



Rt Hon Gillian Keegan MP
Secretary of State for Education
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Dear Secretary of State

School Teachers' Pay: STRB's 33rd Report and Government Response

Introduction

This is a joint response from the unions representing the vast majority of teachers and school leaders in England. We are united on the key issues covered in the STRB report and the Government's response. This unity across the profession adds to the weight of this response to the consultation. It demonstrates that there is a clear consensus among teachers and school leaders on the existing problems and the necessary solutions.

The STRB's recommended pay increases for 2023-24 went significantly beyond the increases proposed by the Government and have been accompanied by increased funding to pay for the increases. The STRB's recommendations were finalised and sent to the Government in May, shortly after NEU, NAHT, NASUWT and ASCL had announced co-ordinated industrial action to continue the dispute with the Government over pay, school funding, and workload and conditions.¹

We welcome the STRB's recognition that evidence of the longstanding decline of teachers' and school leaders' real and relative terms pay is unquestionably a key cause of ongoing supply crisis.

¹ [Unions to co-ordinate action | National Education Union \(neu.org.uk\)](https://www.neu.org.uk)

Government's failure to grasp and tackle this root cause of under recruitment and teacher and leader wastage is evident in its submissions, as is the strength of feeling as expressed in the pay disputes and the action taken. We are therefore absolutely clear that the pay increase for September 2023 must be only the first step in a programme of urgent steps to repair the damage to teacher pay caused by Government political choices since 2010. A major correction in teacher and school leader pay is urgently required.

We will continue to fight for the fully funded correction in pay, and the significant improvements in workload and working conditions, that are needed to tackle the critical recruitment and retention problems. Our fight is on behalf of parents and children as well as teachers and school leaders. To recruit and retain the teachers and school leaders we need, we must value and support them properly.

We have made consistent representations on the problems caused by publication of the STRB report at the end of the summer term. Schools need to be supported in planning and consultation on pay implementation issues. Teachers and school leaders should not have to wait until October or November to get their pay increases. We again call for earlier publication of the STRB report. We welcome the commitment you made (in your letter of 14 July) to align the timing of the STRB process with the school budget cycle, it is imperative that this happens.

We set out below the urgent progress that is needed on the key teacher pay and conditions issues. The Government must act to repair the damage to teacher pay, conditions and supply, or it will fail not only teachers and school leaders but also the parents, children and communities they serve. Teachers, school leaders and the public will hold the Government to account for any such failure.

Repair the damage to teacher pay

The erosion in the value of teacher and school leader pay, against inflation and compared to other graduate professions, has been a key feature of the education landscape in England since 2010. It is a consequence of deliberate policy by a succession of Conservative and Conservative-led administrations over the last thirteen years. Teachers' and school leaders' anger at the impact of these attacks on the value of their pay drove the 2023 disputes and explains the support for these disputes. That anger will remain until the damage done to teacher and school leader pay is repaired.

As we entered the 2020s and even before the current period of high inflation, Government imposition of pay freezes and pay caps had already damaged the real value of teacher and school leader pay against inflation. But worse was to come for teachers and school leaders. They saw their pay frozen in September 2021, even though Retail Prices Index (RPI) inflation was at 4.9%. In September 2022, with RPI at 12.6%, the pay increase of just 5% for most resulted in another major hit to the value of teacher and school leader pay.

Teacher and school leaders lost 23% of the value of their pay between 2010 and 2022, ahead of the implementation of the 6.5% increase in September 2023. The inflation figures for September 2023 are not yet available, but we know that with inflation still relatively high compared to recent decades a 6.5% increase in September 2023 is not sufficient in restoring the pay lost since 2010. Even as inflation rates fall back compared to recent years, this will be simply a slowing of the rate at which prices increase. The huge price increases of recent times are baked in – they continue to hit our members’ living standards.

The much-delayed starting salary of £30,000 from September must be seen, as the STRB notes, in the context of an increase in starting pay for new graduates of some 12% since the Government adopted the £30,000 starting salary target.²

Pay cuts against inflation have been accompanied by a significant deterioration in the value of teacher and school leader pay against earnings in the wider economy and in the graduate labour market. The STRB report noted that: “The relative value of teachers’ earnings fell throughout the 2010s and has fallen further than earnings across the economy, the public sector and professional occupations.”³

The STRB also noted the post-pandemic recovery in the graduate labour market. Alongside the strong earnings growth we are seeing in the wider economy, this sets the context for the improvements in teacher and school leader pay that are needed to enable the profession to compete effectively.

The STRB report points to the strong earnings growth and increases in pay settlement awards, both of which were clear when the STRB put together its report. Data since then show an intensification in these trends.

