



National Foundation for
Educational Research

Research Digest

Summary of NFER's recent research



Issue 4, December 2025

About us

At NFER, our mission is to generate evidence and insights that can be used to improve outcomes for future generations everywhere, and to support positive change across education systems.

Our long history, vast experience and pioneering methods have established our reputation as an authoritative, trusted and respected voice in education. Today that reputation is enhanced with an unmatched depth and breadth of specialist education knowledge, talent and methodological expertise.

We use our expertise to produce high-quality, independent, research and insights to inform key decision makers about issues across the education system, including:

- Accountability
- Assessment
- Classroom Practice
- Education to Employment
- Social Mobility
- School Funding
- School Workforce
- Systems and Structures

Our clients include government departments and agencies at international, national and local levels, third sector organisations, private and public companies, employers and other organisations with an interest in education. They all benefit from the full range of our expert and professional services.

As an independent, not-for-profit organisation we invest any surplus funds directly back into our programme of research to address key questions in education and increase our impact and support for policy makers and practitioners.



Skills Imperative 2035: Creating a system of lifelong learning to provide the essential skills for tomorrow's workforce

Published November 2025

This is the final report from The Skills Imperative 2035 programme, a five-year programme funded by the Nuffield Foundation.

This report is the culmination of eight working papers identifying how the structure and composition of jobs in the labour market could change by 2035, what skills will be most needed to do these jobs, and who is most likely to be affected by these changes.

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Key Findings

1. Around 12 million workers in England currently work in occupations which are in decline. Between one and three million of these jobs could disappear by 2035, largely due to AI and automation – more than previously forecast.
2. The number of jobs in the labour market is expected to grow by 2035, but most of this growth is in professional and technical jobs such as science, engineering and legal roles.
3. There is a critical need to support lower skilled occupations who are at risk of displacement from technology adoption to upskill and reskill, so that they can successfully transition in the labour market.
4. The research has identified six essential employment skills (EES) which will be most in-demand by employers in the future: (1) communication, (2) collaboration, (3) problem solving, (4) organising, planning & prioritising work, (5) creative thinking and (6) information literacy.

Recommendations

1. EES should be mapped throughout the curriculum in a way that supports clarity and consistency for educators about how students should be able to develop knowledge within each subject that draws on, and develops, their EES.
2. Government should explore what additional incentives or changes to funding and accountability measures might be introduced to encourage and recognise efforts by post-16 providers and universities to develop their students' EES, and support successful pathways into employment or further study.
3. The Department for Education (DfE) should expand on current statutory careers guidance, encouraging all schools to shape work experience and employer encounters around a common skills framework.
4. Schools should be given guidance, tools and training on how to formatively assess young people's development of EES.
5. Government should help students to understand the importance of developing their EES and to articulate them using a common skills framework.

High-SEND schools: Understanding the uneven distribution of pupils with SEND across England's mainstream schools

Published October 2025

This interim report, funded by the Nuffield Foundation, shared early findings on the uneven distribution of pupils with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) across mainstream schools in England. These insights are based on analysis of the National Pupil Database and interviews with 10 staff from nine local authorities (LAs).

Key Findings

1. In 2024/25, more than 1.7 million pupils in England were identified as having SEND — equivalent to around one in five pupils in the school system. This compares to 1.2 million pupils with identified SEND in 2015/16.
2. More than half of pupils (56 per cent) with Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) - legally binding plans for pupils with the most significant and complex special educational needs - are educated in mainstream schools. This is up from 49 per cent in 2015/16, with the sharpest rise in primary settings.
3. Primary schools with the highest rates of pupils with EHCPs had, on average, six times as many pupils with EHCPs as those with the lowest rates. This equates to an average of 17 pupils per school in the highest quartile compared to three pupils per school in the lowest quartile. In secondary schools, the difference was around fivefold.

Recommendation

1. Early findings indicate that government plans to reform the SEND system should prioritise greater consistency and equity.
2. It is essential that schools with strong inclusive cultures are supported rather than penalised.
3. Accountability measures and resources are aligned to avoid placing disproportionate pressure on schools serving higher numbers of pupils with SEND.

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Pupil numbers and school finances - what do we know about how demographic changes are impacting schools?

