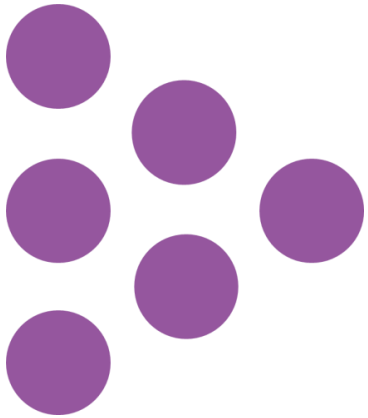
National Foundation for Educational Research

Report
The NFER Research Programme

Investigating job roles in the further education workforce

National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER)



Investigating job roles in the further education workforce

Maria Pia Iocco and Jenna Julius

Published in March 2026

By the National Foundation for Educational Research,

The Mere, Upton Park, Slough, Berkshire SL1 2DQ

www.nfer.ac.uk/

Registered Charity No. 313392

ISBN: 978-1-916567-54-2

How to cite this publication:

Iocco, M.P. and Julius, J. (2026) *Investigating job roles in the further education workforce*. Slough: NFER

.

NFER
National Foundation for Educational Research

Contents

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank The Gatsby Charitable Foundation for funding and commissioning this project in such an important area of research. We are particularly grateful to Jenifer Burden and Dr Rory McDonald at The Gatsby Charitable Foundation for all of their invaluable advice, input and guidance.

Executive Summary

Strengthening teacher recruitment and retention is a key tenet of the ambitions set out in the Post-16 Education and Skills White Paper (HM Government, 2025). However, efforts to address barriers to recruitment and retention in FE can be challenged by the complexity and variety of job roles across the sector. For example, efforts to target support towards particular roles or enhance training across the FE sector may be more challenging when organisations have more varied staffing structures.

This research draws on the Further Education Workforce Data Collection (FEWDC) to explore this issue and provide a comprehensive quantitative assessment of the range of job roles[1] and characteristics in the FE workforce[2]. While we refer to the 'FE workforce' as a shorthand, this report focuses on teaching and support staff[3] on fixed-term or permanent contracts working in General FE colleges[4][5] only.

It aims to support understanding of job roles and explore the potential for greater streamlining across roles to bolster recruitment and retention across the sector. For example, greater streamlining across roles could provide clearer progression pathways and support targeted development, which may in turn improve the retention of staff in FE.

What are the different job roles used across the FE workforce?

- **Teachers are the largest staff group working in colleges** representing 52 per cent of the workforce in the scope of our study (at 60,000 staff in 2022/23). There are a range of job sub-roles recorded for Teachers in the FEWDC: Lecturers (80 per cent), Teachers (15 per cent), Tutors (four per cent), and Practitioners (one per cent).
- **There is significant variability in the job roles and sub-roles reported across colleges.** While almost all colleges report having Teachers, Support Staff, Technicians and Programme Leaders, only 77 per cent of colleges report having a Course Leader. Similarly, less than half report having Trainers (49 per cent), Instructors (49 per cent) and Expert Teachers (39 per cent). These differences were also apparent across sub-job roles. For example, Tutors (54 per cent), Advanced Practitioners (39 per cent) and Practitioners (22 per cent) are only reported in a subset of colleges. While most settings are likely to require staff who fulfil similar

[1] As defined by a job role framework developed by York Consulting for the FE workforce (see Table 1).
[2] We focus on staff in permanent or fixed-term contracts in General FE colleges as recorded by the 2021/22 and 2022/23 FEWDC.
[3] Senior leadership roles are not included in our analysis. We identify around 60,000 FE staff per year in our study scope.
[4] The response rate to the FEWDC in 2022/23 for General FE colleges including tertiary was 93.6 per cent (GOV.UK, 2024a).
[5] Including tertiary. Staff on zero hour or variable contracts are excluded from our analysis. General FE colleges (including tertiary) represent around 62 per cent of the providers in the FEWDC data and permanent and fixed-term contracts represent around 87 per cent of staff in said colleges. Further information on the data used in the FEWDC is included in the Appendix.

functions, this points to the potential to have more consistency in how job roles are structured and described across the sector.

- **Around six per cent of the FE workforce has more than one role** within the same provider: most of these involve combining teaching with other responsibilities.

What are the characteristics of individuals across different job roles in the FE workforce?