According to the latest figures available at the time of writing, annual growth in regular pay was 7.8% in the period April to June 2023.⁴ This was the highest figure since comparable records began in 2001. Private sector pay growth remained significantly ahead of pay growth in the public sector, setting into sharp context the Government’s misleading statements on public sector pay compared to the private sector.

The latest Labour Research Department’s Payline database shows a median pay settlement figure of 8% in July 2023.⁵ The figure for pay settlements in the private sector has been consistently and significantly ahead of the figure for pay settlements in the public sector.

² STRB 33rd Report, paragraph 3.39.

³ STRB 33rd Report, paragraph 3.16.

⁴ Labour market overview, UK - Office for National Statistics (ons.gov.uk)

⁵ Pay & bargaining news | LRD

It is clear from the data that has become available since the STRB finalised its report that the threats to the competitive position of teaching remain and are set to intensify. Pay cuts against inflation and the deterioration of teacher pay against other graduate professions are critical issues.

No solution to the recruitment and retention crisis is possible without urgent and significant restoration of the pay lost and improvement of the position of teaching in the graduate labour market. The STRB is clear in its report on the seriousness of these issues.

The STRB highlights the “structural deterioration in the relative pay of teachers and the inadequate recruitment of graduates.” It goes on to say this: “Additional investment is needed and it will be more cost-effective to act sooner rather than later. The cost of failure is high: it affects teaching quality and adversely impacts children’s education.”⁶

Teacher and school leader living standards have been hit hard by pay cuts against inflation. Recruitment and retention has been undermined as pay in the wider economy and in the graduate labour market has grown more quickly than teacher and school leader pay.

The evidence of the damage caused by pay cuts is clear. The Government must cease its attacks on the value of teacher and school leader pay. It must instead set out urgent proposals to restore the pay lost in real terms against inflation since 2010. The next STRB remit must, unlike previous remits, have as its central focus the need to repair the damage caused by the pay cuts.

Tackle the recruitment and retention crisis

The recruitment and retention crisis will not be tackled without action to repair the damage to teacher pay since 2010, alongside improvements to workload and working time and ending excessive accountability.

Schools, teachers and school leaders are already struggling to cope with the impact of years of teacher shortages. Parents and young people are also hit by the impact of the long recruitment and retention crisis.

The STRB report highlights the strength of the graduate labour market. This is a key factor in setting the context for assessment of teacher recruitment and retention.

The STRB notes that recruitment numbers “fell significantly below” target in 2022-23, in both primary and secondary. Targets were missed right across the secondary curriculum, with thirteen of seventeen subjects missing their targets. Seven subjects recruited fewer than three-quarters of their targets.⁷

⁶ STRB 33rd Report, paragraph 3.47.

⁷ STRB 33rd Report, paragraphs 3.21-3.27.

As the STRB says, leaving rates have increased as the pandemic effect recedes.⁸ We are extremely concerned that retention problems are getting even worse as the pandemic effect on recruitment and retention continues to fade. These concerns are underlined by the finding in the DfE's Working Lives of Teachers and Leaders survey, that a quarter were considering leaving the school sector for reasons other than retirement.

The latest School Workforce data was published after the STRB had completed its report. The latest findings⁹ amplify the concerns expressed in the unions' evidence to the STRB and in the STRB report itself. The number leaving in 2021-22 increased compared to the previous year, to pre-pandemic levels.

Excluding retirements, the number leaving rocketed by almost a third in 2021-22 to just short of 40,000. This number was significantly higher than in any year since 2010.

Sharp increases in vacancy levels, as noted by the STRB, are another indicator of the serious and worsening supply problems.

We wish to address in this context the issues raised by the STRB's observation on "future allocation of resources."¹⁰ The STRB notes that recruitment and retention issues are "more acute" in some subjects, roles and settings. It states that, because "there is almost no area where recruitment is sufficient," it has this year decided to support the "overall position of teachers' pay" by means of a 6.5% increase across the board.

This logic applies equally to future years, but the STRB goes on to argue that a different approach, to "target resources ... towards the most acute recruitment and retention challenges" may be needed in future. The STRB notes the concerns that the unions have expressed on the equity and fairness of such an approach. The STRB and the Government must listen to the consensus in the profession on the need for improvements in pay and conditions to apply equally to all teachers.

We are clear that the widespread and deep-rooted recruitment and retention problems cannot be addressed by "targeting" improvements at some subjects, roles or settings in isolation. We need the Government to commit to improving pay and conditions for all teachers. Sticking plaster approaches will not fix the systemic recruitment and retention problem. So-called targeted approaches will simply create new recruitment and retention problems, because they will alienate those teachers who do not benefit from such approaches and will fail to appropriately value the profession as a whole.

