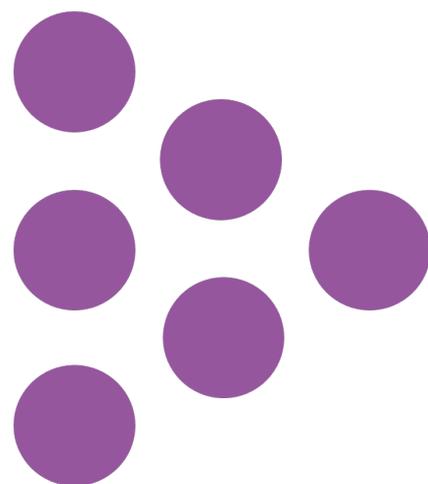**Technical Report**

The School Support Staff Workforce in England
Annual Report 2026

Methodology Appendix

National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER)

The School Support Staff Workforce in England Annual Report 2026

Methodology Appendix

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Contents

1. Introduction

This methodology appendix explains the data we used and the analysis we undertook to produce our findings in "The School Support Staff Workforce in England: Annual Report 2026".

Section 2 lists the data sources we used in the analysis, as well as how we defined support staff in national surveys. The remaining sections then each cover methodological detail relevant to the analysis in the main report.

Section 3 explains how we used data and statistics from School Workforce Census to estimate the number of school support staff, their roles and attrition rates. It also describes how we used other sources of national statistics to produce analysis for this report, including on Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and pupil ratios.

Section 4 discusses how we used Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings data to estimate support staff workers' pay.

Section 5 shows how we used the Labour Force Survey to measure support staff worker's working hours, weekly pay, place of work, and perceptions of their working hours. This section explains key variable and group definitions, provides sample sizes and outlines our methodology for defining a group of similar workers to compare support staff to.

Section 6 outlines how we used the Annual Population Survey to measure support staff' workplace perceptions.

Section 7 details the data collected through the NFER Teacher Voice omnibus survey and how it was used to collect senior leaders' views on the ease of recruiting various types of staff, including support staff.

Section 8 describes how we used Edurio survey data to measure various attitudes amongst support staff, including reasons why support staff were considering leaving their jobs.

This work was undertaken in the Office for National Statistics Secure Research Service using data from ONS and other owners and does not imply the endorsement of the ONS or other data owners.

2. Data sources and the definition of school support staff

2.1. Data sources

The following data sources were used to inform the analysis in this research report:

- The School Workforce Census and related statistics. More information here.
- Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings (ASHE). Available from Office for National Statistics (ONS). More information here.
- The Labour Force Survey (LFS). Available from UK Data Service. More information here.
- The Annual Population Survey (APS). More information here.
- An NFER survey of senior leaders in schools.
- Edurio school staff survey data.

2.2. Definition of school support staff in SWC and Edurio Data

The definition of school support staff in SWC data is set by DfE. More information can be found in the methodology of DfE's statistics release.

In Edurio data, staff who fill in the workplace surveys are asked to identify their role. They can select from the following options: Administrative Staff, Senior Leaders, Middle Leaders, Teaching Assistants, Teachers or Other Staff. We treat Administrative Staff, Teaching Assistants and Other Staff as support staff.

2.3. Definition of school support staff in ASHE, LFS and APS

ASHE, LFS and APS are all national surveys that include workers in a wide range occupations and industries. We therefore use the information in these surveys to identify school support staff for the purposes of our analysis.

We define school support staff using codes that classify a worker's occupation (SOC2020, SOC 2010 and SOC2000 depending on which year of data we use) and codes that classify a worker's industry (SIC2007), as well as a marker to establish if they are a public sector worker.

In short, we define school support staff for the purposes of our analysis as respondents who:

- Work in primary or secondary education (according to their industry code), and
- Work in the public sector, and
- Are not teachers (according to their occupation codes.)

Industry Codes

The following SIC2007 codes are included:

- 8520 – Primary Education
- 8531 – Secondary Education

Respondents with any other industry code would not be classed as school support staff in our analysis.

Public Sector

ASHE, APS and LFS all contain a public sector marker. Anyone who does not have this marker would be classed as support staff in our analysis.

Occupational Codes

Subject to the industry and public sector markers, anyone who is classed as not being a teacher in our data is counted as school support staff. This reflects the fact that support staff can do a very wide range of different roles within a school.

