



1970s working conditions in the 2020s:

**Modernising the professional lives
of teachers for the 21st Century**

June 2023

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Meet the Commissioners



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We are also incredibly grateful to **Ed Dorrell**, Partner at Public First, and **Holly Papworth**, Senior Policy Manager at Public First, for their expert advice and guidance at every stage of this project — and the Public First **data and polling team** for their analysis.

And finally, thanks to everyone at **Education Support** who contributed to this report and to **Charlie Behrens** for its design.



About the Commission

Education Support's Commission on Teacher Retention brought together some of the most experienced educationalists, sector experts and teachers, united by a sense that too little attention is being given to the crisis of teacher retention in our schools.

Launched in December 2022, the Commission set out to examine the drivers behind why so many secondary school teachers (and leaders) in the state sector are leaving the profession, and what would encourage them to stay.

The Commission was particularly interested in examining the factors affecting retention in places with poorer educational outcomes, often areas with significant levels of disadvantage, due to their link with higher attrition rates and staff shortages. As an imperfect proxy, the Commission has looked closely at schools within Education Investment Areas (EIAs) - announced as part of the Government's Levelling Up White Paper 2022, the third of local authorities in England where educational outcomes are currently weakest and where there are existing place-based interventions - as well as the national picture.

That there are also very serious issues around retention in the primary sector, amongst teaching assistants and wider support staff, and in other nations of the United Kingdom is unquestionable. Indeed, some of the evidence to the Commission would suggest they are interlinked with attrition of teachers (and leaders) in secondary settings in England. Certainly, they deserve the same attention that this Commission, and others alike, have afforded teachers working in the state secondary sector.

But the specific remit of the Commission on Teacher Retention was to focus on the retention crisis that has unfurled in state secondary schools in England. Analysis of the Department for Education (DfE)'s School Workforce statistics over time shows that secondary schools tend to have higher leaving rates (as well as lower recruitment rates and higher numbers of unfilled posts) than primary schools¹. It is through this lens that the research has been conducted by Public First.

The Commission is extraordinarily grateful to all those who took the time to feed into the Commission's research - many of whom are credited in this report, but also plenty more who are not.

Methodology

On behalf of Education Support's Commission on Teacher Retention, Public First ran a detailed research project using a mixture of qualitative and quantitative research methods. The quantitative research provided insights into what teachers and school leaders think, with the qualitative research adding colour and allowing further investigation into why they think it.

Prior to the Commission's formal public launch in December 2022, Public First conducted a nationally representative poll of 1,004 secondary school teachers across England, in field between 18-28th October 2022. The polling tables are available in full, here: <https://www.publicfirst.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/Education-Support.pdf>

¹ Dawson McLean, Jack Worth and Henry Faulkner-Ellis, March 2023, 'Teacher Labour Market in England Annual Report 2023', National Foundation for Education Research [accessed via: https://www.nfer.ac.uk/media/5286/teacher_labour_market_in_england_annual_report_2023.pdf].

In January and February 2023, Public First ran four focus groups with teachers and senior leaders working in non-selective state secondary schools in EIAs, including:

- Two focus groups with senior leaders (with the job title of Principal, Headteacher, Deputy Head or Assistant Head);
- One focus group with Early Career Teachers (teachers in the first two years of teaching in a secondary school post-qualification and started induction on or after 1 September 2021);
- One focus group with women classroom teachers aged between 25-39.

Over the same period, Public First facilitated two oral evidence sessions for Commissioners to speak with experts in the school workforce, international retention data and the policy landscape. The witnesses present at the online sessions were:

Evidence Session 1

- **Sir Kevan Collins**, former Government Recovery Commissioner;
- **Professor Andreas Schleicher**, Director of Education and Skills at the Organisation for Education Development (OECD);
- **Professor Becky Francis CBE**, Chief Executive, and Chris Paterson, Director of Impact at the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF).

Evidence Session 2

- **James Zuccollo**, Director for School Workforce at the Education Policy Institute (EPI);
- **Professor Sir Cary Cooper**, psychologist and workplace wellbeing expert;
- **Lucy Kellaway**, economics teacher and founder of Now Teach; former journalist at the Financial Times.

Between January and March, Public First carried out a series of six in-depth interviews with school leaders and former school leaders. One of whom chose to remain anonymous, but the remaining leaders are:

- **Chris Clyne**, Principal of Northampton Academy;
- **Pepe Di'lasio**, Headteacher, and Lisa McCall, Deputy Headteacher of Wales High School in Rotherham;
- **David Lowbridge-Ellis**, Director of School Improvement at the Matrix Academy Trust;
- **Sir Alasdair Macdonald**, retired Headteacher of Morpeth School in Tower Hamlets (1992-2013);
- **Carolyn Roberts**, Headteacher of Thomas Tallis School in Greenwich.

In that same time period, Public First supplemented their research with interviews with other policy experts and professionals exploring this issue, with particular thanks to **Caroline Docherty** and **Laurie Grist** at **Ark**, **Nikolas Gunn** at the **RSA**, **Stephanie Hamilton** at **ImpactEd**, **Professor Tanya Ovenden-Hope** at **Plymouth Marjon University**, **Jack Worth** at the **NFER**, **Dennis Simms** at **Heads Together** and **Parveen Yusuf** at **Star Academies** for their time and insights.

In March 2023, the Commission was also able to negotiate **an anonymised recruitment and retention dataset** of a leading national Multi-Academy Trust (MAT), which was subsequently analysed by Public First against national Department for Education (DfE) data to identify any new trends.

Public First were pleased to carry out a **condensed series of interviews, focus groups and roundtable discussions** at Northampton Academy, in April 2023, spending time in the school speaking to the principal, as well as groups of teachers with experience working in other school, ECTs, teachers with children and senior leaders. The Commission is particularly grateful to Northampton Academy for hosting us.

Lastly, throughout the research programme, between November 2022 and April 2023, Public First facilitated **four full Commission meetings** to tap into the Commissioners' expertise and steer the research programme.



Foreword by Sinéad Mc Brearty

Staff retention is a straightforward indicator of staff satisfaction. Employers across the land pay attention to their ability to retain talent and to achieve a return on investment for the cost of training and development.

That a Commission of leaders from the education sector should come together to consider the systemic drivers for retention and attrition tells its own story. The most recently available data shows that 4,200 teachers retired in 2020-21. A further 32,000 left the sector for other reasons. It costs the Government £20,000 to train a teacher, so these “other reasons” add up to a tidy £640m of lost capacity. At this rate of attrition we will replace the whole workforce every 14 years. And doing so in the knowledge that teachers really get into their flow professionally after seven years in the job. You don’t have to be an economist to work out the scale of the missed opportunity.

Education Support is engaged in this complex problem for one simple reason: our mission is to support the wellbeing of the workforce. The attrition rate is a flashing red light amidst a range of data that point to poor wellbeing. In any job, poor wellbeing leads to less good outcomes. In this case, those “outcomes” are the academic, vocational, social and emotional development of our children and young people. I’m making this point at a time in history when we ought to move heaven and earth to ensure that our next generation of adults are supported with generosity and stability after growing up during such uncertainty.

There are many different perspectives on what matters most in education: on how things ought to be structured, designed, delivered, and on how we ought to interpret and respond to the needs and behaviours of children and young people. Often, we get lost in our points of difference and disagreement. Occasionally, we get beyond the polarisation to find pragmatic ways forward.

This needs to be one of those moments. We are past the point when incremental change might yield material improvement. It is time to come together to think big and act with courage in pursuit of world-class education delivered by world-class professionals.

Our system does many things well, but it is antiquated and increasingly unattractive to those who have a choice in where they make their careers. Modernisation is not a political or philosophical preference: it is a pragmatic response to the data and to the evidence this Commission has heard from across the country. Resetting the social contract and restoring the status of the profession are necessary conditions for retaining talent in the sector and securing a future pipeline of talented educators.

If we fix the retention crisis, we will also fix the recruitment crisis too. We're not just trying to rebuild the lives of teachers, we're trying to rebuild the reputation of the profession. And if we do that, people will come.

Teacher retention matters across the whole country, but especially so in the least well-resourced communities. In neighbourhoods where families have no spare capacity, where incomes are low and services are stretched to breaking point, this all matters so much more. These are the communities that need our brightest and best. The Commission heard countless stories of the vicious cycle of high staff turnover, recruitment deserts and the resultant increase in pressure on the remaining staff teaching in these settings. The outcome is higher than average attrition with knock-on costs to the very young people who face the harshest headwinds.

Finally, through this research we heard repeatedly about the social and emotional legacy of Covid-19 for children and young people. Teachers and school leaders described significant disaffection, apathy and disconnection among the young people they teach. This goes beyond usual behaviour issues and appears linked with the increase in mental health issues presenting at schools. Our evidence makes clear that teachers don't know how to deal with this. Parents don't appear to know either. And currently, wider social and mental health services are not resourced to address the scale of the issue. This matters for teacher retention. If teachers feel powerless to make a difference in the lives of the young people they work with, demoralisation is an inevitable result and changing career is a rational choice.



Introduction by Evelyn Forde MBE

Chairing Education Support's Commission on Teacher Retention, while a privilege, is rather close to home. I work in a 'Good' school, in a leafy suburb in North London, with great outcomes. But retention of staff is one of the things that keep me up at night. And this is not the profession I entered. So, after 23 years in schools — nine as a headteacher - I'm packing up my desk and taking a much needed break.

I am not alone. **More than 1 in 5 (21 per cent)** secondary school teachers surveyed for the Commission said they were unlikely to be in the profession in five years' time.² And when we look specifically at more challenging educational contexts, those working in Education Investment Areas (EIAs), that figure climbs to **nearly one quarter (24 per cent)**.³

It's not all bad news. Overwhelmingly, the teachers we heard from love what they do. **81 per cent** said they like their job⁴ and **more than three-quarters** said it was rewarding.⁵

But, my fear is that the picture is changing, particularly with all the new expectations placed on schools since the pandemic. We cannot afford to ride off the goodwill of the workforce any longer.

The Commission heard how teachers' job satisfaction, their work-life balance and status are being eroded by "empty work", a spiralling list of responsibilities, new challenges around pupil behaviour, antiquated working patterns and toxic school cultures. Why would anyone want to be in teaching?

There can be no silver bullet. That much is clear. But there are actions that the sector can take for itself to improve the working conditions and wellbeing of teachers that would, at least, reduce the disaffection and exhaustion that causes them to leave.

We have been careful to highlight examples of best practice, not to recommend a one-size-fits-all approach. We have drawn from the work of school leaders who have implemented changes and cultivated school cultures that encourage their staff to stay. We wanted to demonstrate what is possible, even in challenging circumstances and with stretched budgets.

Yet there remain key elements in the current culture, ethos and demands of the education system that need to be addressed if we want to make a real difference. Schools face significant barriers - beyond their control - which are preventing them from modernising conditions, competing with other professions, and getting workload under control. Schools are not being given the right tools to succeed. The quality of training is not reflective of the changed context in which schools are now operating.

² Public First, 18th Oct - 28th Oct 2022, Table 17, Poll of secondary school teachers in England [Poll tables available via: <http://www.publicfirst.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/Education-Support.pdf>].

³ Ibid.

⁴ Public First, 18th Oct - 28th Oct 2022, Table 19, Poll of secondary school teachers in England [Poll tables available via: <http://www.publicfirst.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/Education-Support.pdf>].

⁵ Public First, 18th Oct - 28th Oct 2022, Table 24, Poll of secondary school teachers in England [Poll tables available via: <http://www.publicfirst.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/Education-Support.pdf>].

The high-stakes accountability system was raised time and time again in the evidence from the sector, as driving the behaviours in schools that undermine retention. There is a false dichotomy in education that high expectations (for pupils and staff) are at odds with good school cultures and staff wellbeing. But a profession constantly looking over its shoulder is not one that has the autonomy and confidence to implement much-needed change. Fear of not “doing things as they’ve always been done” and following the recipe for a good Ofsted rating have become the focus in education.

This Commission’s tight focus on the local context of a school is what is missing in policymaking in Westminster. It really matters if we are to truly bring teaching into the 21st century and make progress on staff retention. I’m not giving up the fight. And I hope that others with more power than me to turn the retention crisis around haven’t either.



The recommendations

There is no single driver of teacher retention, nor one silver bullet to fix it. Here is the Commission's proposed starter for ten. They are recommendations for policymakers and schools that we think could go some way towards modernising working practices in teaching:

- 1. A serious, Government-commissioned, independent review of the current statutory guidance on pay and conditions for teachers in England is long overdue. The review should aim to ensure that (as a minimum) the framework and guidance governing teachers' pay and conditions⁶ accurately reflects the realities of the working day. It should better fulfil the intended function of the 1991 Act to protect teachers' right to work, at least in part, more flexibly. It is vital that this work is developed in consultation with teachers, classroom assistants, support staff, senior leaders and headteachers. It should consider:**
 - a. The 1,265 hour rule and its relationship with 'undirected' hours.**
 - b. The development of a promotion pathway rooted in classroom teaching, and how the teaching pay scales should reflect that.**
 - c. The introduction of an incentive payment to retain teachers working in schools in Education Investment Areas.**
- 2. Codifying what "poor practice" around workload looks like. There should be a list of things that schools must stop doing, in clear terms on the DfE website. This would finally make it clear what is not required as part of an inspection, once and for all. This will help more school leaders to have the professional courage to change the way they've always done things.**
- 3. School leaders should commit to reviewing their own workload practices on a yearly (or more regular) basis. They should be trusted to consult their teachers and individual subject departments to work out what they can scale back, given their local context, and without compromising high standards.**
- 4. The Department for Education (DfE) should be set new retention targets for the school workforce in England — including teachers, leaders and support staff — published annually. In the same way that there is a target number of trainees to start postgraduate initial teacher training, estimated using the Teacher Workforce Model, so too should retention be a Key Performance Indicator of the DfE.**

In meeting those targets, the Department should re-double its efforts to properly consider the impact of policy changes on staff wellbeing, as part of the DfE's commitment to integrate wellbeing into the 'school workload policy test' through the Education Staff Wellbeing Charter. Any potential intensification of workload resulting from proposed policy changes that might hamper the DfE's efforts to meet its retention targets would be flagged during the policymaking process for consideration.
- 5. The profession needs clarity from the Government in defining what is schools' responsibility and what isn't. Should wraparound services for children and young people be co-located on the school site, or delivered in the community? Clarity is**

⁶ The School Teachers' Pay and Conditions Document (STPCD) and accompanying statutory guidance.

required, and whatever the decision, schools and public services need the right level of training, support and resources.

- 6.** We need a national conversation and a recognition at a political level that the complexity of children and young people's needs and pupil behaviour is becoming more challenging in such a way that exceeds school and teachers' capacity to resolve alone.
- 7.** A fully-funded, specialist Human Resources advisory service should be established for schools, tasked with promoting and supporting them specifically with the implementation of best practice flexible working policies and arrangements. Pre-tender, there should be a wide consultation with the profession to better understand what would be most useful to school leaders, MATs and staff, in terms of the advice and support the service should offer. The research undertaken for this Commission has highlighted the HR advisory body should work with schools to ensure:
 - a.** Non-teaching time should be better organised to take account of modern working lives.
 - b.** The policies around transitioning between full and part-time contracts must be clear, fair and reasonable, and communicated to staff at the recruitment stage.
- 8.** The Government should commit to an urgent review of the deployment and content of the training elements of the Early Career Framework (ECF), and the content frameworks underpinning the suite of National Professional Qualifications (NPQs). This work must be co-produced with a wide range of stakeholders working in the profession. The review should consider:
 - a.** How the content and delivery of both the ECF and the NPQs should be reframed so that they are truly grounded in the realities of teachers' working lives, with flexibilities built in to allow individuals to select the courses that are best suited to their own level of experience, and the local context.
 - b.** Whether to expand the suite of specialist NPQs to ensure they are tailored and truly relevant to teachers' subject specialisms.
- 9.** The accountability system is unbalanced and the negative impact on the profession is troubling. The collection of accountability components, including the pressure experienced by heads and teachers as a result of Ofsted inspections, should be reviewed holistically. The aim of such a review should be to ensure that schools remain accountable to both the general taxpayer and the communities that they serve, but without driving up workload and encouraging short-term management decisions. In truth, it is hard to plot a route to a substantive improvement in teacher retention without a reduction in accountability pressure.
- 10.** Every five years, headteachers should be granted a month-long, paid sabbatical to complete a new qualification - 'the NPQH+' - expertly designed to develop the people management skills required of good leaders, and with a laser focus on the current context in schools.

Section 1

Bringing teachers' working conditions and pay into the 21st Century

A review of the current statutory guidance on pay and conditions for teachers



Education Support’s Commission on Teacher Retention launched in December 2022, as frustrations about pay and conditions amongst the sector bubbled over, and members of the largest education union voted to take strike action in January 2023⁷. It was in this context that Public First conducted its programme of research for the Commission.

No doubt, pay is a significant driver of teacher attrition. In the last 30 years, teachers’ salaries have fallen relative to other professions for teachers of all ages⁸. In a survey for the Commission of over 1,000 teachers in secondary state schools in England, **57 per cent** said that increasing pay was the most important change needed to prevent teachers from leaving⁹.

However, too often in the debate around recruitment and retention, pay becomes the main prism through which the debate is understood. Any suggestion that salary rises alone will stem the flow of teachers leaving the profession is overly simplistic, even in some of the more challenging school contexts.