⁸ STRB 33rd Report, paragraph 3.29.

⁹ School workforce in England, Reporting year 2022 – Explore education statistics – GOV.UK (explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk)

¹⁰ STRB 33rd Report, paragraphs 3.55-3.56.

Invest in education

For many years, we have been highlighting the funding shortages in education and pointing to the need for additional investment to secure the critical objective of pay levels that are competitive and fair. High inflation has made the funding problems faced by schools even worse.

We have consistently urged the STRB to make recommendations on what is needed to value, recruit and retain teachers and school leaders. This objective analysis of all relevant factors is not possible by restricting discussion to what is possible within an inadequate funding envelope.

The next remit must not be constrained by Government limits on funding – the STRB must be told to review all of the relevant evidence and to assess all of the solutions needed. It is then the Government’s responsibility to make the decisions on funding, for which it will be held accountable. The “trade-offs” to which the STRB refers¹¹ are a matter for the Government – the STRB should focus on what is needed to reverse the pay cuts since 2010 and fix the critical recruitment and retention problem.

Education should be viewed as an investment, not as a cost. Failing to invest properly in education, including properly valuing the teachers and school leaders the school system needs, hits economic growth. Young people and parents, as well as educators, are failed by this false economy.

Abolish Performance Related Pay (PRP)

We have sent a separate joint union statement specifically on the issue of PRP. This sets out in detail our call for the immediate removal of the PRP requirement in the STPCD, following the STRB’s clear statement¹² that the existing obligation on schools to operate performance-related pay progression should be withdrawn.

Implement a fair national pay structure

The STRB report included comments on career pathways. The STRB highlights the “importance of clear career pathways for both existing and prospective teachers” including in the context of recruitment and retention.¹³

We agree that clear career pathways are vital. The existing pay structure fails to provide either transparency or fairness.

PRP continues to be imposed on the profession despite its inherent unfairness and the opposition to it of teachers and school leaders. As the unions predicted, it has resulted in unfair pay outcomes, conflict between staff, and additional workload.

¹¹ STRB 33rd Report, paragraph 3.42.

¹² STRB 33rd Report, paragraph 3.53.

¹³ STRB 33rd Report, paragraph 4.18.

The dismantling of the national pay structure and the removal of pay portability, alongside the unfair impact of PRP on pay progression, have made it impossible for the profession to offer to serving and potential teachers clear career pathways. Too often, teacher and school leader career development is damaged by factors outside of their control.

It is now a decade since these attacks on the national pay structure began. Over the same period, pay and workload issues have driven major recruitment and retention problems. The unfair and fragmented pay system has contributed to these problems.

The STRB should focus on what is needed to implement a fair national pay structure, to embed the key principle of equal pay for work of equal value. Pay points should be mandatory for all teachers and school leaders, to provide the clear and fair pay framework that is needed to underpin recruitment, retention and mobility across the school system.

Competitive pay levels, pay portability between schools to support career development, and fair pay progression to value the acquisition of experience as a teacher, are vital to send out the clear signal that serving and potential teachers and school leaders will be properly valued and supported in their careers. This is the direction of travel we need on teacher and school leader career pathways.

Reduce teacher workload

The STRB states that: “Further collaborative action to deliver a meaningful reduction in workload is an immediate priority.”¹⁴ Fully funded improvements in workload are essential, alongside properly funded improvements in pay. The STRB should be given a remit on workload to make further recommendations that will speed up the reductions in workload, working time and work intensity that are necessary and urgent in schools.

Workload issues interact with the other problems – teacher shortages, excessive accountability and PRP all add to workload problems. Tackling workload problems must be part of a package including significant improvements in pay, to ensure supply of the teachers and school leaders the education service needs.

Conclusion

The industrial disputes this year have demonstrated once again that children and young people deserve better. The threats to their education from over a decade of austerity are very real. Teachers, school leaders and parents are crying out for a reversal of Government policy to address the issues on behalf of young people. Over a decade of pay cuts and sky-high workload have caused huge damage to our education service, on which the country depends for economic prosperity and social cohesion.

¹⁴ STRB 33rd Report, paragraph 3.54.

We have set out clearly above the solutions needed. The Government must act now to repair the damage to teacher pay, fix the serious recruitment and retention problems, implement a fair national pay structure with no PRP, and tackle high workload and excessive accountability. All of this requires investment in education, of a level sufficient to achieve a well-supported school system with valued teachers and school leaders.

With a general election due next year, the Government will be held accountable by parents and the public, as well as by educators, for any further policy failures. On behalf of our members and of the young people they teach, we urge you to signal your support for the urgent measures we have set out in our united response.

Yours sincerely



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