

## **Secretary of State's Response to the School Teachers' Review Body (STRB) Thirty Fifth Report 2025**

### **Response of the Association of School and College Leaders**

- 1 The Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL) is a trade union and professional association representing over 25,000 education system leaders, heads, principals, deputies, vice-principals, assistant heads, business leaders and other senior staff of state-funded and independent schools and colleges throughout the UK. ASCL members are responsible for the education of more than four million children and young people across primary, secondary, post-16 and specialist education. This places the association in a strong position to consider this issue from the viewpoint of the leaders of schools and colleges of all types.
- 2 ASCL welcomes the opportunity to make a written response to the Government's proposals following the STRB's recommendations to the 35th Remit. Our response is based on the views of our members, obtained through discussions at ASCL Council, with relevant advisory groups, and prompted and unprompted emails and messages.
- 3 When considering the impact of any proposals on different groups, it is ASCL's policy to consider not only the nine protected characteristics included in the Equality Act 2010, but also other groups which might be disproportionately affected, particularly those who are socio-economically disadvantaged. We have answered any equality impact questions on this basis.

#### **Timeliness of the process**

- 4 It is pleasing to see that for the first time in many years, the process was brought forward and all deadlines set at the offset were met.
- 5 We are grateful that the Secretary of State kept the commitment she made in July.
- 6 It makes a huge difference to school leaders to know the details of the pay award and any related funding well before the end of the summer term, and this year has seen a marked improvement on this with the report and response being published on 22 May.

- 7 That said, it has not been without challenges, particularly in relation to the Department submitting its recommendation on a pay award before the School Costs Technical Note.
- 8 This is something which will require considerable thought in future rounds but must not mean that we see a return to the protracted process as has been the case previously.
- 9 Additionally, we would like to see a move to a standing timetable as suggested by the review body in its 34<sup>th</sup> Report<sup>1</sup>.

### **Matter for recommendation**

#### **An assessment of the adjustments that should be made to the salary and allowance ranges for classroom teachers, unqualified teachers, and school leaders in 2025/26.**

- 10 ASCL was pleased to see that the review body again went beyond the 2.8% increase that the Department deemed sufficient and appropriate, and recommended a 4% increase to all pay ranges and allowances.
- 11 The report said: "*We believe that the Government's proposal of a 2.8% award risks undermining improved supply, including the additional 6,500 teachers the Government has committed to recruiting. We believe a higher award is necessary...*"<sup>2</sup>
- 12 We welcome the 4% increase, but this is a minimum necessary step to address the erosion of pay. We must see this continue until the real terms value of teacher and leader pay has been restored and salaries become competitive with comparable graduate professions.
- 13 This is something the STRB itself has commented on again: "*While several factors influence the profession's ability to recruit and retain, the supply challenges are affected in part by pay. Salaries need to be sufficiently competitive. While recent awards have led to some improvement, the evidence suggests more needs to be done. This is supported by data showing teacher pay has deteriorated in relative terms against economy-wide earnings and other professional occupations. This is also consistent with the updated results of the benchmarking study for comparable roles.*"<sup>3</sup>
- 14 To address not only the recruitment and retention crisis, but also to meet the government's manifesto commitment to recruit an additional 6,500 teachers, the profession needs to be viewed as desirable career once again and this will require salaries to be competitive at all levels.
- 15 This must be as part of a strategic plan which includes the restoration of the differentials between pay ranges which have been eroded over time as a result

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<sup>1</sup> STRB 34<sup>th</sup> Report

<sup>2</sup> STRB 35<sup>th</sup> Report

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, paragraph 2.50

of pay awards which targeted the main pay range over the upper pay range and leadership pay range.

- 16 We note the STRB's concern about pay divergence between schools and further education, as was evidenced by several consultees.
- 17 We urge the government to address this to end the inequity and avoid cross-sector attrition.