In a focus group of Early Career Teachers in Education Investment Areas (EIAs)¹⁰, not once was pay brought up unprompted in the discussion about what would make teachers’ stay. When asked, the participants of that focus group generally agreed that more money would be nice to have, particularly when “you’ve got kids and a mortgage, etc. with this kind of current rate of inflation” but:

“The thing is, I think there are bigger issues that need to be dealt with... I could get paid more, but if I’ve still got a really heavy workload, then those things affect your job satisfaction, your stress levels, your mental health, and that’s just something I value more than the pay at the moment.”¹¹

This is not to underplay the importance of fair and competitive pay, but to highlight the complexity of the retention crisis. That there are higher paid careers available to them is in no doubt in teachers’ minds. **59 per cent** of secondary teachers thought they could get more money if they left teaching. But evidently, the pull of more money on its own is not necessarily the tipping point. Just over one quarter (**26 per cent**) of those who thought they could get more money elsewhere said they would be very likely to leave should that offer of more money in another sector come through¹².

⁷ National Education Union, 16 January 2023, ‘NEU to take strike action over pay’ [accessed via: <https://neu.org.uk/press-releases/neu-take-strike-action-over-pay>].

⁸ James Zuccollo, 7 February 2023.

⁹ Public First, 18th Oct - 28th Oct 2022, Table 46, Poll of secondary school teachers in England [Poll tables available via: <http://www.publicfirst.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/Education-Support.pdf>].

¹⁰ The third of local authorities in England where educational outcomes are currently weakest and where there are existing place-based intervention, designated by the Department for Education: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1149520/Education_Investment_Areas_-_selection_methodology.pdf

¹¹ Early Career Teacher, 10 January 2023, Public First focus group.

¹² Public First, 18th Oct - 28th Oct 2022, Table 32, Poll of secondary school teachers in England [Poll tables available via: <http://www.publicfirst.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/Education-Support.pdf>].

What is clear, however, is that the terms and conditions under which teachers are expected to work, and be compensated for, are a relic of the time in which they were established. They no longer reflect the reality of teachers' working lives today. And this matters significantly for retention (and recruitment), if the profession is to compete with the quickly changing working environments that teachers see in other sectors.

- The uncapped potential of teachers' (undirected) working hours means that their pay cannot be reflective of their hours worked, which is not only eroding teachers' work-life balance, but also their sense of status and appreciation.
- Opportunities for pay progression and promotion really matter for retention, yet pathways are closed off to the very many teachers' wanting to remain, develop and excel in the classroom.

Compensation for an honest day's work: 1,265 hours?

**“It's not necessarily about the money...
it's about being compensated for the hours worked.”**

— Jack Worth, Lead Economist at the National Foundation
for Educational Research (NFER), 1 February 2023

It was nearly 50 years ago, in 1976, that the Burnham Committee - the body tasked with setting the remuneration payable to teachers by local education authorities - sought, for the first time, some codification of teachers' working hours.

Commissioner Sir Tim Brighouse was then Under Secretary (Education) for the Association of County Councils. He was one of the employer representatives who sat on the Authorities Panel on the Committee, alongside the unions. The context of reform, as he explained, is all too familiar:

“There had been a huge problem with teacher recruitment. There was runaway inflation and a cost of living crisis, as well as an energy crisis caused by oil price hikes. We were also engaging in a new relationship with Europe, as we had just joined the EU.

“People said that teachers' conditions of service were non-existent - hence the debate to stop them being exploited by unscrupulous heads. Most old-timers and some young-timers - including me - thought teaching was a vocation and, therefore, any attempt to put on paper what they did was going to de-professionalise the job. But people conceded that some codification was desirable.”

That Committee introduced what is now well known as the 1,265 rule. This is the specified number of hours for which teachers can be directed to work by their headteacher over a year.

It was brought into legislation in 1991 (after the Teachers' Pay and Conditions Act 1987 conferred new powers on the Secretary of State for Education to determine the remuneration of school teachers), and it was at that point, that directed time of 1,265 hours was spread over 195 working days (approx. 6.5 hours/day on average).

The intention behind the policy was actually to protect the right of teachers to conduct planning, preparation and marking more flexibly during undirected hours (i.e. not at a time or place directed by their headteacher). This was all before more formalised, protected PPA time was introduced in 2002¹³.

All these years later, the 1,265 and PPA rules remain in the School Teachers' Pay and Conditions Document (STPCD) and continue to be the main contractual 'protections' for teachers from excessive working hours.

What is clear from the evidence the Commission has heard is the need to revisit whether that remains the best protection we can afford teachers and school leaders. As ***Achieving a work-life balance*** details, teachers' responsibilities have evolved significantly since the 1970s, and the uncapped number of undirected hours has eroded teachers' work-life balance, driving them out of the profession.

78 per cent of teachers who thought they could get a better work-life balance in another career said they would be likely to leave the profession if they were offered a job in another sector which promised a **better work-life balance**. This polled higher than better pay (**64 per cent**).

31 per cent of secondary school teachers reported their work-life balance was either 'bad' or 'very bad'. And, according to the DfE's own data, over half (**56 per cent**) of teachers and leaders they surveyed thought both that their workload was unacceptable and that they did not have sufficient control over it¹⁴.

The intensity of the term-time workload was once a trade-off worth making for the long summer holidays - an attractive and important period of recuperation. Indeed, **30 per cent** of teachers surveyed said the holiday schedule was one of the main reasons they went into the profession¹⁵. Yet, the reality now looks very different and that presents challenges.

In one focus group, ECTs told us that you can't switch off in the holidays. If you do, you're on the backfoot for the next term. In another, with senior leaders in EIAs, there was a sense of frustration about "a real misunderstanding in the general public about our holidays."¹⁶ One senior leader said:

"I think teaching would be brilliant if I had six weeks off in the summer. I think if it was exactly what people thought it was, it would be a fantastic job. But I'm lucky if I get two whole weeks in the summer."¹⁷

¹³ Matthew Evans, 9 September 2018, 'Working 1265 (what a way to make a living)' [accessed via: <https://educontrarianblog.com/2018/09/09/working-1265-what-a-way-to-make-a-living/#:~:text=In%201991%2C%20the%20School%20Teachers,under%20which%20teachers%20were%20employed>].

¹⁴ Lorna Adams, Sarah Coburn-Crane, Alfie Sanders-Earley, Rachel Keeble, Harry Harris, James Taylor and Becky Taylor, April 2023, 'Working lives of teachers and leaders — wave 1 Research report', Department for Education [accessed via: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1148571/Working_lives_of_teachers_and_leaders_-_wave_1_-_core_report.pdf].

¹⁵ Public First, 18th Oct - 28th Oct 2022, Table 30, Poll of secondary school teachers in England [Poll tables available via: <http://www.publicfirst.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/Education-Support.pdf>].

¹⁶ Senior leader, 21 February 2023, Public First focus group.

¹⁷ Senior leader, 21 February 2023, Public First focus group.

School trips were another example commonly brought up:

“There’s a very, very strong expectation that we will organise abroad trips. And that’s been my role for the past four years. And the organisation of an abroad trip for 60-odd students is immense. So you spend a lot of time in the evenings, at weekends doing that - chasing up the tour providers and things. And then you spend four to five days solidly at work over the holidays with no more than a thanks from the parents at the end of it.”¹⁸

Teachers across all the focus groups conducted for the Commission were very ready to acknowledge that long, unsociable working hours are not unique to their profession. But what teachers don’t have is that clearer sense of reward and progression for those hours. There was a palpable sense of unfairness that whilst other professionals may enjoy time off in lieu, paid overtime, or time-and-a-half holiday pay at the employers’ discretion, the same is near impossible within the current remuneration system for teachers.

“I think that a lot of other professions are expected to kind of go above and beyond, but they’re rewarded with payment for doing those extra hours... I just think that the expectation [in teaching] is that these things have to get done and it’s in your own time, and there’s no reward for that.”

— Classroom teacher from the all-women group,
Public First focus group on behalf of Education Support,
21 February 2023

- **80 per cent** of secondary teachers in EIAs reported they do not feel their current salary is a fair reflection of the amount of work they put into their job (**76 per cent** of teachers outside EIAs)¹⁹.

In some cases, responsibility for excessive working hours must be borne, in part, by the profession itself. More can be done to make improvements, and can be read about in the ***Achieving a work-life balance*** section of this report.

As the scope of teachers’ responsibilities have broadened over time (but particularly since the pandemic), the statutory guidance determining teachers’ pay and conditions has not kept pace.

This matters for retention because how that time outside the classroom is managed affects an entire workforce. In the survey for the Commission, only **7 per cent** of secondary teachers said they were not working hours outside of the school day.

¹⁸ Female teacher, 21 February 2023, Public First focus group.

¹⁹ Public First, 18th Oct - 28th Oct 2022, Table 49, Poll of secondary school teachers in England [Poll tables available via: <http://www.publicfirst.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/Education-Support.pdf>].

Pay progression and promotion

“The other thing that we should do more of is reward teachers who are simply good at teaching. One thing that I think is bad for retention is the only way of getting more money is by going further away from teaching by taking on TLRs of one sort or another.”

— Lucy Kellaway, economics teacher and founder of Now Teach,
7 February 2023

Many ambitious teachers putting in exceptionally long hours question the merit in doing so when they are dissatisfied by the opportunities for pay progression and career development available in classroom teaching. **69 per cent** of secondary teachers who thought they could get better progression and career development opportunities in another career said they would be either ‘very’ or ‘somewhat’ likely to leave the sector altogether if offered a job which promised these things²⁰.

Promotion opportunities can be unclear (**41 per cent** of secondary teachers reported this; climbing to **53 per cent** of respondents aged 18-24 years-old²¹) and they depend too much on taking on sustained additional responsibilities that mean more time out of the classroom, i.e., a Teaching and Learning Responsibility (TLR) or a senior leadership role.

Often, the pay reward is not worth the additional hours. Around half of teachers and leaders surveyed for the DfE’s Working Lives of Teachers report received an additional allowance payment as part of their salary. But only **35 per cent** of them agreed that the allowance fairly compensated them for the additional responsibility that comes with the role²².

“Even though I’d love to have a TLR, I’d love to get a promotion and it is in things that I’m interested in, just financially, it’s not worth it in terms of my work-life balance at all.”²³

This moves teachers away from doing what they love most, which is teaching. They want to get on with the job they came into the profession to do. In a focus group of senior leaders, most said they had not considered a leadership role before entering the profession.

²⁰Public First, 18th Oct - 28th Oct 2022, Table 35, Poll of secondary school teachers in England [Poll tables available via: <http://www.publicfirst.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/Education-Support.pdf>].

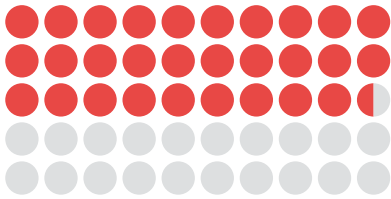
²¹Public First, 18th Oct - 28th Oct 2022, Table 59, Poll of secondary school teachers in England [Poll tables available via: <http://www.publicfirst.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/Education-Support.pdf>].

²²Lorna Adams, Sarah Coburn-Crane, Alfie Sanders-Earley, Rachel Keeble, Harry Harris, James Taylor and Becky Taylor, April 2023, ‘Working lives of teachers and leaders — wave 1 Research report’, Department for Education [accessed via: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1148571/Working_lives_of_teachers_and_leaders_-_wave_1_-_core_report.pdf].

²³Female teacher, Public First focus group, 21 February 2023.

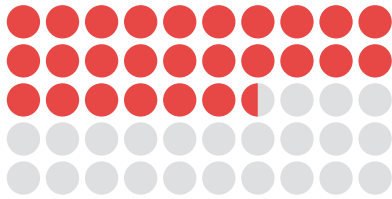
**What are the main reasons you chose to go into teaching?
Please select up to three of the following:**

59%



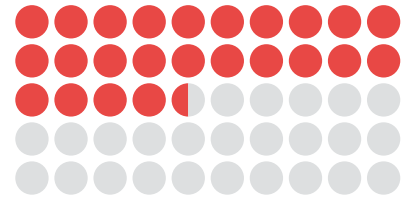
Opportunity to make a difference in young people's lives

53%



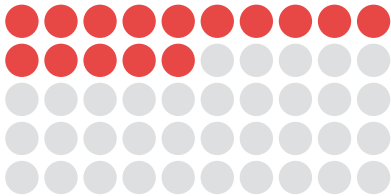
Love the subject I teach

49%



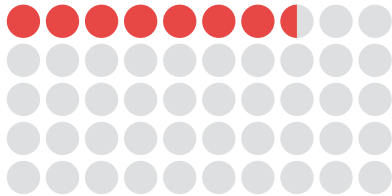
Want to teach young people about a subject area I enjoy

30%



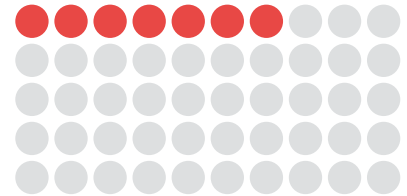
Work hours / holiday schedule

15%



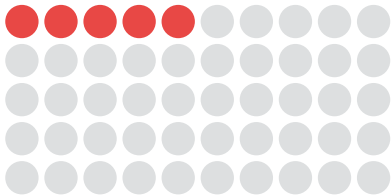
Work - life balance

14%



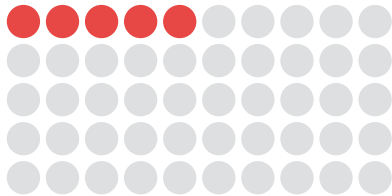
The sense of community

10%



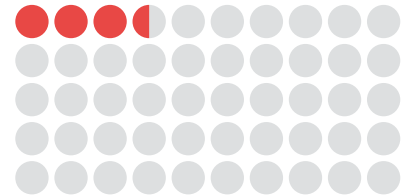
The pay

10%



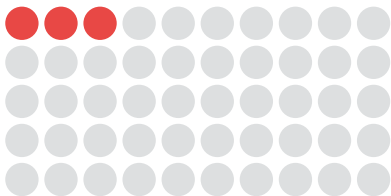
Other jobs did not appeal to me

7%



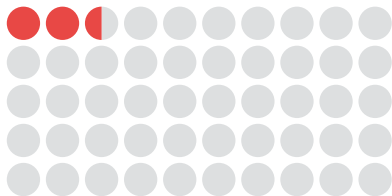
The professional development opportunities

6%



The flexibility of lesson planning

5%



Autonomy over the decisions I make

²⁴Public First, 18th Oct - 28th Oct 2022, Table 30, Poll of secondary school teachers in England [Poll tables available via: <http://www.publicfirst.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/Education-Support.pdf>].

All of this matters enormously for the type of people the system brings through into school leadership positions, and encourages to remain in post. As one senior leader said:

“I love being a teacher. I love being in the classroom. I love my subjects. I love teaching kids. I love making a difference... I’ve obviously thought about changing my role so I actually get more time in the classroom. And that’s what I’m actually going to do over the next few years.”²⁵

Multiple participants in a focus group of women teachers had actually stepped back from additional responsibilities, or were put off by the prospect:

“I do know colleagues who have stepped down from senior leadership and from middle leadership back to what they came into it for, which is teaching, because they felt like they’d lost what they’d come into the job for. And more and more people mentioned it to me: ‘Are you going to go for this role that’s come up?’ And I think: No, because then I’ll lose my teaching hours.”

Getting pay progression and career development opportunities right could, therefore, have implications not only for retention, but for who stays in the profession.

School leaders, however, find themselves between a rock and a hard place when it comes to determining their staff’s pay. In contrast to other professions, they have very limited flexibility to use pay as a lever to reward excellent performance and incentivise their best classroom teachers to stay²⁶. This is down to the salary ranges set out in the School Teachers’ Review Body (STRB).

Some freedoms were afforded to headteachers around staff pay in 2013, but they were eroded by dwindling finances in the system. And the link to performance-related pay created the potential for new tensions between school leaders and classroom teachers, and has been a significant driver of extra workload in itself, for no clear benefit, as schools introduce additional processes to track and audit performance to make largely marginal salary decisions.

This also stands out to the approach of some of education leaders in other countries. In Singapore there is an entrenched belief in the importance of lifelong learning and development in teaching. Once qualified, teachers’ pay increases annually for the first three years, and then can increase further still by moving up one of three tracks. They include, including specialisms and leadership, but also a teaching track, whereby classroom teachers can reach ‘Master Teacher’ or even ‘Principal Master Teacher’ status.

The Advanced Skill Teachers (ASTs) programme, introduced in 1998, was a model much closer to this. It worked to reward the very best teachers - recognised through external assessment - who wished to remain in the classroom rather than being promoted up the management scale or taking on extra responsibilities for additional payment. They were also given more non-contact time to support other teachers to develop their skills, and to share excellent practice, approaches, and ideas.



²⁵Senior leader, 10 January 2023, Public First focus group.

²⁶Classroom teachers are paid on either the main scale or the upper pay scale. Teachers normally progress one point a year up the main pay scale, but can be awarded an extra point for excellent performance.

Local context matters

“Teachers are key to unlocking potential in young people and the country as a whole. We won’t achieve a more equitable society or a more productive and innovative economy unless we make it a profession attractive to join and sustainable to stay in. That starts with getting the talented teachers to schools where recruitment and retention challenges are felt most acutely.”

— Russell Hobby, Commissioner and Chief Executive of Teach First.

The fact that leaders have limited flexibilities over pay also matters for retaining teachers in schools in EIAs. Recognition of the additional challenges faced by staff and schools in these areas could make a meaningful difference to staff retention.

All schools are dealing with significant pressures (particularly since the pandemic) around budget, pupil behaviour, mental health, staffing, workload, as this report’s sections on *Achieving a work-life balance* and *Managing pupil behaviour* makes clear.

But there are certain pressures that are exacerbated by the local context of EIAs - and this is true now more than ever. The cost of living crisis is affecting local communities, local services are squeezed and the pressure on schools to fill that gap has grown.

Overall, **72 per cent** of teachers in secondary state schools said that they are helping students more with non-academic matters than they did 5 years ago; but for teachers in EIAs, this figure was as high as **82 per cent**²⁷.