Published October 2025

With schools in England continuing to face substantial financial pressures, this blog brought together and updated NFER's evidence on the impact of falling pupil numbers to consider the potential effects of demographic change on school finances.

Key Findings

1. The Department for Education (DfE) forecasts primary pupil numbers will fall by seven per cent between January 2025 and 2030 - equivalent to over 1,000 average-sized primary schools.
2. In response to declining numbers, schools are having to reduce the number of classes by 4.8 per cent nationally and average class size by 2.5 per cent nationally.
3. There has been an overall decline in primary pupil numbers across all regions since 2017/18. While London remains the region with the largest decline, schools in other regions are increasingly being affected.
4. Between January and December 2024, the 10 London Local Authorities (LAs) with the greatest pupil declines from 2017/18 to 2024/25 saw five school closures and five mergers. This compares, over the same period, to 1.3 primary school closures and 0.9 mergers per 10 LAs across the rest of England.

Recommendation

1. As schools contend with these challenges, it is crucial that schools are adequately supported by local and national government to minimise the risk of adverse impacts on pupils.

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‘Senior leaders under pressure as pupil numbers fall’ and ‘The state of additional support needs and services in English Schools’

Published September 2025

NFER published a two-part research blog series exploring the challenges schools faced as they returned for a new term.

The first blog, ‘Senior leaders under pressure as pupil numbers fall’, examined the impact of funding pressures and demographic changes on schools.

The second blog, ‘The state of additional support needs and services in English schools’, explored how pupil needs have changed, how teachers are being supported and how senior leaders are responding.

The blogs drew on responses from over 350 senior leaders and 800 classroom teachers to NFER’s June 2025 Teacher Voice Omnibus Survey.

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Blog 1 Key Findings

1. Seventy-one per cent of primary and 65 per cent of secondary leaders are anticipating an in-year budget deficit in 2025/26.
2. A substantial minority of primary school senior leaders (at 21 per cent) report they had or were on track to have an in-year budget deficit that they expect to fund by a negative revenue balance in 2024/25 (as they have no reserves to cover it).
3. Three in five primary school leaders in 2024/25 reported being somewhat or very concerned about the impact of declining pupil numbers on their settings.
4. Around two in five secondary senior leaders said they were somewhat or very concerned about the looming impact on their schools. This is despite secondary pupil numbers not being forecast to dip for a couple more years.

Blog 2 Key Findings

1. Senior leaders estimate that nearly a quarter of pupils require extra support for general wellbeing, mental health, and to access learning and social and extracurricular activities.
2. At least seven in 10 teachers say they received less than a good level of support for their pupils across key support services.
3. Over half of classroom teachers report little or no help from Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS)/Mental health services, more than for any other service.
4. Four in five secondary senior leaders report commissioning external counselling services for pupils, and more than three in five did so for teaching staff.
5. While schools appear to be commissioning external services to fill these gaps, this may not be sustainable in the longer term as financial pressures on school budgets and wider public services stretch resources further.

The Early Years Workforce in England 2025

Published September 2025

In recent years, early childhood education and care have grown to become a key priority for the Government. In October 2024, the Government estimated that the early years workforce would have to grow by 35,000 staff between December 2023 and September 2025 to meet the needs of the planned entitlement expansion.

This report identified the key trends and challenges in recruitment, retention, pay, working conditions and wellbeing in the early years workforce and recommended how these might be tackled.

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Key Findings

1. The early years workforce continues to face significant recruitment and retention challenges, despite growth in recent years.
2. The workforce size is on track to meet the Government's estimate of need at a national level, but there is a lack of data to understand regional variation.
3. Although pay levels have risen in relative terms recently, they are much lower compared to the general workforce, with early years workers earning 36 per cent less on average in 2022/23 than other workers who have similar characteristics and working patterns.
4. There is limited opportunity for pay progression within the early years workforce, which means that staff with different levels of experience and/or qualifications can receive relatively similar pay.
5. Levels of wellbeing in the workforce are generally high, however higher qualified staff reported significantly higher levels of anxiety compared to their colleagues and other similar workers.

