



Revisiting the teacher retention crisis: recommendations for change

Autumn 2025

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About us

Established by teachers for teachers, Education Support has been supporting educators for 148 years. We are the UK's only charity dedicated to supporting the mental health and wellbeing of teachers and education staff.

We support individuals and help schools, colleges and universities to improve the mental health and wellbeing of their staff. We also carry out research and advocate for changes in Government policy for the benefit of the education workforce, using our unique combination of expertise in the education sector and mental health and wellbeing.

Introduction

There is much to celebrate in the English education system in 2025. Highly trained educators routinely use evidence-based strategies to improve learning outcomes for children and young people. Inclusion is a shared goal for many practitioners and policymakers, and although there are deep challenges in the system, there is a widely shared commitment to improving outcomes for those who face the steepest inequalities. For those who care about children, or learning or social equity, a career in education remains a compelling and meaningful choice.

At the same time, the pressures on schools, leaders, and teachers are significant. Yet support from government, communities and wider public services is more strained than ever. Against a backdrop of significant child poverty, long CAMHS waiting lists and a SEND system in need of urgent reform, teachers are being asked to do more than ever before to fill the gaps in failing public services.

Teacher recruitment commands a significant proportion of the oxygen and budget allocated to teacher supply. The urgent need for a national teacher retention strategy remains unmet, with the last strategy published before the pandemic in 2019. The lack of strategy and coherent action risks neglecting the challenges in our classrooms and compromising the future of children and young people's education.

Teacher retention is not just a workforce issue. It is the cornerstone of educational quality and equity. When schools can retain experienced, skilled teachers, children and young people benefit from greater continuity, stronger relationships, and more effective teaching. High teacher turnover disrupts learning environments, undermines progress, and disproportionately affects pupils in disadvantaged communities. A stable teaching workforce enables deeper understanding of pupils' needs, fosters trust, and supports long-term development. In short, retaining teachers is essential to securing the best possible outcomes for every learner.

- The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) publishes annual data for Great Britain. In its most recent report, education continues to be in the top three “industries” with high levels of self-reported work-related ill health.¹
- It also reports that 2.53m working days are lost each year to work-related illness in the sector, at an economic cost of c. £1.8bn.
- Work-related stress, depression or anxiety account for 53% of all ill health in the sector.
- The HSE reports that this level of work-related stress, depression or anxiety “is statistically significantly higher than for workers across all industries”.²

Teacher retention is a vital lever for the Government's opportunity mission and needs to be a priority for our education system. Our collective ability to improve retention — and the relative attractiveness of the profession — will determine the quality of what can be delivered for children and young people for decades to come.

Our work shows that the mental health and wellbeing of our education workforce are not peripheral concerns. They underpin job satisfaction, retention, performance, and pupil outcomes. All of this has a direct impact on the experience of children and young people in our classrooms. Yet the current system is not designed to support long and satisfying school-based careers, meaning that children and young people are missing out on the best possible education, and life chances.



Introduction

This paper builds on the work of the [2023 Commission on Teacher Retention](#). It sets out our evolving thinking through an evidence-based approach to workplace wellbeing that will improve workforce retention. We do not suggest that this paper holds all the answers. Rather, we hope to prompt engagement, reflection and consideration of the issues to further our collective thinking and action across the sector.

England needs a coherent, long-term teacher retention strategy. This isn't only about keeping people in teaching roles: it is about enabling educators to reconnect with and sustain their passion, purpose and commitment.

We cannot deliver high standards for children if we cannot retain an engaged workforce. A new retention strategy must be ambitious for children and young people, as well as the workforce. If we are serious about breaking down barriers to opportunity for all children and young people, retention of talented teachers must be the foundation.

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High teacher turnover disrupts learning environments, undermines progress, and disproportionately affects pupils in disadvantaged communities.”



1. What is the **current** situation?

The challenge of teacher recruitment and retention is a universal issue, with UNESCO highlighting that we need 44 million primary and secondary teachers globally by 2030 for the UN to achieve its Sustainable Development Goals. For nations to develop or recover, their people need access to skills, education, and knowledge.