As one senior leader said:

“I think salaries do need to rise and I think it’s about recognition if you are working in more challenging environments in a city [for example], in AP. Whereas in reality, the only way if you’re in education where you can get more money, apart from getting promoted, is by working in inner city London or London fringe.”²⁸

In her evidence to the Commission, Professor Tanya Ovenden-Hope, who has dedicated many years of her career to research on education and teaching in coastal and rural schools, explained why place can also be a factor itself affecting retention. Using the example of coastal EIAs, she set out why teacher churn is so high in these places:

“There’s no cultural opportunities. So there’s not the things you take for granted in urban settings, like cinemas and restaurants and all those things. You might be in

²⁷Public First, 18th Oct - 28th Oct 2022, Table 82, Poll of secondary school teachers in England [Poll tables available via: <http://www.publicfirst.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/Education-Support.pdf>].

²⁸Senior leader, 10 January 2023, Public First focus group.

a school that's very small. So you may be one of three staff. So there's not actually any kind of networking connection opportunity for you. And also house prices are ridiculous in these areas.”²⁹

Introducing additional payments for those working in EIAs has been tried before. But, unlike failed schemes such as the National Teaching Service, the intention would be to reward those teachers already working in these areas. The aim would be to improve retention, rather than try to ‘parachute’ in teachers from outside the area with a combination of financial incentives and promises of advancement. Such schemes invariably fail, cost money, and risk being perceived as patronising by those schools participating. Instead, those teachers who are committed to schools in EIAs, who are often from the local area, should be recognised and rewarded.

Recommendation

A serious Government-commissioned independent review of the current statutory guidance on pay and conditions for teachers in England is long overdue. The review should aim to ensure that (as a minimum) the framework and guidance governing teachers’ pay and conditions³⁰ accurately reflects the realities of the working day. It should better fulfil the intended function of the 1991 Act to protect teachers’ right to work, at least in part, more flexibly. It is vital that this work is developed in consultation with teachers, classroom assistants, support staff, senior leaders and headteachers.

Such a review would signal real intent to shift the dial on working practices in teaching. It will take into account the changes to workplace conditions in the last 50 years, both inside and outside the education sector.

The conclusions of what such a review might find is beyond the scope of this Commission, as is the overall funding envelope for schools. However, the research conducted for this project suggests that it should examine:

- a. The 1,265 hour rule and its relationship with ‘undirected’ hours.** Of course, headteachers must be able to specify when and where they need their staff in the classroom - there are certain undeniable in-person working hours and responsibilities that make teaching a unique profession. But the Commission has heard that the uncapped potential of what “reasonable additional hours” of undirected time looks like in practice is eroding teachers’ work-life balance, and driving them out of the profession.

The review should consider whether ‘1,265’ directed hours and uncapped ‘undirected’ hours should be replaced with contractual working hours that are more reflective of teachers’ working day and the modern workplace, whilst giving schools the resource and flexibility to grant allowances where teachers’ work outside those patterns.

Not only could this better serve the interests of employees, but it could also grant schools more autonomy over the structure of their school day (e.g. staffing an extended day).

²⁹Professor Tanya Ovenden-Hope, 8 February 2023.

³⁰The School Teachers’ Pay and Conditions Document (STPCD) and accompanying statutory guidance.

- b. The development of a promotion pathway rooted in classroom teaching, and how the teaching pay scales should reflect that.** Good pay progression and promotion opportunities really matter for retention, but the pathways available depend too much on accepting sustained additional responsibilities which take them away from the very thing they came into the job wanting to do. School leaders also have limited flexibility under the existing teacher salary ranges set by the STRB to promote and reward excellent performance in the classroom. As a result, the system risks losing more passionate, committed teachers who are ambitious about their future in the profession, but want to remain in classroom practice.

The review should consider the development and funding of a promotion pathway that rewards classroom teachers who want to hone their subject knowledge, engage in pedagogical research and develop their practice through accredited pathways. This could help professionalise and raise the status of the classroom teacher, as well as standards in education. The review could consider whether to utilise existing mechanisms: for example, by tying financial reward tied to successful completion of a new NPQ pathway, a Masters degree, or by acquiring Chartered Teacher status with the Chartered College of Teaching.

- c. The introduction of an incentive payment to retain teachers working in schools in Education Investment Areas.** All schools are, rightly, under great pressure to secure the best outcomes for their pupils - and increasingly, part of that role is dealing with children and their families' wider needs to ensure pupils are ready to learn. But it is no secret, even amongst teachers themselves, that in some parts of the country, these demands and additional responsibilities are far greater, and there are place-based factors affecting retention that even the best of schools and school leaders cannot compensate for.

As such, there should be some acknowledgement of this reflected in the pay, if we are to truly value and commit to retaining teachers working in these schools. Education Investment Areas (EIAs) are not a perfect measure - and the review could consider the merits of using different metrics. The sum of that payment, and how and when it would best be administered, should be looked at as part of the review.



Section 2

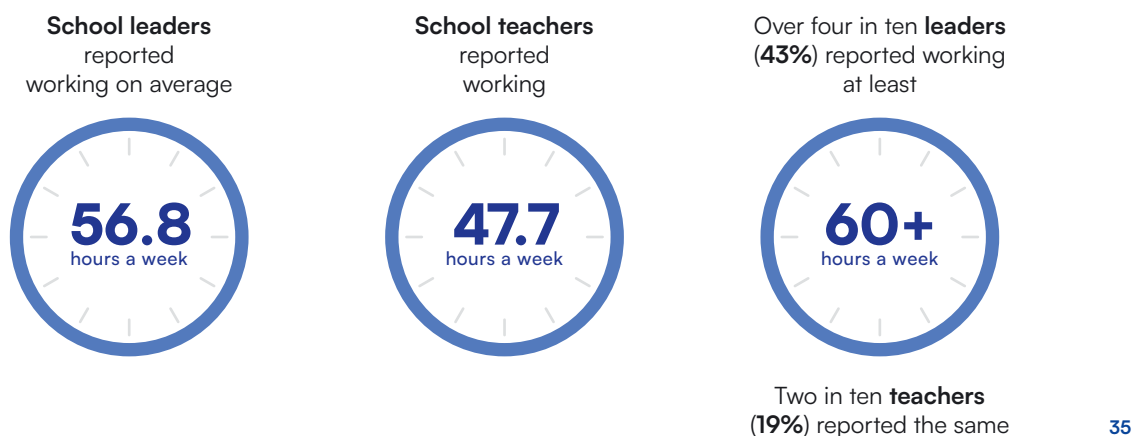
Achieving a work-life balance

Minimising “empty work” and clearly defining what is a schools’ responsibility and what isn’t



“If you ask teachers why they leave, they will say workload. That is the ‘push factor’”. That’s according to economist Jack Worth in his evidence to the Commission, whose extensive teacher labour market research finds that teachers work an average of 4.5 hours more per week than comparable graduates³¹.

Teachers’ working hours are well-researched. **92 per cent** of teachers surveyed for the Commission said they worked hours outside of the school day³². **70 per cent** wished they spent fewer hours doing work outside of school hours³³. And in the DfE’s Working Lives of Teachers and Leaders survey 2023, **72 per cent** of teachers disagreed that their workload was acceptable³⁴.



In and of itself, however, the evidence from teachers to the Commission would suggest that the hours are not necessarily what is driving attrition rates.

For one, plenty of other professions demand long or unsociable working hours, with periods of particularly high intensity, yet do not see a similar exodus.

Secondly, “workload has been an issue for a long time”, as Professor Becky Francis, Chief Executive of the Education Endowment Foundation, told the Commission, and, in policy terms, “there have been long standing attempts to kind of remediate that.”³⁶

Furthermore, “teachers’ workload and stress hasn’t risen dramatically over the last 30 years” in the way in which we have seen attrition climb, as James Zuccollo, Director for School Workforce at the Education Policy Institute, told the Commission.

³¹ Dawson McLean, Jack Worth and Henry Faulkner-Ellis, March 2023, ‘Teacher Labour Market in England Annual Report 2023’, National Foundation for Education Research [accessed via: https://www.nfer.ac.uk/media/5286/teacher_labour_market_in_england_annual_report_2023.pdf].

³² Public First, 18th Oct - 28th Oct 2022, Table 85, Poll of secondary school teachers in England [Poll tables available via: <http://www.publicfirst.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/Education-Support.pdf>].

³³ Public First, 18th Oct - 28th Oct 2022, Table 88, Poll of secondary school teachers in England [Poll tables available via: <http://www.publicfirst.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/Education-Support.pdf>].

³⁴ Lorna Adams, Sarah Coburn-Crane, Alfie Sanders-Earley, Rachel Keeble, Harry Harris, James Taylor and Becky Taylor, April 2023, ‘Working lives of teachers and leaders — wave 1 Research report’, Department for Education [accessed via: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1148571/Working_lives_of_teachers_and_leaders_-_wave_1_-_core_report.pdf].

³⁵ Education Support, May 2023, ‘Teaching: the new reality’ [accessed via: <https://www.educationsupport.org.uk/media/cxkxon2/teaching-the-new-reality.pdf>].

³⁶ Professor Becky Francis, 12 January 2023.

What has shifted though, is what teachers are doing in those hours. The nature of the tasks filling those hours are, increasingly, taking teachers away from what they love doing most: teaching.

The intensification of teacher workload combined with the other decreases in job quality have been rehearsed elsewhere³⁷. It was notable, however, how strongly they were reflected in our research.

- 1. Part One** of this section explores the tedious, “pointless” tasks that could be made more efficient or automated. This is what the Commission is calling “empty work”: data drops, unnecessarily excessive marking, responding to emails. This is where much of the policy efforts to reduce workload have been directed, though evidence to the Commission suggests this battle is far from won.
- 2. Part Two** of this section looks at the impact of how **the scope of what is now perceived to be teachers’ responsibility goes far beyond the role of an educator**, and beyond the expectations of those entering the profession. How supported and comfortable teachers feel in carrying out their work, particularly newer challenges or those exacerbated by the pandemic, like those relating to pupil behaviour, matters enormously.

On their own, each would be a problem for retention - and indeed, in some schools and contexts, one is more a problem than the other. But combined, workload takes on a new intensity, one that erodes teachers’ work-life balance, and drives them out of the profession.

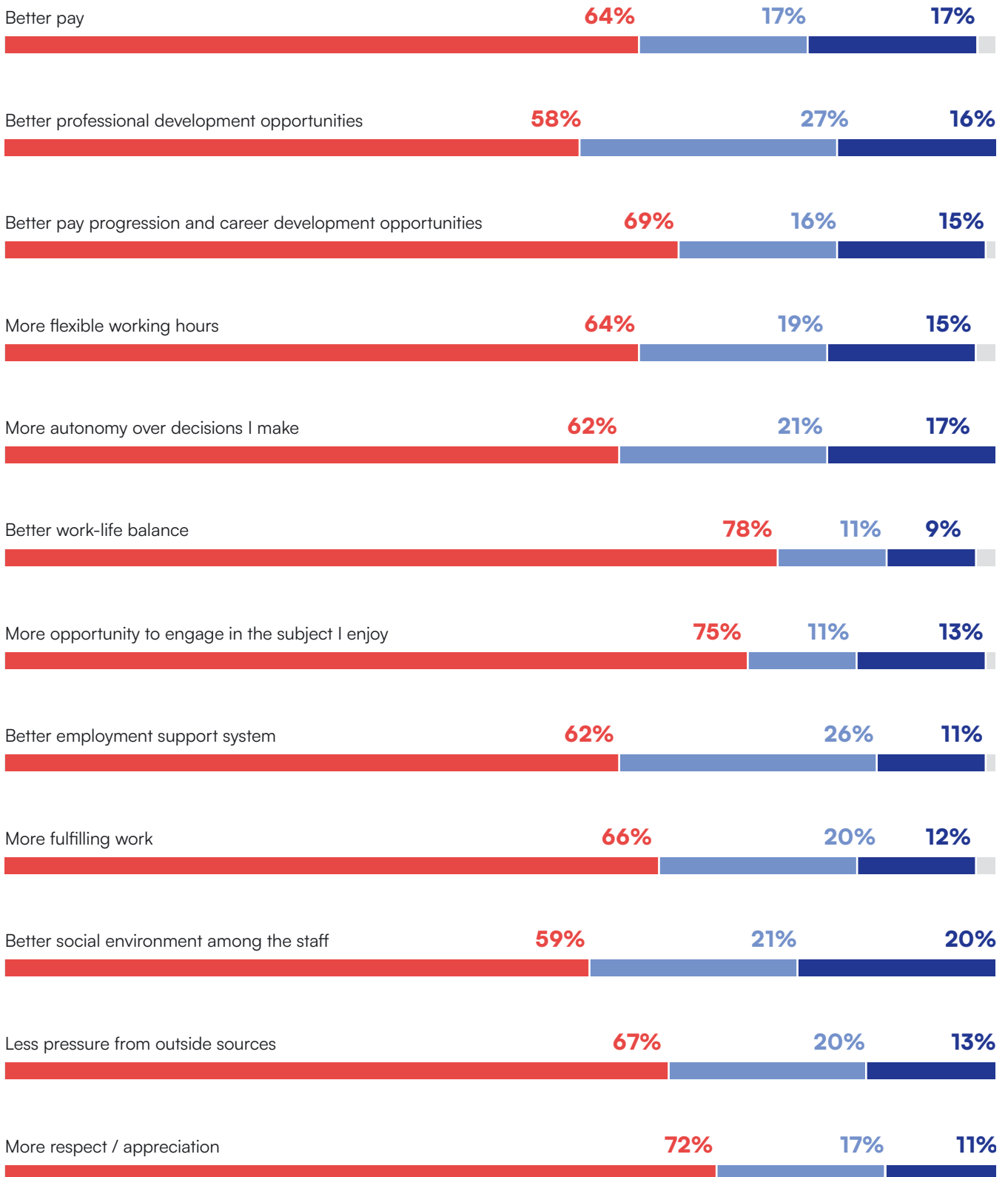
78 per cent of teachers who thought they could get better work-life balance in another career said they would be likely to leave the profession if this was offered to them. This polled higher than better pay (**64 per cent**)³⁸.



³⁷ Francis Green, 2021, British teachers’ declining job quality: evidence from the Skills and Employment Survey, Oxford Review of Education, 47:3, 386-403, DOI: 10.1080/03054985.2020.1847719

³⁸ Public First, 18th Oct - 28th Oct 2022, Table 33, Poll of secondary school teachers in England [Poll tables available via: <http://www.publicfirst.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/Education-Support.pdf>].

How likely or unlikely would you be to leave teaching if you were offered a job in another sector which promised...



- Likely to leave teaching for this
- Neither likely nor unlikely to leave teaching for this
- Unlikely to leave teaching for this
- Don't know

Focus group participants explained they felt drained by the impact of such an intense workload:

“I think it has quite a big impact on my personal life because it just affects the time that you could be giving your family or friends... I’ve just noticed that there’s a lot more that I could have done if I wasn’t working in the evenings.”³⁹

“The problem with teaching isn’t the hours... The issue is more the intensity. And this will be something every single teacher will tell you that you start probably at some point before eight, and you are full on until you leave. And so, it might be only ten - but ten hours at that intensity is very, very tiring, indeed.”⁴⁰

There is very little respite.

“We do this six weeks of really, really intense mental drain, and then we get to a holiday and you’re just fit for nothing. I don’t think it’s a healthy way of working physically or mentally. I think there’s a real misunderstanding in the general public about our holidays.”⁴¹

36 per cent of teachers in EIAs said the school holiday schedule and working hours was one of the main reasons they chose to go into the profession⁴². But, the reality is that the holidays and half-terms are nearly completely subsumed by catching up on work, planning for the term ahead, and/or completing life admin tasks that have been impossible to get done during the constraints of term-time working hours.

“I spend my holidays kind of doing life admin so like going to the bank and the post office and the dentists and the doctors and all that kind of boring stuff... There is...a massive stereotype that teachers work nine to three, and then they have so many holidays, weeks holiday, but it’s not a holiday, like I’m doing what other people could do during their lunch break.”⁴³

Moreover, the rise of remote and flexible working now afforded by other professions is a source of envy for those working in the teaching profession, which has failed to keep pace with modern flexible working perks.

“From what I can gather, [other professionals] might finish a bit later at six, but then all of that time is free. And I think that they’re less drained from what they’ve done all day. So they’re more willing to, like, socialise, whereas it’s not really a thing for teachers to like, socialise together.”⁴⁴

“I see so many people and they get to put a load of washing on in the middle of the day. I just think that’s the dream. The dream.”⁴⁵

³⁹ Female teacher, 21 February 2023, Public First focus group.

⁴⁰ Lucy Kellaway, 7 February 2023.

⁴¹ Senior leader, 10 January 2023, Public First focus group.

⁴² Public First, 18th Oct - 28th Oct 2022, Table 30, Poll of secondary school teachers in England [Poll tables available via: <http://www.publicfirst.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/Education-Support.pdf>].

⁴³ Female teacher, 21 February 2023, Public First focus group.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

Work-life balance matters to teachers at every stage, from recruitment to long-term retention. Workplace wellbeing expert Professor Cary Cooper told the Commission, “Gen-Z isn’t going to tolerate a crap environment”. They “learned a lot in the pandemic” when their “life was potentially threatened”. Their attitude now is: “I want a good quality of working life.”

Certainly, the ECTs in one focus group felt that whilst they could potentially manage the workload now, it might not be sustainable in the longer-term. They were unsure if they could commit to being in the classroom in five years, and if they have families. Many talked about moving into adjacent careers or even abroad.

Building a culture of flexible working in schools sets out more on what the profession can do to compete with the flexible working offer of other professions. But, getting workload under control once and for all has perhaps never been more critical than now.



Part one:

Minimising empty work

“The work-life balance and not having that time in my school hours has made me reevaluate how much I want to do this profession... even if you’re giving me that time back, you need to tackle the amount of work you’re giving me in the first place”.

