and Bute Council for decision on what will happen next.



## THE CONSULTATION

# METHODOLOGY

Consultation was split into engagement with education professionals, particularly Head Teachers, and engagement with the public.

**Presentations (in slideshow and video formats) were prepared that explained the reasons for change, shared the proposal, and posed questions to help frame responses. The presentations were tailored to appropriate levels of detail for each audience or stakeholder group.**

A website (Empowering our Educators) was published on 29th November 2021, where information and presentations could be accessed. The website provided clear ways for people to have their say, and included the full engagement timetable.

Audience-specific documents were disseminated through the website to:

- 29 November 2021: Parent and Community Councils;
- 29 November 2021: Elected Members;
- 3 December 2021: Head Teachers and school enquiries email to disseminate to school staff (prior engagement on the proposals was conducted with Head Teachers in focus groups)

The Empowering our Educators website included a questionnaire to enable our stakeholders to respond with their opinions on the proposal, positive or negative. Two open-ended questions enabled this input. A short list of the benefits which the authority believe the model delivers was provided for consultees to either agree, or disagree with. And finally an overall 'highly agree' or 'highly disagree' indication.

The website also enabled individuals to schedule 'one-to-one' sessions online with education professionals and ask questions directly. Finally, it provided a Frequently Asked Questions area which was regularly updated.

Argyll and Bute Council's social media channels were used to promote awareness of the website, as well as direct email addressed to the Council's existing education mailing lists.

Independent groups (eg. Community Councils, Parent Councils) were provided with a toolkit to facilitate their own engagement meetings, curate learnings and feed back through the Empowering our Educators website.

## Education professionals

**We received 169 responses from respondents who self-identified as teachers or school staff. 99.4% of those responses were made through the Empowering our Educators website and one response was submitted by email.**

All Head Teachers in Argyll and Bute were invited to a series of workshop sessions on 26th October–2nd November 2021 with the Heads of Service to explore the context and reasons for change. Following that, Head Teachers were engaged in groups of three to six to review the proposal (11–25th November 2021). 68 Head Teachers across the local authority took part in these sessions. The remainder, who were unavailable through illness or were only recently appointed Head Teachers, attended sessions on 14th February and 4th March 2022.

Consultation with Head Teachers included a second round of engagement, with the opportunity once again for Head Teachers to come together in small groups to share their views. These sessions took place from 17th to 26th March 2022.

There was a dedicated area on the Empowering our Educators website for school staff. Materials explaining the proposal and how it would affect them were shared with all school staff via direct email and general school enquiries email, and also disseminated by their Head Teachers.

Three webinars for school staff took place, on 15th, 22nd February and 14th March 2022, led by the Heads of Service and the Education Manager (Transformation).

Education managers and officers in the Education Service central team participated in facilitated sessions during the week beginning 29th November 2021. Sessions were also held for the Educational Psychology, Inclusion and Equity, Early Years and School Support teams with an opportunity to find out more about the proposals and ask questions of the Heads of Service.

Consultation with the relevant Trade Unions and Professional Associations has been ongoing throughout the consultation period. On 29th and 30th November 2021 Trade Unions and professional association members were invited to an information and discussion session. Following on from this the Heads of Education and Education Manager (Transformation) have met with AHDS, SLS and EIS regional representatives to present the proposal and answer questions.

Engagement is ongoing with the Joint Services Committee, the four weekly meeting of Trade Union, professional associations, HR and the Education Service where the proposals and consultation are a standard agenda item.

## THE CONSULTATION

# METHODOLOGY

### Public bodies

Argyll and Bute Council met with representatives of Bord na gadhlig and Comann nam Pàrant to discuss the proposal and explore opportunities for sharing Gaelic culture and language in the proposed school collectives. This was followed up by consultation sessions offered to parents of children and young people in Gaelic Medium Education on 22nd March 2022. We also published a fourth set of FAQ documents specifically for Gaelic related questions – both in English and Gaelic.

The Education Manager (Transformation) met, and will continue to meet with, diocese and representatives from SCES to discuss the implications of the proposal for denominational education in Argyll and Bute. The most recent of these meetings took place on 8th February 2022.

The proposals were shared with the Armed Forces and Community Partnership at their meeting on 25th February.

### School pupils

Age and context appropriate materials explaining the proposal were provided to all Head Teachers in Argyll and Bute for them to share, supporting Pupil Council engagement in every school. These materials were able to be viewed by the public on the website. Pupil Councils had their own section of the Empowering our Educators website, including presentations, videos and feedback forms. These were developed through focus groups with pupils and feedback from teachers and Head Teachers across the local authority. All Pupil Council feedback was returned for collation by the end of the school term.

The Education Service's Inclusion and Equity Team liaised with Head Teachers with regard to engagement with ASN pupils across the local authority, offering additional support or further differentiated materials where requested.

### The public

**We received 477 responses where respondents self-identified as either parent/guardian or Argyll and Bute resident. 95.8% of responses were made through the Empowering our Educators portal and 4.2% were submitted by email or post. It was clear from some organisational responses that they had undertaken surveys or other engagement activities and were therefore representing the views of a number of people.**

Five Q&A sessions were hosted for chairpersons of Community Councils and Parent Councils. The Heads of Service and Education Manager (Transformation) presented the proposal and answered questions from a total of 93 chairpersons from across Argyll and Bute at these sessions.

Chairpersons were encouraged to share the proposal with their Community Councils and Parent Councils for discussion, and feed back in a structured fashion through the Empowering our Educators website. Argyll and Bute Council offered the support of an education professional from the Education Services team to attend their discussions and answer any questions. 37 Community Councils and Parent Councils took up that offer.

Elected members were invited to attend sessions, held between mid-December 2021 and mid-January 2022, with the Heads of Service and Education Manager (Transformation) to explore the proposal, give feedback and have their questions answered one-to-one.

A briefing was held for members of the local press and representatives of community newsletters on 25th January 2022. An interview was arranged with the Times Education Supplement on 16th February 2022.

All parents of children and young people in Argyll and Bute schools received a summary of the proposal titled 'In a Nutshell' via the Xpressions app (which is regularly used to share notifications from schools with parents). This was also shared with all school staff by email.

The leadership of Argyll and Bute Council and Education Heads of Service met with both Jenni Minto MSP and Jackie Baillie MSP to discuss the proposals.

