

Teacher Labour Market in England: Annual Report 2021

Introduction and background

NFER's annual series of Teacher Labour Market reports monitors the progress which the English school system is making towards meeting the teacher supply challenge. It measures trends in recruitment, retention, and initial teacher training (ITT). This latest report also includes analysis of new datasets which focus on the short-term impacts of the pandemic. Findings are drawn from a wide range of sources - the Labour Force Survey (LFS), the Annual Population Survey (APS), the UK Household Longitudinal Study (UKHLS), the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS), and NFER surveys of school leaders.

Key findings

Teacher wellbeing

- Data from the UKHLS COVID-19 surveys and the APS is used to measure the trends in teacher well-being throughout 2020. As these surveys are long-standing, it is possible to compare well-being during the pandemic with baseline measures from before 2020. It is also possible to compare the experience of teachers in England to that of similar individuals in other professions.
- The onset of the pandemic led to an increase in subjective distress, a rise in anxiety, and lower levels of happiness and life satisfaction among teachers, compared to pre-pandemic levels. However, the lower level of well-being among teachers was also experienced by similar individuals in other professions. There is even some evidence of teachers being less negatively affected compared to those in other professions. There appears to be no evidence that being a teacher during the COVID-19 pandemic was specifically associated with lower levels of well-being, over and above the widespread negative effects on the well-being of the population.
- Teachers had a significantly higher level of feeling that the things they do in life are worthwhile, compared to other professionals. This higher perception of feeling the things they do are worthwhile pre-dated the pandemic, and while there was a slight drop in feeling worthwhile during the pandemic for both groups, teachers maintained a higher level throughout 2020. The gap between the two groups remained a similar magnitude throughout 2020.
- Another potential reason why teachers' well-being has been less negatively affected by the pandemic may be that their job security has remained high. Research has shown a significant relationship between job security and higher well-being. Data from the UKHLS COVID-19 surveys

shows that teachers reported a higher level of job security during 2020, compared to similar professionals. Only around 20-25 per cent of teachers reported feeling any job insecurity at all.

Working conditions and pay

- Before the pandemic, teachers were working longer hours in a usual week in term time than similar professionals. Data from the LFS shows that in 2018-19, full-time teachers were working around 47 hours in a normal working week, compared to 41 hours for similar professionals.
- However, during the spring 2020 lockdown, when teachers were mostly working at home while schools were only open to keyworker and vulnerable children, full-time teachers' working hours were at a similar level to other professionals, at around 40 hours.
- During the autumn term, which saw schools fully open to pupils, full-time teachers' working hours rose to their pre-pandemic level of around 46 hours per week. In autumn 2020, 55 per cent of full-time teachers would have preferred to work shorter hours compared to 38 per cent of full-time similar professionals.
- For a range of reasons, COVID-19 led to an increase in staff absence during 2020. NFER's senior leader survey indicated that in July 2020, 8 per cent of the primary teacher workforce and 10 per cent of the secondary workforce was unavailable to work either at home or in school. This compares to a usual staff absence rate of 2 per cent. The situation worsened in autumn 2020 when 10 per cent of the primary teacher workforce and 13 per cent



of the secondary teacher workforce was unable to work. The high level of staff absence led to a squeeze on teaching staff capacity and to additional strain on the teachers who could work.