— Classroom teacher from all women group, Public First focus group on behalf of Education Support, 21 February 2023

One of the main reasons teachers choose their career path is the opportunity to make a difference to people’s lives (selected by **59 per cent** of respondents to a survey for the Commission)⁴⁶. The second most important reason? Because they love the subject they teach (**53 per cent**)⁴⁷. As *Bringing teachers’ working conditions and pay into the 21st century* makes plain, teachers want to be in the classroom.

Yet, the reality is that their workload and mental energy is dominated by just about everything but teaching.

The nature and duration of these tasks change with a number of different factors: years of experience, levels of responsibility, the school calendar, external pressures and, importantly, the school context.

“When I first trained, I was spending quite a lot of time doing planning and preparation and getting to know the kids as well. But then the more experience you [get], I feel like I’ve [now] got lots of resources I can dip into, and that doesn’t take as long and I think it’s because you’re used to it more. But then you get burdened with other things as well. So you kind of go through phases linked with Ofsted, and about what school... want me to focus on... And whatever the ‘hot topic’ is, that is what you spend quite a lot of time doing.”⁴⁸

But across all of the focus groups that were conducted in EIAs, including ECTs, middle leaders and SLT, the most “frustrating” hours were those spent on “pointless” tasks. These were tasks that, could be eradicated or made more efficient by the adoption of better school-wide policies or technology. Teachers were continually expected to carry out these tasks because ‘that’s how things have always been done.’

⁴⁶ Public First, 18th Oct - 28th Oct 2022, Table 30, Poll of secondary school teachers in England [Poll tables available via: <http://www.publicfirst.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/Education-Support.pdf>].

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Female teacher, 21 February 2023, Public First focus group.

Often, it is these tasks that are adding to high levels of stress.

This is particularly pertinent to the labour market in this country because, as Professor Andreas Schleicher, Director for Education and Skills at the OECD, told the Commission:

“British teachers who experience stress at work would be close to three times as likely to be at risk of attrition and those who do not experience stress at work.”⁴⁹

Lesson planning

In an effort to reduce workload and drive up standards, some schools have prioritised time spent on lesson planning. Central banks of resources have become much more prevalent in schools, particularly those in MATs. These are proving highly popular, particularly at that critical early stage of a teacher’s career when tasks inevitably take longer. And indeed, in focus groups, there was a marked difference in the reaction to workload from ECTs working in schools with centralised resources, and those without.

“We have a central bank of resources, lessons, schemes of work, assessments - so everything’s working for you. I think it’s absolutely brilliant. And I’m a real advocate of it, because actually, what that does, then, is relieve the workload pressure of having to plan every lesson.”⁵⁰

“I don’t plan any lessons in any week, I just amend them. And by that, I mean spending 10 minutes fixing them up.”⁵¹

“Whilst we’ve got all the lessons there, we’re constantly told that we need to update them. So it’s almost like we’ve done the work, but we’ve got to do it again - and it just seems a little bit pointless sometimes.”⁵²

Though well-intentioned, the short-term gains in workload efficiency can risk undermining teacher autonomy, which is vital for teachers’ longer-term retention. As Carolyn Roberts - an experienced headteacher of 21 years, the last ten of which she has spent at Thomas Tallis School in Greenwich - explained:

“Off the peg lessons... undermines one of the most fulfilling things that teachers come into teaching for, which is planning their own stuff.”

“Now, obviously, teachers who have only got two hours [of PPA] one week, and three hours the next week, or even less in some schools, will say, ‘Oh, that’s great. There’s off the peg stuff.’ But what [that] is doing there is treating a symptom of the recruitment and retention crisis and not its cause. So it’s yet another shortcut to quality, which in the end will undermine what we’ve got.”

Autonomy matters to teachers at every stage. Indeed, one ECT said:

“I feel like sometimes it can stifle your creativity... because there’s just so much to do that you feel like you’re going into lessons, you’re getting the job done, but are you doing it as well as you want to do it? And maybe if we had a bit more free time, then

⁴⁹ Andreas Schleicher, 12 January 2023, based on TALIS 2018 [accessed via: https://www.oecd.org/education/talis/TALIS2018_CN_ENG_Vol_II_extended.pdf].

⁵⁰ Early Career Teacher, 10 January 2023, Public First focus group.

⁵¹ Female teacher, 21 February 2023, Public First focus group.

⁵² Ibid.

you know, we'd be able to be even more creative in our lessons and have a bit more time to think about it.”⁵³

Balance might be restored by ensuring central banks of materials are co-created by the teachers using them, developed within individual subject departments of a school, quality assured, and ‘live’ - in the sense that they are constantly being adapted, tailored and improved. Of course, the local context of the school matters here, too, and it should be for school leaders to work with their teachers to determine the right approach to lesson planning that works for the needs and interests of their pupils, as well as staff.

Data drops

There is a sense in the Westminster bubble that the issues around performative data drops have been resolved. That the DfE’s 2018 Workload Reduction Toolkit, the 2018 report of the Teacher Workload Advisory Group, the changes to the Ofsted inspection framework, the various blogs and guidance issued to schools have eradicated disproportionate practices.

But of all the issues brought up across the focus groups, by far the most arduous of things “expected now in teaching” was conceived to be data.

“It's definitely, for me, the admin tasks that take up a lot of my time above and beyond the school hours. A lot of being Head of Department is a lot of data gathering, a lot of data analysis, a lot of writing of class profiles and intervention strategies. A lot of it is already in other documents. So I do find it very frustrating that I'm picking data out from one document and kind of transferring it somewhere else and then a little bit later on in the year I have to do the same thing again.”⁵⁴

“All of a sudden, you become a data analyst, as well as a teacher, as well as a social worker, and everything else that the umbrella term of teaching covers.”⁵⁵

The lack of automation in schools in England falls behind many other professions, but also the classrooms in other countries. Professor Schleicher told the Commission of the “major, major difference” technology has made in Estonia, Korea and China, not only in reducing teachers’ workload, but for improving the pupil experience of learning.

“I was in a classroom in Shanghai where they were teaching calligraphy, which is one of the biggest headaches of teachers there - you know, we struggle with 30 characters, and they have to learn thousands. And it's a massive kind of volume task. And it's not just a technique, it's an art. The students were drawing the characters on the tables, they had scanners integrated into their mobile phones on the table. And students were getting personalised, real-time feedback on the quality of the drawings and based on big pattern analysis - AI - the teacher at the front of the classroom could actually see where students had common misconceptions, where different students made similar mistakes.”⁵⁶

The potential for technology to enhance the teaching and learning experience, help teachers identify common misconceptions and monitor progress in a subject, offer feedback, and reduce the burden of administrative tasks could be “major”, according to Professor Schleicher. But this only works where “teachers are active designers of those technologies”.

⁵³ Carolyn Roberts, 23 February 2023.

⁵⁴ Female teacher, 21 February 2023, Public First focus group.

⁵⁵ Early Career Teacher, 10 January 2023, Public First focus group.

⁵⁶ Professor Andreas Schleicher, 7 February 2023.

Marking

Similarly, when it comes to outdated marking practices, the ‘Making data work’ 2018 report of the Teacher Workload Advisory Group suggests:

“The Department for Education (DfE), Ofsted and the profession have all started to address the workload challenge. Ofsted has clarified what inspectors do not expect schools to produce, and monitor inspection reports to ensure no particular methods of marking or planning are praised as exemplars. The Department has introduced the workload protocol and committed to a period of stability for the curriculum, assessment and qualifications...”⁵⁷

But beyond some nods to the benefits of ‘live marking’, the conversation has barely moved on.

“At the moment, we've been marking mock exams... for Year 11s you teach biology, chemistry and physics, you've got about 90 papers. My school wants you to write down exactly how many marks each student has got for every single question. So just marking a set of papers will take about three hours. But then the QLA analysis, where you're writing down how many marks students have got in every single question... Each question has got another five sub questions. It adds an extra two hours on! That's five hours marking biology. Five hours marking chemistry. Five hours marking physics. I only have three frees a week. So I was never going to get that done on top of my marking... And some of the deadlines they gave us for most of these papers was about two days. So it was about six hours after school each day.”⁵⁸

David Lowbridge-Ellis, a former teacher and senior leader who has spent the last eight years working with the DfE on best practice marking policies, explained:

“You will still find a lot of school leaders... are saying: ‘No, it needs to be marked every two weeks, regardless of whether it's the appropriate point’. And, actually, that works against quality feedback, because if they're waiting two weeks to check what the children understand, then they're probably not checking all the way through. So, I really do think that still, even as a profession, we're still quite weak in making sure we're using some kind of evidence base to inform our decision-making.”⁵⁹

Even where there had been attempts to revise marking and feedback policies, the DfE’s Working Lives of Teachers survey 2023 revealed that just **29 per cent** of teachers believed such revisions had actually reduced their workload⁶⁰.

⁵⁷ The Teacher Workload Advisory Group, November 2018, ‘Making data work’, Department for Education [accessed via: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/754349/Workload_Advisory_Group-report.pdf].

⁵⁸ Early Career Teacher, 10 January 2023, Public First focus group.

⁵⁹ David Lowbridge-Ellis, 22 March 2023.

⁶⁰ Lorna Adams, Sarah Coburn-Crane, Alfie Sanders-Earley, Rachel Keeble, Harry Harris, James Taylor and Becky Taylor, April 2023, ‘Working lives of teachers and leaders — wave 1 Research report’, Department for Education [accessed via: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1148571/Working_lives_of_teachers_and_leaders_-_wave_1_-_core_report.pdf].

The role of external accountability

Underpinning much of this “empty work” is a deep-seated fear: that to break away from these entrenched practices risks not meeting Ofsted’s expectations. In schools led in this way, there is a ‘trickle down effect’, whereby the external accountability system exacerbates the workload problem.

- **63 per cent** of teachers surveyed for the Commission believe they spend more time doing lesson planning and marking papers because of external accountability⁶¹.

One of the pieces of advice that came through most strongly in the interviews with exceptional school leaders is to “be brave” and have that professional courage to buck these entrenched habits.

“There are constraints, and I'm not diminishing the fear that senior leaders and headteachers have of Ofsted. It is real, it is real, absolutely real. And that does drive a lot of this and perhaps creates some of that inertia. But we do have to be more courageous and think: ‘Okay, this has to happen. There's a more time effective way to do this’.”⁶²

Pepe Di’lasio, Headteacher at Wales High School in Rotherham, explained that where schools are managed well, there is no trickle down effect of the angst around Ofsted inspection. At his own school, he said:

“It’s like a Fight Club-type thing. No one talks about it... If you get the systems right already, you don't have to remind them, you don't have to change anything for Ofsted.”⁶³

School leaders have the power to change so much around workload management. The case studies below are just two examples of school leaders that have taken a hard look at their own policies.

However, the profession can only get so far on its own. The frameworks and guidance have changed, yet still “people think that if there's an Ofsted expectation that there's going to be tons of red pen in the books.” And it is hardly surprising that this “inertia” remains when school leaders’ experience of inspection works against changing this:

“This is really awkward - during Ofsted inspections, I've had to educate the inspectors... The problem is you do get inspectors, unfortunately, whose knowledge of teaching and learning and what's effective, the evidence base, is actually not as up to date as many school leaders that I work with. And you have to educate them around that.”



⁶¹ Public First, 18th Oct - 28th Oct 2022, Table 104, Poll of secondary school teachers in England [Poll tables available via: <http://www.publicfirst.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/Education-Support.pdf>].

⁶² David Lowbridge-Ellis, 22 March 2023.

⁶³ Pepe Di’lasio, 6 March 2023.

Recommendations

Codifying what “poor practice” around workload looks like. There should be a list of things that schools must stop doing, in clear terms on the DfE website. This would finally make it clear what is not required as part of an inspection, once and for all. This will help more school leaders to have the professional courage to change the way they’ve always done things.

Often, in the policy world, it is far easier to prescribe what schools should do — to highlight best practice. However, in this case, a far more useful way to think about this is what schools should not do. Altogether, these practices of overly regular data drops, time-consuming lesson planning and detailed marking book-by-book - without any clear or meaningful explanation as to why this is necessary - would be extraordinarily poor practice in any school. But, as ever, the local context matters, and school leaders and their staff are best placed to know what they are able to do at that moment in time to reduce workload.

School leaders should commit to reviewing their own workload practices on a yearly (or more regular) basis. They should be trusted to consult their teachers and individual subject departments to work out what they can scale back, given their local context, and without compromising high standards.

For this to work well, the system must incentivise professional courage.

There appears to be a disconnect between what Ofsted purports to be looking for, as shown by its commitment to workload reduction reports, and the lived experience of teachers and school leaders on the ground. All involved have a part to play to address that, but Ofsted should acknowledge the unique power it holds in the current system and work the hardest to change its own practice where needed, and the perceptions held by the sector. **Until that work is done by Ofsted to correct the variability in the inspection experience, the DfE’s messaging around workload reduction, through its resources and guidance to schools, will continue to feel empty.**



⁶⁴David Lowbridge-Ellis, 22 March 2023.

CASE STUDY:

‘Stripping out the noise’ — Northampton Academy

Chris Clyne joined Northampton Academy six years ago from London, taking the reins as Headteacher in the midst of the pandemic. The school serves over 1,700 pupils from a highly multicultural community with significant levels of deprivation. Teacher churn at Northampton Academy is enviably low; but that hasn't always been the case, as one long-standing member of staff said:

“Ten years ago, this place [had] a reputation... And rightfully so! I remember splitting up a fight on my very first day of school and thinking: what have I gotten myself in for?... It's the place to be now, which is amazing... Since Chris came in, it's become even better in terms of Chris' understanding of what makes people happy in the workplace. The drive towards getting wellbeing right has happened even more since Chris has been appointed.”

As headteacher, Chris has made a conscious effort to transform the work-life balance of his teachers and support staff:

“We do as much as we can to do what I call, ‘stripping out the noise’, so that [teachers] can just focus on their core business, which is teaching good lessons. That's why we got into teaching — not for all the bureaucracy that exists and form filling and things that schools have kind of lost their way with. We try and strip as much as that. And that's now at a point where we're not reinventing the wheel, we're just tweaking things.”

For Chris, that starts with consulting his workforce to understand what is bothering them the most:

“I did an admin survey recently for staff — teaching staff — and asked what they are doing that they don't think is impactful. And we've stripped away something else that, actually, I don't know why we're still doing it. There wasn't any impact of it. It was just an exercise that we'd done for years and we were just continuing to do. So we got rid of it. And again, it's just another kind of tweak and a quick win.”

Driven by a determination only to do those extra tasks that are really beneficial to the pupils and the staff, he's introduced a welcome policy of no email communication during the evenings, weekends or holidays, and re-evaluated data drops:

“Before, we used to have like six data drops each year. And it was insane. We're down to two, and we're now looking at only doing one a year, potentially. A lot of time, we didn't do anything with the data.”

CASE STUDY:

A Workload and Wellbeing Review

David Lowbridge-Ellis was a teacher and senior leader for nearly 20 years, working in schools in challenging contexts in and around the Midlands. He spoke to the Commission about his personal endeavour to shift the mindset in teaching away from “doing things how we’ve always done them”, and to improve teacher wellbeing:

“I used to be the sort of person who used to be up until two o’clock in the morning, marking books and all that sort of stuff. And then I realised it was killing me. So I started trying to do things differently. And a lot of things that I was doing then were not talked about - like codes instead of writing long written comments on marking.

“I was just doing the job that I thought I should be doing and not wasting time on things that were stupid... I’ve never wanted to be in a position where I’m being told to do something that doesn’t have value.”

Since pioneering many of the time-saving methods that are now widely recommended across the sector, David turned his attention to helping a wider network of schools get workload under control, as Director of School Improvement at the Matrix Academy Trust:

“I’ve created a Workload and Wellbeing Review, which we’ve been doing in all of our schools since September...

“I keep saying to people, ‘Why do you do this?’ If the answer to that question is: ‘just because we’ve always done it that way’, then that is not a good answer to that question. It’s trying to build that mindset into all of the staff at these schools... Never ask someone to do something, unless you know what the purpose of doing that is.”

The Workload and Wellbeing Review was created and based around the DfE’s Workload Reduction Toolkit. The conclusions of each review do not prescribe blanket actions and policies for schools across the trust, allowing for “a high degree of autonomy”, but instead “raises questions around some of the practices that don’t seem to be having the desired effect”.

“If people understand why they’re doing what they’re doing, and there’s a really good rationale behind it, they’re going to do it better. And also, it is healthy to question: is this the best thing to do?”

Key to the success of this is good school leadership and “creating a culture of candour amongst your staff” so that they feel comfortable to “bring these things forward and say, ‘actually, I think this is pointless.’”

Part two:

The expansion of the role

“We are becoming another wing of social services in the NHS”.

— David Lowbridge-Ellis, Director of School Improvement,
Matrix Academy Trust

The pandemic, and the period in which schools have fully reopened since then, have seen many schools take on a more visible role - and, where possible - meet unmet need in their communities.

An estimated **one in five** schools across the country have set up foodbanks to provide for local families struggling with the cost of living⁶⁵. Staff in some schools are out knocking on doors in the mornings to get persistently absent children into lessons.

Pupils' readiness to learn is one of the many things that have become the responsibility of schools, particularly those working in poorer educational contexts.

In **Teaching: the new reality**, Education Support set out how that need presents itself in schools⁶⁶. And polling for the Commission revealed that the nature of what teachers are doing day-to-day goes far beyond even the pastoral care expected in teaching.

- Nearly three quarters (**74 per cent**) of teachers often help pupils with personal matters beyond their academic work.
- And **72 per cent** of respondents said that they are helping pupils more with non-academic matters than they did 5 years ago. This climbed to **82 per cent** of teachers in schools in EIAs⁶⁷.