### **Matter for recommendation**

**An assessment of any changes to flexibilities around TLR payments, concerning the existing pro-rata rule.**

***“STRB Recommendation: The STPCD be amended such that a TLR payment reflects the proportion of the responsibility being carried out. This principle should apply to both full and part-time teachers. To ensure schools have sufficient time to make the necessary adjustments, implementation should take place no later than September 2026 (with earlier adoption encouraged). It would be helpful, in the guidance section of the STPCD, to clarify the principle and to set out how schools can utilise the additional flexibility resulting from this change.”***

- 18 We endorse the STRB's recommendation and are pleased to see that it addresses the issues we raised in our initial evidence for this remit, in that the changes around this principle should apply to both full and part-time teachers.
- 19 This gives school leaders maximum flexibility in arranging their staffing structures and provides more opportunities for part-time teachers, who are more likely to be women, to move into middle leadership roles. This should in turn help to reduce the gender pay gap and hopefully increase the proportion of women in leadership roles.
- 20 We note the concerns raised by the IWPRB in its 4<sup>th</sup> Report<sup>4</sup> when a similar recommendation was made: *“We conclude, therefore, that the current pro-rata arrangements are potentially discriminatory against part-time teachers, and we are concerned at the impact of the pro-rata principle on the recruitment of women in particular to leadership roles.”*
- 21 We support the changes proposed to the draft STPCD and also encourage early adoption wherever possible. To enable this, we urge the government to ensure that schools receive additional funding to fully implement these changes.

### **Flexible working**

- 22 We welcome the recommendations and suggestions made by the STRB in relation to flexible working and the introduction of flexible working into the STPCD.

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<sup>4</sup> IWPRB 4<sup>th</sup> Report

- 23 The draft 2025 STPCD introduces new guidance (paras 89–92) to support and promote flexible working in schools.
- 24 The STRB recognised that flexible working is key to improving teacher recruitment, retention, and wellbeing. The Document now encourages schools to adopt a strategic approach, offering arrangements such as part-time roles, phased retirement, off-site PPA, and personal or family days.
- 25 The table outlining approaches that could be taken as whole-school actions and individual teacher interventions is helpful and will help both employees when submitting a request for flexible working, and employers when reviewing and updating flexible working policies, and when considering requests.
- 26 Many of these changes have been recommended by ASCL in recent evidence submissions to the STRB.
- 27 We note that the STRB feel that a Department intervention is needed to move practice in schools forward, and hope to see this being actioned as a priority through the appropriate mechanisms.

### **Pay award funding**

- 28 We welcomed the additional funds allocated via the school budget support grant (SBSG) to support schools with pay award cost pressures. We understand that the amount of money available for this grant has been calculated at national level, after taking into account the DfE headroom projection for school budgets in 2025/26. As ever, using a national average will create winners and losers at individual school level.
- 29 The impact of less than adequate funding via the SBSG coupled with shortfalls in funding to cover changes in National Insurance Contributions (NIC) policy is leaving some schools and trusts having to find more than the 1%, set out by government, in productivity gains.
- 30 In our original submission to the 35th Remit<sup>5</sup> we raised concerns about the efficacy of DfE evidence being produced without the support of the Schools Cost Technical Note (SCTN). We understand that this was a timing issue with relevant and up to date data not being available for inclusion in SCTN.
- 31 At the same time, we do appreciate the efforts of the government in bringing the remit process forward. This creates an unhelpful situation. We hope that DfE will work towards aligning the production of the SCTN more closely with the improved STRB timelines.
- 32 The ASCL position remains that, as a fundamental principle, all national pay awards should be fully funded by central government. The impact of not fully funding the pay award will bring schools to crisis point and place our members

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<sup>5</sup> [ASCL evidence to the STRB's 35<sup>th</sup> Remit](#)

in an invidious position, making it necessary to set deficit budgets and leading to schools becoming insolvent. In this regard the recent trend towards additional corrective grants (notwithstanding the continued debate on their adequacy) has been welcomed.

