

NFER submission to the Education Select Committee's Inquiry on Teacher Supply

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Introduction

1. The issues relating to teacher supply are complex. The wide array of data sources and trends make it challenging to understand what is happening. An accurate picture of the nature and scale of the teacher supply challenge is essential to inform an effective, proportionate, and well-targeted policy response.
2. NFER is an independent charity working to provide evidence that improves education and learning. This submission seeks to elucidate and reconcile the messages from different data sources on teacher supply, and offers new insights from an analysis of the Labour Force Survey to be published soon.

Headlines reporting a crisis of teachers leaving the profession are exaggerated and unhelpful

3. Department for Education (DfE) figures show that 49,120 teachers¹ (10.4% of the teaching workforce) left teaching in the state-funded school sector in England in 2014². Although this represents a 7.5% (3,500 teachers) increase on 2013, departure rates have been relatively stable over the past ten years³, generally between 9-10%.
4. The numbers of teachers leaving the profession are matched almost exactly by similar numbers joining⁴, with numbers joining tending to exceed the number of leavers in most years.
5. Surveys typically report much higher proportions of teachers who have considered leaving, or who are planning to leave. The June 2015 edition of NFER's representative Teacher Voice Omnibus Survey found that 20% of teachers were considering leaving teaching in the next 12 months (publication forthcoming). Recent surveys undertaken by YouGov for the National Union of Teachers and LKMco/Pearson have found over half of teachers considering or having considered leaving.

¹ Including full and part-time teachers.

² School Workforce in England 2014. Table C1a <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/school-workforce-in-england-november-2014>

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

6. However, stated intentions can be an unreliable guide to individuals' actions and therefore teacher surveys can only tell us so much about the true motivations of the teaching workforce. Indeed, half of the Teacher Voice respondents who said they intended to leave were undecided on what they will do next, suggesting many had not made concrete plans, and so ultimately may not end up leaving.
7. Furthermore, exaggerating the scale of the challenge by reporting survey findings such as these in isolation can distract policymakers, and risks putting off potential new recruits to teaching – thus contributing to the underlying problem.

The challenges are, nevertheless, real

8. **More teachers will be needed:** Maintaining the number of teachers at the current level will be an insufficient target for the future, given the predicted rise in pupil numbers.⁵ Between 2000 and 2010 the number of teachers increased relative to the number of pupils, and since then the number of teachers has kept pace with the number of pupils. All else being equal, the overall number of teachers will therefore need to rise to deal with the expected 13% rise in pupil numbers between 2015 and 2024.
9. **The pipeline is insufficient:** The number of individuals entering initial teacher training (ITT) programmes (excluding Teach First and Troops to Teachers) has fallen from 39,000 in 2010⁶ to 31,700 in 2014⁷. Provisional figures for 2015/16 suggest that a similar number (32,000) started an ITT course this year⁸. The number of teacher trainees is an important indicator of future teacher supply because teacher training is a key pipeline of new entrants to the teaching profession (representing around half of entrants). The number of ITT entrants has been below the target set by DfE's Teacher Supply Model (TSM) for the last four years.
10. **Secondary schools face particular challenges:** The number of pupils in secondary schools is expected to grow the fastest: by 20% between 2015 and 2024⁹. The number of new entrants to secondary teacher training is further below the recruitment targets set out by the TSM than in the primary sector (91% of target in 2014, whereas primary was 93% of target). Whereas the provisional 2015 figures for primary are looking strong, secondary continues to struggle. Furthermore, Teacher Voice indicated secondary teachers are significantly more likely to be considering leaving, and more teachers actually left secondary schools in 2014 than joined (the wastage rate was 10.4% compared to an entrant rate of 9.6%).

⁵ National pupil projections: trends in pupil numbers - July 2015. Table 1.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/national-pupil-projections-trends-in-pupil-numbers-july-2015>

⁶ Initial teacher training: trainee number census - 2014 to 2015. Table 1a

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/initial-teacher-training-trainee-number-census-2014-to-2015>

⁷ Initial teacher training: trainee number census - 2015 to 2016. Table 7 (2015 figures now include Teach First trainees, however we have assumed revised 2014 figures continue to exclude Teach First). <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/initial-teacher-training-trainee-number-census-2015-to-2016>

⁸ Initial teacher training: trainee number census - 2015 to 2016. Table 1a.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/initial-teacher-training-trainee-number-census-2015-to-2016>

⁹ National pupil projections: trends in pupil numbers - July 2015. Table 1.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/national-pupil-projections-trends-in-pupil-numbers-july-2015>