- **Two-fifths of FE Teachers work part-time**. In general, staff in support staff roles were more likely to be working part-time than Teachers (at 63 per cent compared to 41 per cent), whilst staff in middle management roles were less likely to be working part-time than Teachers. The rate of part-time working in FE is greater than that in secondary schools, where one in five secondary classroom teachers work part-time (GOV.UK, 2025). Although this may be partially explained by the fact that, due to data limitations, our analysis cannot identify staff contracted to more than one provider (which may be more common in the FE workforce than in schools).
- **Women are slightly more likely to be working in the FE workforce than men**. This is true of teaching and middle management roles, such as Teachers (56 per cent female) and Programme Leaders (56 per cent female). However, the gender mix varies across roles. The FE teaching workforce has a more even gender split than the secondary school classroom teacher workforce, where women represent around two-thirds of the secondary teaching workforce (GOV.UK, 2025).
- **The FE workforce in colleges is much older than the school teaching workforce**. Most of the FE workforce is over 30 with a significant proportion of the workforce approaching retirement age (with 14 per cent aged 60 and over, as compared to three per cent among secondary school classroom teachers). This is particularly the case for Trainers (19 per cent), Technicians (20 per cent) and Learning Coaches (22 per cent). As might be expected, younger staff are less likely to be in middle leadership roles.
- **Staff tend to be relatively new to their current positions**: 24 per cent of the staff have been in their current role[6] for less than a year, with a further 33 per cent having been in it for one to three years.

How do salaries differ between job roles across the FE workforce?

- **There is variation in salaries both within and across roles and sub-roles within the FE workforce**. In 2022/23, median earnings (annualised and adjusted by FTE) vary widely from Instructors (£25,452) and Progress Tutors (£25,594) to Teachers (£34,875). Median earnings for middle leadership roles range from Expert Teachers (£38,983) to Programme Leaders (£44,314). Focusing on the sub-roles that make up the Teacher role (Lecturers, Practitioners, Teachers and Tutors), Teachers (£34,718) have very similar median earnings compared to Lecturers (£34,757) and

[6] Based on length of time in current role only. Staff may have been at their current provider for longer.

Tutors (£32,347), which again suggests there may be scope for streamlining of job roles.

- **There is a large pay differential between the FE workforce and schools.** Salaries of Teachers in the FE workforce (£34,875) compare to median secondary school classroom teacher pay of £44,643 in 2022/23 (GOV.UK, 2024b).

  To account for the fact that differences in salaries across the FE workforce may reflect staff characteristics (e.g., age) or role characteristics (e.g., contract types), we use regression analysis to compare how the salaries of staff with different teaching roles compare to Teachers, when a wide range of staff and role characteristics are accounted for.

- **Salaries do not tend to vary by subject taught, despite differences in recruitment challenges across subjects**. Using 'Health, Public Services and Care' as a baseline for comparison[7], we find only four subjects in the FE workforce with a significant subject salary gap: Arts, Media, and Publishing (approximately 3.4 per cent); Engineering and Manufacturing Technologies (3.2 per cent); Construction, Planning, and the Built Environment (2.2 per cent). Preparation for Life and Work is the only subject with a significantly lower salary (at 4.3 per cent less). More broadly, salary differentiation does not appear to be utilised for subjects proving more difficult to recruit to.
- **Staff earnings increase systematically with age.** While the FEWDC collects data on FE and industry experience, the coverage of the data is very poor, such that it could not be included in our analysis. In this context, age is likely to be acting as a proxy for industry and FE experience. As compared to staff under 25 years of age, staff aged 25 to 29 had earnings which were approximately 6.5 per cent higher. The oldest group, aged 60 and over, are earning approximately 24.5 per cent more than their youngest colleagues.
- **Only London (at 17.9 per cent higher than the North West[8]) has significantly different earnings to other regions.** This is broadly in line with London premium in the school workforce (at 20 per cent in inner London and 10 per cent in outer London premium (GOV.UK, 2025), reflecting the higher cost of living in London.
- **Women and men have similar earnings in the FE workforce,** once a wide set of characteristics are controlled for.

[7] All statistical models require a baseline comparison. 'Health, Public Services and Care' was chosen as a baseline as a popular subject choice.

[8] The North West is the baseline region used for our analysis.

Conclusions

By developing our current understanding of the composition and structure of the FE workforce, our analysis highlights that there are a wide range of roles and sub-roles reported across the FE workforce. It suggests, particularly considering the extent to which different colleges structure their workforces, that there may be scope for greater consolidation across roles and sub-roles. In turn, greater streamlining has the potential to support clearer progression pathways, better mobility, targeted development and consistency across the FE workforce.

This report also emphasises the distinct characteristics of the FE workforce, such as the large proportion of the workforce who work part-time and the sizeable cohort of FE staff approaching retirement age. These highlight that the well-documented recruitment and retention challenges in the FE workforce (Flemons *et al.*, 2024) not only need to carefully consider the demographics of the workforce, but are only likely to become more challenging in the years ahead.

Finally, whilst our report is among the first to draw on the novel FEWDC, our research has flagged key quality issues and limitations of the data. It is crucial that these are addressed and prioritised going forward to support the Government's ambitions set out in the recent Post-16 Education and Skills White Paper.