The UK is also experiencing a teacher retention challenge. Between 2021-22 and 2022-23, we saw a 44% increase in those leaving the profession in England.³ In 2023-2024, one in eleven qualified teachers left the state school system.⁴ Headteachers are five times more likely to leave the profession before retirement than they were in 2010/11.⁵ The NFER's 2025 teacher labour market report shows a slight improvement, attributed to efforts to address poor pay, and policies which recognise international qualifications.⁶

Wider economic factors, such as sustained inflation and a tightening labour market, are likely to stem the flow from the profession this year.

England is viewed as having the UK's worst teacher retention problem, but challenges also exist in the other three nations. Wales enjoys slightly better retention in secondary, but the picture is worse in primary phase.⁷ Scotland faces challenges in workforce planning, and increased levels of staff absence and sickness.⁸ While we could not locate data to provide an accurate picture in Northern Ireland, we know that drivers of staff attrition echo the rest of the UK and include workload.

44%
increase

Between 2021-22 and 2022-23 we saw a 44% increase in those leaving the profession in England.³

1 in 11

In 2023-2024, one in eleven qualified teachers left the state school system.⁴

×5

Headteachers are five times more likely to leave the profession before retirement than they were in 2010/11.⁵



2. Why is this a problem?

Great teaching lies at the heart of great education systems. Great education transforms lives.

Teaching is a highly demanding profession, requiring a wide range of skills, a constantly evolving knowledge base and hands-on practice. It takes time for a teacher to be fully in their stride and confident in their practice, with rapid development in self-efficacy happening in the early years of professional practice.^{9 10} By retaining them in the system for longer, we increase the impact that teachers can make, and we benefit more from the public investment in their training.

An education system with high levels of attrition will experience a variety of problems and missed opportunities. What matters most is how these dynamics combine to constrain outcomes for children and young people, especially for those growing up in the poorest settings. Some of the most important factors include:

i. Quality of teaching:

The long-term attractiveness of the teaching profession should be expected to decline as more education staff leave the profession.¹¹

When teachers leave their careers, it affects their school colleagues and the overall workforce in two directions:

1. It is often a response to declining job quality and job satisfaction.¹²
2. It is also a driver for increased pressure on the colleagues left behind.

Both factors have a negative impact on the reputation of teaching as an attractive or satisfying career. This in turn will erode the quantity and quality of candidates who enter and remain in the profession.¹³

Ultimately, this has a negative effect on outcomes for children and young people.

ii. Social equity and opportunity:

Teacher turnover is not evenly experienced across the education sector. It has a disproportionately negative impact on those who are schooled in the most deprived areas.^{14 15} Teacher attrition presents a direct barrier to social mobility and to the achievement of the current Government's mission to break down barriers to opportunity for children and young people.

iii. Productivity:

Not only is high staff attrition an indicator of sub-par workplace wellbeing, but it also acts as a brake on the efficiency and effectiveness of how schools operate.¹⁶ Given the relatively high level of attrition in the education sector, we must recognise that it acts as a material drag on the overall performance of our education system, in terms of outcomes for children and young people.

iv. Value for money:

With education funding unlikely to meaningfully increase anytime soon, the ongoing pain of lost investment will culminate in the later 2020s. It is hard to predict what the system will look like by then. In a tighter fiscal environment, the impact of every pound invested in the system becomes more critical.

In 2023/24, 37,021 teachers left the profession for reasons other than retirement. The cost of training these teachers was over £1bn in real terms.¹⁷ We can neither afford to lose this precious resource, nor to ignore the £1bn lost opportunity cost.

The loss is further compounded by the additional costs incurred by managing staff turnover. This includes the costs of lost productivity, recruitment costs, supply costs, impact on workload and morale of the wider team. Once this is accounted for, we estimate that the cost of the current rate of attrition rises to over £1.5bn per annum.¹⁸