Recommendations

1. The Government should continue increasing funding rates so that early years providers can offer competitive wages to recruit and retain staff, with a pay structure that rewards higher qualification levels and career progression.
2. The Government should implement its policy proposals on the early years professional development offer and career pathway swiftly to upskill and retain the current workforce.
3. The Government and providers should emphasise the high sense of worthwhileness, fulfilment and positive working environments in early years in recruitment.
4. The Government should commission a large-scale nationally representative survey of early years staff to understand more about their job satisfaction, working conditions and career perceptions.
5. The Government should consider establishing an individual-level early years staff census, capturing their characteristics and employment information, similar to the School Workforce Census or Further Education Workforce Data Collection.

Do free schools increase opportunities and reduce disparities in economic and social outcomes?

Published July 2025

Free schools are all-ability schools established in 2010 by the former Coalition Government to foster innovation and choice in education, although the priorities of the programme have evolved over time.

This report, conducted by NFER in partnership with Manchester Metropolitan University and funded by UK Research and Innovation (UKRI), evaluated the impact of secondary free schools on pupil outcomes, including for those living in the most deprived areas.

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**UK Research
and Innovation**

In partnership with



**Manchester
Metropolitan
University**

Key Findings

1. Enrolling in a secondary free school is estimated to have had a significant positive effect on Key Stage 4 (KS4) attainment. A pupil enrolled at a free school was 4.6 percentage points more likely to be awarded five GCSEs graded 9-4/A*-C (including Maths and English) compared to their siblings enrolled at other types of schools. A comparable pattern was found for Progress 8 scores and for pupils living in deprived areas.
2. Enrolling in a free school has an impact on lowering pupil absence. The estimated absence rate of a pupil enrolled at a free school during Key Stage 4 (KS4) was 0.7 percentage points lower than their siblings at other types of schools.
3. There was no evidence that suspensions differ between free schools and non-free schools for all pupils, or those living in the most deprived areas.
4. Pupils enrolled at a free school are more likely to be taking at least one A-level compared to their siblings enrolled at other types of schools. This finding was similar for pupils living in the most deprived areas.

Recommendation

1. Further research is required to understand exactly why secondary free schools have been successful in supporting the outcomes of pupils and identify whether any lessons can be drawn to enable both new and existing schools to better support pupil outcomes, including those in deprived areas.

The impact of early career retention payments on teacher retention

Published June 2025

This evaluation, funded by the Nuffield Foundation, provided a new analysis of the impact on teacher retention of five major Early Career Retention Payments (ECRPs) that have been piloted in England since 2018. The study broadened the evidence base on the effectiveness of retention payments and highlighted the implications for future policy design.

Our analysis covers the impact so far of five schemes that have been piloted since 2018: maths and physics retention payment (MPRP), teacher student loan reimbursement (TSLR), maths phased bursary (MPB), early career payment (ECP) and levelling up premium (LUP).

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Key Findings

1. Overall, eligibility for the five ECRPs that have been piloted in England since 2018 is associated with teacher leaving rates that are 5.1 per cent per year lower than they otherwise might have been. However, while our findings are partially supportive of the conclusions from previous research that retention payments are effective at improving retention, they are not conclusive.
2. Eligibility for the:
 - maths phased bursary (MPB) is associated with a 10.9 per cent per year reduction in leaving rate
 - levelling up premium is associated with a 6.3 per cent per year reduction in leaving rate, although the difference is not statistically significant
 - maths and physics retention payment (MPRP) is associated with an 8.1 per cent per year reduction in the leaving rate, although the difference is not statistically significant.

Recommendations

1. The Government should maintain a policy of teacher retention payments focussed on shortage subjects. Our evidence suggests that while their marginal cost is likely to be high, the impact of eliminating retention payments could be to worsen the teacher supply in these important subjects.
2. The Government should retain a policy of raising bursaries for subjects experiencing teacher supply challenges where bursaries are low and maintain high bursaries for maths, physics, chemistry and computing, raising them over time with the level of the teaching starting salary.
3. The Government should continue to monitor and evaluate the impacts of new retention payment policies, such as the Targeted Retention Incentive.
4. The Government should invest in deepening the evidence base of interventions that can improve teacher recruitment and retention.

Ethnic disparities in entry to teacher training, teacher retention and progression to leadership

Published June 2025

This report, funded by Mission44, follows NFER's previous research on racial equality in the teacher workforce to further explore the factors influencing ethnic disparities at three key progression points: entry into initial teacher training (ITT), progression to leadership and retention.

