Teacher Wellbeing Index 2021

Mental Health of Education Staff
We asked teachers and education staff about symptoms and signs of poor mental health, the work and personal issues they relate to and who they turn to for help.

Our main findings:

- More than three-quarters (77%) of all staff experienced symptoms of poor health linked to their work.

- Staff reported a seven percent increase in mental health issues in the past academic year.

- The most common symptom of poor mental health is insomnia, or difficulty sleeping.

- Symptoms linked to signs of anxiety and depression are higher than the general population.

- Levels of exhaustion have considerably increased.

- A lack of work-life balance, excessive workload and the Covid-19 pandemic are the three main work issues linked to symptoms of poor mental health.

- Staff experiencing mental health problems at work are most likely to turn to their family and friends for help.

- Family issues, health concerns and financial worries are the three most common personal reasons for symptoms of poor mental health.

- The wellbeing score for staff is 43.90 – lower than last year’s Index and lower than the general population scores for England, Scotland and Wales.
1. Mental health issues in the past academic year

We asked all teachers and education staff if they had experienced a mental health issue in the past academic year.

38% of teachers and education staff reported experiencing mental health issues in the past academic year (7% increase on 2020).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2020</th>
<th>2021</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Senior leaders</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School teachers</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support staff</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

n. 1 (All sample sizes for each chart (known as 'n' numbers) can be found at the back of the section. n. 1 refers to note 1, and so on.)

Staff who had experienced a mental health issue had problems:

- Whilst working: 27%
- Outside work in their personal life: 13%
- Combination of problems at work and in their personal life: 57%

n. 2

Percentage of staff who experienced any mental health issue in the past year:

- Scotland: 41%
- Northern Ireland: 28%
- North East: 42%
- North West: 47%
- Yorkshire and the Humber: 36%
- East Midlands: 39%
- West Midlands: 32%
- Wales: 30%
- London: 37%
- South East: 33%
- South West: 37%
- East of England: 45%

n. 3
2. Symptoms of poor mental health experienced in the last year

Staff reported experiencing increased symptoms of poor mental health, compared to last year. The most common was insomnia, or difficulty sleeping. (Note: This question asks all respondents in the 2021 survey for their perceptions relating to both 2021 and 2020.)

52% experienced insomnia or difficulty sleeping (13% increase on 2020)
### Symptoms by job role in 2021

#### Insomnia
- Senior leaders: 51%
- School teachers: 48%
- Support staff: 48%

#### Irritability or mood swings
- Senior leaders: 49%
- School teachers: 45%
- Support staff: 45%

#### Over-eating
- Senior leaders: 46%
- School teachers: 45%
- Support staff: 45%

#### Difficulty concentrating
- Senior leaders: 45%
- School teachers: 42%
- Support staff: 42%

#### Muscle tension
- Senior leaders: 37%
- School teachers: 34%
- Support staff: 34%

#### Tearfulness
- Senior leaders: 41%
- School teachers: 46%
- Support staff: 46%

#### Forgetfulness
- Senior leaders: 40%
- School teachers: 41%
- Support staff: 41%

#### Recurring headaches or migraines
- Senior leaders: 36%
- School teachers: 36%
- Support staff: 36%

#### Dizziness
- Senior leaders: 22%
- School teachers: 24%
- Support staff: 24%

#### Changes to appetite
- Senior leaders: 22%
- School teachers: 23%
- Support staff: 23%

#### Panic attacks
- Senior leaders: 18%
- School teachers: 20%
- Support staff: 20%

#### Under-eating
- Senior leaders: 11%
- School teachers: 12%
- Support staff: 12%

#### High blood pressure
- Senior leaders: 12%
- School teachers: 12%
- Support staff: 13%

#### No symptoms
- Senior leaders: 12%
- School teachers: 14%
- Support staff: 20%
Senior leaders experienced the highest rates of insomnia or difficulty sleeping. They also experienced slightly higher levels of irritability or mood swings and muscle tension.