Table 1 contains the codes we define as being a teacher.

Table 1 Occupational codes we class as being a teacher and therefore not school support staff

SOC2020 Code	SOC2020 Group
2313	Secondary education teaching professionals
2314	Primary education teaching professionals
2315	Nursery education teaching professionals
2316	Special and additional needs education teaching professionals
2321	Head teachers and principals
SOC2010 Code	SOC2010 Group
2314	Secondary education teaching professionals
2315	Primary and nursery education teaching professionals
2316	Special needs education teaching professionals
2317	Senior professionals of educational establishments
SOC2000 Code	SOC2000 Group
2314	Secondary education teaching professionals
2315	Secondary education teaching professionals
2316	Special needs education teaching professionals

In some of the analysis, we also look at the differences between teaching assistants and other forms of support staff. To do this, we take the school support staff group as defined above and identify teaching assistants using the occupational codes, as in Table 2.

Table 2 Occupational codes we class as being a teaching assistant within the wider school support staff group

SOC2020 Code	SOC2020 Group
3231	Higher-level teaching assistants
6112	Teaching assistants
6113	Educational support assistants
SOC2010 Code	SOC2010 Group
6125	Teaching assistants
6126	Educational support assistants
SOC2000 Code	SOC2000 Group
6124	Educational assistants

3. SWC: analysis of school support staff numbers in England, including by region and qualifications

3.1. Use of SWC Statistics

Throughout the report, we use statistics published in the SWC statistical release, available [here](#).

3.2. Experimental analysis of support staff exit rates in SWC

As well as statistics, we produced our own estimates of the exit rates of support staff who left the school system in between one annual wave of the SWC and the next.

To do this, we use the SWC contracts data. This data contains one row per contract at the school. The row contains information about the post the person works in, how long they have worked at the school, and other data. Crucially, it is possible to link records between years using a longitudinal ID that DfE include in the data.

We produce our estimate of the exit rate as follows:

- We identified all staff in support staff posts who were in employment on the census date in each year.

- We removed a small number of support staff who worked at schools where the school was not in the data in the following year

- Many support staff have multiple rows in the data, reflecting that they work in different roles in the same school (or occasionally across schools). To avoid double counting, we de-duplicated the data using anonymised longitudinal IDs of individuals. In effect, we keep one record per person per year.

- We defined an exit as follows: "Individual in year 1 is **not** in the data in any support staff post in year 2."

- We then calculated the exit rate for year 1 by counting how many support staff exited between year 1 and year 2, and dividing it by the number of support staff in year 1.

We have marked the analysis as 'Experimental'. This is because it has known limitations:

- Because of challenges cleaning the full time equivalent (FTE) variable for support staff across contracts, we have used a headcount measure. The statistics we produce should therefore not be directly compared to FTE-based measures in DfE's statistics.

- Some support staff may have left their school to join a central team in a school trust. Where this happens, they will disappear from the SWC data in year 2 because only school-based roles are covered by the SWC. In our method, they will be classed as exiting the system.

We will seek to make improvements to this analysis in future iterations of the report, including working with DfE to ensure we are using the data in the best possible way.

4. ASHE: analysis of support staff pay over time and their position in the wider earnings distribution

To analyse where the pay of school support staff sits within the earnings distribution in England and how it has changed over time, we used data from ASHE for 2011 to 2025. Since the ASHE is collected in April of each year, we re-aligned the data so that the 2025 represented the 2024/25 academic year.

Our sample consisted of individuals in the ASHE working in one 'main job'. We included full-time and part-time workers and focused on **hourly** earnings because many support staff work part-time. For those working in a 'main job' and an 'additional job', we discarded the 'additional job'. For those working in multiple part-time jobs or multiple full-time jobs, we discarded their records altogether. We also discarded anyone not on a permanent employment contract, anyone with missing earnings records or occupation / industry codes, anyone working a junior pay rate or who were on an apprenticeship and anyone whose earnings were affected by leave.[1]

The ASHE has some known limitations, such as non-coverage of those in self-employment, relatively high non-response rates and non-sampling bias (since the ASHE only samples jobs registered on a pay as you earn (PAYE) scheme). To minimise the impact of these limitations, we applied the ASHE calibration weight to our analysis. This helped to ensure that our estimates were weighted to be representative of the entire labour force in England, as per the Labour Force Survey (LFS). Finally, we identified support staff in the sample using the definition outlined in Section 2.

