

## ASCL SURVEY ON TEACHER SHORTAGES

### Methodology

We conducted a survey from 22 to 27 June of headteachers and principals of state sector schools and colleges in England. The survey was sent to 3,107 recipients and we received 766 responses – a response rate of 25%. The majority – 675 (88%) – were from secondary schools with the remainder from primary, middle, special, and alternative provision schools, FE and sixth form colleges, and UTCs or studio schools.

### Survey responses

The survey found that a very large number of respondents – 725 (95%) – have been experiencing difficulty in recruiting teachers.

The context is that the Department for Education has repeatedly missed recruitment targets for trainee secondary teachers over the course of several years other than a temporary improvement during the pandemic in **2020/21**. In the current year, 2021/22, it has recruited only 82% of the secondary target for initial teacher trainees. High numbers of teachers leave the profession early – 31% within five years of qualifying and 40% within 10 years ([School Workforce in England 2021](#)). The number of secondary school pupils in England has increased from 3.19m in 2015/16 to 3.57m in 2021/22.

### 1 | Have you been experiencing difficulty in recruiting teachers?

Answer Choice	Response Percent	Response Total
1 Severe difficulty	42.8%	328
2 Some difficulty	51.8%	397
3 No problem with teacher recruitment	5.4%	41
	<i>answered</i>	766
	<i>skipped</i>	0

We asked respondents who said they were experiencing difficulties with teacher shortages some more detailed questions.

### 2 | What problems are you experiencing with teacher recruitment? (Indicate as many as apply)

Answer Choice	Response Percent	Response Total
1 Low number of suitable applications for posts	90.8%	658
2 Receive no applications at all for some posts	69.4%	503
3 Often have to re-advertise for posts	79.0%	573
4 Other (please specify)	9.9%	72
	<i>answered</i>	725
	<i>skipped</i>	41

Examples of responses from those indicating 'other' included: Candidates who are offered posts withdrawing their verbal acceptance after being offered more money to stay at their current school; candidates not turning up for interview or dropping out prior to interview; candidates asking for more money than the job advertised; poor quality applications.

### 3 | How are you dealing with recruitment difficulties? (Indicate as many as apply).

Answer Choice	Response Percent	Response Total
1 Using supply staff to cover for vacancies	72.3%	524
2 Using non-subject specialists to teach classes	68.8%	499
3 Larger class sizes	30.6%	222
4 Other (please specify)	19.6%	142
	<i>answered</i>	725
	<i>skipped</i>	41

Examples of responses from those answering 'other' included: using unqualified teachers and higher level teaching assistants; increasing senior leadership teaching time; changing the curriculum and reducing subject choices; offering more money or responsibility; settling for staff with less than ideal qualifications or expertise; trying to recruit from overseas.

### 4 | If secondary or post-16 in what subjects is recruitment difficult? (Indicate as many as apply).

Answer Choice	Response Percent	Response Total
1 Maths	61.0%	425
2 Biology	36.2%	252
3 Chemistry	49.2%	343
4 Physics	61.4%	428
5 Computing	49.1%	342
6 Modern foreign languages	38.5%	268
7 English	32.1%	224
8 Geography	26.7%	186
9 History	8.6%	60
10 Art	8.3%	58
11 PE	4.2%	29
12 Design and technology	52.5%	366
13 Other (please specify)	26.0%	181
	<i>answered</i>	697
	<i>skipped</i>	69

Common responses from those answering 'other' to this question included: business studies, economics, psychology, religious education, and music.

The Department for Education’s [Initial Teacher Training Census 2021/22](#) shows a number of subjects that fell short of recruitment targets, including only 22% of the target for physics trainee teachers, and 23% for design & technology trainee teachers. The other subjects that under recruited were business studies (45%); computing (69%); modern foreign languages (71%); music (72%); geography (86%), mathematics (95%); and religious education (99%).

Our survey also found that about two-thirds of respondents – 495 (65%) – have been experiencing difficulty with teacher retention.

## 5 | Have you been experiencing difficulty with teacher retention?

Answer Choice	Response Percent	Response Total
1 Severe difficulty	7.8%	60
2 Some difficulty	56.8%	435
3 No problem with teacher retention	35.4%	271
	<i>answered</i>	766
	<i>skipped</i>	0

We asked respondents to tell us what was causing difficulties with teacher retention. The most common responses were workload (235 mentions) and pay (226 mentions) followed by a sense that teachers were reassessing their work/life balance following the Covid pandemic.

The context is that teacher and school leader pay is around a fifth lower in real terms than if it had been increased in line with RPI inflation since 2010. The government froze pay for the current academic year 2021/22, and its pay proposals for the next two years include awards of 3% and then 2% for many teachers and leaders despite the current level of RPI inflation being at 11.7%. Pay awards have also been very constrained in colleges which are under intense financial pressures. The Association of Colleges has [called](#) on the government to step in to support with college staff pay.

In terms of workload pressures, school and college budgets, despite recent uplifts in government funding, are tight as a result of poor government funding settlements since 2010 and rising costs<sup>1</sup>.

Financial pressures constrain staffing and other resources. Educational institutions are also subject to punitive accountability measures from Ofsted and in the form of performance tables. Class sizes have risen in secondary schools from an average of 20.4 in 2015/16 to 22.3 in 2021/22, and are much higher in primary schools, where funding levels are lower, at an average of 26.6.