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MISSION44

Key Findings

1. If applicants to postgraduate teacher training from ethnic minority backgrounds were accepted on to training courses at the same rate as their white counterparts, the system would train around 2,000 more teachers per year.
2. If UK-domiciled applicants from all ethnic backgrounds were the same age, had similar socio-economic backgrounds and types of qualifications, and applied to the same providers, the gap in rejection rates between applicants from Asian and white ethnic backgrounds would be 14 percentage points. Similarly, the gap with white counterparts would be 18, six and 18 percentage points for applicants from black, mixed and other ethnic backgrounds, respectively.
3. Teachers from Asian and black ethnic backgrounds are more likely to intend to apply for promotion than teachers from white ethnic backgrounds.
4. Teachers from a black ethnic background are more likely to consider leaving teaching than their white counterparts.

Recommendations

For Government:

1. Play a more proactive role in encouraging ITT providers, schools and trusts to adopt more inclusive recruitment practices.
2. Pilot innovative approaches to improving equity in teacher recruitment and promotion processes and rigorously evaluate their impact to build the evidence base.

For school and trust leaders:

3. Develop pathways to actively support ethnically diverse teachers who are interested in promotion, such as coaching, shadowing, or promoting leadership training opportunities.
4. Evaluate selection criteria and processes for promotions and appointments to leadership positions to ensure transparency, inclusivity and equity.

For ITT providers:

5. Provide ongoing professional development and reflection to improve equity in their attraction and selection processes.

A decade later: Have England's youngest adults closed the international literacy and numeracy skills gap?

Published April 2025

The Survey of Adult Skills is part of the Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC) led by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), measuring literacy, numeracy and adaptive problem solving skills in adults aged 16-65.

The results from cycle two of The OECD Survey of Adult Skills were published in 2024.

This compared the results of 16-24 year olds in 2012 with 25-34 year olds in 2023 to understand whether gains are consistent, or if any particular groups have been left behind, and how they compare with international peers.

Key Findings

1. Young adults in England have made larger skill gains in their post-compulsory education and early careers than young adults in other countries.
2. The skills gap between the highest and lowest achievers has not changed significantly since 2012.
3. The highest performing adults aged 25-34 in 2023 scored 26 points higher on average than the highest performing adults aged 16-24 in 2012 in numeracy skills.
4. In 2012, 26 per cent of the youngest adults had low skills in numeracy. In 2023, this had dropped to 15 per cent in this cohort.
5. Men and women aged 25-34 in 2023 had significantly higher scores in literacy and numeracy than men and women aged 16-24 in 2012.
6. 16-24 year olds in 2012 who grew up with fewer books at home continue to have lower skills aged 25-34 than adults who had more books at home.
7. The gap between adults with the lowest levels of education and those with either upper secondary or tertiary level qualifications is substantial, and their literacy and numeracy skills remain stubbornly low.
8. Adults in the North of England aged 25-34 in 2023 had similar skills to adults aged 16-24 in 2012 in the same region.

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Technical Education Learner Survey 2024 Research report

Published March 2025

This report described the current activities, career plans and course reflections of the second T Level cohort (2021-2023), surveyed one year after completing their course. A comparator sample of learners on A level and level 3 technical courses were also surveyed.

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**Department
for Education**

In partnership with

**National Centre
for Social Research**

Key Findings

1. Similar to the first T Level cohort, the most common destinations for the second cohort of T Level completers were a university degree (44%) and paid work (37%), with fewer (12%) undertaking apprenticeships. Almost three-quarters (71%) of learners had remained in their T Level field, and a further 14% intended to return.
2. The minimum 45-day industry placement was the most commonly cited aspect which T Level completers thought had prepared them for their current study and/or work. As seen with the first T Level cohort, industry placements continued to be a significant route to direct employment.
3. Among learners in paid work, T Level completers were more likely to agree that their course prepared them for the workplace (71%) than level 3 technical learners studying equivalent subjects (with differences in agreement rates of between 10 and 15 percentage points across subjects).