The annual sample sizes of individuals in our main analysis sample, as well as those who are support staff, are provided in **Table 3**.

Using our full sample of all workers, for each year we estimated each percentile of the hourly earnings distribution (i.e. we estimated 100 percentiles so that each represented one per cent of the earnings distribution). We also estimated the median hourly earnings of the support staff in the sample for each year (using the definitions outlined in Section 2). We then combined the two data series to find where the median earnings for support staff is placed within the entire earnings distribution in each year.

Table 3: Sample sizes for ASHE analysis

Year	Total number of workers in England in sample	Total number of support staff in England in sample
2011	143,292	11,557
2012	138,272	10,769
2013	139,852	10,733
2014	144,093	10,113

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[1] We included in the analysis those who were put on furlough during the Covid-19 pandemic but who were still paid at their full rate of pay. We excluded those who were put on furlough where it impacted their earnings. Due to small sample sizes in 2020 (when the collection of the ASHE was impacted by the pandemic), excluding all workers on furlough would have dramatically reduced sample sizes and likely also had implications for the occupational composition of the sample.

Year	Total number of workers in England in sample	Total number of support staff in England in sample
2015	142,634	9,416
2016	138,550	8,882
2017	139,594	8,402
2018	139,870	8,053
2019	137,930	7,947
2020	90,469	6,700
2021	96,195	6,564
2022	109,436	5,624
2023	121,437	5,979
2024	128,798	6,427
2025	121,394	6,450

Source: NFER analysis of ASHE data for 2011 to 2025.

5. LFS: analysis of support staff's working hours, weekly pay, place of work, and attitudes to work compared to those of similar workers

The LFS data enables us to measure how working hours, weekly pay, place of work and working hours perceptions have changed over time. It also enables us to compare how these compare to those working in other occupations.

The analysis involved several key steps, including identifying support staff and a suitable comparison group in the data, ensuring comparability in the two groups, and defining the key indicators for reporting.

5.1. Identifying support staff and a suitable comparison group

Support staff

We define these as in Section 2.

Similar workers

For our comparison group, we included all other workers in the LFS in England who are not support staff. We reweight this group so that it better resembles support staff in terms of key characteristics: highest qualification level, age, gender, region and – in some instances – working pattern (i.e. whether the person is full-time or part-time).

We reweight the other workers group to improve comparability in these specific characteristics with the support staff group. This ensures that the distribution of these characteristics is the same among the support staff and the comparison group. We use a technique called entropy balancing to reweight the other workers group within each survey wave and derive a 'similar workers' group.[2] The original ONS weights are used as a starting point for these adjustments.

It is important to note that this re-weighting approach does not remove all the underlying differences in characteristics and motivations between support staff and similar workers. However, it minimises the risk that any observed differences in working conditions are driven by differences in the distribution of these key characteristics. Nonetheless, no comparison of different occupations should be interpreted as the effect of entering that occupation, although working conditions, and employees' perceptions of them, can be influenced by entering that occupation rather than another.

5.2. Variables used in the analysis

The variables in the LFS survey which we reported on are as follows:

Gross weekly pay

Average (mean) of a derived variable which calculates the gross weekly pay of the respondent in their main job, based on answers given to various questions about earnings. See LFS user guide for details.

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[2] Hainmueller, J., & Xu, Y. (2013). ebalance: A Stata Package for Entropy Balancing. Journal of Statistical Software, 54(7), 1–18. https://doi.org/10.18637/jss.v054.i07

We use LFS income weights for this variable. For all other variables listed here we used person weights.

Working hours in the reference week

Average (mean) response to a derived variable which calculated total hours worked across all jobs in the latest week.

We looked at the average hours for workers across all working patterns.

In addition, we also restricted analysis to those who worked a full-time schedule, identifying individuals who had worked at least five days during the reference week using responses to the question 'In the week ending Sunday the …, on which days were you scheduled to work?'. We also restricted this analysis to those who were not off work on those days despite being scheduled to work, using responses to the question 'In that week, did you have any days off work because you were sick or injured?'.