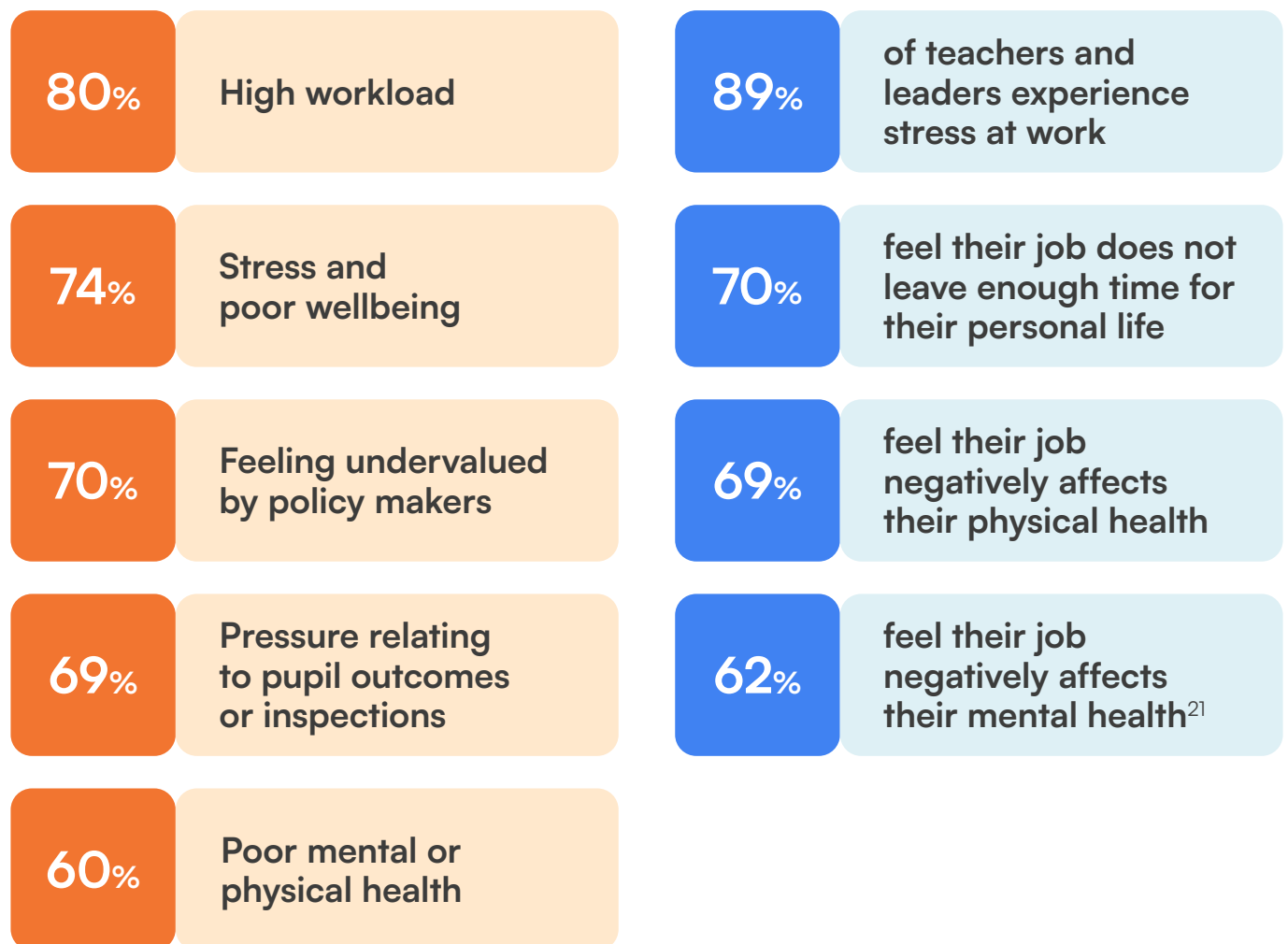
3. Why do teachers leave the profession in England?

The reasons why people leave their careers in teaching and school leadership are known and well-documented.

The Department for Education's Working Lives of Teachers and Leaders report lists the top reasons for leaving the profession (for those who left between 2022-2023) as:

There are a wide variety of other sources that support these findings, including previous work by Education Support.^{19 20}

We see this primarily as a workplace wellbeing problem. And we believe that a significant improvement can be made through actions grounded in evidence and taken at both the system and school levels.



4. What should the **goals** of a teacher retention strategy be?

The central purpose of a teacher retention strategy must be to enable the system to deliver the very best outcomes for children and young people.