Recommending the course

1. One year after completing their T Levels, about three fifths (62%) of T Level completers were likely to recommend their course to others, while almost a fifth (18%) were unlikely to recommend it.
2. The second cohort of T Level learners were less likely to recommend their course than the first cohort of T Level learners (72% of 2020 T Level completers). This varied substantially by T Level route.
3. Across both cohorts, a high proportion of Education and Early Years learners were likely to recommend the course (82% of 2021 completers, 83% of 2020 completers).
4. The proportion of learners likely to recommend their course was noticeably lower in the second cohort among Digital learners (50% of 2021 completers, 71% of 2020 completers).
5. The proportion had also fallen among Construction learners (from 76% among 2020 starters to 65% among 2021 starters).

Teacher Labour Market in England 2025

Published March 2025

NFER's annual Teacher Labour Market report, funded by the Nuffield Foundation, monitors the progress the education system in England is making towards meeting the teacher supply challenge by measuring the key indicators of teacher supply and working conditions.

Last year, the new Labour Government pledged to recruit 6,500 new expert teachers in key subjects over the course of the five-year parliament. The Government has a significant opportunity at the upcoming Spending Review (June 2025) to secure the resources necessary to deliver this promised improvement in teacher recruitment and retention. Since policy actions take at least a year or two to influence schools' staffing experience, this year is a crucial moment to act if the Government wants to fulfil its pledge by the end of the current parliament.

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Key Findings

1. Teacher unfilled vacancy levels are at their highest rates since records began in 2010, and June's Spending Review is the Government's last chance to hit its 6,500 new teacher target.
2. Teacher leaving rates have not improved since before the pandemic. More leavers are of working age rather than those retiring.
3. This, coupled with persistently poor recruitment into initial teacher training (ITT), is leading to widespread teacher shortages, with unfilled vacancies reaching six per thousand teachers in 2023/24.
4. Ninety per cent of teachers considering leaving teaching in 2023/24 cited high workload as a factor, and pupil behaviour has become one of the fastest-growing contributors to workload since the pandemic.
5. Trainee recruitment for all, except five, secondary subjects was below the respective target in 2024/25 and NFER's latest forecast for 2025/26 shows only five subjects have reasonable chance of recruiting at or above target.

Recommendations

1. The School Teachers' Review Body (STRB) should recommend that the 2025/26 teacher pay award exceeds three per cent and/ or strongly signal that it intends to make future recommendations exceeding forecast rates of average earnings growth.
2. The Government should supplement pay rises with increases in spending on financial incentives targeting shortage subjects.
3. The Government should develop a teacher workload reduction strategy to improve retention that is fully integrated with the wider policy reform agenda.
4. Schools should consider whether and how generative AI tools such as ChatGPT could help improve teachers' planning workload.
5. The Government should develop a new approach for supporting schools to improve pupil behaviour, reinforced by improved external school support services and backed with additional funding in the Spending Review.
6. School leaders should consider adopting a wider range of flexible working practices in their schools to improve teacher retention.

Voices from the Classroom - Understanding how secondary schools support students returning from absence

Published March 2025

This project aimed to understand what schools with good or improving attendance figures are doing to support students returning to school after absence. It also explored the key factors for a successful return and students' views about the impact and effectiveness of school interventions.

Key Findings

1. Students value having trusted staff members to talk to when returning from absence, while staff emphasised the importance of tailoring support to individual students' needs.
2. Students in schools that took a supportive yet structured approach—offering recognition for good attendance alongside pastoral support - felt more motivated to come to school.
3. Students in schools that relied primarily on sanctions such as detentions, fines and phone-calls home, were more likely to perceive attendance policies as unfair, particularly when absences were due to circumstances beyond their control.
4. Some schools reported offering rewards, such as prize draws and trips, to encourage and motivate good attendance. However, both staff and students recognised that focusing solely on a perfect attendance record can be problematic.
5. Illness, mental health challenges and term-time holidays were common causes of absence in the participating schools.

Considerations

For school leaders:

1. **Foster a welcoming and inclusive school environment:** Create an environment that motivates students to attend and fosters a sense of belonging.
2. **Ensure consistency in support provision:** This could involve setting clear, school-wide expectations for staff, ensuring that all teachers consistently provide support for missed lessons, and offering training to help staff deliver appropriate pastoral support.

For policymakers:

3. **Increase funding for attendance and pastoral support:** Providing targeted funding would help schools expand their attendance interventions and offer support to help students thrive.
4. **Champion multiagency working coupled with investment in external mental health and family support services:** Specialist support services can play an important role in addressing the root causes of severe absence.

