



VACANCY

Tackling teacher retention and turnover challenges

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A major on-going research project by the National Foundation for Educational Research is helping us to gain a deeper understanding of the dynamics within retention and recruitment for the teacher workforce in England. [Dorothy Lepkowska](#) looks at the latest findings

Teacher recruitment and retention remains one of the biggest issues facing policy-makers. But how to solve this is one of the great unanswered challenges in education.

Understanding how and why teachers are leaving is key in tackling retention. This is an important issue as pupil numbers are projected to increase by nearly 500,000 in the next five years. Fewer new trainees and teacher shortages in some key subjects further add to classroom pressures.

Recently published research from the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER), funded by the Nuffield Foundation, has looked at the factors associated with teacher retention and turnover.

The *Teacher Retention and Turnover Research: Interim Report* (2017) found that between 2010 and 2015 the number of working-age teachers who left the profession each year has risen steadily from nine to 11 per cent for primary teachers, while the number leaving their school to work in another has risen from five to seven per cent. This has left some schools struggling to fill vacancies.

Flexible working in schools

One in four teachers in primary schools is currently employed part-time, compared with one in six in secondary schools. The prevalence of primary part-time working is partly due to more women working in the sector. However researchers said that much of the gap between primary and secondary persisted even when gender and age were accounted for.

“This suggests that primary schools are better able, or more willing, to accommodate part-time teachers,” the report said. It added that part-time workers in secondary schools were more likely to leave the profession than primary teachers working on a similar basis, which suggests that primary schools are better at making part-time employment work.

The report calls for greater flexibility for teachers’ working patterns in a bid to address recruitment and retention problems. Soon after the report was published, Justine Greening, the former education secretary, announced a pilot programme to encourage flexible working in schools to help schools “keep their valued teachers” and to enable them to stay in the profession while they raised families or approached retirement.

Ofsted ratings and MATs

The NFER report found that a school's Ofsted rating also influenced the movement of staff. Successive ratings of "inadequate" were likely to see a higher incidence of staff moving to another school or leaving the profession. Teachers working in schools which had been upgraded to "requires improvement" rating had a better chance of securing a new job than if their existing school had been downgraded "perhaps as the after-effect of previously being inadequate or because of the experience of delivering school improvement being viewed positively in the labour market", the research stated.

Multi-academy trusts (MATs) have a slightly higher than average rate of teachers leaving the profession compared to other school types, despite suggestions by another former education secretary, Nicky Morgan, that MAT models of staff development with opportunities for career progression would encourage more teachers to stay in their jobs.

The report said: "This may be due to different staff management practices in MATs but could also be due to the way that staff movements from a school to the MAT central team are recorded."

It went on: "After excluding internal moves within the same MAT, MATs had similar rates of teachers moving school when compared with other schools. There, therefore, appears to be little evidence to date to suggest that MATs are better able to retain their teachers."

The study recommended that MATs do more to promote career progression within their organisations and a feeling that the MAT was a structure to which teachers belong.

"The movement of teachers was found to be most acute in London, where considerably more staff were leaving compared with other parts of the country, including other large cities"

City living and job satisfaction

The movement of teachers was found to be most acute in London, where considerably more staff were leaving compared with other parts of the country, including other large cities. While the capital tended to attract staff aged in their 20s, it was losing one per cent of teachers in their 30s and 0.6 per cent of teachers in their 40s every year, at a time when pupil numbers were rising faster than in other parts of the country.

The report suggested that expensive housing was a deterrent to teachers wanting to work in London and recommended that policy-makers consider housing subsidies or other ways of reducing the costs of living in the capital.

Is the grass greener?

A subsequent study from the NFER in this Nuffield Foundation funded series, published in December, identified the aspirations and career paths of teachers who had left the profession. The research – *Is the Grass Greener Beyond Teaching?* (2017) – found that while those who had left teaching earned less pay in subsequent roles, they enjoyed increased job satisfaction and reduced working hours. Using data from the *Understanding Society* survey it recommended that teachers needed to be nurtured, valued and supported if they were to remain in the profession.

The study found that more than half of leaving teachers who were not retiring, remained working in education in some capacity, usually moving to the private sector or taking on a non-teaching role. Typically, these teachers earned up to 10 per cent less in a new role but gained other benefits, such as a reduction in working hours and increased job satisfaction.

The self-reported job satisfaction of teachers who left the profession declined in the years before they left. The authors recommended that school leaders, the government and school inspectors needed to jointly review the impact their actions were having on teachers' workload and how this could be mitigated.

Jack Worth, a senior economist at NFER, said: "This data gives us rich and valuable insights on what motivates teachers to leave teaching, because we can see how their lives change after leaving and taking up a new job.

Policy responses that aim to increase teacher retention need to consider pay alongside other factors, such as teachers' workload, working hours and job satisfaction."

• Dorothy Lepkowska is a freelance education journalist.

Teacher Retention and Turnover Research

■ NFER will be publishing further insights this year including a final report in the summer. To find out more about the on-going Teacher Retention and Turnover project and to receive the latest research directly to your in-box, visit www.nfer.ac.uk/research/teaching-workforce-dynamics/

Further information and reading

In recent years, NFER has published several research reports on the school workforce, examining the extent of the teacher recruitment and retention problems:

- *Teacher Retention and Turnover Research: Research update 3: Is the Grass Greener Beyond Teaching?* 2017: www.nfer.ac.uk/publications/NUFS04/
- *Teacher Retention and Turnover Research: Interim Report*, 2017: www.nfer.ac.uk/publications/NUFS03/
- *Teacher Retention and Turnover Research: Research update 2: Teacher dynamics in multi-academy trusts*, 2017: www.nfer.ac.uk/publications/NUFS02/
- *Teacher Retention and Turnover Research: Research update 1: Teacher retention by subject*, 2017: www.nfer.ac.uk/publications/NUFS01/
- *Keeping Your Head: NFER Analysis of Headteacher Retention*, 2017: www.nfer.ac.uk/publications/LFSC01/
- *Engaging Teachers: NFER analysis of teacher retention*, 2016: www.nfer.ac.uk/publications/LFSB01/
- *Should I Stay or Should I Go? NFER Analysis of Teachers Joining and Leaving the Profession*, 2015: www.nfer.ac.uk/publications/LFSA01/



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