The priority goals to support that purpose include to:

1. Secure long-term supply of quality educators

This is one of the key tasks of central government within the English system. Retention rates should be a key target for the DfE, alongside recruitment.

2. Reduce teacher turnover in the least well-resourced communities

Successive governments have highlighted their ambitions to support those children and young people who face the most challenging circumstances. Ensuring that these communities can attract and retain talented teachers is a critical requirement for breaking down barriers to opportunity for everyone. As AI tools promise to transform education forever, human relationships may seem like a tired, old-school pedagogical technology. According to the evidence however, they remain critical to a successful education system.²²

3. Support unhurried leadership development pathways

Offering leadership opportunities to teachers is positive for their development and wellbeing. Rushing people to take on leadership responsibilities before they are ready is not. Our teaching workforce is relatively young and the proportion of educators

who want to take on leadership roles is declining. This can create local pressure to recruit talent into leadership, sometimes at a very fast pace. This can result in inexperienced educators taking on significant responsibilities before they are comfortable or fully prepared. Whilst this might be a short-term solution to a local resourcing problem, it can create longer-term systemic issues when underprepared educators struggle to manage their load, and, ultimately, decide to leave the profession. Counterintuitively, this can weaken the pipeline of future leaders, by making leadership look like an unattractive and demanding choice.

4. Make staying in the classroom an attractive career path

The average age of teachers in England is well below the OECD average. The pathways for pay progression depend heavily on the acceptance of additional responsibilities that take teachers away from the part of the job that they most value — the teaching. If we are to retain talent in the profession, we must find ways to enable pay progression linked to pedagogical practice, subject knowledge and other professional development anchored in the classroom.



5. How can we achieve those goals?

All system actors have a role to play

There is no silver bullet to resolving the retention challenges we face. Coherent action is required by actors at all levels of the system.

The Public Accounts Committee has rightly recommended that any teacher retention strategy must be part of a broader 'whole system strategy'.²³ Schools cannot meet the growing social, emotional, mental health and safeguarding needs of children alone. A joined-up approach across public services is needed, one that ensures health, social care, and education services work together to meet the needs of children and families, and have the necessary resources (both financial and human) to do so. Such an approach would provide the necessary supporting infrastructure for a teacher retention strategy.

The Government must prioritise staff retention goals and ensure that education policymaking supports and reinforces this. On page 12, we repeat our call for the DfE to establish a staff retention target to sit alongside its existing recruitment KPI.

Employers, local authorities and school leaders have a vital role to play, and must take action to support improvement locally. We have included recommendations for employers to consider on page 13.

Over time, initial teacher education, the early career framework and NPQs must also evolve to include a stronger focus on career sustainability.

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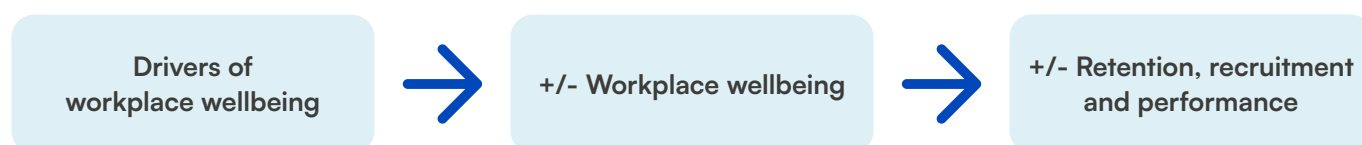
A systematic review of teacher wellbeing has suggested that teacher wellbeing influences teaching quality, indicating an impact on pupils and learners.²⁵ There is also evidence of a negative association between teacher stress, burnout, depression and/or anxiety and outcomes for pupils in schools in terms of their academic achievement.”^{26 27 28}

Workplace wellbeing strategies are affordable and effective

Since workplace wellbeing is such a significant reason for attrition in England, we believe that there is real value in looking at the issues through a wellbeing lens. This is not about privileging the needs of adults over those of children, but rather to navigate our way to the best environment in which the system functions as it should, and children and young people can thrive.