School teachers experienced the highest levels of tearfulness. They experienced slightly higher levels of dizziness and panic attacks.

Support staff had the highest levels of experiencing no symptoms.

### Symptoms by length of time working in education

Early career staff (working up to 0–2 years) experienced the highest levels of symptoms in seven areas.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Symptoms</th>
<th>Length of service</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0–2 yrs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PANIC ATTACKS</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over-eating</td>
<td>49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irritability, mood swings</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tearfulness</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forgetfulness</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Changes to appetite</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dizziness</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Early career staff (working up to 0–2 years) experienced the highest levels of symptoms in seven areas.*

### Observations

Staff working more than 60 hours per week experienced more symptoms than those working 40 hours per week or less.

Staff who reported feeling stressed experienced more symptoms than those who were not stressed.

Staff who indicated their organisations did not support them well experienced more symptoms in all categories than those who indicated their organisations supported them well.

*Data is based on percentage point scores which are not statistically significant, with the exception of irritability/mood swings.*
3. What do the symptoms mean?

The most common signs of poor mental health that the symptoms could be attributed to were anxiety, exhaustion, depression, burnout and acute stress.

**Anxiety**

44% of education staff felt, or it was suggested to them, that the symptoms they experienced were signs of anxiety.

37% of adults in the general population report high levels of anxiety according to the Office for National Statistics in 2020.

The signs of anxiety were highest among school teachers.

- School teachers: 46%
- Senior leaders: 40%
- Support staff: 39%

**Exhaustion**

29% of education staff felt, or it was suggested to them, that the symptoms they experienced were signs of exhaustion.

The signs of exhaustion were highest amongst senior leaders.

- Senior leaders: 38%
- School teachers: 27%
- Support staff: 21%

**Depression**

28% of education staff felt, or it was suggested to them, that the symptoms they experienced were signs of depression.

21% of adults in the general population experience some form of depression according to the Office for National Statistics in 2021.

The signs of depression were highest amongst school teachers.

- Senior leaders: 22%
- School teachers: 30%
- Support staff: 26%
SECTION 3 MENTAL HEALTH OF EDUCATION STAFF

Education Support

**Burnout**

24% of education staff felt, or it was suggested to them, that the symptoms they experienced were signs of burnout.

The signs of burnout were highest amongst senior leaders:

- Senior leaders: 32%
- School teachers: 22%
- Support staff: 21%

**Acute stress**

20% of education staff felt, or it was suggested to them, that the symptoms they experienced were signs of acute stress.

The signs of acute stress were highest amongst senior leaders:

- School teachers: 19% (2020: 19%, 2021: 19%, increase: 3%)
- Senior leaders: 28% (2020: 28%, 2021: 28%, increase: 5%)
- Support staff: 19% (2020: 19%, 2021: 19%, increase: 1%)

9,570 calls to Education Support’s free and confidential helpline in 2020-21.
### Formal diagnosis

Many of the staff who exhibited signs went on to consult with their General Practitioner (GP), or doctor, for a diagnosis. Support staff have not been included in the breakdowns below due to the small sample set.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Anxiety</th>
<th>Exhaustion</th>
<th>Depression</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Senior leaders</th>
<th>School teachers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anxiety</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exhaustion</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Depression</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>59%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Burnout</th>
<th>Acute stress</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Senior leaders</th>
<th>School teachers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Burnout</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acute stress</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 4. Levels of resilience

Levels of staff resilience (their ability to adapt and recover after experiencing difficulties or challenges in life)

- **62%** stated as having very or fairly high resilience
- **26%** medium resilience
- **11%** fairly low or very low resilience

Of those with very or fairly high resilience:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Senior leaders</th>
<th>School teachers</th>
<th>Support staff</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>73%</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>62%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

n. 12 n. 13
Staff with low levels of resilience were more prone to experience signs of mental ill-health.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of resilience</th>
<th>Depression</th>
<th>Anxiety</th>
<th>Exhaustion</th>
<th>Acute Stress</th>
<th>Burnout</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5. Symptoms of poor mental health due to work