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Special Schools Workforce in England

Published February and March 2025

Special schools are a vital part of the education landscape in England. In this blog series, NFER looked at the workforce in state-funded schools, teacher vacancy rates and data about teachers with qualified teacher status (QTS). They also sought to understand teacher recruitment and retention in these schools by looking at the dynamics of the teacher workforce over the last five years.

NFER's Senior Economist, Michael Scott, has written two blogs:

1. Exploring the special schools workforce: What's the current picture? (Published late February 2025).
2. Special School Teachers: Where do they come from? Where do they go? (Published early March 2025).

Key Findings

1. State-funded special schools face distinct workforce challenges because of the higher staff to pupil ratio needed. Special schools have around four times more staff on a per-pupil basis than primary or secondary schools.
2. Special schools are vulnerable to funding pressures when the government provides additional funding for pay rises for teachers but does not do the same for pay rises for support staff.
3. Special schools employ teachers without Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) more often than mainstream schools. This suggests special schools are more willing - or need - to use a wider pool of candidates when recruiting teachers.
4. Special schools do not recruit their teaching staff from ITT routes as much as primary and secondary schools, suggesting more could be done within the existing ITT system to improve the flow of trainees into special schools.
5. The current system seems to rely on teachers developing experience with SEND pupils in the mainstream sector before moving to special schools.

Recommendations

1. Special schools should always be fully funded to increase support staff pay. Funding allocations that only fund pay increases for teachers (and not support staff) will particularly disadvantage special schools and alternative provisions (AP) settings, who spend a higher proportion of their budgets on support staff.
2. Work should be done to understand why around 10 per cent of teachers in special schools do not have QTS, compared to the national average of three per cent, and remedies are implemented where this is driven by shortages in teachers with QTS.
3. DfE should conduct more deliberate workforce planning for special schools (and AP), in line with existing processes for primary and secondary school teachers.
4. There should be an emphasis on SEND in the Early Career Framework and the role nearby special schools can play in helping build up experience across the teacher workforce.

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ChatGPT in lesson preparation - A Teacher Choices Trial

Published December 2024

This report, funded by the Education Endowment Foundation, examined the effect on workload of science teachers using ChatGPT for lesson and resources preparation compared to preparing lessons without using any form of generative artificial intelligence (GenAI).

Key Findings

1. Teachers using ChatGPT - alongside a guide to support them to use it effectively - can reduce their lesson planning time by 31 per cent. It brought their timing down to 56.2 minutes per week compared to 81.5 minutes.
2. There was no noticeable difference in quality of lesson planning between using GenAI and using no GenAI.
3. Teachers confident in physics and/or technology were more likely to use ChatGPT for lesson planning, while those with high confidence in their science subject knowledge used it less.

Ways to implement this in schools

- The [ChatGPT guide](#) is available online. This resource provides technical support on getting started on ChatGPT, teacher-led demonstration videos, and example scripts showing the prompts that a user entered. It aims to support teachers to find activity ideas, adapt materials for their pupils and find effective examples and ready-made practice questions and model answers
- Teachers in this trial tended to use ChatGPT for one or two activities rather than across the lesson, most commonly for creating questions/quizzes or finding new ideas for activities.
- Teachers may wish to consider allowing additional time for planning when first using GenAI. In this trial, teachers in the ChatGPT group were given a five-week learning period (weeks 1–5) to familiarise themselves with the ChatGPT guide and practice using ChatGPT to plan lessons, before their planning time for relevant classes was recorded in weeks 6–10.

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How to recruit 6,500 teachers? Modelling the potential routes to delivering Labour's teacher supply pledge

Published December 2024

In 2024, the new Labour Government pledged to recruit 6,500 new teachers in key subjects over the course of the five-year parliament.

This report, funded by the Gatsby Foundation, explores the role of financial policy levers - pay, bursaries and early career retention payments (ECRPs) - as well as non-financial measures, such as workload reduction, in meeting the teacher supply target.