We believe that an explicit focus on evidence-based strategies that improve workplace wellbeing will make a meaningful impact on teacher retention, if implemented across the education system.²⁴ Recent research demonstrates that by improving the drivers of workplace wellbeing, we can improve recruitment, retention and performance of institutions.²⁸ This insight should guide policymaking on retention.

The logic is relatively simple, and supported by a strong body of evidence:²⁹



5. How can we achieve those goals?

Recommendations for Government

On page 13 we have provided an update on the limited progress of our original recommendations from the [Commission on Teacher Retention \(2023\)](#). Many of the recommendations have not been acted upon. Where there has been activity — such as reform of training frameworks or the inspection process — we are not yet able to measure their impact on retention.

The evidence and our thinking have evolved since the Commission on Teacher Retention (2023). Figures 1-3 illustrate a range of approaches to be considered as part of a teacher retention strategy, mapped against the twelve drivers of workplace wellbeing.³⁰ We believe that a retention strategy that addresses as many of these drivers as possible will stand the best chance of really shifting the attrition rate in the sector.

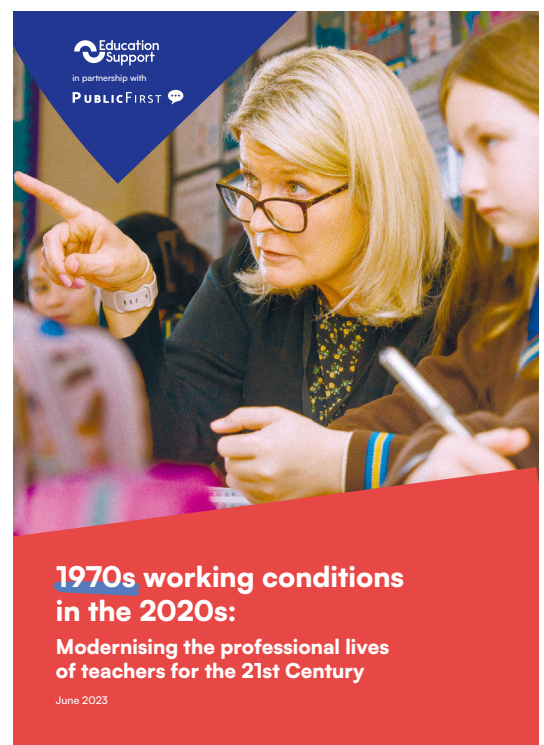
We welcome the opportunity to discuss these with stakeholders in more detail.

Alongside these recommendations, it's important to note the systemic reality that educators are working in. They are being asked to do more than is possible within the resources and time currently available. This is reflected in the way around half the workforce, including leaders, negatively describes the impact of their workload and workplace culture on their wellbeing.

We can no longer expect schools to do more with less. We need to reset the ratio between the resource available to schools and the extent of demand placed upon them, and this requires political leadership. A transparent and unequivocal signal of intent would set a hopeful tone and a climate for improved teacher retention.

50%

of all education staff consider their organisation's culture has a negative effect on their mental health and wellbeing³¹



Drivers of workplace wellbeing

Their work illustrates how evidence-based drivers of workplace wellbeing directly contribute to four dimensions of work-related wellbeing:

- Job satisfaction
- Purpose
- Happiness
- Stress

The drivers lead to positive and/or negative wellbeing, which in turn affect workforce productivity, recruitment, retention and organisational performance. This paper is grounded in De Neve and Ward’s³² model of workplace wellbeing.

De Neve and Ward’s (2025) model of workplace wellbeing is the most helpful that Education Support has found so far in terms of the translation from theory to practice. Whilst there are many other ways to conceptualise workplace wellbeing, this model best fits our understanding of the dynamics of workplace wellbeing in the education sector currently and has a good evidence base.

Related to this work — and also produced in collaboration with the University of Oxford’s Wellbeing Research Centre — is the Work Wellbeing Playbook.³³ Through this extensive systematic review of 3,000 academic studies of workplace wellbeing interventions, twelve specific drivers of workplace wellbeing are distilled.

This paper uses these twelve drivers to reflect on our 2023 recommendations from the Commission on Teacher Retention. Figure 1 on page 12 illustrates the recommendations in line with the driver it best fits.