77% of all staff experienced at least one behavioural, psychological or physical symptom linked to their work (3% increase on 2020)

- **Behavioural symptoms**
  - (eg changes to appetite, irritability, procrastination, mood swings)
  - Increased by 4% from last year to 58%. They were the most common type of symptoms

- **Psychological symptoms**
  - (eg depression, anxiety, panic attacks)
  - Increased by 2% from last year to 51%*

- **Physical symptoms**
  - (eg raised blood pressure, muscle tension, sweating, dizziness, headaches or migraines)
  - Increased by 4% from last year to 51%

Symptoms of poor mental health due to work - by job role

- **Senior leaders** 84%
- **School teachers** 77%
- **Support staff** 67%

*Not statistically significant
Observations

Staff who were stressed were more likely to experience symptoms than those who were not stressed.

Staff who felt well supported by their organisation were less likely to experience symptoms than those who were not well supported.

Stressed staff experienced the most physical symptoms, followed by behavioural and psychological symptoms.

Staff who felt trusted were less likely to experience symptoms than those who were not trusted.

We asked staff who had experienced behavioural, psychological or physical symptoms linked to their work about its impact

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Work performance suffered</th>
<th>Personal relationships suffered</th>
<th>Work relationships suffered</th>
<th>Taking time off work</th>
<th>None of these</th>
<th>Felt they had to leave their job</th>
<th>Felt suicidal</th>
<th>Personal relationships broke down</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Senior leaders</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School teachers</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support staff</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

n. 16
6. Symptoms related to work issues

The most common work-related issues for staff who had experienced symptoms were work-life balance, excessive workload and the Covid-19 pandemic.

**Work-life balance**
- 66% of staff reported issues with work-life balance.
  - Senior leaders: 78%
  - School teachers: 63%
  - Support staff: 49%

**Excessive workload**
- 64% of staff reported excessive workload.
  - Senior leaders: 78%
  - School teachers: 58%
  - Support staff: 64%

**Covid-19 pandemic**
- 62% of staff reported issues related to the Covid-19 pandemic.
  - Senior leaders: 63%
  - School teachers: 61%
  - Support staff: 62%
7. How do teachers and education staff seek support?

Teachers and education staff who experienced mental health problems at work sought support from four main sources – their family and friends, their partner or spouse, their GP, the NHS or Health professionals, and their peers or colleagues.

**Family and friends**  
44%  
- Senior leaders: 41%  
- School teachers: 46%  
- Support staff: 32%

**Partner or spouse**  
36%  
- Senior leaders: 42%  
- School teachers: 35%  
- Support staff: 34%

**GP, NHS or Health professionals**  
25%  
- Senior leaders: 21%  
- School teachers: 28%  
- Support staff: 17%

**Peers or colleagues**  
24%  
- Senior leaders: 24%  
- School teachers: 25%  
- Support staff: 16%
8. Personal issues which are linked to the symptoms of poor mental health

The three most common personal reasons for symptoms of poor mental health were family issues, health concerns and financial worries.

**Personal issues linked to symptoms of poor mental health**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>Senior leaders</th>
<th>School teachers</th>
<th>Support staff</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Family issues</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health concerns</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None of these</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial worries</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trauma</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bereavement</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing Problems</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problems with neighbours</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the period 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2021, Education Support received **726** grant applications from education staff in financial difficulties. The most prevalent issue was housing.5

*Due to small dataset for support staff, the findings can only be treated as indicative*
9. Wellbeing scores

We use an established questionnaire to determine the wellbeing score for teachers and education staff, namely the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (WEMWBS). To understand more about this, go to Appendix [D].

Scores below 40 suggest an individual could be at high risk of major depression and should be advised to seek help (Taggart et al, 2015)\(^6\).

Those with scores between 41 and 45 should be considered at high risk of psychological distress and increased risk of depression.