- 33 We are extremely concerned that in the recent spending review the Chancellor has indicated that public sector pay awards will need to be funded within departmental settlements set out in the Spending Review 2025<sup>6</sup>. The spending review document indicates that if review bodies recommend pay increases above the level departments have budgeted for, departments must carefully consider the justification for these awards and determine whether the additional costs can be absorbed through offsetting savings or further productivity gains. There will be no reserve access for public sector pay.

### **Pay progression including Performance-Related Pay (PRP)**

- 34 We are disappointed that the Secretary of State has not gone further to remove PRP completely. This has now created a system where some schools, local authorities and trusts have moved away from PRP, but others haven't. So those that have retained it will still be impacted by the additional workload created and the impact it has on retention of staff.
- 35 This could create competition between schools so that a teacher would opt to apply for a vacancy at a school which does not operate PRP rather than one that does. This does nothing to improve recruitment and retention across the system.
- 36 The joint unions, and other consultees have been calling for the removal of performance related pay from the Document for several years now, and it is time for it to be removed completely.

### **Workload and working time**

- 37 We remain concerned about the workload and working hours within the profession, and particularly of our members.
- 38 The STRB also highlights the average working hours for leaders and cites the significant workload challenges that they face:
- Managing increased pupil needs (e.g. SEND, safeguarding).
  - Responding to Ofsted and accountability pressures.
  - Addressing staffing shortages and covering for absent staff.
  - Supporting staff wellbeing and retention in a high-pressure environment.
- 39 Our members work incredibly hard and are entitled to a reasonable work-life balance allowing them to take well-earned breaks, whether that be evenings, weekends or during in school closure periods.

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<sup>6</sup> Spending Review 2025

- 40 We know that middle leaders do not aspire to be school leaders, and are particularly reluctant to move on to headship, and the lack of protections provided to leaders in the STPCD plays a big part in this.
- 41 We must see this included as a separate matter for recommendation in the STRB's next remit.

### **Career paths and pay structures for teachers and school leaders**

- 42 This was considered very briefly under a previous remit, to which ASCL submitted extensive evidence.
- 43 In our response to the 34<sup>th</sup> Report, we stated that we felt the most pressing of these was to broaden the scope of the STRB remit and the STPCD so that it remains relevant to the whole state funded sector, including academies.
- 44 It is time for a complete review of the STPCD to ensure that it remains fit for purpose and relevant to all. The review body clearly agrees, as is demonstrated by its suggestion in the 35<sup>th</sup> report<sup>7</sup>:

***“STRB Suggestion: The Secretary of State to remit STRB or another appropriate body to undertake work on modernising teacher employment terms and conditions.”***

- 45 The changes announced under clause 45 of the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill makes this point even more. However, we feel that it is imperative for the proposed changes to ensure that all employers follow the STPCD as a minimum benchmark, and that this does not just include paying above the minimum of each pay range.
- 46 There are other important pay-related elements which employers can and do deviate from which are to the detriment of teachers and leaders. An example of this is salary safeguarding, it must be the case that all employers honour the provisions of the STPCD as a minimum.
- 47 We again call for business leaders to be brought into that scope. Business leaders are not served well by the NJC arrangements, nor will they be by the reinstatement of the School Support Staff Negotiating Body (SSSNB). Their roles are very different to those of school support staff; they are school leaders working in senior trust or school leadership roles.
- 48 It is critical that they are recognised and remunerated in the same way as their leadership colleagues, and it is our view that being brought under the auspices of the STRB and the STPCD under a leadership category is the only way that this can be achieved.
- 49 The risk to the sector if we fail to retain those working in these roles is huge.

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<sup>7</sup> STRB 35<sup>th</sup> Report, pg 29

- 50 The compliance and regulatory responsibilities they hold are very complex and specialised, and these are often the only people in schools and trusts with the relevant expertise to ensure that requirements are adhered to.
- 51 We urge the Secretary of State to recognise the clear distinction between those working in business leadership roles and school support staff, and to exclude those working in business leadership roles from the SSSNB and include them in the STPCD. We hope to see this item included in the next remit.