For our latest thinking on teacher retention, we systematically considered the situation in schools through each of the twelve drivers, drawing on evidence in the literature as well as on our own work with schools and colleges. This work is not scientific and there are multiple ways in which specific approaches could be viewed or aligned to wellbeing drivers. For the purposes of this document our thinking to date is shared here. Further work is required to better map domain specific evidence against the drivers. Feedback from sector stakeholders will help improve and refine the work further. The results of the work to date are illustrated in figure 2 (page 13) and figure 3 (page 16).

The twelve drivers represent key aspects of job quality that influence wellbeing, motivation, and retention across professions and comprise:



Figure 1: Progress to date on the specific recommendations made in the 2023 Commission on Teacher Retention

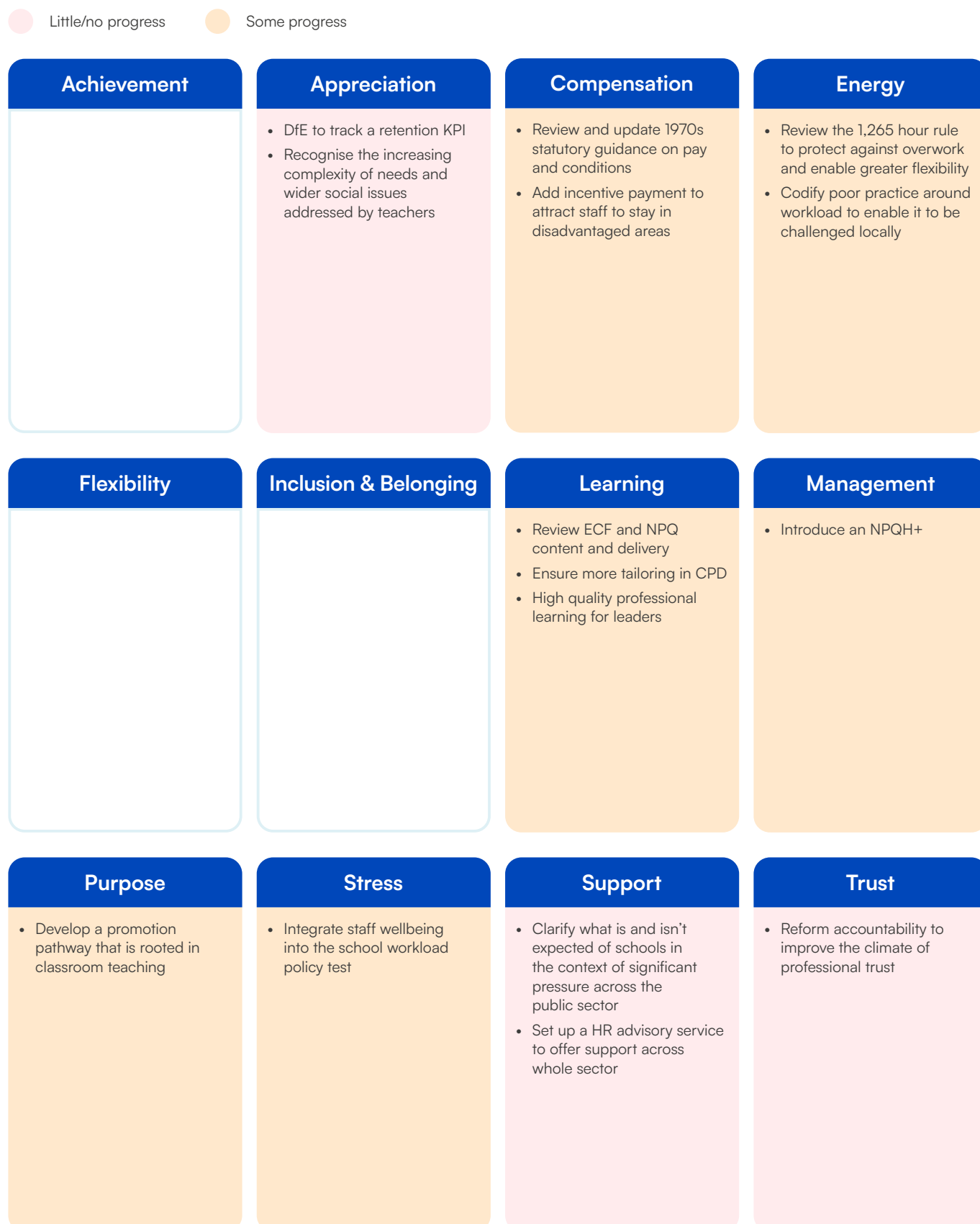


Figure 2: Updated suggestions to Government for improving retention

Retained existing recommendation	New recommendation		
Achievement	Appreciation	Compensation	Energy
Review the way in which selection at the point of entry to schools and colleges can be gamified to improve perceptions of performance and risk demoralisation in the most inclusive settings	- DfE to track a retention KPI - Senior government figures publicly celebrate and appreciate teaching and teachers - Highlight the value that good teaching creates for society	- Review and update 1970s statutory guidance on pay and conditions - Ensure relative real income of mid-career teachers is competitive compared to other professions through fully-funded pay awards - Fully fund support staff pay increase	- Review the 1,265 hour rule to protect against overwork and enable greater flexibility - Codify poor practice around workload to enable it to be challenged locally - Consider increasing funded PPA to lessen work intensity and overwork - Improve the effectiveness of the DfE workload policy test
Flexibility	Inclusion & Belonging	Learning	Management
Highlight resources, templates, budget calculators and timetabling approaches to support flexible working	- Share evidence on the value of diverse representation in education - Profile role models with visible and invisible protected characteristics	- High quality professional learning on people leadership - Support ITE providers to ensure training is grounded in the complex reality of modern classroom life - Ensure more tailoring in CPD - Promote reflective practice and learning models that increase teacher agency	- Review per pupil funding model in the context of falling birth rate - Ensure reflective practice space available to every leader that wants it
Purpose	Stress	Support	Trust