The facility was provided for any individual to book a one-to-one call with an education professional from Argyll and Bute Council to personally discuss the proposal. This opportunity was promoted through local press and social media. 28 such calls were held.

Questions and feedback on the proposal arrived through the website and via email to [support@empoweringoureducators.co.uk](mailto:support@empoweringoureducators.co.uk). Over 400 emails and enquiries were received and responded to.

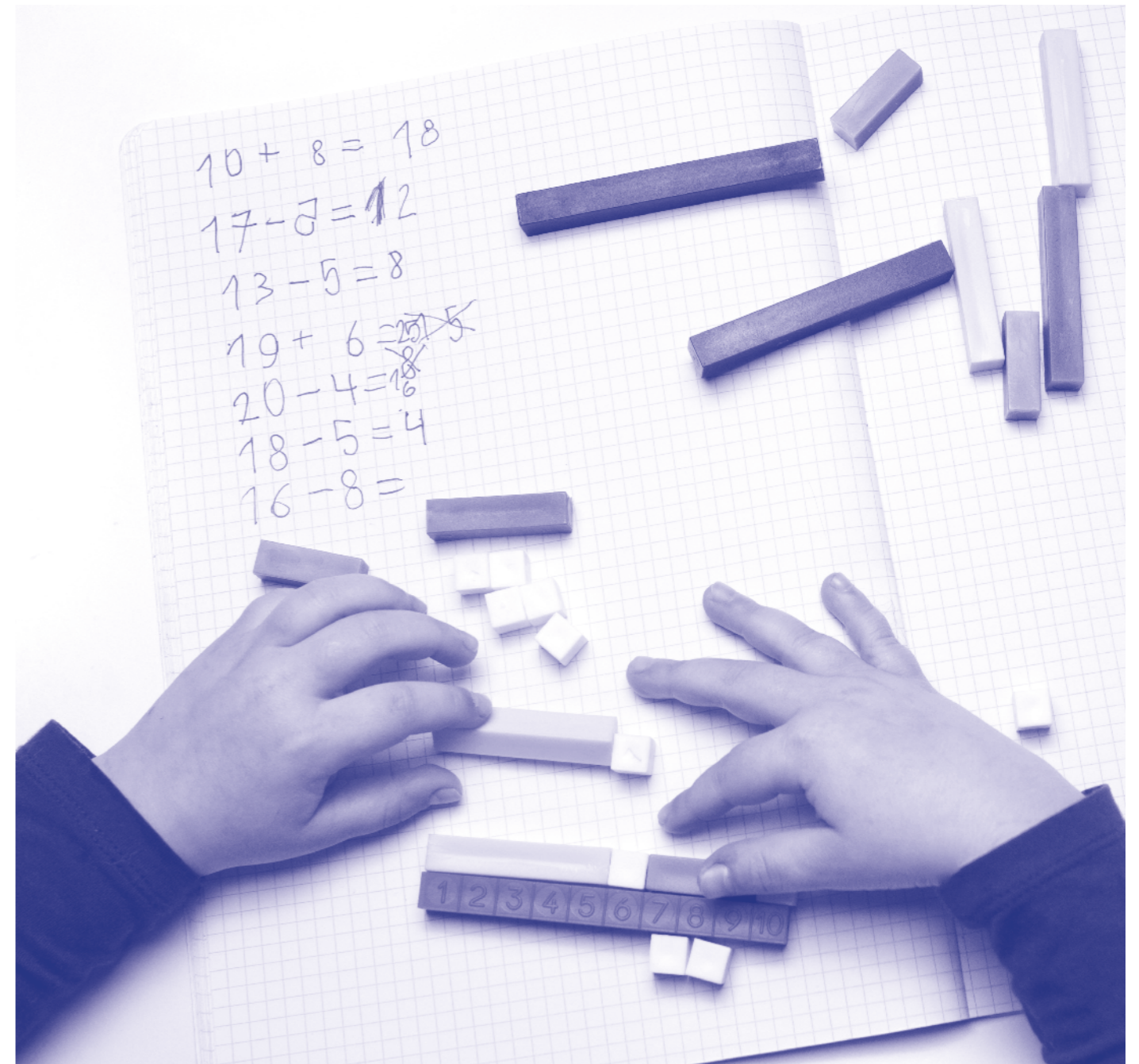
Three sets of Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) were collated, responded to and published to date. December questions were collated and responded to in FAQ 1, published through the website on 6th January 2022. January questions were collated and responded to in FAQ 2, published through the website on 4th February 2022. February questions were collated and responded to in FAQ 3, published through the website on 4th March 2022.

\* Respondents were parents/guardians, residents/non-residents, individual school pupils and public bodies/organisations.

# THE CONSULTATION METHODOLOGY

## Engagement programme, as published October 2021

| Dates              | Audience  | Method  |
|--------------------|---|---|
| Oct 2021           | Teaching unions and professional associations               | Workshop sessions to consult on and explore proposals                 |
| Oct–Nov 2021       | All Head Teachers in Argyll and Bute                        | Workshop sessions to consult on and explore proposals                 |
| Dec 2021 –Jan 2022 | School staff  | Head Teachers engage with their school staff                          |
| Oct 2021 –Mar 2022 | Elected members   | Ongoing one-to-one engagement   |
| Nov 2021           | Higher/Further Education bodies in Argyll & Bute            | Workshop sessions to consult on and explore proposals                 |
| Nov 2021 –Jan 2022 | Parent, Community & Pupil Councils                          | Toolkit supplied to allow self-led sessions and feedback on proposals |
| Jan 2022 (2 weeks) | Open consultation   | One-to-one virtual drop-in sessions held online                       |
| Nov 2021 –Jan 2022 | Businesses, diocese, Bòrd na Gàidhlig & other public bodies | Toolkit supplied to allow self-led sessions and feedback on proposals |
| Nov 2021 –Mar 2022 | <b>All</b>  | Ongoing engagement and updates via dedicated social media channels    |





## THE CONSULTATION CONTEXT

Argyll and Bute's schools were still dealing with the effects of Covid-19. Pandemic restrictions and a spike in cases locally resulted in significant staff absences across schools, particularly in March 2022.