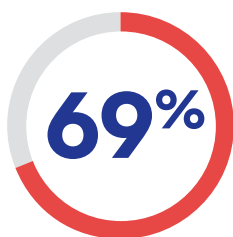


⁶⁵ Kellogg's, February 2021, 'Filling the poverty gap: the increasing role of schools in supporting families' [accessed via: https://www.kelloggs.co.uk/content/dam/europe/kelloggs_gb/pdf/A_FIFTH_OF_UK_SCHOOLS_NOW_FOODBANKS_FOR_STRUGGLING_FAMILIES.pdf]

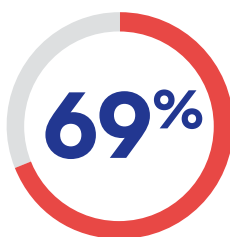
⁶⁶ Education Support, May 2023, 'Teaching: the new reality' [accessed via: <https://www.educationsupport.org.uk/media/cxkexon2/teaching-the-new-reality.pdf>].

⁶⁷ Public First, 18th Oct - 28th Oct 2022, Table 81, Poll of secondary school teachers in England [Poll tables available via: <http://www.publicfirst.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/Education-Support.pdf>].

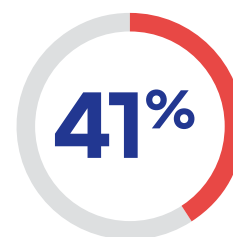
Which, if any, of the following have you done as a teacher for a pupil? Please select any that apply



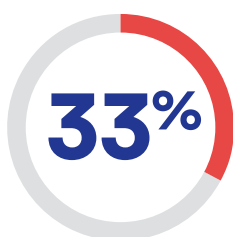
Helped them to process their emotions



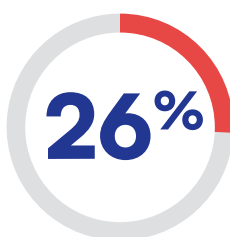
Talked to them about their mental health



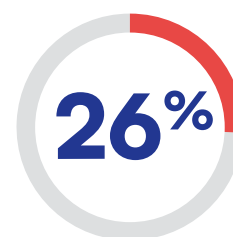
Bought them key supplies (such as pens, paper, or bags)



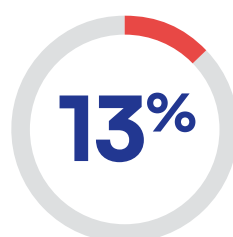
Helped them to resolve a family conflict



Signposted their family to local support services (such as social housing)



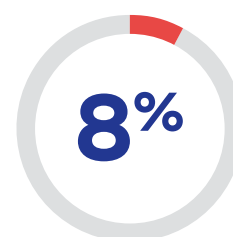
Prepared them food when they didn't have any



Cleaned their clothes when they were dirty



Bought them parts of their school uniform



None of the above

This has implications for retention for two reasons. Firstly, these tasks deviate significantly from the social contract between schools, the public and the Government, as to what might once have been conceived of the role of a teacher as an ‘educator’, and from the expectations of someone entering the profession who wants to be there to teach. As Gareth Conyard, Commissioner and Chief Executive of the Teacher Development Trust, put it:

“There’s busy - you’re spending 60 hours a week doing something - but 60 hours doing something that you love and think is meaningful, may feel different to spending time on some of the things that we’re beginning to see. Washing clothes for pupils who can’t wash them - that kind of stuff really has a different impact on how you view the job, rather than planning your maths lesson.”⁶⁸

⁶⁸ Gareth Conyard, 7 February 2023.

A focus group of senior leaders described a shift in public attitudes, possibly since Covid - “it’s like people have got angrier” - with schools expected to deal more with young people’s complex needs, juggle parents’ expectations, whilst often being “blamed” for problems in the community.

“I’m not sure at this moment in time, there’s much that’s going to change it apart from a slowness of time for parents to actually take back some responsibility. And that, I think, will only be done by the government saying that it’s not schools’ responsibility to do things. But if I have one more parent telling me this term that I need to get their child into school, then I might actually scream at somebody because that’s not my job.”⁶⁹

Secondly, this type of work can take its toll on teachers’ wellbeing. It weighs on teachers’ minds, even in those precious moments of downtime. Participants in focus groups spoke about an inability to switch off from work; thinking about children living in difficult home circumstances, safeguarding cases, knowing that children are depending on them.

“My main challenge is my own sort of mental exhaustion, and getting home and realising that noise levels have been far too much for far too long... I find that it may [have] brought down [my] wellbeing I guess... I’m in demand all the time, whether that’s at school and at home and balancing that, I suppose... I get home on a Friday night, and you think, ‘Oh my God. I just need to sit in a dark room for 20 minutes’, and just desensitise myself a little bit.”⁷⁰

“I love the teaching, but it’s the absolute mental drain of dealing with what you deal with day in, day out. And I can quite often get home and I’ve got nothing left in the tank. My own kids, my own husband - and I just think, I don’t want to sit and talk... And I think that, mentally, that is threatening, and I think it’s a really unhealthy way of working.”⁷¹



⁶⁹ Senior leader, 10 January 2023, Public First focus group.

⁷⁰ Early Career Teacher, 10 January 2023, Public First focus group.

⁷¹ Senior leader, 21 February 2023, Public First focus group.

CASE STUDY: Family Support Workers in school - Dixons Trinity Academy Bradford partnership with the NHS

At the start of the academic year, Dixons Trinity Academy Bradford embarked on a new partnership with the Bradford District Care NHS Foundation Trust to host a full-time family support worker across Dixons Trinity Academy and Dixons Music Primary.

Jim Lauder, Trust Assistant Principal, told the Commission that the partnership, which was facilitated by the Bradford Opportunity Area, was borne out of a joint effort to better utilise the NHS services and interventions that are out there, but which schools don't have the capacity to do in-house. He explained:

“Lots of schools have this role but what is different about what we've done is [our family support worker] is employed by the District Care Trust as an NHS member of staff and is funded by them. Because she's NHS staff, she's got access to NHS SystemOne records, and that wider level of support that the Public Health Children's Nursing Service can offer our families. That has been quite different in terms of being able to really close some of the gaps around health and wellbeing provision for our students.”

An opt-out data sharing policy is in place with parents and, in practice, the family support worker speaks to pupils and their parents, looks at clinical records, and works closely with the Public Health Children's Nursing Service to ascertain what support is needed - whether that's a referral to external counselling or mentoring services or chasing up a GP or opticians appointment. She also organises immunisations, screenings, heights and weight checks in school, and runs after-school activities for vulnerable children and coffee mornings for parents of children with additional needs.

Ava Green, Assistant Director for Autistic Children's Services at the Bradford District Care NHS Foundation Trust explained that this initiative stems from a much longer-term ambition to connect health and education, stemming from the long running and ground breaking Born in Bradford study:

“Health and education are unhelpfully divided in the way they deliver services. We can see in the Born in Bradford data how poor health is limiting children's readiness to learn, and how in turn education outcomes predict adult health and happiness. So finding ways to work together is essential.”

“Effective partnership in health and education can be hard because it requires people to share responsibilities and decision making for services they control, and take on accountability for services other people lead. We are really grateful for people like Jim and Dawn, and their teams, who are acting as role models by making these commitments.”

The Centre for Applied Education Research (part of the Born in Bradford research family) is currently evaluating the programme, which has an aspiration to scale up and embed more NHS family support workers in schools around Bradford.

Commissioner Anne-Marie Canning, who was previously Chair of the Bradford Opportunity Area said:

“This practical partnership shows that joining up different sectors and systems not only helps children but can also reduce the stress and strain on teachers who are trying to navigate these systems on behalf of the pupils they care about. Everyone benefits when we join the dots.”

Recommendations

The Department for Education should be set new retention targets for the school workforce in England — including teachers, leaders and support staff — published annually. In the same way that there is a target number of trainees to start postgraduate initial teacher training, estimated using the Teacher Workforce Model, so too should retention be a Key Performance Indicator of the DfE.

The DfE shapes the policy environment in which state schools operate, including those policies which have a direct impact on the intensity of teachers’ workload. The evidence to the Commission has shown that it is the intensification of workload in recent years that is eroding teachers’ work-life balance, their wellbeing and, in turn, their desire to stay in the profession. **Therefore, the Government should be held accountable for, and demonstrate, the effectiveness of its policies to tackle the retention (and recruitment) crisis in schools.**

In meeting those targets, the Department should re-double its efforts to properly consider the impact of policy changes on staff wellbeing, as part of the DfE’s commitment to integrate wellbeing into the ‘school workload policy test’ through the Education Staff Wellbeing Charter. In doing so, any potential intensification of workload resulting from proposed policy changes that might hamper the DfE’s efforts to meet its retention targets would be flagged during the policymaking process for consideration.

The profession needs clarity from the Government in defining what is schools’ responsibility and what isn’t. It could make all the difference to the status and satisfaction of the profession. Depending on the goodwill of the school workforce, to fill the gap in local services is not sustainable.

Should wrap-around services for children and young people be co-located on the school site, or delivered in the community? Clarity is required, and whatever the decision, schools and public services need the right level of training, support and resources.

And what the evidence to the Commission has shown is that a one-size-fits-all solution would be problematic. Many schools are willing and able to provide these services with the support of their community, but plenty also are not. The local context matters.



Section 3

Managing pupil behaviour



The intensity and pressure of teachers' workload is heightened by worsening pupil behaviour. Nearly two thirds (**64 per cent**) of teachers in EIAs said it is an issue - if not the biggest - in their school⁷².

Teachers in focus groups described a worsening of pupil behaviour since the pandemic, an apathy towards learning, and a decline in respect for teachers (often linked to figures like Andrew Tate):

“My main challenge, and probably a lot of my colleagues at the minute is just really extreme, challenging behaviour. We’re in an area with a lot of need, and a lot of pupil premium, a lot of difficult situations. But at the moment, we’re really struggling with just extreme behaviour that just we’ve not seen before, or that my colleagues who’ve been there for years have said they’ve never seen before. And we’ve recently had a senior leadership member in charge of behaviour resign because of stress.”⁷³

“At the moment is a lot of like aggression, a lot of like, flat out refusal to do basic things, and massive lack of respect. So the strategies that I’ve maybe used in the past that have been quite effective with students that are willing to change and willing to sort of get on board, that don’t really work at the moment, because the students just like, not wanting to give me any respect.”⁷⁴

“Even though they are in a deprived area, in Oldham, I know that the parents are very supportive. So when I’ve been on the phone to parents, you see a massive change in the pupils behaviour, because they do want the education.”⁷⁵

⁷² Public First, 18th Oct - 28th Oct 2022, Table 74, Poll of secondary school teachers in England [Poll tables available via: <http://www.publicfirst.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/Education-Support.pdf>].

⁷³ Early Career Teacher, 10 January 2023, Public First focus group.

⁷⁴ Female teacher, 21 February 2023, Public First focus group.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

“The demographic of kids that I teach, they’ve got a lot of things going on in their life. And I know from my colleagues that over lockdown, it was a real struggle for the school. Lots of the kids don’t even have a laptop or even a phone. So they just did nothing. They were basically doing welfare checks on the kids to make sure they were still in the country, and all sorts of things like that. So that became my school’s priority. But then other kids have come back to school now. And we don’t know the full extent of what they’ve been through in lockdown. But for a lot of them, it’s coming out in their behaviour. A lot of them, you can see it’s anger and fear and frustration.

“And with my year 10 group, and my colleague with her year 11 group, there’s like a complete sense of apathy. When I asked them what you know, what they want to do, when they’re older, are they thinking about apprenticeships? Have you been doing stuff with your apprentices week thing? And...they just don’t care.”⁷⁶

Recommendation

Behaviour came up time and again - and that since the pandemic, it is worsening. The evidence the Commission has gathered suggested that it is hampering teachers’ enjoyment of teaching, and driving them out altogether. While it is absolutely possible to have school policies that mitigate pupil behaviour, there are certainly calls for more up-to-date training for staff, and this is covered more in *Reforming, but not uprooting, professional learning*. But, there are also a host of externalities that are driving this, beyond the scope of this Commission’s research, that demands a much wider community response. **We need a national conversation and a recognition at a political level that the complexity of children and young people’s needs is becoming more challenging in such a way that exceeds schools’ capacity to resolve alone.**



⁷⁶ Ibid.

Section 4

Building a culture of flexible working in schools

A body of HR advisors to promote flexible working and offer practical, hands-on support to schools that need it.



“I go back to that Einstein quote about the definition of insanity. If you keep doing the same thing over and over again, but expect a different outcome. So, if we’re struggling with recruitment or retention, but said: ‘You must be here full-time. You must start at 8.30am. You can’t go home ‘til four. You have set days. You have set holidays’... Then recruitment and retention is not going to get any better. Because there are those moments in other jobs where you can go get the flat white. Or you can go for a long weekend to Europe. Or you can go to the museum. You can go to Glastonbury on a Friday. There are things that we need to be able to do, if we are going to be the job of choice in the future.”

— Pepe Di’lasio, Headteacher at
Wales High School in Rotherham

The pandemic demonstrated the possibility of remote working, even in workplaces where it might once have been inconceivable. Before the pandemic, only around one in eight working adults reported working from home⁷⁷. Employers have embraced lasting changes to their flexible working policies, with around **44 per cent** of working adults in Britain working from home, at least for part of the week⁷⁸.

On the surface, it may appear that flexible working practices in teaching are fairly reflective of the national picture. **40 per cent** of teachers and school leaders report having some kind of formal or informal flexible working arrangement with their school⁷⁹. But dig a little deeper, and you find that most commonly, this accounts for part-time contracts (**21 per cent**)⁸⁰.

The lack of meaningfully flexible working in teaching, as this section of the report explores, has become one of the factors driving teachers out of the profession. From ECTs with enormous potential, enticed by the possibility of remote-working, living (nearly) wherever in the world they wish; to experienced professionals with a family, for whom flexibility is increasingly a necessity, due to rising childcare costs.

⁷⁷ ONS, 13 February 2023, ‘Characteristics of homeworkers, Great Britain: September 2022 to January 2023’ [accessed via: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/articles/characteristicsofhomeworkersgreatbritain/september2022tojanuary2023>].

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Lorna Adams, Sarah Coburn-Crane, Alfie Sanders-Earley, Rachel Keeble, Harry Harris, James Taylor and Becky Taylor, April 2023, ‘Working lives of teachers and leaders — wave 1 Research report’, Department for Education [accessed via: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1148571/Working_lives_of_teachers_and_leaders_-_wave_1_-_core_report.pdf].

⁸⁰ Ibid.

It matters for recruitment, too. Faced with the now widely available option of remote working, the teaching sector is already struggling to recruit, and risks losing out on enormous talent if it fails to move with the times.

By no means is flexible working the panacea in the retention crisis. But, the value of moving to more flexible working in teaching for retention should not be discounted.

Polling for the Commission revealed that the promise of more flexible working hours in another sector would make **64 per cent** of teachers likely to leave the profession⁸¹. This is more so for women than men (**68 per cent** vs. **57 per cent**), which matters in a profession dominated by women⁸².

A rigid timetable

For classroom teachers with children, the rigidity of the timetable and the in-person nature of the job makes childcare arrangements and family commitments very difficult.

“I think that as my daughter gets a bit older, that’s going to be something that’s at the back of my mind about the fact that I don’t get to see her go into school, or pick her up from school and kind of communicate with other mums.”⁸³

“I decided to leave classroom teaching, because I wasn’t going to be able to take my daughter to school, when she started, I wasn’t gonna be able to pick her up. And I was like... it’s not worth it.”⁸⁴

There are examples, like Northampton Academy and Wales High School (see the case studies, below), where staff contracts and the timetable have been designed with work-life balance in mind, but this is not widespread.

In our all-women focus group, there was a strong consensus that non-teaching hours, like PPA or staff meetings, could be better organised to allow staff to leave the school estate, and work from home, making it easier to fit around school pick-up and drop-off times. For example, having PPA timetabled for the first or last period of the day, back-to-back in a morning or afternoon and having hybrid or remote staff meetings.

“If there was a way that you could do it, where obviously you can... have your PPAs first, or... where, if you’ve got your PPA in the afternoon, you can go and kind of work at home or work in a coffee shop... that’d be brilliant.”⁸⁵

⁸¹ 64 per cent of teachers were either ‘very likely’ (28 per cent) or ‘somewhat likely’ (36 per cent) to leave teaching. Public First, 18th Oct - 28th Oct 2022, Poll of secondary school teachers in England [Poll tables available via: <http://www.publicfirst.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/Education-Support.pdf>].

⁸² Department for Education, published 2022, data collected in November 2021, ‘School Workforce Census’ [accessed via: <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/school-workforce-in-england>].

⁸³ Female teacher, Public First focus group, 21 February 2023.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

Making part-time, work

Many of the teachers we spoke to had moved to part-time work - a more established form of flexible working in schools - in order to fit their teaching role around childcare. Nonetheless, teachers' accounts of their experiences switching to part-time arrangements, and particularly those who then wanted to move back into full-time work, were shocking. Many - if not all of the participants - found the flexible working policies in their school to be unclear, tricky to navigate, "daunting" or simply unfair:

"I found that our flexible working policy meant that I could only make one request in any 12 month period. And so I had to make a really not nice decision as well as to whether I was going to go [back] four days immediately, or go back three days for a while, or go back full-time. And that was horrible... Only being able to make a request once in any 12 months - it really impacts women coming back from maternity leave for sure."⁸⁶

"When you go part-time in my trust, your contract changes to part-time hours. So then, if you did ever want to go back full-time again, like I have done just from September this year, you end up having to go in front of all the governors and prove that you are worth the full-time hours."⁸⁷

"I'm a bit bitter because when I came back after maternity, I asked if I could do four days a week, and I was told no. And I challenged that and [it] went to the governors. And when I did that, they said that they can meet me halfway and do five days one week, and then four days the next week. So, for me, childcare has just been... based upon my mum being really flexible and being retired and being able to have my daughter every other kind of Wednesday, which I have."⁸⁸

Part-time also doesn't mean part-time in practice. Many of the teachers we spoke to said they are fitting a full-time job into part-time hours. This was particularly true in four-day-a-week arrangements, rather than three.