- Develop a promotion pathway that is rooted in classroom teaching - DfE to conduct a biannual review of bureaucratic requirements on schools with explicit target for reduction	- Support schools to manage parental expectations and relationships - Address teacher supply in shortage subjects	- High quality professional learning for leaders - In policymaking, explicitly recognise and consider the impact of the ratio between the demand on schools and the resource available to meet that demand - Fund capacity for high quality mentoring for early career teachers	- Reform accountability to improve the climate of professional trust - Involve teachers in policymaking, framing classroom practice as respected expertise

5. How can we achieve those goals?

To improve retention and teacher supply across England, a multi-faceted approach is required. Using the evidence-based drivers of workplace wellbeing³⁴ as a framework through which to identify policies with the greatest potential for impact, we have illustrated a collection of measures on page 13. Taken together, these measures will significantly move the dial on workplace wellbeing across the sector. This in turn will improve retention, as well as improving recruitment and performance, in terms of outcomes for children and young people.

Many of the suggestions on page 13 are well understood. Some are less familiar, or the potential impact on retention is not well understood, for example:

- **People leadership professional learning:**

Evidence shows that good quality relationships built on trust, appreciation, support and inclusion have a meaningful impact on people's wellbeing and effectiveness at work. We also know that school leaders want better training — and time — to develop their relational, communication and emotional intelligence skills,³⁵ as they are faced with an increasingly complex range of stakeholders to manage. It's vital that we invest in these skills now, to ensure that current and future cohorts of school leaders feel equipped to take on the complexity of their role, and can strategically develop positive organisational cultures, which make their schools attractive places to work. We support calls to include relational skills in future NPQ content and see this as a key pillar in any retention strategy.

- **Reflective practice:**

We hear so often that staff are stuck in fire-fighting mode and can seldom step-back from the day-to-day and think creatively about the challenges they face. Reflective practice approaches, like supervision, coaching and mentoring provide these spaces. Our work delivering professional supervision in education shows that it has a significant impact on school leaders' emotional resilience, self-efficacy and desire to remain in their jobs. Any teacher retention strategy should include funded provision of reflective practice for educational professionals, especially for those in emotionally demanding roles such as leadership, safeguarding, or SEND roles.

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Evidence shows that good quality relationships built on trust, appreciation, support and inclusion have a meaningful impact on people's wellbeing and effectiveness at work.”