Proportion wanting to work fewer hours

Average (mean) of a measure that is derived from a combination of responses and routed questions regarding whether someone is seeking to work fewer hours. This variable is created based on whether respondent is looking for a different or additional paid job, and whether they would like to work fewer hours than in their current job. See LFS user guide for further details.

Proportion wanting to work fewer hours even with less pay

Same as above except we also look at information about whether they want to work fewer hours than in their current job even with less pay.

Proportion who usually work evenings

Average (mean) response to a question about when people usually work.

Proportion who would like to work more at current level of pay

Average (mean) of a measure that is derived from a combination of responses and routed questions regarding whether someone is seeking to work more hours. This variable is created based on whether respondent is looking for an additional paid job, or whether they would like to work more hours than in their current job. See LFS user guide for further details.

Proportion who primarily work from home

Average (mean) of a binary variable which equals one for those who responded with either 'In your own home', 'In the same grounds or buildings as your home' or 'In different places using home as a base' to the question 'In your main job do you work mainly:'.

5.3. The analytical approach to the LFS

Obtaining an average

The LFS is a quarterly data collection with a longitudinal design. This means that respondents are sampled for one quarter and can then feature in up to four further quarters. For this project, we are primarily concerned with annualised estimates of the variables of interest. To obtain these estimates from quarterly data, we followed the suggested approach by ONS. For an approximation

of an academic year, we look at four successive quarterly waves, starting with those in October to December, and finishing with those in July to September. This is the closest alignment with the academic year that can be achieved with the data. We then:

1. Calculate the mean of the variable of interest (see above) for support staff and similar workers in each quarter, using the weightings obtained from entropy balancing for the latter group. We also calculate the standard error of that estimate.
2. Obtain a value for the academic year by calculating an 'average of averages' using the averages obtained from the four quarterly waves for that academic year. (Specifically, we sum the quarterly averages and divide by four).

Because respondents will feature in successive waves, estimates from each wave will be correlated. We specifically adjust our estimate of the standard errors for this using a variance formula. The variance formula for the annual estimate described above equals:

$$\mathrm{Var}\left(\frac{\hat{\theta}_4 + \hat{\theta}_1 + \hat{\theta}_2 + \hat{\theta}_3}{4}\right) = \frac{1}{16}\left(\left(\sum_{j=1}^{4} \mathrm{Var}(\hat{\theta}_j)\right) + 2\sum_{j<k, j,k=4} \rho_{jk}\sqrt{\mathrm{Var}(\hat{\theta}_j)\mathrm{Var}(\hat{\theta}_k)}\right)$$

where $\hat{\theta}_j; j = 1,..,4$ are the quarter-specific estimates (averages) for a specific academic-year, $\mathrm{Var}(\hat{\theta}_j); j = 1,..,4$ is the variance of each estimate and ρ_{jk} is the correlation coefficient between the estimate in the quarter j and k for a specific academic year.

This latter term means that, for example, the correlation between quarters 1 and 2, ρ_{12}, differs between the 2015/16 and 2016/17 academic years. We therefore simplify this formula by following Holmes and Skinner's[3] observations: for a given variable, we use only one representative correlation coefficient for any pair of quarters a given number of periods apart. Hence, regardless of the academic year, we use one correlation coefficient for estimates separated one period (i.e. $\rho_{43}, \rho_{12}, \rho_{23}$ are the same across academic years), another for estimates separated two periods (i.e. ρ_{42}, ρ_{13} are the same across academic years) and another for those three periods apart (i.e. ρ_{41} are the same across academic years).

Estimation of these three coefficients is based on the autocorrelations of the quarterly estimates. In other words, the correlation coefficient for estimates separated by one period is given by the first autocorrelation coefficient across the estimates, and so on.

5.4. Sample sizes

The sample sizes in the LFS analysis are shown in **Table 4**. Sample sizes for each individual measure differ depending on the extent of missing data for each measure. The table is illustrative as it summarises the sample sizes from only one measure: **average working hours**. The sample sizes of both support staff and similar workers have generally been falling slightly over time, which is due to falling response rates to the LFS across the whole population, although there has been a

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[3] Holmes, DJ and Skinner, CJ (2000) Variance estimation for Labour Force estimates of Level and change. *GSS Methodology Series*, No 21. https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/ukgwa/20160105160709/https://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/guide-method/method-quality/specific/gss-methodology-series/gss-methodology-series--21--variation-estimation-for-labour-force-survey-estimates-of-level-and-change.pdf. Last retrieved: January 2026

partial recovery in the later years. The sample sizes for questions about earnings is smaller because not all respondents are asked these questions.