"When I was working full-time, I never used to take work home... But when I had my first child and I became part-time, that proved a little bit difficult. So then it started creeping in."⁸⁹

"All of the other admin tasks were the same, but you had less time to do those same tasks. So you'd have three days to do those tasks rather than the five days to do those tasks."⁹⁰

And, often, there is uncertainty around the year-on-year arrangements for working patterns, which does not make long-term planning around work and childcare arrangements easy.

"I had to pay for childcare if it wasn't on a Monday and Tuesday next year, and my worry is that, obviously they can change my days next year, and I don't really get a say in it. But if it's not on Monday or Tuesday, then I definitely can't afford to work and pay childcare... the only worry in terms of flexible working is that very quickly, it doesn't fit, does it?"⁹¹

⁸⁶ibid. ⁸⁹ibid.

⁸⁷ibid. ⁹⁰ibid.

⁸⁸ibid. ⁹¹ibid.

“Boots on the ground”

Working against any progress in this area is a deeply engrained belief - even in the minds of some of the most successful headteachers and school staff - that teachers must be physically present on the school site for the duration of their working day. That children need continuity and “stability” to the extent that their outcomes are damaged should they not have the same teacher for their subject lesson.

“All of the flexible working solutions, if you can manage to sustain it within the timetable, actually make the entire school community just feel a bit less stable.”

And there are plenty of headteachers and senior leaders who think flexible working - and the staffing and timetabling arrangements that make it possible - are just too difficult and expensive to do.

“We wouldn’t have the capacity to run the school without everybody in. So we would need more staff. But we haven’t got the money for that.”⁹²

Interestingly, of the school leaders the Commission heard from that were hesitant, they often jumped to “part-time” working as the definition of flexible working, without any consideration about what more incremental practices might look like. As such, it wasn’t simply a case of it not being possible in their school, but that it wasn’t possible across the entirety of the sector.

Evidently, there is much more to be done to build on the work of the Government’s Flexible Working Ambassador Schools around sharing best practice with the sector.

The Commission heard from teachers working in schools with an expectation or sense of pressure to be visibly working on the estate, helping out with extra-curricular or after-school duties.

“I can give you an example. We offer after-school revision sessions to Year 11s on Mondays... Well, really, if I could I’d have declined that because I already had so much marking to do as well. But there’s that sort of work culture where you feel like everybody else doing it so you have to, and this is all you know, unpaid voluntary as well.”⁹³

“It’s definitely impossible.. It’s just you just couldn’t offer it. As a teacher, you know, you’re pulled left, right and centre in school to do different roles and cover, to attend meetings, to attend behavioural issues. You couldn’t do that from home could you?”⁹⁴

But, there are signs that the workforce are beginning to think more about the possibilities:

“I think I would have said the same thing three years ago. But I think COVID has shown us that we can work in very, very, very flexible ways that we would have never thought possible. I’m not sure operationally what it would look like... It would involve more staff and therefore more money.”⁹⁵

⁹²Female senior leader, 21 February 2023, Public First focus group.

⁹³Early Career Teacher, 10 January 2023, Public First focus group.

⁹⁴Female senior leader, 21 February 2023, Public First focus group.

⁹⁵Female senior leader, 21 February 2023, Public First focus group.

And, already, there are some real success stories of schools in disadvantaged communities with stretched budgets working against the grain. The Commission was fortunate to hear from some exceptional school leaders who had reached a point with their own retention rates and staff wellbeing, that they sought to rethink how they were working, and the results have been astounding.

Headteacher Pepe Di'lasio has already introduced flexi-working at Wales High School in Rotherham. He made the important counterpoint that, with all these additional responsibilities that schools have now taken on, and with all the work being done to catch up pupils on lost learning, making sure staff are not burnt out, but energised, is more important than ever:

“We’ve tried to adjust our days and our contracts to allow staff to have greater flexibility in the way that they work throughout the day. And I think some schools don’t like to do that, because they feel that it’s important to have the same teacher with the same class the entire week. And whilst that is important, and there’s no doubt that’s the best thing to do, I would argue that having a fantastic teacher three out of four lessons, rather than an average teacher four out of four lessons, you’re better off.”⁹⁶

CASE STUDY: ‘Golden Tickets’ at Wales High School in Rotherham

Pepe Di'lasio has been Headteacher at Wales High School - serving over 1,800 pupils - for 11 years, and his Deputy, Lisa McCall, has worked there for 24 years. They are now in a great place with their retention:

“Most people that leave here in the last five or ten years have gone on to promotion or retirement. So it is very rare.”

But, Pepe is absolutely clear that retention “is the biggest issue heads are facing right now”. Speaking to the Commission with Lisa, they were very open and honest about the challenges they have had, not necessarily with retaining teaching staff, but their teaching assistants and support staff, who “were leaving us quite quickly after one or two years”.

“...Part of that was, you know, you could earn equally as much working, flexibly stacking shelves at Aldi, rather than being a teaching assistant with big responsibilities.

“...[But] the vast majority of our teaching assistants were mothers who had challenges around getting into school and getting home for pickups of families throughout the day. So we’ve adjusted that to create greater flexibility in their working week [and working day pattern]. That’s had a massive impact on the staffing culture and the ethos over the last year, 18 months.”

⁹⁶ Pepe Di'lasio, 6 March 2023.

The changes they have made to TA contracts have inspired a much more widespread culture of flexible working at Wales High, including arranging the timetable and staffing so that staff can - from time to time - arrive later or leave early if they don't have a lesson or tutor group. Deputy Lisa was conscious that staff shouldn't lose out financially:

“Some of the members of staff - quite often it's women who have the burden of always sorting out childcare - felt they couldn't lose the money. So they were trapped between what they needed to do at home, but also their salary. And so we give staff options. So it isn't just about: 'come in at 10 o'clock and lose eight till 10 salary'. We've got staff who say: 'Oh, if I do that, I'll do extra lunchtime duties where we might need more staff'... And they've been really happy with that sort of arrangement.”

Across the entire school, Pepe has introduced what is known as a 'Golden Ticket' - a free pass to take leave during term-time. He explained how it works in practice:

“You can go do some Christmas shopping with your family or something like that. And what we do is we cover your classes on that day when you use your golden ticket. Now, because everyone buys into that, most people who bring their Golden Ticket [to me] say: 'I'm using my Golden Ticket on Friday, but these four people are doing the bits that need doing on that day. Is that okay?' And we say: 'Of course it's okay', because we don't need to do anything [to arrange cover short notice]. That's sorted.”

On staffing flexible working arrangements, “it's a really simple answer”:

“We over staff... in order to give us the flexibility to do the sort of things we're talking about. But in that, though, our supply costs are virtually nil... we don't spend any money on advertising” - the offer of flexible working, and solid local university partnerships, have helped with recruitment. “We make sure we set the school up with our own staffing, to do whatever we can to cover on a day to day basis.”

For Pepe and Lisa, the key to the success of these arrangements - with low staff attrition, excellent recruitment (“in ten years, we've had one advert in the Times Ed”) and above average pupil attainment scores - is fairness:

“You cannot beat being fair and reasonable with people. Because what you find is, if you're fair and reasonable people, they're fair and reasonable back.”

Another such Principal is Chris Clyne at Northampton Academy. Understanding of the scepticism around flexible working that exists in teaching, he encourages more leaders to build on the best practice out there, and “be brave”:

“You've got to have a bit of confidence to do it and be up for it. Sometimes you've got to take risks in life and see what happens. And, you know, we're always scared of unknowns, aren't we? It's human nature. You're always a bit wary of unknowns, especially when you don't know how they're going to play out. But the more people speak to other leaders who have done it and have successfully done it, then hopefully that allows them to do it.”⁹⁷

⁹⁷ Chris Clyne, 22 February 2023.

CASE STUDY:

Flexi-working at Northampton Academy

Principal Chris Clyne and his senior leadership team sought to transform staff retention and wellbeing at his school by tackling outdated, performative workload practices and implementing more flexible working practices. The Commission's researchers were invited to spend time in his school speaking to staff to get a better understanding of their flexible working arrangements in practice. He explained:

“The whole mantra is: we trust staff to do their job. There isn't a finite way in which you should be working. Just because you're in school doesn't mean you're productive... My only non-negotiable is you're in front of your classes when you might be teaching them. Outside of that, fill your boots... it's just one strand of our kind of larger wellbeing manifesto.”

One of the ways in which they've changed their working patterns is to implement flexi-working. Every teaching member of staff has at least one free period - either one or five - each week, allowing them to come in later, or leave at lunchtime. Staffing cover and timetabling haven't been as complex as might be assumed:

“We said at the outset when we launched this: ‘Not everyone is going to get Friday period five. Not everyone is going to get Monday period one.’ It's going to be potluck where you land, right? Some people don't even use it, some don't want to use it. And that's fine as well... And then some staff will use it at a particular time of the year. So, for example, maths - I've seen them go when they've just done a round of mocks, they will actually just go home and work from home in the garden if it's a nice day.”

This “transient school, where staff are kind of coming and going” aims to remove that “archaic way of thinking that you have to be present” to be productive. Nathalie, a second-year Geography ECT told us:

“If it's in the middle of the day, sometimes it's really handy if you're off to the doctor's. You know, just little things like that... The culture of just everyone appreciat[ing] that you've got your own life. No one's judging you for walking out that gate. [No] criticism, looking at when you've logged in, logged out. Full trust in what you're doing. And everybody does their job!”

Jane Rigby, Vice-Principal, worked with Chris from the outset on the idea, sparked by lessons from the pandemic:

“We [thought], this is our opportunity to take the bull by the horns and see out of something that was, in the main, entirely negative and detrimental to school and education, what good practices we could retain. So virtual meetings basically changed my life as a senior leader. Because, before that, we had a briefing every morning in this office, and we had to be in school for ten to eight” which, for parents, just didn't fit in with dropping off children at school, “so we kept those virtual.”

The introduction of more opportunities for home working has meant a lot to staff, particularly those with children. Chris, an English teacher who had recently joined Northampton from another school, said:

“[It’s a] massive selling point. Massive. So there are other reasons why I joined this school. But when you’re told that you can have this opportunity to go and pick your son up or take him to school, I haven’t [ever] done that... Here I can be a parent, I can play a role. Without that flexi-time, I might still be at square one. And when you then come into work, knowing you’ve dropped off your boy, or you can go home and pick him up and he comes out of school... that is worth its weight in gold!”

The school is also trying to be more flexible around time off during term-time, where possible, something previously unheard of in the sector. Katie, a first-year English ECT, felt it would be hard to ever leave Northampton Academy, where “there is a bit of wiggle room and we can have a life”, for another school because she would be “really picky because [she] want[s] these things”:

“If we’re really passionate about something... like if you want to go see a concert or whatever, Chris is like: ‘put it in on Blue Sky, and if we can accommodate it, you can have the day off’... I had my graduation off because it was delayed because of COVID.”

Flexi-working launched properly in September 2021, following a trial and staff consultation. Principal Chris explained:

“What I did on week one myself, I went down to London on the Wednesday afternoon for dinner with my in-laws. And I wrote to all staff because [in] my daily bulletin: ‘I’m in London, taking advantage of flexi’. Because people were a bit worried and apprehensive about doing it at first. But I thought if I role model it and say it’s fine to do, then people will more likely follow suit. So then people did start to do it.”

Since then, staff satisfaction and pupils’ results have gone from strength-to-strength:

“Our GCSE results [last year]... were +1.04. We were 42nd in the country for results [out of] 4,000 schools - the top 1-2 per cent. So I think there’s proof in the pudding that [flexible working] works absolutely fine. And A Level results were the best they’ve ever been. Without a doubt, it works.”

“Staff alignment has improved year on year as they’ve seen investment, that we’ve got a clear vision as a school. And the staff understand why we’re here. They understand the purpose, and they understand where we’re trying to go as a school as well. And people are more likely to follow you as a result. So rather than trying to just do a quick fix overnight, just understanding that it will take a bit of time to change culture. But be brave... one of the key things is people feel trusted, and have a sense of belonging. So by starting to say: I trust you to do your job as you see fit, so therefore there’s going to be flexibility.”



Recommendation

A fully-funded, specialist Human Resources advisory service should be established for schools, tasked with promoting and supporting them specifically with the implementation of best practice flexible working policies and arrangements. There are MATs and local authorities with capacity to deliver in-house HR services available to their schools; but there are also plenty of schools with the bare minimum provision. The consulting offer should be available to all school leaders, and existing HR representatives in MATs and local authorities, and work with them on a case-by-case basis to understand the barriers or particular challenges around facilitating flexible working. Genuinely enabling the transition to a more modern mode of working, beyond highlighting best practice, would require powers to deliver hands-on support, with the ability to go into schools to get those processes set up.

This provision shouldn't necessarily be delivered by central Government. Instead, there should be a process of consultation and a tender process to seek an appropriate provider, rather than starting up a new body from scratch.

Pre-tender, there should be a wide consultation with the profession to better understand what would be most useful to school leaders, MATs and staff, in terms of the advice and support the service should offer. The research undertaken for this Commission has highlighted the HR advisory body should work with schools to ensure:

- 1. Non-teaching time should be better organised to take account of modern working lives.** The HR advisory body should work with schools on their timetabling, staffing and cover arrangements to facilitate more opportunities for remote working, should staff wish to make use of that (e.g. holding hybrid staff meetings, arranging non-teaching hours to allow greater flexibility to leave the school estate, creating processes to request term-time leave).
- 2. The policies around transitioning between full and part-time contracts must be clear, fair and reasonable - and communicated to staff at the recruitment stage.** The HR advisory body should support schools and MATs to draft appropriate policies, facilitate requests where they are proving more practically difficult, and ensure staff have some level of year-on-year certainty around their working patterns. Together with the recommendations in *Achieving a work-life balance*, close attention should be paid to workload to prevent significant "creep" into non-working hours.

At the same time, the HR advisory service should be supported by continued efforts from the Department for Education and Ministers to promote meaningful, best practice flexible working in schools - beyond simply part-time work - and rebut the presumptions that are holding back teaching from competing as a modern, attractive profession.



Section 5

Reforming, but not uprooting, professional learning

An urgent review of the deployment
and content of the training elements
in the ECF and NPQs



The starting point

“The potential for training to become another reason why teachers hate their jobs is a grave danger.”

— Lucy Kellaway, economics teacher and founder of NowTeach,
7 February 2023

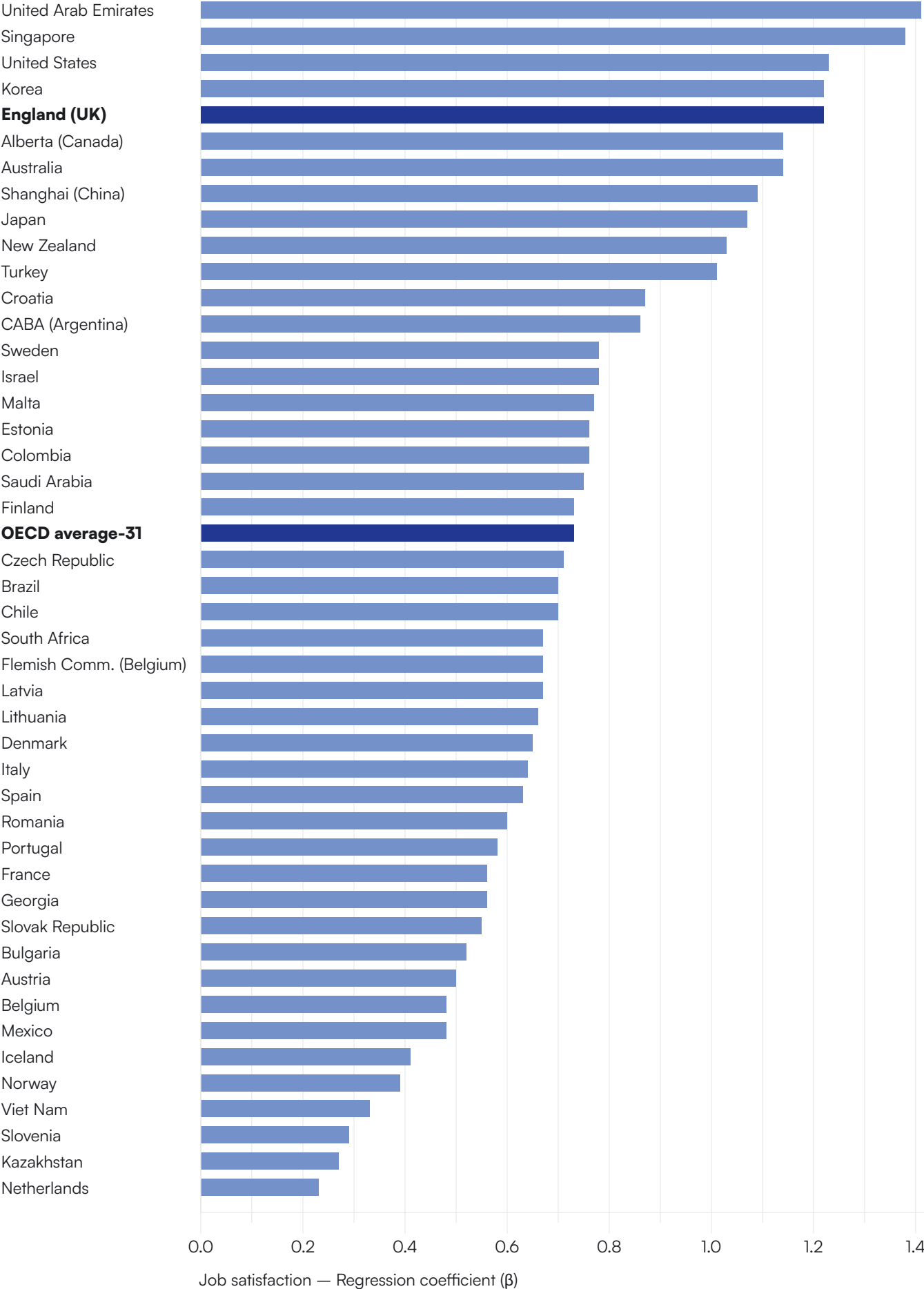
The DfE’s spirit and ambition of a “golden thread” of high-quality evidence underpinning support, training and development available to teachers throughout their careers - from Initial Teacher Training (ITT) to the Early Career Framework (ECF) and National Professional Qualifications (NPQs) - is the right one.