The overall wellbeing score of the education workforce was

\[43.90\] (3% decrease on 2020)

This score is lower than the scores recorded by this Index in both 2020 and 2019

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2019</td>
<td>44.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2020</td>
<td>45.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2021</td>
<td>43.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The full scores for 2021 and 2020 can be found in Appendix D.

In addition to the overall score, other findings include:

- **10\%** (29% to 18\%) decrease in respondents saying they feel relaxed all of the time or often (Q3)
- **9\%** (52% to 44\%) decrease in respondents saying they have been thinking clearly all of the time or often (Q7)
- **8\%** (56% to 48\%) decrease in the number of respondents saying they have felt loved all of the time or often (Q12)
Comparisons with published wellbeing data for the UK adult population

National WEMWBS scores are available for the adult populations in England\(^7\), Scotland\(^8\) and Wales\(^9\). When the scores from the Teacher Wellbeing Index are compared with the most recent nationally available scores for 2021, they are found to be much lower\(^{10}\).

Country and regional comparisons – 2021

Staff working in Northern Ireland were found to have the highest wellbeing scores, followed by staff working in Wales. Staff working in Scotland and England had broadly similar results.

On a regional basis, we found the highest wellbeing in South West and South East, and the lowest wellbeing in the West Midlands and the North West.
Over the past three years, we found that the wellbeing of staff working in Northern Ireland has improved, while the wellbeing of staff working in the other nations has declined.

We have found that the wellbeing of staff working in the English regions is now lower in 2021 than in 2020 and 2019.
Comparison by job role

In the last three years, the wellbeing of senior leaders and school teachers rose in 2020, but in 2021 dropped lower than 2019 levels. The wellbeing of support staff also rose in 2020, but in 2021 was marginally higher than in 2019.

Comparison by education phase

The wellbeing of staff working in the early years, primary, secondary, sixth form college, further education and vocational education sectors is now lower in 2021 than 2020 and 2019. Staff working in the adult education sector showed a marginal improvement on both 2020 and 2019 levels, and staff working in other sectors an improvement but it was not as high as in 2020.
Observations

32.9% of staff had a WEMWBS score of 40 or below, which indicates probable depression.

Staff working for 31+ years had the highest WEMWBS score (45.25) and staff working 6-10 years the lowest (43.24).

Staff who consider they are well supported by their organisation have a higher WEMWBS score (46.94) than those who consider they are not well supported (40.75) by their organisation.

Staff who are stressed have a much lower WEMWBS score than staff who are not stressed (41.71 compared to 49.63 who are not stressed – the latter is much closer to the national average figures).

Staff who felt trusted at work have a higher WEMWBS score (45.47) than those who feel distrusted (36.78) at work.

Staff who rate themselves with higher levels of resilience also have a higher WEMWBS score (46.82) when compared to those with medium (41.15) or low levels of resilience (33.91).
Sample profile

n.1 2021 Base: All education staff (n = 3,318), Senior leaders (n = 771), School teachers (n = 2,224), Support staff (n = 221)

n.2 2021 Base Where the problem was: All education professionals (n = 1,258)

n.3 2021 Base: East Midlands (n = 257), North West (n = 377), Wales (n = 123), East of England (n = 249), North East (n = 127), West Midlands (n = 319), South East (n = 535), South West (n = 302), Scotland (n = 269), Northern Ireland (n = 65), London (n = 435), Yorkshire and the Humber (n = 296)

n.4 2021 Base: All education staff in the last year (n = 3,077), in the last two years (n = 2,480)

n.5 2021 Base: Senior leaders (n = 717), School teachers (n = 2,065), Support staff (n = 202)

n.6 2021 Base: All education staff (n = 3,077), 0-2 years (n = 114), 3-5 years (n = 347), 6-10 years (n = 624), 11-20 years (1,129), 21-30 years (n = 647), 31+ years (n = 216)

n.7 2021 Base: All education staff (n = 2,006), Senior leaders (n = 469), School teachers (n = 1,347), Support staff (n = 125)