Where we compare our key measures over time and between support staff and similar workers, we test whether any differences were statistically significant by conducting a t-test that the difference was statistically significantly different from zero (at the five per cent level).

Table 4: Sample sizes for LFS analysis

Year	Number of support staff	Number of similar workers
2010/11	5,071	139,619
2011/12	4,878	140,606
2012/13	4,599	135,733
2013/14	4,324	138,444
2014/15	4,440	135,536
2015/16	4,143	129,858
2016/17	3,887	127,268
2017/18	3,892	128,655
2018/19	3,778	120,923
2019/20	3,157	105,375
2020/21	3,603	116,827
2021/22	2,909	96,581
2022/23	2,094	68,345
2023/24	1,937	68,340
2024/25	2,711	100,142

Source: NFER analysis of Labour Force Survey data for 2010/11 to 2024/25.

6. APS – Analysis of support staff's wellbeing and workplace perceptions

6.1. Overview of the approach

The APS is comprised of aggregated data from four quarters of LFS data plus a boost sample. As the APS includes additional measures that are not available in the LFS, such as wellbeing and workplace perceptions, we also analyse data from the APS to look at how support staff compare to similar workers.

We take the same approach to this analysis as described above, with the following exceptions:

- Instead of pooling quarterly data into academic years, we simply use the APS in calendar years. This means each wave of data only contains one observation from each individual and our variance estimates do not need adjusting as in the LFS.
- We only had APS data to the end of 2024, rather than the end of the 2024/25 academic year.

6.2. Variables used in the analysis

The variables in the APS survey that we reported on are as follows:

Proportion who agree they have opportunities for career progression

Average (mean) based on a 5-category Likert scale variable (Strongly disagree, Disagree, Neither disagree nor agree, Agree and Strongly agree) that reports workers' agreement with the following statement: 'My job offers good opportunities for career progression'. We treat 'Agree' and 'Strongly Agree' as 1 and any other response as 0.

6.3. Sample sizes

The sample sizes in the APS analysis are shown in **Table 5**. Sample sizes for each individual measure differ depending on the extent of missing data for each measure. The table is illustrative as it summarises the sample sizes from only one measure: **the proportion who agree they have opportunities for career progression**. Sample sizes in the APS appear smaller than the LFS data because each APS wave strictly contains one response per person, whereas in the LFS data the same person could be featured up to four times – see LFS section for more details.

Table 4: Sample sizes for APS analysis

Year	Number of support staff	Number of similar workers
2020	1,312	33,994
2021	1,375	31,207
2022	970	26,205
2023	654	19,599
2024	794	22,810

Source: NFER analysis of Annual Population Survey data for 2020 to 2024.

7. NFER Survey – Senior leaders' perceptions of the ease or difficulty of recruiting teachers and support staff

In November 2025, NFER surveyed teachers across schools in England. The survey was sent to the Teacher Voice panel as well as an additional sample of high SEND schools for another project. The questions for this project were limited to those who said they are senior leaders, who are most likely to make recruitment decisions and/or have awareness of recruitment conditions.

For this analysis, senior leaders were asked "How would you describe your overall experience of recruiting each of these groups of staff over the last 12 months?" The three groups they were asked about were:

1. Teachers
2. Teaching assistants
3. Other school support staff (excluding Teaching assistants)

They could select one of the following seven options:

1. Very easy
2. Easy
3. Neither easy nor difficult
4. Difficult
5. Very Difficult
6. Don't know
7. Not applicable – we have not attempted to recruit staff of this type in the past year

We received 405 responses in total from senior leaders. 269 of these were from primary schools and 136 were from secondary.

Before analysis was done, the responses are weighted to be nationally representative of mainstream schools in England. Both primary and secondary samples presented good levels of representation across key school level factors including school type, performance and local authority type. However, the primary school and combined samples were not nationally representative by free school meals eligibility. To address this, weights were calculated using free school meals eligibility data on the primary school, secondary school and combined samples and then applied to create a more representative sample of all schools.