High-quality professional development is essential for the development, engagement and status of the profession, as well as the outcomes of pupils.

It matters more to teachers in England for their retention, than teachers in other nations. OECD data presented to the Commission by Professor Andreas Schleicher showed that teachers in England who had participated in “impactful CPD” reported higher levels of job satisfaction than those teachers reporting that their training had no impact on their teaching practices.



Relationship between teacher’s job satisfaction and participation in impactful professional development



This makes it all the more important that we get CPD right.

Certainly, the Commission heard that there are some really successful elements of CPD - those that are grounded in the realities of the job, and deployed well. The mentoring in the ECF, for example, was immensely popular amongst ECTs.

On the other hand, the Commission heard that aspects of the content and deployment of the ECF and NPQHs can be too technocratic, and lacks any kind of applicability to the working day in a school, teachers' subject specialisms or their level of experience and expertise.

Any kind of professional development that doesn't recognise where the profession is, is going to be flawed in some way. It doesn't matter how well focused it is on the transmission of knowledge or skills. If the lived experience of teachers lives is so different from that, then it is at best, a missed opportunity, or worse, it holds problems for the quality, status and retention of the workforce.

There is a real risk, as Lucy Kellaway highlighted to the Commission, that CPD is becoming yet another burden on teachers' plates - a tick-box exercise - causing them to disengage from their enjoyment of the job.

Deployment matters

Polling for the Commission suggests that there is a gulf between the quantity of CPD available, and what the profession would like to receive.

Overall, just over one third (**34 per cent**) of respondents said that there was a lack of CPD at their school. This rises to **41 per cent** of respondents working in EIAs. Further, **61 per cent** of those who said there was a lack of CPD in their school said they were likely to change careers to have more opportunities.

Further investigation with focus groups suggested that some of this could come down to the deployment and arrangement of training opportunities in the timetable and workload conflicts.

“In terms of our meeting schedule and CPD schedule, we’ve got a protected slot, timetabled now for personal CPD. I’m not convinced many people actually use that slot for that, because you know, you’ve got other things, pressing issues.”⁹⁸

One ECT said:

“For me, the in-school support from the mentor and my Head of Department has been excellent. But the kind of online platform that we’ve - I think everyone is with a different provider - that side of things, where we’ve got these blocks to do each term with the endless videos, and things to read. And it’s just hours and hours of work. And it’s just so unrealistic.”⁹⁹

The sector knows that long, twilight CPD sessions at the end of an exhausting day - particularly when the content of which could have been an email - is poor practice. Yet, focus groups still reported cases where this was standard practice.

⁹⁸ Senior leader, 21 February 2023, Public First focus group.

⁹⁹ Early Career Teacher, 10 January 2023, Public First focus group.

“In previous schools that I’ve worked at, we’ve done sort of these long, twilight CPD Inset sessions that just could have been an email. And yeah, I really, really didn’t appreciate those.”¹⁰⁰

Where training is delivered well, according to the teachers, was where continuous improvement of staff was embedded within the culture of the school so that it was actively encouraged, and where it involved collaboration between different departments and schools.

“I really do feel that they put a lot of value into CPD and.... they have a little motto, which is: ‘every teacher better, every year’. And again, it’s really cheesy. When I first started, I was like, ‘Oh, here we go’. But they genuinely do really want every teacher to get better every year, for their own sake and also for the students.”¹⁰¹

Lucy Kellaway’s example of the “20 per cent of training that’s really good”, in her experience across three very different types of schools, involved teachers teaching each other:

“The training that I have had in school has been, I’d say 80 per cent of it has not been useful. And of that about half of it has been actually counterproductive... It’s made me feel grumpy, resentful, more like a 14-year-old... and inclined to misbehave... [And] anybody who thinks that they can deliver great training at the end of a knacker day, forget about it. That’s not happening.

“...Within the maths department, we took it in turns, so they were very competitive, so slightly nauseating, and made you feel a bit rubbish, but they would take a difficult subject, and model how they explained it. That was really useful... [but training generally] is often delivered very badly.”¹⁰²

It’s about quality, not (just) quantity

“Every occasion that we have of working together as professionals will either build our commitment to professional growth, to a vision of teaching and teachers, or it will erode that commitment. There’s no half way.”

— Judith Little, researcher and retired professor, in ‘Moving toward Continuous School Improvement’, June 1984¹⁰³

The quality and quantity of CPD interacts with other factors affecting teacher retention, for instance, workload. As Chris Paterson, Director of Impact at the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) told the Commission:

“Workload is not necessarily an absolute thing in terms of quantity of hours. It’s a combination of: amount of work, and how comfortable you feel in any given scenario doing that work.

¹⁰⁰ Female teacher, 21 February 2023, Public First focus group.

¹⁰¹ Female teacher, 21 February 2023, Public First focus group.

¹⁰² Lucy Kellaway, 7 February 2023.

¹⁰³ [Accessed via: <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED249590.pdf>].

“If I’ve got five meetings in a day, and I feel like I don’t know what I’m doing in any of them, my workload feels much worse than if I’ve got five meetings and I feel I’m fully trained and I know what I’m doing.”¹⁰⁴

The findings from focus groups supported this idea, with more experienced teachers reflecting on how long certain tasks took them to complete when they were newer professionals.

In a similar way, making sure that the training teachers and leaders are receiving is highly relevant to the realities of their role - genuinely useful and equipping them with the knowledge and skills to carry out their duties confidently and successfully - is equally important to that feeling that the job is manageable. Paterson continued:

“It’s a combination of, yes, quantum, but also capacity and support to try to make what is an incredibly difficult and challenging job - and rightly deserves to be in that status - sort of have the right level of support and training to make it doable.”

The relevance of training is particularly important for those working in schools serving disadvantaged pupils, like EIAs. Professor Tanya Ovenden-Hope, who evaluated the RETAIN programme - a year-long CPD pilot for ECTs in Cornwall, explained the value of action learning to prepare and equip teachers with the “confidence, the skills, the knowledge of the curriculum to really improve the outcomes of those children”, and make the difference to children’s lives that teachers want to make.

“That reality shock for early career teachers when they go in and it’s not what they expect... Many trainees go into school and the expectation is their own experience of being at school. They may have done a couple of placements... but it doesn’t prepare them when they go in, particularly to a school with high levels of socioeconomic disadvantage and high [pupil premium] levels.”¹⁰⁵

Thinking about the classroom environment post-pandemic, and how some of the impacts of social isolation and the lockdowns are manifesting in pupil behaviour - as *Achieving a work-life balance* explored - Sir Kevan Collins reiterated that “supporting teachers to meet the genuine issues in front of them is critical in retention”:

“[There’s] lots of support you can give teachers in practical ways to solve that problem. Unfortunately, lots of training hasn’t been practical. And it’s been a bit abstract and intellectual, and it should be more rooted in meeting the teachers needs.

“...I think, here, the key thing for me is quality, not quantity. There’s no issue about the amount of Inset... sessions that teachers receive. It’s how many are directly related to support you to meet the needs of your children in front of you in the classroom.”¹⁰⁶



¹⁰⁴ Chris Paterson, 12 January 2023.

¹⁰⁵ Professor Tanya Ovenden-Hope, 8 February 2023.

¹⁰⁶ Sir Kevan Collins, 12 January 2023.

Grounding training in the realities of the job

So, making the content of the ECF and NPQs most beneficial to classroom teachers depends on it being contextualised, and reflective of the kind of challenges that teachers and leaders come up against in (and increasingly, outside) the classroom.

But, in the absence of meaningful co-production with teachers and leaders, the Commission heard that the content of the ECT programmes and NPQs has become overly “prescriptive” – a “sausage factory” approach – rather than responsive to the experience of the profession.

In one focus group, ECTs largely dismissed the online training exercises as part of the ECF as an irritating imposition. They were badly organised, unrelated to their subject or level of expertise, and several participants talked about how they “pressed play” and got on with something else. There was a vague sense that it might be useful but not in the way it is currently delivered.

“Honestly, myself and other ECTs in the school, we find ourselves put[ting] the video on in the background and get[ting] on with our work... A whole section was about learning kids’ names. And... a lot of us thought, why should this take three hours about learning a child’s name?”¹⁰⁷

[Speaking about the “evening clinics” put on at their school]: **“They could just chop it in half, easily, instead of just endlessly going on and on and on, and repeating themselves over and over again, repeating what the videos say. Like, you know, I couldn’t even tell the difference between all the blocks because they all look the same.”¹⁰⁸**

“We don’t look at the videos. We literally click through the online platform, but we literally just click through... A lot of the stuff that I’ve received... was in Initial Teacher Training. It wasn’t subject specific, and it just doesn’t work for Maths. A lot of it I can’t do it... for Maths, it just doesn’t work. So those sections just aren’t tailored to the subject. So pretty much pointless, because they don’t suit the needs of the learning.”¹⁰⁹

Carolyn Roberts, Headteacher at Thomas Tallis School in Greenwich, redesigned an early career programme and had it signed off by an accrediting body, after seeing how “unworkable” the training was. She told the Commission:

“The ECT one and two programme is hugely over-burdened. There’s far too much stuff in it. Too much stuff in it that people have to churn through supplement topics, in-school leaders churn through huge amounts of content.”

“...Being able to reflect on what’s happening in the early years in the workplace is much more important. So people have to know things but they’ve got to be able to... they’ve got to be able to apply it to the context in which they find themselves – that’s how professional on the job learning works. It’s not learning parroted stuff.”¹¹⁰

Indeed, she says the NPQs “are very similar, sadly” with “a lot of process to learn, but there’s very little reflection time”. This was also true of the evidence from school leaders on the NPQH, which is covered more in *Cultivating exceptional leaders and school cultures* later in this report.

¹⁰⁷ Early Career Teacher, 10 January 2023, Public First focus group.

¹⁰⁸ Early Career Teacher, 10 January 2023, Public First focus group.

¹⁰⁹ Early Career Teacher, 10 January 2023, Public First focus group.

¹¹⁰ Carolyn Roberts, 23 February 2023.

In the absence of that level of contextualised support being provided through the content of the ECF online training, the mentoring role has evolved far beyond its original intention, to fill that void.

Just as collaborative training was much more popular amongst the teachers the Commissioners heard evidence from, ECTs in one focus group were genuinely animated by the extent to which they were helped by their mentor as part of the ECF - someone with whom they can have a proper conversation, who understands what's going on, and can help them find the right kind of support. Clearly, it had made a big difference to their first years in the classroom.

“It’s been really useful. So whenever I’ve got problems, I can always talk to my mentor about it. He’s the Head of Department, as well. And he’s got decades of experience behind him. So whenever, I just call him and he helps me with whatever problems I’ve got. He’s been really supportive from the beginning.”¹¹¹

Lisa McCall, Deputy Headteacher at Wales High School in Sheffield told the Commission it is already having a domino effect of ECTs wanting to go on and become mentors:

“You don’t have to struggle to get a mentor here. Everybody wants to be a mentor, they want to have that influence over that member of staff and the training. But they also get something from that.”¹¹²

The evolution of that role is not necessarily a problem in itself, but the prescribed suite of training programmes means that mentors don’t have the discretion to recommend certain modules, tailored to what would be most useful to them - a ‘pick-and-mix’ approach.

Chasing status

The prescriptiveness of existing training has implications for retention because of its reflection on the status and prestige of the profession. As Sir Kevan Collins explained:

“It’s very demoralising if you get given it to be you know, if you’re painting by numbers too early and too quickly... we shouldn’t get too straitjacketed around how it has to be all the time.”¹¹³

For Dame Alison Peacock, Commissioner and Chief Executive of the Chartered College of Teaching, this gets to “the heart of professionalism” and “not just being a technician”:

“One of the issues I would have with the NPQs is that they are very much a one-size-fits all. So pretty much the curriculum content for an early career teacher is pretty similar to what you’d get as a senior lead on an NPQ...”

“The principle of teachers studying and developing their practice and being able to horizon scan and make the best judgments they can - not on the basis of what other people are telling them, but on the basis of their children in their context, their classroom this day. That’s what we need...”¹¹⁴

¹¹¹ Early Career Teacher, 10 January 2023, Public First focus group.

¹¹² Lisa McCall, 6 March 2023.

¹¹³ Sir Kevan Collins, 12 January 2023.

¹¹⁴ Dame Alison Peacock, 29 March 2023.

Co-production with the sector, building high-quality professional learning that is based on a “combination of theory and practice - that Felicity where you’ve got the research, but also the very grounded repertoire of skills within the classroom” enables you to “build a really confident profession”.

Professor Becky Francis’s evidence to the Commission also placed importance on a co-produced evidence-base underpinning professional development in “making teaching an attractive, high quality, prestigious profession”.

“There’s the issue about professional development opportunities. All the best professions build this in, and take their being a learning professional for granted... Having an evidence base, that all professionals refer to and feel that they can contribute to, is fundamental to high status professions.”¹¹⁵

Recommendation

The Government should commit to an urgent review of the deployment and content of the training elements of the Early Career Framework (ECF), and the content frameworks underpinning the suite of National Professional Qualifications (NPQs), co-produced with a wide range of stakeholders working in the profession.

The spirit of the ‘golden thread’, including the introduction of the ECF is the right one. But, the evidence to the Commission suggests that the deployment of CPD is now counter-productive, working against the professionalisation of the sector, and becoming a reason why teachers no longer want to remain in the profession.

The review should consider:

- a. How the content and delivery of both the ECF and the NPQs should be reframed so that they are truly grounded in the realities of teachers’ working lives, with flexibilities built in to allow individuals to select the courses that are best suited to their own level of experience, and the local context.**
- b. Whether to expand the suite of specialist NPQs to ensure they are tailored and truly relevant to teachers’ subject specialisms.**



¹¹⁵ Professor Becky Francis, 12 January 2023.

Section 6

Cultivating exceptional leaders and school culture

A new qualification for headteachers - 'the NPQH+' - expertly designed to develop the leadership skills required in modern school life



“There are actions that could be taken that would improve the working conditions and wellbeing of teachers and make it somewhat more likely that they stay in the profession. But there are also key elements in the current culture, ethos and demands of the education system that need to be addressed if we want to make a real difference.”

— Sir Alasdair Macdonald, retired Headteacher of Morpeth School (1992-2013)

Attrition rates amongst school leaders are worryingly high. Analysis of DfE data by the National Association of Head Teachers (NAHT) revealed that **more than 1 in 3 (37 per cent)** of headteachers - and close to half of middle leaders, **44 per cent** - leave within 5 years¹¹⁶.

As Evelyn Forde, Chair of the Commission at headteacher at Copthall School in Barnet said:

“If there’s a mass exodus of headteachers, where are the role models for all the other layers underneath? And, therefore, we end up with another void there.”¹¹⁷

School leadership is no longer an attractive pathway. In a focus group with SLT working in EIAs across the country, nearly all of them visibly recoiled at the question of becoming a headteacher or principal.

“[Senior] leadership was completely accidental... But, headteacher? No, thank you. I don’t know how many of you do it.”¹¹⁸

One focus group participant suggested that the changed context in which school leaders are operating has meant that, at least for him, the job has become less appealing in recent years:

“I think it’s difficult for teaching staff. I think it’s very difficult for senior leaders in schools. And I think it’s incredibly difficult for headteachers. And so, do I think it’s worth [becoming a headteacher] in the right environment in the right school in the right trust? Yes. But, I’m increasingly seeing very good colleagues in the system getting buried by Ofsted, buried by the pressure. So I think it’s a very difficult environment at the moment. So not ‘no’, but I think certainly less of a percentage than it would have been five years ago, ten years ago, and certainly 12 years ago.”¹¹⁹

Others put more colour on this, describing the shift in the pressures that come with headship, touched on in *Achieving a work-life balance* - dealing more with “the bigger picture things” of school life, like accountability:

¹¹⁶ NAHT, 26 April 2023, ‘New data reveals sharp increase in number of school leaders leaving the profession within 5 years’ [accessed via: <https://www.naht.org.uk/News/Latest-comments/Press-room/ArtMID/558/ArticleID/1640/New-data-reveals-sharp-increase-in-number-of-school-leaders-leaving-the-profession-within-5-years>].

¹¹⁷ Evelyn Forde, 29 November 2022.

¹¹⁸ Female senior leader, 10 January 2023, Public First focus group.

¹¹⁹ Male senior leader, 10 January 2023, Public First focus group.

“You’re dealing with parental complaints, or you’re dealing with teachers who didn’t handle situations very well or complaints from the community about whatever else.”¹²⁰

“Maybe when you’re in leadership, or maybe it’s me becoming a Deputy instead of an Assistant Head, we’re more privy to parental pressures and dealing with a lot of people’s very challenging backgrounds with a lot of very complex young people. The young people are brilliant, but juggling their parental expectations of a school, or the fact that it’s kind of every school’s the fault of everything. If there’s a fight in the community, it’s school’s fault. The neighbourhood blame the school. The police blame the school. Pupils blame the school. So I think that’s where the pressures come in, really, more than a kind of workload in the day. Then, combine that with a kind of external pressure of Ofsted.”¹²¹

One senior leader working in a rural, coastal EIA, said it was the lack of power to change things in the wider education system, even with leadership responsibilities, that was disheartening:

“No thanks, I don’t want to be headteacher ever... I’ve discovered being [a part of SLT in an academy school] that there are not as many opportunities to change things as I thought SLT had. I don’t know necessarily if it’s just our Trust, but I think there are certain things that are put on us and we have to do, which as a classroom teacher, I hadn’t necessarily appreciated.”¹²²

So, there’s an issue of attrition, and the pipeline of talent into headship. But there’s also the issue of, frankly, poor school leadership driving teacher attrition - and the two are closely interlinked.