11. **Certain subjects face particular challenges:** Entrants to teach some EBacc subjects - sciences, languages, and geography - were particularly low compared to target in 2014. DfE figures for 2014 show that a significant number of pupils are being taught by a teacher without a relevant post A-level qualification in their subject.¹⁰ This suggests that even where posts are being filled, headteachers may be finding recruitment difficult. Furthermore, these difficulties could have implications for pupil outcomes. On the one hand, in their 2014 review, 'What makes great teaching?', the Sutton Trust concluded that the link between teachers' academic qualifications and student performance are weak. On the other hand, they do also report evidence that subject-specific knowledge is related to performance.
12. **Some schools and regions may struggle:** There are many potential drivers for this, which should be explored through more detailed analysis of the relevant data. This would help identify the extent to which different factors are relevant in each region, for example property prices, the cost of living, regional variation of salaries in alternative professions, the size/composition of the overall labour pool, and the characteristics of individual schools (there is evidence, for example, that staff turnover is highest in schools with the most deprived intakes¹¹).

The Labour Force Survey enables us to better understand those joining and leaving teaching

13. National statistics on the school workforce indicate that of those teachers leaving in 2014, around a quarter went into retirement¹². While this does of course contribute to the wider teacher supply challenge, teachers retiring is not a new phenomenon; it is not a consequence of education policy, and is less amenable to policy intervention. Teacher Voice similarly found that a quarter of those considering leaving teaching said they planned to retire, and ten per cent reported that they would like a different job in the education sector. However, national statistics provide limited further detail on the actual destinations of leaving teachers.
14. New NFER analysis of the Labour Force Survey (LFS) (to be published shortly) provides insights into the destinations of teachers leaving the profession not available from other data sources. It reveals that the most common destinations of those that left teaching in the state-sector were jobs in the school sector. Excluding those that left to retire, just over half (51%) left to one of several destinations in the wider school sector including teaching in private schools (16%), becoming teaching assistants (15%) and taking up a non-teaching role in a school (19%). Relatively few teachers that left took up new jobs outside the school sector (19%) and 40 per cent of those took up jobs in further or higher education. The remainder became inactive (e.g. looking after family, sick or unemployed). These findings are consistent with previous NFER and CEER surveys of leavers' destinations¹³.

¹⁰ School Workforce in England 2014. Table 12. <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/school-workforce-in-england-november-2014>

¹¹ Allen, Burgess and Mayo (2012) The teacher labour market, teacher turnover and disadvantaged schools: new evidence for England <http://www.bristol.ac.uk/media-library/sites/cmpo/migrated/documents/wp294.pdf>

¹² School Workforce in England 2014. Table C1a <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/school-workforce-in-england-november-2014>

¹³ NFER: <https://www.nfer.ac.uk/publications/LGK01/LGK01.pdf>

15. On average, the wages of teachers that left for another job were ten per cent lower than those that stayed in teaching. This drop remained after taking account of different characteristics among leavers and stayers, such as their initial pay level, whether they had management responsibilities, the phase of education they taught in, and their age. There was no sign of a significant minority of teachers leaving for better paid positions outside teaching in the state sector. Indeed, those that left to become teaching assistants or took up a job in the public sector (many of which were in further or higher education) saw a drop in their wages of around 25-30% compared to similar individuals that stayed in teaching.
16. The LFS only allows us to follow teachers for one year, and so it remains a possibility that the prospect of higher pay in the longer-term still provides a motivation for changing career.
17. Part-time teachers and teachers aged over 50 are more likely to leave, whereas teachers with leadership positions are less likely to leave. Each of these is consistent with previous DfE analysis of the characteristics of teachers that leave, using administrative data sources¹⁴. Similarly part-time teachers are more likely, and senior leaders are less likely, to *join* teaching.
18. Our analysis of the LFS also reveals that the employment origins of individuals that join teaching are somewhat similar to the destinations of those leaving. Excluding student entrants, more than half of those joining (or returning to) teaching in the state education system were working in the school sector (53%), either teaching in private schools (29%) or in a non-teaching role in the school sector (24%). Teachers in the state sector seem to be part of a wider education labour market, rather than an isolated workforce.
19. The fact that many of those that joined teaching came from similar jobs to those that left were going to, and shared similar characteristics, suggests that a lot of the flows in and out of teaching counterbalance each other. However, where those joining do not already have a teaching qualification, then this turnover of staff still represents an overall cost to the system from training new teachers. On the other hand, if most leavers of working age remain in the education sector, it also suggests that their future transition back to teaching in the state-sector is likely to be easier.