**Local elections were taking place in May 2022, straight after the consultation period ended. The school leadership proposal was a hot topic for residents.**

EIS, Scotland's largest teaching union, actively campaigned against the proposal, even before the consultation was live, and promoted their opinion on the proposal to Parent Councils during the consultation. Their survey of members did not take place until the final two weeks of the consultation. The survey did not require sign-in to vote, any individual could vote, and any individual could vote multiple times. The 52% response they recorded is therefore not robust and reliable.

Wise4All, a local lobbying group, rallied Parent Councils and local press, driving their agenda on the validity of the consultation and promoting a message that the proposal was driven by budget cuts.

Press coverage across the authority led on cuts to Head Teachers. This headline remained constant during the consultation period.

## THE CONSULTATION

# A THEORETICAL MODEL

The purpose of this consultation was to gather input and ideas from communities to help shape the proposed changes to school leadership.

Many respondents misinterpreted the process as a request to either approve or reject the proposal immediately - instead of an opportunity to co-create and improve it.

**In some cases, especially with Community and Parent Councils, this common misconception was further fuelled by lobbying groups promoting rejection of the proposal.**

In the proposal, the reasons for change centred around falling school rolls, recruitment challenges and national educational reforms.

The proposal did not discuss the potential consequences of not moving to the proposed new delivery model.

At this stage in the process many areas of information were not yet decided/defined:

- The criteria or method for how school collectives would be determined.
- The financial challenges the authority faces in delivering the service.
- The workings on how the theoretical model and example collectives were costed.
- Clear job descriptions for the Executive Head Teacher and Head of School roles.
- A recruitment strategy for increasing the number of classroom teachers.

For many respondents, this lack of information was a significant barrier to exploring the model from a wider perspective.





## THE CONSULTATION OBSERVATIONS

This consultation attracted significant levels of negative feedback across two related key areas: lack of evidence presented, and general mistrust of the reasons given for change.

**Lobbying bodies and the EIS teaching union ran a consolidated campaign to disrupt the consultation process with mistrust, accusations of budget cuts, and headlines on schools without Head Teachers. This shows in the high levels of misinterpretation in comments received through the feedback.**

Outwith these recurring themes, there were relatively few comments that challenged the basic premise of the proposed school leadership model.

There were few comments from parents about non-teaching Heads, nor the value of Heads of Schools working together - two of the core elements of the model. Specialisms were rarely acknowledged, nor was the value of having this expertise on hand when required. There were very rarely comments on whether our schools would benefit from shared resources. There was no recognition of consistency and quality of education across all schools.

School pupils were one audience who saw immediate value in the proposal. Pupil Councils voiced an understanding that the model would provide broader access to their peers, and to a wider teaching base.

Our qualitative research, working with Head Teachers to understand their concerns and also their hopes for change, was more balanced. All Head Teachers were willing to engage and to share their own experiences. And without exception, they were willing to be involved in shaping change proposals.

## RESPONDENTS AND RESPONSES

## RESPONDENTS TO THE CONSULTATION

Argyll and Bute has an active, engaged community both in and out of its schools. School staff, pupils and Parent Councils were particularly keen to to understand and be heard.

Overall there were 804 responses to the consultation.\* The majority of these (93%) were consultation form responses which were received through the Empowering our Educators online portal (748).

In addition, there were 60 email submissions that did not follow the consultation form structure. These responses ranged in length from individuals writing several paragraphs in an email through to organisations producing a report and submitting their consultation surveys. Of these additional submissions, the vast majority (24, 40%) were from Parent Councils.

In line with the Scottish Government's approach to analysing consultation responses and for the purposes of this analysis, each response was treated as equal in weight. For example, if an organisational response indicated that they had consulted with their members in order to respond to the consultation and therefore representing a large number of people, this was treated as a single response.

Respondents to the consultation stated their 'audience type' as part of the response. In line with standard practice for the analysis of Scottish Government consultations, these self-selections have been accepted on face value and have formed the basis of our analysis.

\* Calculated by every single response, including anyone who responded more than once - minus test responses - that came in via the dedicated website forms and emails to [support@empoweringoureducators.co.uk](mailto:support@empoweringoureducators.co.uk)

## Audience groups

The list on the right breaks down the responses received by audience group. The categories are those provided to respondents in the questionnaire and have been used as the basis of the analysis.

It was possible for a respondent to submit their feedback in several categories eg as a parent, and as a teaching professional. For the purposes of this analysis, where this has happened, the self-selection has been respected.

**School staff**

- Head Teachers
- Middle leadership
- Teachers
- Early years
- Non-teaching staff
- Classroom support staff

**Pupils**

- Primary pupils
- Secondary pupils

**Community bodies**

- Community Councils
- Parent Councils
- The Educational Institute of Scotland (EIS)
- Association of Headteachers and Deputies in Scotland (AHDS)
- School Leaders Scotland (SLS)
- Diocese of Argyll and the Isles
- Argyll and Bute Community Network for Carers of Care Experienced Children
- North West Mull Community Woodland Company
- Wise4All

**Public**

- Parents, guardians or carers
- Argyll and Bute residents



## RESPONDENTS AND RESPONSES

# FEEDBACK ON THE CONSULTATION PROCESS

There were a significant number of criticisms of the consultation process, particularly from Parent Council and Community Council respondents.

**Many Parent Council and Community Council respondents felt the consultation was biased in its delivery of the proposal and that the questionnaire was designed to generate positive responses.**

These criticisms arrived in all formats of submission, including the Empowering our Educators website, the offline submissions and the 34 Parent/Community Council engagement events held with stakeholders throughout the course of the consultation.

There were substantially less comments on the consultation process from any of the other audience types, across all forms of response.



This criticism of the consultation process included:

- The consultation document was promoting only a positive picture of the proposal.
- The proposal did not give more options.
- Concerns were raised about the lack of detail in the proposal and the need for more information.
- The consultation period was thought to be not long enough and that the Parent/Community Council chairs felt under-informed to support this exercise.
- There were questions around the timing of the consultation in relation to the pandemic, the current stresses on the workforce.
- There was misunderstanding that they were being asked to vote for or against the proposals. And a concern that the proposals would be pushed through as a result of this consultation process (the purpose of the consultation which was to engage and gather opinion before the decision to proceed to the next stage of a process would be made by the Council in the Autumn of 2022).
- Concerns were raised about a perceived lack of engagement with Head Teachers and school staff. There was a view that there needs to be more public engagement and more involvement from Parent Councils specifically.
- There was a view that the assumptions in the document were not evidence-based and an impact assessment needed to be delivered, particularly in relation to the Islands.
- The questionnaire was considered to be biased to a positive response.
- Respondents also thought that the model was already being treated as a 'done deal'.
- Some respondents also thought that the proposal did not reflect the reality of current structure and did not make a clear argument for why change is needed.
- Several raised the issue of a perceived lack of a link to the wider education reform.