Comments from survey respondents included:

- They can earn as much working in business, often remotely from home, as they can at school. The lack of flexibility of being a teacher, coupled with the relatively poor salaries is causing unprecedented numbers to leave our school.
- I think there are many reasons why teachers are leaving – some linked to workload/stress/pay – but COVID has also given many a push to follow their dreams. Quite a few said they were applying to ‘be nearer home’ or ‘closer to their family’ as part of their reasons for wishing to leave.
- Pay, workload, cost of living (one member of staff resigned as she can’t afford the petrol to commute), post-pandemic reflections on wanting a different lifestyle.
- Pay, relative to the cost of living here in Central London. The perception is clearly that life is more affordable in other locations.
- Cost of housing in the South East – young staff move away to start families as they cannot afford family homes locally.
- Having wages frozen has not helped, but when the cost of living increases and wages look so poor next to workers in sectors such as service or delivery then this became a real issue.

<sup>1</sup> According to the [Institute for Fiscal Studies](#), school funding per pupil in England fell by 9% in real terms between 2009–10 and 2019–20 – the largest cut in over 40 years. Extra government funding means spending per pupil in 2024 will be about the same as in 2010 – representing 15 years with no overall growth. Even with additional funding, college funding per pupil in 2024–25 will still be around 10% below 2010–11 levels, and school sixth-form funding per pupil 23% below 2010–11 levels.

- Effects of lockdown have caused teachers and support staff nearing retiring age to take early retirement. Workload not sustainable, especially when you cannot recruit, resulting in larger class sizes. We are well over PAN [published admission number] and through appeals, even more over PAN. It is not sustainable.
- Of those who have left the profession, they quote pay, workload stress, oppressive accountability and the ability to secure alternative employment on equal or improved pay and conditions in other professions as the main reasons.
- Post pandemic, staff have been reassessing lifestyle and we are losing staff from the profession. Other professions that offer greater flexibility in home/office working are now just as attractive as teaching with the holidays. Workload issues are often cited despite workload not increasing since before the pandemic but there is a perception shift in how people want to work, coupled with challenging behaviours from students and families that have been exacerbated by the impact of the pandemic.

The survey also showed a very high level of respondents – 703 (92%) – reporting difficulties in recruiting support staff. [TES](#) reported earlier this year that schools were facing problems recruiting and retaining support staff with low wages, combined with the cost of living crisis, resulting in many considering jobs outside of education. School support staff pay is negotiated through the National Joint Council (NJC) for local government services. The real value of pay has fallen for many years. While many schools and colleges have the flexibility to set their own pay for support staff, or pay more than the NJC pay scales, the reality is that the level of funding they receive from the government means that they are unable to do so.

## 6 | Are you experiencing difficulty in recruiting support staff?

Answer Choice	Response Percent	Response Total
1 Severe difficulty	46.7%	358
2 Some difficulty	45.0%	345
3 No problem in recruiting support staff	8.2%	63
	<i>answered</i>	766
	<i>skipped</i>	0

### Conclusion

Teacher recruitment and retention has been difficult for many years, but this snapshot survey shows an alarmingly high proportion of schools and colleges reporting problems, and this supports anecdotal evidence from leaders that the situation is increasingly grave. It is also clear that the crisis extends beyond the question of filling teacher vacancies to problems in recruiting support staff – leaving schools and colleges with serious challenges across their workforces.

The government is aware of the pressure on teacher numbers and has introduced several initiatives designed to shore up the situation. These include the introduction of the [early career framework](#) designed to provide more support to newly qualified teachers, [‘levelling up’ premium payments](#) for teachers in certain STEM subjects, and, recently, a [scheme](#) to encourage more overseas teachers to teach in England.

However, these initiatives tend to be piecemeal and limited in their effectiveness. The big-ticket items – pay and workload – remain largely unresolved. Teacher pay has been eroded since 2010 by pay freezes and below-inflation pay awards falling in real terms by about a fifth. School teacher pay is recommended by the School Teachers’ Review Body but the government sets out the parameters and has effectively imposed pay austerity on the sector over many years. This has made teaching salaries less competitive in the graduate jobs market and has affected both recruitment and retention.

The government does plan to improve starting salaries to £30,000 over the course of the next two years, but its pay proposals are undermined by significant real-terms pay cuts for more experienced teachers, tapering down to 3% and then 2% for those on the upper pay scale and leadership ranges, which has the potential to further damage retention.

The problem is compounded by workload pressures. Again, there have been various initiatives to address this issue. However, the driving factors are the pressure on school and college budgets which constrain staffing numbers and resources, and an onerous and high-stakes accountability system in which educational institutions are judged severely in both performance tables and Ofsted inspections. Negative Ofsted ratings can themselves have an impact on teacher recruitment making it more difficult for schools with the greatest challenges to recruit teachers.

Schools and colleges have in place strategies and approaches to address workload pressures but this can only be done within the reality of their budgets and the way that the government and its agencies judge their school or college. As one of our respondents said, there is a perception among teachers that they are being asked to do more for less.

In the meantime, the government has launched a Schools White Paper which sets out targets to substantially improve pupil attainment by 2030. It wants to see the number of primary children reaching the expected standard in Key Stage 2 reading, writing and maths, raised to 90%, and the national average GCSE grade in English language and maths increase from 4.5 to 5.

It is hard to see how these targets can be achieved when there are severe teacher shortages and without the political will and Treasury funding needed to improve the situation. Teachers are the essential pre-requisite on which every other aspiration and policy is based.

In order to maintain and raise educational standards, the government must focus relentlessly on addressing the teacher, leader and support staff crisis. It needs to look at all of its current proposals and policies through this lens, and, working alongside the profession, develop a coherent, funded strategy that secures the vital human resource on which schools, colleges and students depend.

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