### **Pension flexibility**

- 52 We are concerned at some of the STRB's comments around pension flexibility. We believe that there may be scope to investigate the potential for a teacher to be able to vary the level of their contributions to the Teachers' Pension Scheme (TPS), but not that there could be an offer of an alternative pension scheme, even if this was in exchange for a higher salary.
- 53 This would involve less contributions, both employer and employee being paid into the government's unfunded scheme, which could put the scheme at risk.
- 54 Furthermore, funding is provided to schools and academies to cover the employer contributions, and this money goes back into government finances to fund the TPS scheme.
- 55 If this was not the case, the government would be providing funding to schools and academies which was then given to a third-party business provider.
- 56 Schools and academies are not financial advisers and as such are not qualified or positioned to be able to make recommendations of this nature.
- 57 We are fundamentally opposed to this option and believe that it is only fair that all teachers and leaders should be paid an appropriate and competitive salary (which is not currently the case), and that this should be in addition to membership of the TPS. It should not be the case that they need to move to an alternative pension scheme which is significantly inferior to the TPS to be paid appropriately.
- 58 A move of this nature would still be a reduction in total remuneration, due to the loss of the benefits provided by the TPS, and receipt of a significantly lower pension at retirement age.
- 59 We do support the suggestions around flexible retirement options, and this is something we have been calling for in our evidence and promoting with our members.

### **Targeting remuneration**

- 60 ASCL made recommendations in relation to this on a previous remit. These were for a competitive pay framework that does not differentiate and a responsive career-long retention scheme that can be adjusted as demand requires it.

61 We were pleased to see the review body support this in its report: “We understand the arguments for bursaries and retention payments but agree they would be more effective if they better complemented the pay framework.”<sup>8</sup>

62 However, we are aware of recent evidence from NfER which calls into question the efficacy of retention payments<sup>9</sup>, stating that the evidence is mixed. The report also highlights the need for more research and evidence on this.

### **Pay Scales**

63 Once again, it is disappointing that advisory pay scales for the leadership pay range have not been reintroduced into the Document and we again recommend that these are included at the earliest opportunity.

64 As in previous years, we will continue to publish updated pay scales for all pay ranges in conjunction with Community, NAHT, and NEU, and we will encourage employers to use these as a minimum.

### **Conclusion**

65 The 4% pay award is welcomed.

66 We must see a strategic plan to restore the erosion of pay which has taken place since 2010 and the structural deterioration in teacher and leader pay relative to comparable professions.

67 Future pay awards must at least keep pace with RPI and be fully funded by the government – this is in addition to the restoration of pay referenced above.

68 The scope of the STRB and STPCD must be broadened to include all school leadership roles, in particular Business Leaders.

69 The focus cannot be solely on early career teachers, nor can it be just on recruitment. It is imperative that teaching is seen as an attractive profession for a career, whether that be as a teacher or as a school leader, not just for recent graduates.

70 More must be done to retain the teachers and leaders already in the profession, by improving the pay and working conditions so that they actively choose not to leave.

71 We are pleased to see the STRB acknowledge the ‘step change’<sup>10</sup> required on flexible working, and whilst acknowledging that there is more that can be done on a school and individual level, there is also more that can be done on a wholesale, system wide basis that all schools can benefit from.

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<sup>8</sup> STRB 35<sup>th</sup> Report, pg 27

<sup>9</sup> Do retention payments for early career teachers really work? NfER, June 2025

<sup>10</sup> STRB 35<sup>th</sup> Report, pg 25

72 The Secretary of State's commitment that she will prioritise ensuring that the pay round works better for schools under the Labour government was a welcome one which she stood by, and we must see this continue moving forward.

73 We hope that this is of value to your consultation, ASCL is willing to be further consulted and to assist in any way that it can.

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2 July 2025