In separate email contribution between Parent/Community Councils and the authority, issues raised regarding the short consultation period included a concern that Parent Councils were not equipped to support this consultation on behalf of the authority. And that it did not fall within their remit.

## RESPONDENTS AND RESPONSES

## ANALYSIS METHODOLOGY

Consultation was primarily conducted via the Empowering our Educators website, in the form of a questionnaire.

The questionnaire was supported by clear guidance on how to submit feedback in a structured manner.

**The portal protected the integrity of the responses and ensured that all submissions were recorded, stored securely and backed up. Argyll and Bute Council agreed to accept feedback through other channels. Each submission was acknowledged when received.**

All responses that were received offline were read in full and mapped against the two open-ended questions. These responses were then integrated into the final analysis and reporting in relation to each question and were also scanned for themes using keyword searches.

Quotes have been included for illustrative purposes but these are not intended to be representative, given the broad range of audiences that responded to the consultation. In some instances, these quotes have been shortened for conciseness of the overall report.

All consultation responses, including the detailed contributions of the 804 individual responses and individuals that provided written submissions to the consultation, are available alongside this report and must therefore be considered in conjunction with this report to reach a full understanding of the breadth of the debate.

Feedback is segmented by audience group and geographic area. Island responses have been supplied to the Council to facilitate an Island Communities Impact Assessment. Equality impact assessments were prepared.

**Quantitative analysis**

The quantitative analysis presents the numbers and percentages for each relevant closed question in the Empowering our Educators format, by audience type alongside the total number of responses for each question.

Please note however, that the benefits resonating with each of the target audiences is illustrative rather than definitive - giving the authority a sense-check on what areas of the model were recognised by the respondents as a positive output from the proposal.

As noted above, in relation to the responses that were received via email, not all respondents indicated the benefits in the structure provided by the Empowering our Educators website.

**Qualitative analysis**

Given the basis of the consultation on gathering opinions through two open-ended text questions, the focus has therefore been on a thematic analysis of recurring issues. These comments were collated in audience sets, and sub-sets, geography area and type, colour coded in relation to positive, neutral, or negative response. All format of submission received via either the portal or by email were coded in this way.

All responses that were received offline were read in full and mapped against the open-ended questions where possible. These responses were then integrated into the final analysis.

Quotes have been included for illustrative purposes but these are not intended to be representative. In some instances, these quotes have been shortened for conciseness of the overall report.

All consultation responses and written submissions to the consultation are available alongside this report and must therefore be considered in conjunction with this report to reach a full understanding of the breadth of the debate.

As with all consultations it is important to bear in mind that the views of those who have responded are not representative of the views of the wider population. Individuals (and organisations) who have a keen interest in a topic – and the capacity to respond – are more likely to participate in a consultation than those who do not. This self-selection means that the views of consultation participants cannot be generalised to the wider population.

It is important to note that some of the responses to this consultation contain a significant level of misunderstanding, and distrust of the proposal. It is not possible in a report such as this to fully reflect the level of detail included in these submissions. It is difficult to reflect all the nuances of all the responses in a single report. This document is therefore a qualitative summary of the main themes coming through from the consultation.

We therefore strongly recommend that interested parties consult the responses that have been published alongside this report for further detail. For the same reason, we would suggest that, while we have provided high level summaries of each chapter, the full content of the chapter should be considered in order to assess the balance of views.

# SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

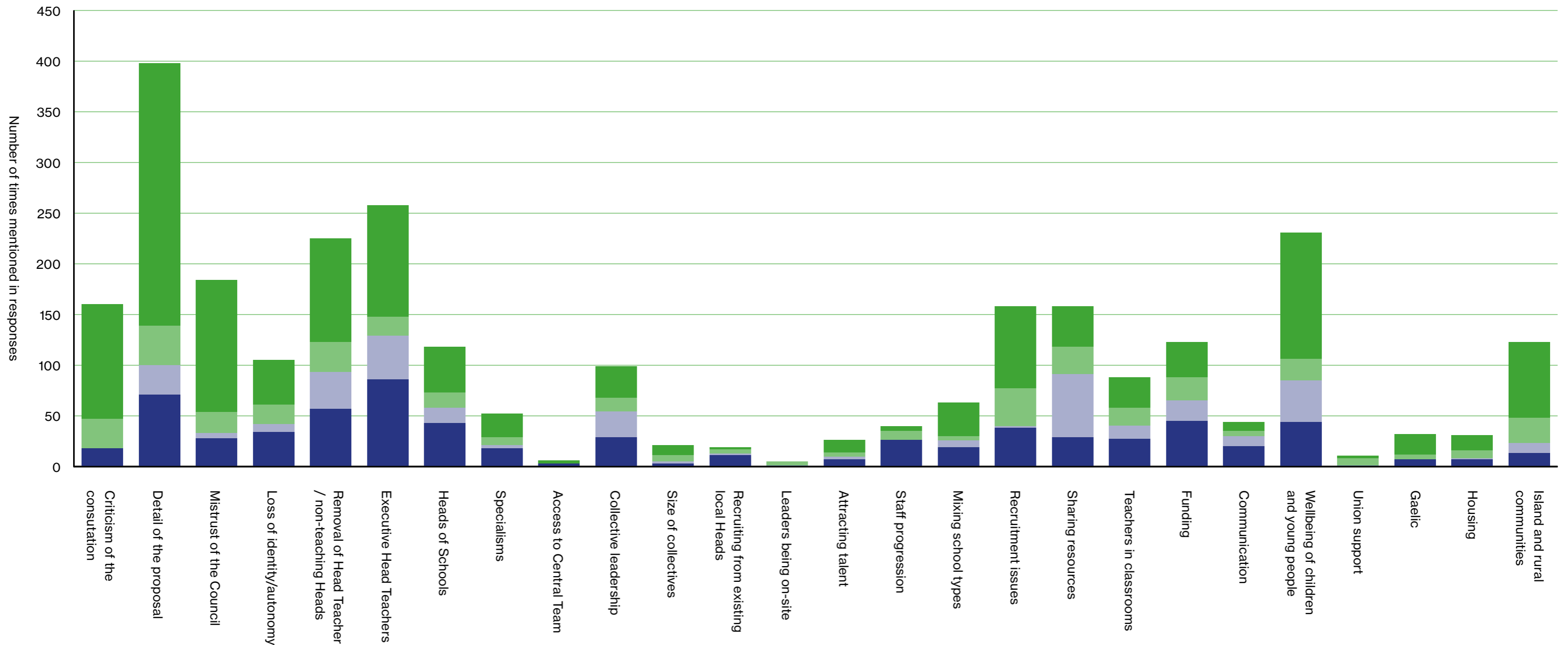
SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

# MOST COMMON THEMES

26 common themes were identified across public consultation responses. This chart shows how many times each was mentioned in a response, to highlight the most frequently raised areas of interest or concern.