- NFER research found that the proportion of teachers considering leaving the profession in July 2020 had dropped by around half compared to in June 2019. This is likely due to a combination of practical reasons (i.e., not wanting to leave their school understaffed during a lockdown) and economic reasons (i.e., fewer job prospects outside of teaching). The number of teachers leaving the profession is likely to remain lower in 2021 compared to recent years.
- Senior leaders reported a decrease in turnover. Recruitment activity also decreased because of concerns about leaders' ability to assess the quality of candidates via a remote interview process and concerns about a diminished field of applicants.
- In 2020-21, the teachers' pay scale points rose by 3.5 per cent on average, although pay awards varied, from 5.5 per cent for newly qualified teachers to 2.75 per cent for the upper and leadership pay scales. This was part of a planned 3-year rise in teacher pay, tilted towards early career teachers in line with the government's aim to raise the teacher starting salary to £30,000 by 2022-23.
- UKHLS data indicates that teachers' perceptions of their current financial security rose in 2019-20 and 2020-21 to the same level as similar individuals in other professions.
- The level of teachers' pay is currently in line with the pay of similar professionals. However, the 2021-22 pay freeze may lead to a less competitive level of teacher pay in the short-term. While labour market uncertainty is likely to bolster teacher supply for a few more years, a prolonged period of teacher pay restraint beyond 2021-22 would likely lead to teacher pay becoming increasingly uncompetitive compared to other professions.

Initial Teacher Training

- UCAS data shows that the Covid-induced recession with its negative impact on the labour market led to a surge in applications to teacher training during the summer of 2020.
- The overall recruitment numbers represented 130 per cent of the target for primary teachers and 106 per cent for secondary teachers. However, not all subjects met their recruitment targets. These included long-standing shortage subjects, such as physics, maths, chemistry, and modern foreign languages.
- The surge in applications has continued above pre-pandemic levels into the 2021 cycle. Up to mid-February 2021, the number of applications to postgraduate ITT in England is 26 per cent above the same (pre-pandemic) point in the 2020 cycle.
- As a result of the application surge, the DfE has reduced training bursaries for non-shortage subjects in 2021. The aim of these changes is to dampen demand back towards the numbers needed to meet supply needs.
- The bursary reductions appear to have been successful in maintaining the strong demand for shortage subjects, while reducing the over-supply of new teachers in non-shortage subjects.
- Although there are more trainees in the ITT system compared to 2019-20, COVID-19 has caused some

schools to reduce their provision of ITT placements in 2020-21. Senior leaders reported a range of reasons for reducing placement capacity. The most significant factors for primary senior leaders were 'concerns about the burden on school staff to provide support for trainees' (41%) and 'concerns about having too many different people in school' in light of COVID-19 guidance (39%). The issue of the burden on staff to support trainees was also a salient factor for secondary senior leaders (30%).

- However, secondary leaders also recognised the benefit of ITT placements for supporting recruitment (36%), as did 25 per cent of primary leaders.
- The July 2020 senior leaders survey asked about what might encourage school leaders to increase placement capacity. The most cited measures were 'increased financial support from Government' (64% for primary and 56% for secondary) and 'incentives/ recognition for providing placements' (45% for primary and 36% for secondary).

Recommendations

- **Recommendation 1:** Reducing teacher workload and supporting well-being should remain a priority for the Government in the post-pandemic recovery phase. The capacity of the teaching workforce should be considered in the Government's catchup plans. Additional workload could lead to falling teacher retention rates once the economic recovery takes hold.
- **Recommendation 2:** The Autumn 2021 Government Spending Review should account for a measured 3-year package of teacher pay increases to ensure pay remains competitive. A prolonged teacher pay freeze to reduce the Government budget deficit could sow the seeds of the next teacher supply challenge, once the wider labour market recovers.
- **Recommendation 3:** The School Teachers' Review Body (STRB) is currently not invited to make recommendations on teacher pay if the Government decides to freeze teacher pay. STRB should be given a permanent remit to make independent recommendations on teacher pay, even when the Government considers that pay should be frozen.
- **Recommendation 4:** The Government should closely monitor teacher absence data throughout the 2021 spring and summer terms and publish weekly data.
- **Recommendation 5:** The Government should take action to ensure schools have sufficient mentoring capacity to support the increasing numbers of new teachers entering the system, particularly as the roll-out of the Early Career Framework begins.

The full document can be downloaded from:

https://www.nfer.ac.uk/media/4382/teacher_labour_market_in_england_annual_report_2021.pdf