1. Introduction

The further education (FE) sector plays a key role in delivering technical and academic training to post-16 students in England. Despite this important role, the sector has faced significant hurdles over the last decade, including teacher recruitment and retention challenges (Smith and Husband, 2024). NFER's recent research has highlighted that pay is one of several factors - which include workload, progression opportunities and lack of support - that are likely to be contributing to this recruitment and retention challenge (Flemons *et al.*, 2024).

Strengthening teacher recruitment and retention is a key tenet of the ambitions set out in the latest Post-16 Education and Skills White Paper (HM Government, 2025). In addition, college staff are included in the Government's pledge to recruit 6,500 additional teachers by the end of this parliament (Chantler-Hicks, 2025). However, our current understanding of the composition and structure of the FE workforce remains limited.

In addition, little is currently known about the potential for streamlining roles in FE to bolster recruitment and retention across the sector. For example, while Lecturer and Teacher are both used as job titles for staff teaching in the FE workforce, less is known about the similarities between individuals teaching in these roles in practice. Streamlining has the potential to provide clearer progression pathways and support better targeting of training and development opportunities. Ultimately, these are mechanisms to improve recruitment and retention in the FE workforce.

This research draws on the 2021/22 and 2022/23 waves[9] of the Further Education Workforce Data Collection (FEWDC) to address the gap in understanding of the composition and structure of the FE workforce and provide a comprehensive quantitative assessment of the range of job roles in the FE workforce.

While we refer to the 'FE workforce' as a shorthand, this report focuses on teaching and support staff[10] on fixed-term or permanent contracts working in General FE colleges[11][12] only, using the job role classification for the FE workforce developed by York Consulting (Cowen and Wilson, 2022). The rationale for focusing on FE colleges only is it enables us to compare roles across a similar set of providers as an initial step towards building a greater understanding of roles in the FE workforce.

[9] These were the latest waves available in the ONS Secure Research Service at the time of analysis.
[10] Senior leadership roles are not included in our analysis. We identify around 60,000 FE staff per year in our study scope.
[11] The response rate to the FEWDC in 2022/23 for General FE colleges including tertiary was 93.6 per cent (GOV.UK, 2024a).
[12] Including tertiary. Staff on zero hour or variable contracts are excluded from our analysis. General FE colleges (including tertiary) represent around 62 per cent of the providers in the FEWDC data and permanent and fixed-term contracts represent around 87 per cent of staff in said colleges. Further information on the data used in the FEWDC is included in the Appendix.

More specifically, it addresses the following research questions:

1. What are the different job roles used across the FE workforce?
2. What are the characteristics of individuals across different job roles in the FE workforce?
3. How do salaries differ between job roles across the FE workforce?

Our approach draws on descriptive approaches to explore the composition of the FE workforce (Sections 1 and 2). This is alongside regression analysis which considers how different staff and role characteristics are associated with teacher pay, holding other factors constant (Section 3). All the analyses presented in this report are associational, rather than causal.

It should be noted that there are limitations associated with using the FEWDC including that not all providers are included in the data and missing data issues affect some response options. Where observation numbers are low, some data is excluded or rounded to ensure that no individuals can be identified in our analysis[13]. Further technical detail can be found in the Appendix.

[13] When this happens, we include a note in the figure or table with the corresponding details.

2. What are the different job roles used across the FE workforce?

2.1. Roles in the FE workforce

Our analysis considers the different job roles reported across the FE workforce as recorded in the FEWDC and explores how these differ across colleges. This provides a starting point for exploring the potential to streamline roles across the FE workforce to support recruitment and retention in FE, as outlined in section 1.

The first step of our analysis draws on a framework developed by York Consulting, drawing on qualitative evidence, to define the key overarching roles in the FE workforce[14] as shown in Table 1. By drawing on this established framework, we can jointly consider sub-roles identified in the FEWDC where individuals are likely to be performing the same or similar role.

Figure 1 presents the different job sub-roles recorded in the FEWDC (on the left of the graph) and shows how they map to roles as defined by the York Consulting job role framework (on the right).

The percentages listed in the role column on the right indicate the proportion of the workforce with that role within our study scope, while the percentages in the sub-role column on the left indicates what proportion that sub-role represents within that job role category. For example, Figure 1 shows that Teacher roles (at 52 per cent of our sample, or over 30,000 college staff per year) are the most common role in our study scope. The left column shows that this group is made up of: Lecturers (80 per cent), Teachers (15 per cent), Tutors (four per cent), and Practitioners (one per cent).

Similarly, Figure 1 shows that support staff also represent a key group of staff in FE colleges, making up 19 per cent of our in-scope population. These include a mix of sub-roles including Learning Support (53 per cent), Learning Support Assistant ((SEN), 29 per cent), Learning Facilitator (eight per cent), Teaching Assistant (five per cent) and SEN Co-ordinator (three per cent). Programme Leaders represent the third largest category in our in-scope population (at seven per cent) made up of Heads of Department (55 per cent), Programme Leaders (35 per cent) and Faculty Leads (11 per cent).