Stakeholder groups

- School staff
- Pupils (primary & secondary)
- Community bodies
- Public



SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

# MOST COMMON THEMES

The tables below highlight the themes raised most often by each group of respondents. This gives a clear indication of what each group is most interested in or concerned about.

| Common themes among ALL RESPONDENTS          | Number of mentions |
|--|--------------------|
| <b>Detail of the proposal</b>                | <b>380</b>         |
| <b>Executive Head Teachers</b>               | <b>254</b>         |
| Wellbeing of children and young people       | 225                |
| Removal of Head Teacher / non-teaching Heads | 218                |
| Mistrust of the Council                      | 177                |

| Common themes among SCHOOL STAFF             | Number of mentions |
|--|--------------------|
| <b>Executive Head Teachers</b>               | <b>86</b>          |
| <b>Detail of the proposal</b>                | <b>71</b>          |
| Removal of Head Teacher / non-teaching Heads | 57                 |
| Funding                                      | 45                 |
| Wellbeing of children and young people       | 44                 |

| Common themes among PRIMARY PUPILS           | Number of mentions |
|--|--------------------|
| <b>Sharing resources</b>                     | <b>58</b>          |
| <b>Executive Head Teachers</b>               | <b>39</b>          |
| Wellbeing of children and young people       | 38                 |
| Removal of Head Teacher / non-teaching Heads | 32                 |
| Detail of the proposal                       | 26                 |

| Common themes among PUBLIC             | Number of mentions |
|--|--------------------|
| <b>Detail of the proposal</b>          | <b>259</b>         |
| <b>Mistrust of the Council</b>         | <b>130</b>         |
| Wellbeing of children and young people | 125                |
| Criticism of the consultation          | 113                |
| Executive Head Teachers                | 110                |

| Common themes among COMMUNITY BODIES         | Number of mentions |
|--|--------------------|
| <b>Detail of the proposal</b>                | <b>39</b>          |
| <b>Recruitment issues</b>                    | <b>37</b>          |
| Removal of Head Teacher / non-teaching Heads | 30                 |
| Criticism of the consultation                | 29                 |
| Sharing resources                            | 27                 |

| Common themes among SECONDARY PUPILS                | Number of mentions |
|---|--------------------|
| <b>Sharing resources</b>                            | <b>4</b>           |
| <b>Executive Head Teachers</b>                      | <b>4</b>           |
| <b>Removal of Head Teacher / non-teaching Heads</b> | <b>4</b>           |
| Detail of the proposal                              | 3                  |
| Wellbeing of children and young people              | 3                  |



## SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

## OVERVIEW

Most respondents said their schools are doing fine - change isn't necessary. But Head Teachers told a different story, of overload and stress.



## Reasons for change

**Recruitment challenges and education reform are not resonating as reasons for change. For most respondents, they certainly don't make the case for a significant change to the way we run our schools.**

There was little confidence that the model could help create a more sustainable system, fit for future education delivery.

Equity of provision for all children and young people is not the primary concern for most respondents. From parents to Head Teachers, their focus is primarily on what this means for their own child or their own school.

Most respondents (except Head Teachers) believe the current system 'isn't broken'. Any perceived issues with schools are blamed on funding and resources - not on school leadership, workloads, or individual remits.

Head Teachers tell us that they are struggling with workload, stress and daily demands, in a role that is only getting more demanding (this is a national issue). The challenging nature of their current role was not noted by other respondents.

## Lack of trust

**There is considerable mistrust in the proposal, with a commonly held view that this is a budget cutting exercise.**

The lack of evidence or workings shared alongside the proposal allowed space for respondents to question the rigour of its modelling.

The consultation process was criticised as biased, vague, and lacking in transparency. This was despite education service leaders being highly visible and available throughout the consultation, making every effort to engage with respondents on their own terms and help them understand the proposal.

Teaching unions campaigned and lobbied Parent Councils with their rejection of the proposals. As a result, the union voice was quoted more by non-educational audiences than it was by school staff respondents.

The consultation was disrupted by a few loud campaigning voices with an unclear agenda. This is expected as part of any consultation process but was seen to be exceptionally effective here.

## School collectives

**Respondents repeatedly said that no two schools in Argyll and Bute are the same. Small schools, large schools, urban, rural, island, 2-18, early years, primary, secondary, denominational, Gaelic Medium, etc. There is a commonly-held belief that people with experience of one school type cannot understand the intricacies of another.**

All respondents, from Head Teachers to pupils to communities, are asking for much more detail - the sort of detail they can only get when actual collectives are planned and shared. Without this information, the majority of audiences are not able or willing to engage meaningfully with the proposal.

Most respondents share a concern that the collective model would risk the unique identities of schools. One young respondent's analogy of their schools becoming 'like McDonald's' described this fear perfectly. A sense of place and belonging is highly valued.

## SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

# OVERVIEW

The title of 'Head Teacher' holds emotional weight. Changing it will never be popular, and proposing to do so has hampered consultation.

## Heads of Schools

**Almost all respondents are very strongly against removing or changing the 'Head Teacher' title. There is no specific dislike of 'Head of School', but rather there is a complete dismissal of any title that is not 'Head Teacher'.**

The proposed change of job title has disrupted the whole consultation and distracted from rest of the story, providing a platform for negative press and lobbying headlines - encouraging a misconception that Head Teachers would be removed from schools.

Most respondents struggled to see the proposed Head of School role as having parity with existing Head Teachers. Partly because of an assumption that the Executive Head Teacher would be taking on the 'bigger' parts of the leadership role.