As outlined above, part of the survey's sample was targeted at those working at high SEND schools. Theoretically, the distribution of the responses in the sub-population of these schools may be different to the wider population of all primary and secondary schools. To explore this, we compared how our results would change if we only used schools from the Teacher Voice panel, which is not affected in this way. We found that doing so did not make a substantial difference to the findings.

We report the percentage of weighted responses that said recruitment was either 'Difficult' or 'Very Difficult'. 'Don't know' and 'Not applicable' responses were omitted from the analysis.

The 2023 results reported are from a previous set of NFER reports.

8. Edurio Staff Survey - attitudes amongst support staff, including reasons why support staff were considering leaving their jobs.

Because relatively little evidence exists about the experiences of support staff, for this report we used evidence from Edurio's "Staff Experience and Wellbeing Survey". The survey captures the views of school staff across England, including teachers, teaching assistants, school leaders, administrative staff, and central trust teams. We did not look at responses from central trust teams.

We first describe the questions we used. We then show how the Edurio sample we used compares to the national population.

8.1. Edurio Questions

We focus our analysis on four questions from the survey. Not all questions were all asked of all respondents.

Question 1: Considered resigning

The question is asked as followed:

In the past three months, how often have you considered resigning from your post?

1. *Constantly*
2. *Often*
3. *Sometimes*
4. *Rarely*
5. *Never*

We report the proportion of school support staff who said they considered resigning 'Sometimes' or more often than that. This was based on 29,063 responses.

Question 2: Reasons for considering resigning

This question is only asked to those who replied 'Sometimes', 'Often', or 'Constantly' to the previous question. Those who are asked to respond can select multiple responses. It is asked as follows:

What has made you consider resigning? Please select all that apply. Dissatisfied with my line-manager (please comment)

- *Dissatisfied with the SLT (please comment)*
- *Family reasons (e.g., childcare, caregiving, etc.)*
- *Feeling undervalued*
- *Financial reasons*
- *Government policies and attitudes*
- *Lack of career progression opportunities*
- *Lack of professional development opportunities*
- *Lack of staffing*
- *Low staff morale in the workplace*
- *Mental health reasons*

- *Not enough resources for SEND support*
- *Overwhelming workload*
- *Physical health reasons*
- *Poor work-life balance*
- *Pupil behaviour*
- *Relocation to a different area*
- *Retirement*
- *The profession is wrong for me*
- *Other reason(s) (please comment)*
- *Prefer not to say*

Because this is multiple response question, we highlighted the ten most common responses amongst support staff in 2024/25. This is based on 8,269 unique responses.

Question 3: Career progression

This question comes from the analysis of the question:

How satisfied are you with opportunities for career progression in your workplace?

1. *Very satisfied*
2. *Satisfied*
3. *Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied*
4. *Dissatisfied*
5. *Very dissatisfied*

We reported the percentage of support staff who said they were 'Very satisfied' or 'Satisfied' as the percentage who were satisfied, and visa-versa for those who were 'Very dissatisfied' or 'Dissatisfied'. These percentages were based on a total of 19,906 responses.

Question 4: Fairness of pay compared to similar roles

How fair is your pay, compared to similar roles in the organisation?

1. *Completely fair*
2. *Quite fair*
3. *Moderately fair*
4. *Not very fair*
5. *Not fair at all*

We reported the percentage of support staff who said it 'Not very fair' or 'Not fair at all'. This was based on 5,461 total responses.

8.2. Comparison of the Edurio responses against national data

Whilst the sample sizes in Edurio data are large, we know the survey is largely targeted at staff who work in trusts. We therefore looked at how the profile of all staff who responded to the survey in 2024/25 compared to the profile of school workforce staff in School Workforce Census statistics.

We found that the Edurio sample contains materially more responses from workers at secondary schools than we would expect if they were randomly sampled. This is to be expected, given the

focus on trust-based delivery. Likewise, the Edurio sample was materially more concentrated among those working in larger schools (measured by number of pupils).

We also looked at whether the Edurio sample represented staff from disadvantaged schools well (as measured by the proportion of students who are eligible for Free School Meals, or FSM, rate). Responses in the Edurio survey have good coverage across different FSM percentage groups, but slightly more responses were from schools with the highest FSM rates (and less from the lowest).

Finally, we looked at the geographical distribution of responses in the Edurio survey, by region. The distribution was broadly similar to that of the population. Some regions like London, the North West and the North East were modestly underrepresented. The South West was modestly overrepresented.

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