Many of these pressures just described - high-stakes accountability, low reward and recognition, weak professional autonomy - not only drive headteachers out, but they also play a part in incentivising poor management styles and toxic school cultures, driven largely by fear.

In turn, the Commission has heard how these pressures on headteachers can filter down the chain, and manifest in all the other issues that this report has already explored: high volume workloads, inflexible working patterns, little opportunity for high-quality development, and low autonomy.

There are things - with the right support - that are within the remit of individual schools, MATs and leaders to mitigate these stresses and establish positive cultures of mutual trust and respect, collaboration, candour and openness, whilst promoting challenge, aspiration and high expectations for pupils and staff.

But, unquestionably, there are also things - sometimes intentional, sometimes unintentional consequences of system-wide policy changes in education - like those caused by a high-stakes accountability system, and the relevance of training for school leaders, working against them. Unless addressed by policymakers, the system will continue to serve as a disincentive for the fostering of good school cultures - the kind that make a person want to stay in the profession.

¹²⁰ Female senior leader, 10 January 2023, Public First focus group.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Ibid.

Trusting staff to uphold high standards

Greater professional autonomy, particularly at school leadership level, was repeatedly raised by those working in and around the sector as being the very essence of improving school culture and the struggling retention rates.

61 per cent of teachers who thought they could more autonomy in another career said they would be likely to leave the profession if it was offered to them in another sector¹²³.

Workplace culture expert Professor Cary Cooper told the Commission:

“You lose them by not managing them and giving them the autonomy, control, recognition - everything that a good head... would actually provide.”¹²⁴

Sir Alasdair Macdonald, the former headteacher heralded for his transformation of Morpeth School in Tower Hamlets between 1992-2013, characterised the state of the profession today:

“Our education system and our teachers are becoming very passive. And I think passivity doesn’t breed fulfilment, or desire to stay in the profession. I think if you’re active, and you’re more in control of what’s going on, and you know what you’re doing on a day-to-day basis, you get much more fulfilment from that.”¹²⁵

Throughout this report, the Commission has been careful to highlight the need to consider the local context of a school - its pupil intake, staffing, community, financial circumstances, Ofsted rating and reputation - in any suggestion around retention policies. There are no easy answers that can be transposed across all schools.

Naturally, this applies to the autonomy problem as well. There are leaders working in exceptionally challenging contexts and/or doing their best to turn around failing schools. And what might quickly be deemed overly prescriptive, autocratic or even punitive methods of managing staff, pupils and teaching might actually be pertinent to improving pupil outcomes or practically managing large numbers of pupils safely.

With this approach, however, one must accept that it won’t be for everyone, and small scale staff attrition might be a necessary forfeiture in the short-term, as part of that process. That is why, there is no such figure that can define a ‘healthy level of teacher churn’.

But, the evidence the Commission heard would suggest this has gone too far. Far from it being a ‘pick-and-mix’ approach, with certain more high-control policies (e.g. centralised lesson plans, or hierarchical staffing arrangements) deployed just in the short-term - long enough to raise the quality of teaching and learning, but relaxed over time - or balanced out with significant autonomy in other aspects of school life, in some schools, it has become the dominating, long-term culture.

High expectations - for pupils and staff - are not at odds with good school cultures and staff wellbeing. Indeed, a 2012 study of high-need schools in the US, showed that better

¹²³ Public First, 18th Oct - 28th Oct 2022, Table 37, Poll of secondary school teachers in England [Poll tables available via: <http://www.publicfirst.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/Education-Support.pdf>].

¹²⁴ Professor Cary Cooper, 7 February 2023.

¹²⁵ Sir Alasdair Macdonald, 20 January 2023.

interpersonal working conditions within a school — collegiality, leadership and mutual trust, respect and openness — significantly reduced the risk of a teacher leaving a school¹²⁶. Significantly, this research also demonstrated that “improvement[s] in the context of teachers’ work is associated with improvements in student achievement growth” in English and Maths.

Nonetheless, across all of the focus groups and interviews with teachers, even if not their own experience, they all knew of schools where teachers’ freedom to manage their classes and time had been completely eroded, or where there was a fiercely hierarchical culture.

“I know one of our Trust schools is very prescribed. They have a script, they’re not allowed to banter or talk with the children at all about anything like the football at the weekend or anything that... it has to be about learning all the time.”¹²⁷

“It was very normal for me to be two seconds late for transition duty, but then there would be a bollocking email sent to the whole staff saying, ‘[X member of staff], on green now’. And that goes to everybody... for the young teachers, this is horrible.”

Lucy Kellaway, who has taught economics at three very different schools, told the Commission that an entire “business model that says teacher churn is good” has evolved out of, and is actually rewarded, by the current accountability system.

“They want to keep their costs as low as possible, and the energy levels as high as possible. So to have very new teachers does that. Also, if it’s a school that has very high levels of control, that works better with younger teachers.

“So, there’s this whole issue there, which is something I’m really, really concerned about, that these schools that are that are held up as the models - and they are fantastically impressive - that if what you’re trying to do with education is make it into this - and sausage machine sounds too derogatory - but if what you’re trying to do is to get the best possible results for, not the majority of students, but for every student. I don’t know how you do that sustainably in terms of teachers, I don’t know any schools that have managed that sustainably.”¹²⁸

As she says, “treating teachers like children is becoming more and more and more of a thing, and it’s a catastrophe for retention.” It also has wide implications for the status and attractiveness of teaching, as Sir Alasdair Macdonald explained:

“I think we’re moving towards a model whereby not only are we told what we should be teaching... someone will be telling us how we should teach it. I think that you’re not talking about a profession then.”¹²⁹



¹²⁶ Johnson, Kraft, Papay, 2012, ‘How context matters in high-need schools: The effects of teachers’ working conditions on their professional satisfaction and their students’ achievement’ [accessed via: <https://scholar.harvard.edu/mkraft/publications/how-context-matters-high-need-schools-effects-teachers%E2%80%99-working-conditions-their>].

¹²⁷ Female senior leader, 10 January 2023.

¹²⁸ Lucy Kellaway, 7 February 2023.

¹²⁹ Sir Alasdair Macdonald, 20 January 2023.

Developing people management skills

So much of any good working culture that encourages people to stay depends on the quality of that leadership at the top. Professor Cooper explained:

“The heads create the culture... and the senior leadership team create the culture - and they’re the ones who you have to have the right kind of people in those kinds of roles. And they have to get proper training, and doing a one week course here and there is not proper training.”¹³⁰

Pathways to progression in teaching depend on taking on leadership responsibilities, though many want to remain in the classroom, as *Bringing teachers’ working conditions into the 21st century* sets out. As long as this is the case - and without sufficient training to develop those all-important management and people skills - it will be much harder to bring on exceptional leaders and raise retention.

The “parity between their people skills and their technical skills” is also important for leaders to be able to assess and balance high standards with the wellbeing and satisfaction of their workforce. Professor Cooper went on:

“Like all professions, the problem we have is people get promoted based on their technical skills, not their people skills... to create the right kind of culture in the future, to get the most out of people, to minimise mental ill health at work to get higher productivity, it’s about the line manager from shop floor to top floor and getting the right people into managerial roles... You may be a great classroom teacher, but... from a personality point of view... you’re not predisposed to be a manager.”¹³¹

The National Professional Qualification for Headteachers (the NPQH) has an entire section devoted to school culture. For one, the framework aims to ensure leaders learn that “a culture of mutual trust and respect between colleagues fosters effective relationships and supportive professional environments” and know how to “create an environment for pupils and colleagues where everyone feels welcome, safe, and able to learn from mistakes”¹³².

This should be the perfect opportunity to develop good inter- and intra-personal skills - or ‘the EQ’, as Professor Cooper calls it - among school leaders. But the working environments described by some of the focus groups suggest there is a long way to go.



¹³⁰ Professor Cary Cooper, 7 February 2023.

¹³¹ Professor Cary Cooper, 7 February 2023.

¹³² Department for Education, October 2020, ‘National Professional Qualification (NPQ): Headship Framework’ [accessed via: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1125999/NPQ_Headship_FINAL_Ref.pdf].

The approach to school culture is quite academic and ignores the realities of being in a school today - a familiar thread of this report's section on **Reforming, but not uprooting, professional learning**. Commissioner and Chief Executive of the Teacher Development Trust Gareth Conyard explained:

“There is nothing in the current framework for NPQH that prepares you as a headteacher to manage strike action, for example, beyond a basic coverage of the statutory duties. But that isn't the hard bit - it is managing the relationships with staff who you might feel are letting you down or you might sympathise with. There isn't anything in there to help you manage a serious mental health issue within your team - what if you have a suicidal teacher? These are the things that keep heads up at night, and we could do much more to support the lived reality of being a head in challenging circumstances.

“Overall, we are still rooted in an old-fashioned sense of the head as an heroic leader, as the person who can do it all, including creating the culture of excellence within a school. That is a lot of pressure on a single set of shoulders! If you were the CEO of a big corporate organisation and saw that approach, I think you'd be very concerned. It feels like we are setting our heads up to be the 'single point of failure', carrying too much alone, rather than sharing the responsibilities effectively.”¹³³

Investment in developing the people management skills of the workforce - rooted in evidence - is integral to building that professional confidence, and in turn, the modernisation of the profession. Sir Kevan Collins explained:

“Historically, I did quite a lot of work in Denmark because they have much more flexible teacher contracts. So there is a question around flexibility in the workforce - going to where people are, rather than some of the traditional patterns of employment that we see in education, which I think are all too frequent. That requires at the school level... more investment in the people management agenda. In the private sector, the Head of People, as you might call it, sits on the senior management team, and that is their function to support the growth of development and support people. I don't think we're particularly historically good at giving enough resource and energy to this question, how we manage our people.”¹³⁴

Harnessing technology

Learning how to use “a range of data, the expertise of colleagues and experience of the wider community” in the “creation and ongoing refinement” of school culture is also drawn out in the NPQH. And some of the best and most positively described school cultures the Commission heard about were those informed by staff consultation.

The potential for technology to help school leaders better understand the drivers behind attrition in their own context, and the effectiveness of interventions designed to improve culture and retention, is a really exciting development for the sector.

¹³³ Gareth Conyard, 23 May 2023.

¹³⁴ Sir Kevan Collins, 12 January 2023.

CASE STUDY:

Teacher Engagement Platform, ImpactEd

In 2022, ImpactEd launched a pilot in schools to test a new digital Teacher Engagement Platform (TEP). The platform draws on best practices in employee engagement from other sectors.

The pilot has been conducted with over 100 schools, with over 4,500 staff responses. They will be publishing a full research report on pilot data findings in Summer 2023. Initial insights are revealing the strong link between leadership and management drivers and overall engagement. Workload questions are typically the lowest scoring nationally, but importantly have a wide variation in scores between schools which indicates there is some good practice in play that can be shared between school leaders.

Using a large standardised question set, the TEP allows leaders to take a temperature check across their staff on 15 drivers of teacher engagement - everything from teacher workload to classroom resources - in their school. It is all administered, reported and benchmarked through the digital platform.

From the report, schools can see how they perform against like-for-like schools through benchmarks (e.g. national, regional, pupil premium eligibility). School leaders can then work out what they need to prioritise to keep their teachers engaged and intervene early, before they lose them.

Over time, as more schools join the programme and there is more longitudinal data, it will be able to identify, or even predict, key drivers of attrition and retention. The ambition is to add in a 'best practice' feature into the platform, to encourage greater collaboration between like-for-like schools who are looking to improve on their weaker areas of engagement, and those that are more successful.



“A profession constantly looking over its shoulder”

“There are actions that could be taken that would improve the working conditions and wellbeing of teachers and make it somewhat more likely that they stay in the profession. But there are also key elements in the current culture, ethos and demands of the education system that need to be addressed if we want to make a real difference.”

— Sir Alasdair Macdonald, retired Headteacher of Morpeth School (1992-2013)

There are some incredible leaders working in education - the Commission was privileged to speak to several of them. But, there are plenty of leaders who could be leading better, creating the school cultures that inspire retention, were it not for the pressures and restraints of such a high-stakes accountability system.

That the system needs strong accountability is not in dispute. It was certainly not the strength of feeling amongst the teachers the Commission heard from that Ofsted should be abolished.

For one, it is tied up with status. Professor Becky Francis told the Commission:

“All the great professions also have really strong accountability.”¹³⁵

But as Commissioner Gareth Conyard pointed out, “we can look at examples of health” - arguably, high-status professions - but where accountability “is separate from the individual experience of the doctor. They don’t sit in on an operation and watch what you’re doing, as they would in a classroom.”¹³⁶

And, what makes that experience feel even worse, particularly for leaders of schools with more disadvantaged cohorts, like those in EIAs, is a sense that the inspectors do not fully understand or consider that context in their judgement.

“We’re a semi-rural school, and we have a lot of issues around transport, around the rural poor and all of those sorts of things. And, unfortunately, my experience of Ofsted and people that have come in but also people from our trust, is that they’re not necessarily fruitfully clued up on those impacts.”¹³⁷



¹³⁵ Professor Becky Francis, 12 January 2023.

¹³⁶ Gareth Conyard, 17 January 2023.

¹³⁷ Female senior leader, 10 January 2023, Public First focus group.

“We just had Ofsted in during the summer... we are under huge amounts of scrutiny. And I think what I’ve noticed... is we’re being scrutinised by people that I genuinely don’t think could do our job. And, I have no problem whatsoever in being criticised or supported, or helped by colleagues that are experienced... and I’ll take constructive criticism all day long. But when you’re sort of being inspected, and you’ve got inspectors... that refuse to be in the same room as students or won’t come into classrooms, and where good things are happening, won’t come down the corridor or break and lunches...”¹³⁸

These senior leaders were very conscious of the impact of a poor Ofsted rating on the reputation of a school and were disparaged by the lack of contextualisation in the accountability system:

“If I’m honest with you, why would you work in a challenging environment when you’re held to the same standard as a grammar school? The same Ofsted handbook? The same Progress 8? Why would you?”¹³⁹

The potential “trade off between accountability and pressure on schools, and the quality of education that students get” is a balance that needs to be considered very carefully¹⁴⁰. But, Sir Alasdair Macdonald explained why it has now gone too far:

“We’ve got stuck with this model, which I think had its place, to kind of kickstart things. But we’ve now let it become the permanent model..

“...High stakes accountability, largely driven by Ofsted, was probably needed. But that punitive form of inspection has served its purpose. The impact, particularly anxiety and stress, on teachers and leaders, and therefore pupils, is now counterproductive.”¹⁴¹

The pressures manifest in the culture of the school. That fear of the Ofsted inspection process or a poor rating trickles down into workload, inflexible working patterns - doing things for the sake of Ofsted, not necessarily for the right reasons, or for the interests of staff and pupils.

Dame Alison Peacock, Commissioner and Chief Executive of the Chartered College of Teaching, described it as “a profession constantly looking over its shoulder” which, in turn, is driving school behaviours:

“As soon as anything becomes too... top down, what happens is that innovation becomes stifled. People try to second guess the requirements of the inspectors. They try to speak the language of the inspectors.”¹⁴²

The system drives competition. And it takes an enormous amount of professional courage - the kind exhibited by the headteachers and school leaders this report has highlighted in case studies - to prioritise the positive school cultures that encourage retention. Instilling that confidence in headteachers requires much more support. As one senior leader said:

¹³⁸ Male senior leader, 10 January 2023, Public First focus group.

¹³⁹ Male senior leader 10 January 2023, Public First Focus group.

¹⁴⁰ James Zuccollo, 7 February 2023.

¹⁴¹ Sir Alasdair Macdonald, 20 January 2023.

¹⁴² Dame Alison Peacock, 29 March 2023.

“I think it’s really important that we create a culture whereby heads [and heads] of department are strong enough to go in and not fear Ofsted and be able to sell their curriculum and know that what they do day in day out is right for our young people.”¹⁴³

Commissioner and Regional Director at Star Academies Craig Dillon set out what that support for school leaders should look like:

“In a system that has become synonymous with high stakes accountability and pressures of workload there are too few real opportunities for school leaders to take the space and time to evaluate their working practices around the key areas of workload, wellbeing and retention and to learn about best practice elsewhere in education and in other sectors.

“By formalising the opportunity for headteachers to do this periodically, we would not only be investing in their development but would also ensure that these issues remain high on the profession’s list of priorities and are continually subject to review and evolution — to the benefit of all stakeholders.”

Recommendations

The accountability system is unbalanced and the negative impact on the profession is troubling. The collection of accountability components, including the pressure experienced by heads and teachers as a result of Ofsted inspections, should be reviewed holistically. The aim of such a review should be to ensure that schools remain accountable to both the general taxpayer and the communities that they serve but without driving up workload and encouraging short term management decisions. In truth, it is hard to plot a route to a substantive improvement in teacher retention without a reduction in accountability pressure.

Every five years, headteachers should be granted a month-long, paid sabbatical to complete a new qualification - ‘the NPQH+’ - expertly designed to develop the people management skills required of good leaders, and with a laser focus on the current context in schools. During that time, deputy headteachers would be expected to step up into that role, supporting the development of the next generation of school leaders.

The courses that make up the NPQH+ should be action-based and collaborative. As part of the programme headteachers would visit comparative schools with leading cultures and retention rates, intentionally building communities of leaders to help create a protective resilience, grow their confidence, and incentivise professional courage.

The qualification, which should be drawn up in consultation with the school workforce and people management experts, should be an entitlement built into the terms and conditions of headship.

The sabbatical would offer headteachers an opportunity to reflect on their own school cultures, management styles and accomplishments.

¹⁴³ Female senior leader, 10 January 2023, Public First focus group.



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