No group of respondents has been able to see past the change of title, and communicating the model has been made significantly more difficult because of this one element.

## Executive Head Teachers

**Few respondents see the Executive Head Teacher role as necessary for the proposed model to succeed. Many see it purely as added bureaucracy - a waste of money which could otherwise be spent directly in schools and classrooms.**

Including the words 'Head Teacher' in the title allowed misunderstanding to take root, with many respondents believing the Executive Head Teacher would be the only 'real' Head Teacher left in each collective after 'demoting' others to Head of School.

Many respondents believe that the existence of the Executive Head Teacher role will inevitably lead to the homogenisation of schools and dilution of their individual identities.

Many Head Teachers see the role as an unnecessary layer of scrutiny that challenges their leadership status and autonomy. Some interpret it as a very similar role to the past remits of Education Officers or Education Managers and question why those are not being reintroduced instead.

## Pupils

**Pupil Councils, with the support of their teachers, engaged fully with the proposal and provided valuable, articulate insight, with consideration for their peers in other schools and for their teachers.**

Both primary and secondary pupils were very positive about the idea of collectives, shared resources and collaboration between schools. They saw wider opportunities (both educational and social) and greater equity as the main benefits of the proposal.

Pupils are concerned for the wellbeing of their teachers and think the model could improve their working lives - but they also see where it might bring challenges, particularly in ensuring parity between schools. And they worry about losing local identities - every pupil feels their own school is unique and special.

They also acknowledged how challenging change can be for many - a point which adult respondents missed.



# THE RESPONSES



## SCHOOL STAFF

Argyll and Bute's Head Teachers are the key opinion-shapers, as leaders of their staff teams. They want an active, participatory role in the final shaping of the model.

68 of Argyll and Bute's Head Teachers participated in group workshop sessions. The candid nature of their responses demonstrates real commitment to their schools and to building a system that positions them for the future.

Head Teachers are struggling with expanding remits, overwhelming workloads and a severe shortage of supply teachers.

There is suspicion of Argyll and Bute Council's motives and school staff at all levels assume this proposal is about cutting costs.

There is widespread misunderstanding among teachers that Head Teachers will be 'lost' from schools, leaving no leader on-site.

"My biggest challenge is our enormous, relentless workload. Being Head Teacher is a life of sacrifice."

"You spend a lot of your day covering things that should really be done by somebody else, then begin your actual job as Head at eight o'clock at night."

"I strongly feel that Heads should not have a teaching commitment."

"I worry that the formal collective groups may not work as well as the informal groups that have already formed."

"If this model were to go ahead ... I think Heads would have to have their input, to be invested in it."

"We are a suspicious and highly unionised profession, and the job title change makes us very concerned. It feels like a trick is being pulled."

"What will happen to my Principal Teacher job?"

"This proposal strikes me as yet another long term money saving exercise. I believe the educational justification is very weak."

"I think it's a mistake not having a hands-on, available, Head Teacher for the children, parents and staff."

"Head Teachers are needed in schools, not out of schools."

If the big driver is to free up the Head Teachers to lead rather than teach, surely employing more class teachers would be a better use of resources?"

"Although this may be appropriate in some more rural areas of Argyll and Bute, in more populated areas the benefits seem minimal."

# SCHOOL STAFF

## Quantitative research methodology

An email was sent to all teachers and school staff in Argyll and Bute, with a personalised link to an online survey (hosted on the Empowering our Educators website).

If there was more than one response from the same email address, both were analysed and counted.

There were some misunderstandings on how the response form worked. The multiple choice question of “What do you think the main benefits of this proposal could be?” was not mandatory, and users could choose to select none. However, many responders selected “Other (please explain below)” and used this opportunity to express, in their view, there were no benefits. Therefore, any selection of “Other (please explain below)” was not quantified and counted as a benefit.

For open-ended questions in the response form (“Other Benefits”, “What are your main reservations about the proposal?” and “Is there anything else you would like to share?”) and any responses received via the *support@empoweringoureducators.co.uk* email address, responses were categorised under 26 wide-ranging themes. For example, if one respondent mentioned the “Consultation process”, “Detail of the proposal” and “Mistrust of the council” within their question responses, then this would be counted against all three themes. This was to give a broad overview of the most common points of discussion.

Those submissions received outwith the portal (to the *support@empoweringoureducators.co.uk* email address) did not answer the multiple choice questions - therefore these responses are not quantified in: “Which of these best describes you?”, “What do you think the main benefits of this proposal could be?” and “Having engaged with the proposal, do you believe the School Collective Leadership model will positively affect the future education of young people in Argyll and Bute”.

## Responses

|                                  |            |
|----------------------------------|------------|
| <b>Total number of responses</b> | <b>168</b> |
| Duplicates omitted               | N/A        |

| Respondents' roles (Selected from list)                                      | Number |
|--|--------|
| In a teaching role   | 81     |
| Head Teacher   | 16     |
| In a deputy head, faculty Head or Principal Teacher role (middle leadership) | 31     |
| In a support role in the classroom   | 16     |
| In a non-teaching role in a school   | 18     |
| In an early years setting  | 6      |

There are 2,042 staff across education in Argyll and Bute (excluding casual posts). Therefore, this represents an **8.2% response rate** (2,042/167), including 16 of our Head Teachers. However, all of our Head Teachers contributed directly in online sessions.

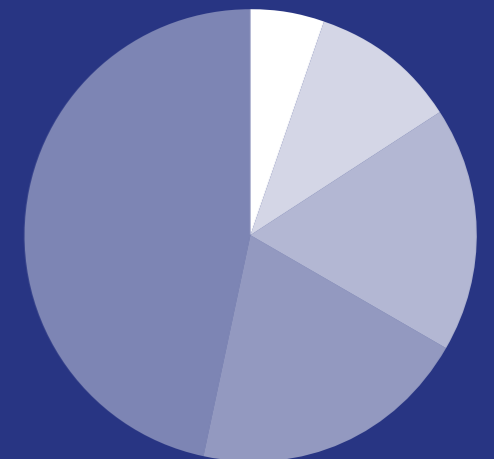
**Q. What do you think the main benefits of this proposal could be?**

| Benefits (Selected from list*)  | Positive responses |
|---|--------------------|
| More teachers in classrooms   | 34                 |
| Sharing specialists (like science teachers) with neighbouring schools                         | 35                 |
| Giving Heads more time to lead schools, instead of having them teach as well                  | 49                 |
| More equality between schools, with resources better shared                                   | 29                 |
| Expert specialists in local schools (like assessment specialists, or early years specialists) | 28                 |
| More collaboration between schools  | 56                 |
| Improved progression for pupils between primary classes and when moving to secondary          | 30                 |
| An Executive Head Teacher whose job is to drive improvement across all the local schools      | 21                 |

\* Respondents were able to select multiple or no answers.