n.8 2021 Base: All education staff (n = 2,006), Senior leaders (n = 469), School teachers (n = 1,347), Support staff (n = 125)

n.9 2021 Base: All education staff (n = 2,006), Senior leaders (n = 469), School teachers (n = 1,347), Support staff (n = 125)

n.10 2021 Base: All education staff (n = 2,006), Senior leaders (n = 469), School teachers (n = 1,347), Support staff (n = 125)

n.11 2021 Base: All education staff (n = 2,006), Senior leaders (n = 469), School teachers (n = 1,347), Support staff (n = 125)

n.12 2021 Base: Anxiety (n = 866), Exhaustion (n = 595), Depression (n = 536), Burnout (n = 484), Acute stress (n = 413)

n.13 2021 Base: All education staff (n = 3,354), Senior leaders (n = 776), School teachers (n = 2,251), Support staff (n = 225)

n.14 2021 Base: High resilience (n = 1,202), Medium resilience (n = 538), Low resilience (n = 250)

n.15 2021 Base: All education staff (n = 3,257), Senior leaders (n = 761), School teachers (n = 2,178), Support staff (n = 218)

n.16 2021 Base: All education staff (n = 2,505), Senior leaders (n = 629), School teachers (n = 1,663), Support staff (n = 142)

n.17 2021 Base: All education staff (n = 1,062), Senior leaders (n = 282), School teachers (n = 693), Support staff (n = 51)

n.18 2021 Base: All education staff (n = 2,505), Senior leaders (n = 632), School teachers (n = 1,658), Support staff (n = 143)

n.19 2021 Base: Senior leaders (n = 179), School teachers (n = 576), Support staff (n = 49)

n.20 2021 Base: All education staff (n = 3,354), 2020 Base: All education Staff (3,034), 2019 Base: All education staff (3,019)

n.21 2021 Base: England (n = 2,897), Wales (n = 123), Scotland (n = 269), Northern Ireland (n = 65)

n.22 2021 Base: North East (n = 127), North West (n = 377), Yorkshire and the Humber (n = 296), East of England (n = 249), West Midlands (n = 319), East Midlands (n = 257), London (n = 435), South East (n = 535), South West (n = 302)

n.23 2021 Base: England (n = 2,897), Wales (n = 123), Scotland (n = 269), Northern Ireland (n = 65)

n.24 2021 Base: North East (n = 127), North West (n = 377), Yorkshire and the Humber (n = 296), East of England (n = 249), West Midlands (n = 319), East Midlands (n = 257), London (n = 435), South East (n = 535), South West (n = 302)

2020 Base: North East (n = 116), North West (n = 349), Yorkshire and the Humber (n = 263), East of England (n = 254), West Midlands (n = 278), East Midlands (n = 243), London (n = 330), South East (n = 513), South West (n = 286), 2019 Base: North East (n = 135), North West (n = 367), Yorkshire and the Humber (n = 290), East of England (n = 237), West Midlands (n = 277), East Midlands (n = 228), London (n = 326), South East (n = 462), South West (n = 280)

n.25 2021 Base: Senior leaders (n = 776), School teachers (n = 2,251), Support staff (n = 225)

2020 Base: Senior leaders (n = 749), School teachers (n = 2,010), Support staff (n = 184)

2019 Base: Senior leaders (n = 545), School teachers (n = 1,842), Support staff (n = 474)

n.26 2021 Base: Early years (n = 147), Primary (n = 1,417), Secondary (n = 1,407), Sixth form college (n = 87), Further education (n = 142), Adult education (n = 43), Vocational education (n = 12), Other (n = 99)
Footnotes


4Although burnout is not a medically diagnosable mental disorder, it is an occupational condition. Therefore, GPs can still make an assessment on a patient having burnout.


7The 2019 national WEMWBS score for England is 51.4, as communicated to Education Support by NHS Digital’s Lifestyles Team on 23 August 2021.


10The 2019 national WEMWBS score for England is 51.4, as communicated to Education Support by NHS Digital’s Lifestyles Team on 23 August 2021.