- **1,265 and workload:**

The intention of the 1,265-hour rule was to protect teachers from excessive working hours. We recognise that changing this long-standing feature of the landscape may cause anxiety for some, but in practice we believe it does little to prevent excessive hours worked as undirected time. On average, education staff work many more hours than is healthy or sustainable. The WHO has highlighted that working more than 55 hours per week represents a serious health hazard.³⁶ Full time teachers work just under this; full time leaders work above it.³⁷ Significant reform is needed to turn the tide. Given how many staff leave the profession due to an unsustainable work-life balance, reform of 1,265 needs to be part of any serious retention strategy. This cannot be done effectively without collaboration with employers in pursuit of a shared objective of system improvement.

- **Evolution of accountability regime:**

Our accountability regime has many well-documented negative effects on school staff and their wellbeing. The EEF highlights the relationship between accountability systems and staff attrition.³⁸ A wide-ranging debate on the essential elements of the accountability system was called for by Dame Christine Gilbert in her independent review of Ofsted. The new framework is developed and ready for roll out, but this debate is still much needed. Any teacher retention strategy should commit to understanding and responding to the ways in which our wider accountability system unnecessarily drives staff attrition.

6. The role of employers

Workplace wellbeing in England will be materially improved through action by Government as set out on page 13, but also critically by the actions of employers and school leaders.

The Commission on Teacher Retention (2023) made two substantive recommendations for employers:

- i. That school leaders undertake an annual review of workload practices.
- ii. That schools ensure flexibility in how and where PPA can be done, and that they remove friction and jeopardy in the process for a teacher moving from a permanent to part-time contract.

This paper illustrates an expanded range of suggestions for employers to consider to improve retention within individual trusts or schools. These ideas come directly from our work with schools, as well as from the workplace wellbeing evidence base.

We do not imagine that all of these ideas will be relevant to all settings. The specificity of the wellbeing drivers, and the evidence of their value for positive outcomes, create a compelling reason to consider

them individually within a specific school or college setting. We would strongly encourage employers to consider all twelve of the wellbeing drivers, over time, and to identify incremental improvements that can be made in their own specific settings. Positive improvements can be achieved quickly and can build momentum for positive culture change.

We also note the positive degree of overlap between the practices that emerge from this wellbeing lens, and many of strategies highlighted by the Education Endowment Foundation's work on leadership approaches.³⁹ Going forward, we hope to better map existing evidence against the twelve drivers of workplace wellbeing.



Figure 3: Suggestions to employers and school leaders for improving retention

Achievement • Celebrate good news, regularly • Involve and engage staff in setting school development goals	Appreciation • Engage staff to co-produce whole-school appreciation practices	Compensation	Energy • Directly challenge presenteeism • Role model, encourage and support healthy work-life balance • Continue to prioritise and deprioritise work to minimise overwork
Flexibility • Be open to exploring ways of implementing flexible working • Experiment with and evaluate flexible working options • Ensure transition between full and part-time contracts is straightforward	Inclusion & Belonging • Be explicit about inclusion in the school culture • Ensure staff and student voice is regularly heard • Promote respect, civility, openness and collegiality practices	Learning • Encourage and support a culture of continuous professional learning, supporting teachers to improve, not prove, themselves • Invest in relational skill development • Support bespoke development strategies for individuals	Management • Review workload practices at least annually • Inquire and understand what matters for staff retention locally • Ensure that the journey to management and leadership responsibilities is well-paced with proper support and training • Line management training (including relational skills) for middle leaders to enable more engaged relationships
Purpose • Intentionally curate opportunities for staff to reconnect with their sense of purpose • Clearly articulate how school aims align with local community context	Stress • Ensure PPA time is respected and not routinely compromised • Promote reflective practice for leaders • Implement consistent, positive school discipline practices	Support • Promote and facilitate collaborative working practices • Balance teacher agency and organisational efficiency in planning and/or team-teaching approaches • Support and enhance professional autonomy • Provide access to Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) or other emotional support	Trust • Increase staff involvement in decision-making • Regular, transparent internal communications • Adopt high challenge/low stakes internal performance improvement approaches

Footnotes

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