**Q. Having engaged with the proposal, do you believe the collective leadership model will positively affect the future education of young people in Argyll and Bute?**

| Answer (Selected from list) | Number of responses |
|-----------------------------|---------------------|
| Strongly Agree              | 9                   |
| Agree                       | 18                  |
| Neither agree nor disagree  | 29                  |
| Disagree                    | 34                  |
| Strongly disagree           | 78                  |



## SCHOOL STAFF

## HEAD TEACHERS

94% of Argyll and Bute's Head Teachers were engaged in mixed groups of between one and seven participants. Schools of all sizes and contexts were represented.

## Methodology

The key principles behind the school leadership proposal were shared and open questions were posed around each. This enabled free discussion between the Head Teachers as peers. This approach focussed conversation on the reasons for change and the goals of the proposal, rather than theoretical details of how it might be delivered.

61 of 67\* Head Teachers attended the first set of two-hour sessions in November 2021 and 54 of 65\* attended the second set in March 2022. All actively engaged in a professional manner and helped ensure the individual context of each school was considered.

Given the scope of the engagement, it is difficult to reflect all the nuances of all the responses in a single report. This document is therefore a qualitative summary of the main themes of the consultation. High level summaries of each topic are provided, but the full content of the comments selected for this document should be considered in order to assess the balance of views.

\* Refers to total number of Head Teachers in post across Argyll and Bute at each time - 67 in November 2021 and 65 in March 2022.

## Context

These engagement sessions ran at the end of an intensive five months' authority-wide consultation period. Head Teachers had been the first group engaged with at the beginning of those five months.

Head Teachers had also received two separate briefing sessions with the Heads of Service. They were often present at engagement sessions with their Parent Councils, where support from an education professional was also offered. Finally, one-to-one sessions were also conducted with some Head Teachers who took the opportunity during general drop-in sessions, or by contacting their Heads of Service individually.

These engagement sessions took place during the final two-week period prior to the Spring break, and during a period when the schools were experiencing high levels of staff absence due to Covid-19 (Argyll and Bute had a spike at this time).

There was no shortage of input. The candid nature of the comments received from Head Teachers demonstrates real commitment to their schools and to building a better system (regardless of their feelings about this model).

## Observations

Head Teachers across Argyll and Bute operate in very different scenarios. Schools that look similar on paper often operate in significantly different situations.

The proposal talks about Argyll and Bute's falling school rolls, recruitment challenges and educational reforms. The proposal does not talk about sustainability of our schools, the equity in quality of education delivered across our schools, or the potential consequences of not moving to a new delivery model.

At this stage in the proposed model's development many areas of information were unavailable to Head Teachers:

- How the collectives would be determined.
- The financial challenges the authority faces in delivering the service.
- The workings on how the model was costed.
- Clear job descriptions for the Executive Head Teacher and Head of School roles.
- A recruitment strategy for increasing the number of classroom teachers.

We acknowledged the gaps in detail in the proposal at the start of each session and then discussed the fundamental parts of the proposed model one by one to engage Head Teachers in the thinking that underpins it. This helped each Head Teacher consider the proposal in their own school context.

These sessions were rich in conversations. Head Teachers are open to knowing more and want to be closely involved in co-creating and shaping the model as it develops.

This creates a powerful opportunity to include Argyll and Bute's Head Teachers in the next stage of development if the proposal goes forward. Doing so could build strong relationships between the authority's education leadership and their most senior school management. It would demonstrate trust and respect, and show that you value their experience. Co-creation and collaborative problem solving would ultimately provide the best results.

Helensburgh and Lomond Co-operative (HALCO) is an area that may need to be considered separately. They believe that the challenges described in the proposal do not apply to their local area. They especially do not see the benefit of the Executive Head Teacher role. Although we heard various statements to the contrary, most HALCO Head Teachers do not recognise a lack of equity of voice in their cluster.

## SCHOOL STAFF: HEAD TEACHERS

## SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Head Teachers are struggling with expanding remits and overwhelming workloads.

Admin and HR paperwork is taking over their time. They often need to cover classes because there is a severe shortage of supply teachers.

Head Teachers concern themselves primarily with what's good for their own school.

The 'siloed' way that schools operate in the current system encourages this mindset.

There is a huge lack of trust and Head Teachers assume this proposal is about cutting costs.

This is largely because of the model's lack of detail at its current stage.

Everybody supports collaborative leadership in principle, but many Heads believe they already collaborate well enough and resist any change.

Most Heads welcome the idea of non-teaching roles, but some - especially in smaller schools - simply enjoy teaching classes and don't want to stop. However, being non-teaching is seen as a pipe dream - something which never happens in reality, despite the best of intentions.

There is huge attachment to the 'Head Teacher' title and suspicion around why it would be changed. Heads are concerned about having their remits added to with specialisms and about salaries being reduced.

The Executive Head Teacher role is, by far, the most controversial element of the model for Head Teachers.

There is no real understanding of what specialisms would be, how they would be implemented and how they would work day-to-day.

Some Heads think the proposed model offers more support to previously daunting roles, which may help with recruitment and progression. But most feel it fails to offer anything new to ambitious teaching staff.

Heads of larger schools, especially in the HALCO cluster, are more likely to feel the proposal does not offer any new benefits over the leadership structures they already have.

Many of the barriers to recruitment are outwith the control of the education service - like housing availability and affordability. There are concerns that continuing recruitment difficulties will prevent the proposed model from being implemented effectively.



## SCHOOL STAFF: HEAD TEACHERS

**BEING A HEAD TEACHER IN 2022**

Head Teachers are struggling with expanding remits and overwhelming workloads.

Admin and HR paperwork is taking over their time.

They often need to cover classes because there are few supply teachers.