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Key Findings

1. Achieving the supply target will require new policy measures that are additional to business-as-usual and add to what is already enacted.
2. Many of the current policy measures would not be sufficient to meet the supply target in isolation, unless they were taken to unrealistic extremes.
3. The government would need to increase teacher pay by nearly 10 per cent a year, for three years, to reach the 6,500-teacher target, if using pay as a sole incentive. This would cost the government £7.7 billion per year from 2027/28 to finance.
4. Scenarios with lower costs are those that either rely on cost-effective spending on targeted measures aimed at shortage subjects, particularly bursaries and early-career retention payments (ECRPs), or on non-financial measures such as reducing workload or improving continuing professional development (CPD).

Recommendations

1. The Government should publish a comprehensive strategy for how it defines and plans to meet the 6,500-teacher supply target, with sufficient funding to deliver it.
2. The Government should invest in deepening the evidence base of interventions that can improve recruitment and retention.

Evaluation of the early roll-out of the Early Career Framework

Published October 2024

The Early Career Framework (ECF) outlines what early career teachers (ECTs) should learn and practice at the start of their careers. It was introduced as part of the Department for Education's (DfE) Teacher Recruitment and Retention Strategy to improve ECTs' teaching quality, job satisfaction, well-being, and commitment to the profession.

Funded by the Education Endowment Foundation, the evaluation assessed the impact of the ECF early roll-out (ERO) on ECT retention after two years. It also looked at retention after one year, retention within initial schools, and perceptions of teaching quality, job satisfaction, and self-efficacy.

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Key Findings

1. After two years of induction, ECTs in schools who participated in the ECF ERO were as likely as comparison ECTs to remain in the state-funded sector. While the retention rate of participating ECTs was slightly lower than the retention rate of comparison ECTs, the uncertainty around this estimate suggests the ERO of the ECF had a null effect on retention. These results have a low to moderate security rating.
2. Participating ECTs were more likely to stay in their original induction school after two years of induction compared to the comparison group. This result has a low to moderate security rating. Survey and interview findings suggest that the ECF ERO enabled deeper ECT–mentor relationships, which may have strengthened the bond between ECTs and their schools.
3. Perceived benefits of the ECF ERO included an improvement in ECTs' teaching practice, self-efficacy, confidence, and job satisfaction, as well as mentors' skills and confidence in coaching.

Recommendation

1. Future research could look to explore the impact on longer-term teacher retention, using longitudinal follow-up data in future School Workforce Census (SWC). Given the longitudinal linkage of the SWC, new waves of data are released each summer, providing ongoing opportunities for exploration. While the national ECF roll-out from 2021 means subsequent cohorts of new teachers have received the intervention, the ERO comparison group cohorts will remain an untreated comparison group.

Building a stronger FE college workforce: How improving pay and working conditions can help support FE college teacher supply

Published September 2024

Further education (FE) is key to delivering technical and academic qualifications to post-16 students and adult learners in England but has recently been facing significant challenges, including critical staff shortages in some subject areas.

This mixed-method research investigated some of the key barriers FE colleges face in recruiting and retaining staff in three subject areas: Construction, Engineering and Digital.

Commissioned by



Key Findings

1. The combination of skills shortages within Construction, Engineering and Digital and the pay differential with both industry and other education roles places FE at a disadvantage for both recruitment and retention.
2. The financial responsibilities of younger workers mean they are generally less able to take the pay cut to move from industry into FE, driving an ageing workforce.
3. FE salary bands are narrow, limiting opportunities for pay progression – particularly where unqualified teachers are recruited straight from industry at the top of the band to reduce the pay gap.
4. Offering higher pay to support recruitment feeds poor retention by creating pay inequalities that lower staff morale.
5. FE teachers consider their workload to be excessive and inappropriately centred on unfulfilling administrative work.

Recommendations

1. Government should continue to increase funding to the FE sector to help colleges, at a minimum, match FE teacher pay with that of school teachers.
2. Colleges should consider how they can help recruit and retain more teaching staff from industry, by improving onboarding procedures for new staff and by better promoting the positive lifestyle benefits of the role to potential recruits.
3. Government should devise a long-term evidence-based strategy and concrete resources to help reduce FE teacher workload, similar to what exists for schools. This strategy should be informed by further research on how improving working conditions can help support FE teacher supply, including by collecting qualitative and quantitative data on teacher workload.
4. Government should continue to support improvements to future waves of data relating to post-16 providers.



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Learn more about NFER

If you would like to know more about our, our resources, and our services, or about partnering with us in our work, please get in touch:

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