“I am a non-teaching Head of a medium sized school, and the best part of my role is being that figurehead - leading the school and getting to know all the children, not just your own class as you do in a classroom. It’s a different relationship. It’s about knowing them holistically - their parents, their circumstance. I know more about their lives than a classroom teacher does. It’s a richer relationship and I thoroughly enjoy it.”

“I see the impact of my leadership. We become leaders for a reason - for me because I think I have something to contribute and an impact to have across the school.”

“My biggest challenge is the breadth of the job. We all need to mop up sick sometimes, we are leaders and we have to do the things we ask our staff to do. Everything from essentially being a social worker for my school down to those HR processes. The breadth is the biggest challenge but also the greatest pleasure.”

“I’d like to do more of the strategic leadership of my school. Sometimes that’s the thing that gets put aside because operational, immediate things need quick responses. The strategy stuff can fall off the end of your desk.”

## SCHOOL STAFF: HEAD TEACHERS

## BEING A HEAD TEACHER IN 2022

## Revisiting the discussion with 54 Head Teachers in March 2022 we heard more on the same themes.

“My biggest challenge is our enormous, relentless workload. Being Head Teacher is a life of sacrifice. You work way beyond your hours every day to keep your head above water. It shouldn't be what you sign up for, but it is. I am a non-teaching Head and the workload is relentless.”

“Education Scotland keeps me up at night. The scrutiny. Staffing ... loads of things.”

“My to-do lists have their own to-do lists. I can never switch off from the school. I'm always thinking and planning about my school. It's a lot. You can never switch off. You worry about everything. Always.”

“My biggest challenge is keeping all the plates spinning. Putting together things like holiday assurance calendars - who holiday assures me? I'd like more time to think strategically about the school.”

“We are always fighting for the support which is the child's right. I think the reality is that as Head you are the ASN, you're doing lunch duty, you're taking phone calls, and that's going to get worse. We already tell our Education Officers what we need, we already don't get it, and I don't see that the new model will change that.”

“Our biggest challenge, even before Covid, is workload. Strategic work is done in our own time. I'd like more thinking time, with my senior leadership team - to drive my school forward. We're reactive rather than proactive at the moment.”

“I work 80 hours a week, and that hasn't changed because of Covid. I can never have a week where I'm not the janitor, cook the lunch, run a nursery and a one class school at the same time. Be the classroom teacher and be at a meeting. My typical week is to be two or three people most of the time. Biggest challenge is to keep my workload into a reasonable limit. Keeping focus is so hard. I applied to be a Head Teacher. And I want to be a teaching Head Teacher. A proper teaching Head Teacher. A proper funding model that works for our size of school.”

“It's not that we don't welcome parent voices, but I don't think there is any profession under as much scrutiny as ours. It's very difficult to manage parent expectations and voices, especially in this day and age.”

“Sometimes we feel we can't do right for doing wrong. We're walking a tightrope between being the managers and experts we are and sometimes having to apologise for rubbing people the wrong way. I overthink a lot, and the what if scenarios run around my head all night. You can feel very vulnerable as a Head.”

“Even before Covid I was being called in to cover lessons, and also cover playtimes and lunchtimes. My hourly rate to sit and watch kids eat is not a good use of resource. You spend a lot of your day covering things that should really be done by somebody else, then begin your actual job as Head at eight o'clock at night. We have a huge recruitment problem at all levels. Typically we get one applicant per each interviewable post.”

“Carrying the heavy weight of so much responsibility. Knowing whether you've taken the right decision, what the consequences might be, etc. masses of us are awake in the middle of the night, feeling stressed about the job. It's worrying about the things you haven't managed to do yet.”





## SCHOOL STAFF: HEAD TEACHERS

# ADMIN AND HR RESPONSIBILITIES

Admin work is a significant issue.  
EVERY Head Teacher mentioned this.

**“I’d love to deal with less of the repetitive bureaucratic processes. It’s so frustrating and it’s the bit we’ve had the least training for. Nobody has ever told me how to fill in a critical response report. I’ve never had feedback on whether I’m doing it well or poorly.”**

“I’d love to do less HR stuff. Return to work interviews etc take up so much time. It impacts me being able to be strategic. Through Covid our remit as Head has grown so wide. It needs refocusing.”

“If the Executive Head Teacher took all of the HR and parent complaints I would say go for it.”

“Biggest challenge is the admin and business side - dealing with HR. I appreciate there’s been cuts. Every time I need to do an attendance review or back to work review I spend my entire day doing them. Then there’s clearing purchases with procurement. Dealing with buildings. But they NEED done. And people call you up if they’re not done.”

“I want to do less paper time and less covering for others. In a slimmed down teaching service I don’t want to be the Argyll and Bute Council HR team (or other teams that have been shrunk down).”

“I would love some support for the business and management side of things, so that I could get back to strategy and classrooms.”

“Paperwork is the bane of every teacher’s life but in my setting ... I might have to stop what I’m doing to help de-escalate a situation with a child, deal with injuries from other children or staff, complete notes on the event, fill in paperwork, exclude the child and complete further paperwork, make time to meet with the parents, be available to discuss with my staff, etc. There is so much repetition this paperwork. With children like in our school, it’s unbelievable what I have to do in the case of even just one incident. I didn’t come into teaching to do paperwork.”

“I would like more trust and less paperwork - less being asked to prove it, prove it, and prove it. A bit more trust.”

## SCHOOL STAFF: HEAD TEACHERS

**SILO ATTITUDES**

Head Teachers tend to operate independently in their schools, working in single-school 'silos' which encourage a mindset that they know what's best for their own school in their own community.

But they also describe being 'isolated' in their roles with little day-to-day opportunity to see how other schools deliver the curriculum, or find solutions for common challenges.



The current leadership model and resulting lack of capacity do not encourage collaborative working or even peer support between Head Teachers. They simply don't have the time.

Head Teachers from smaller schools believe that their voice will be lost in a collective with bigger schools. Even some of the Head Teachers in larger schools feel the same way - that their voice and their school could suffer beside more experienced peers, or primary schools could suffer beside secondaries.

**"I do work with my peers in our cluster and share improvement plans and resources, but if that impacts on my school, it's a problem. I won't allow anything to take away from the education of my children."**

"We don't have people in our area reluctant to progress. We have too many applicants for each role available, too many people trained and ready to progress."

"I am a non-teaching Head, so there isn't much advantage visible for me. I do think being a teaching Head is a really difficult job. There is no carrot being dangled for big schools - we don't teach anyway."