Among the other job sub-roles recorded in the FE workforce, they have mostly been matched one-to-one to the York Consulting classification. For example, Learning Mentors in the FEWDC has been mapped to the Progress Tutor role in the York Consulting framework.

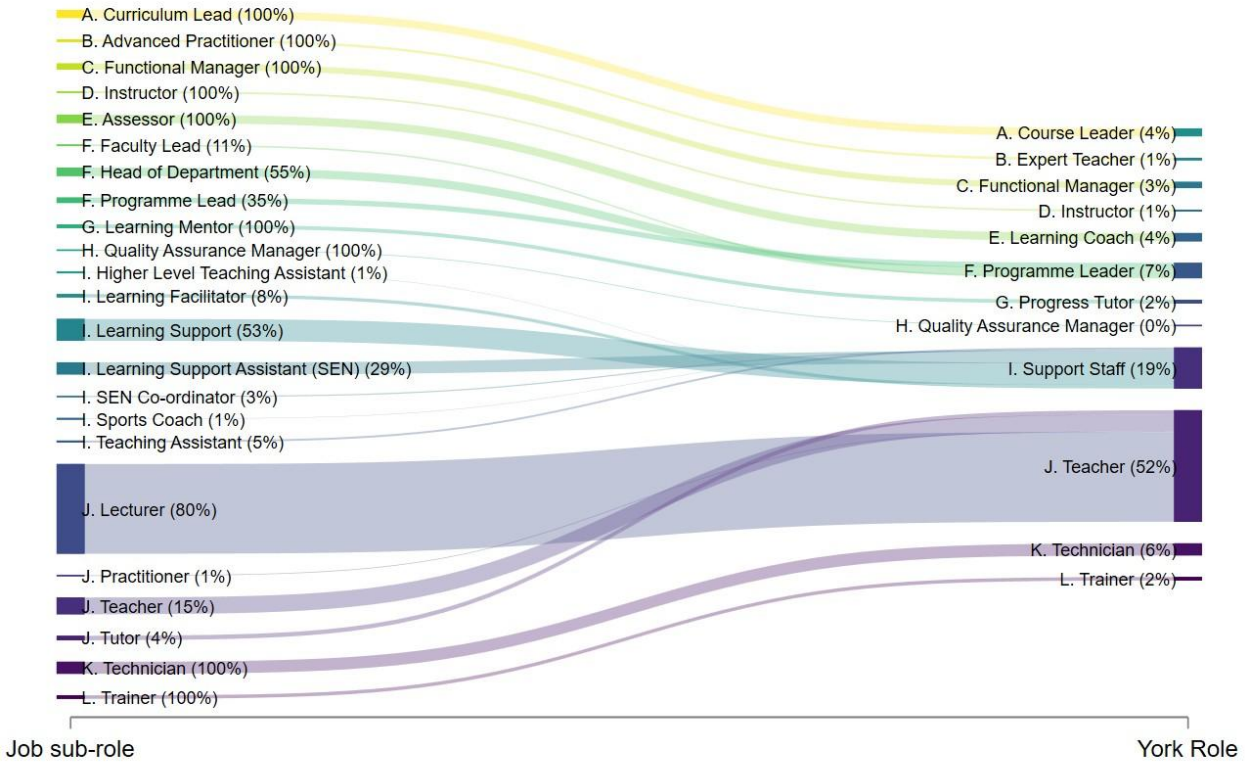
[14] Our framework is adapted from York Consulting's original framework due to differences in scope.

Table 1 Mapping framework for FE job roles

Role	Description	Sub-roles included
Teacher	Teach courses to groups of students.	Lecturer, Teacher, Practitioner, Tutor
Learning Coach	Teach mostly in a 1:1 capacity or to small groups. Often includes previously named assessor role.	Assessor
Instructor	Teach knowledge and skills elements of courses, mostly to groups of students, commonly in 4–6-week blocks.	Instructor
Technician	Teach practical skills to groups of students; primary role to provide technical support on technical education courses.	Technician
Programme Leader	Heads of departments and/or programmes, responsible for planning and managing programmes and staff teams. Commonly also teach technical education courses to groups of students.	Programme Lead, Head of Department, Faculty Lead
Course Leader	Teach groups of students, with specific responsibility for curriculum planning and student progress on courses.	Curriculum Lead
Expert Teacher	Teach groups of students, with additional responsibilities to train, develop and advise other teachers on aspects of teaching and learning. Often called outstanding or advanced practitioners.	Advanced Practitioner
Progress Tutor	Teach independent study, careers information, and essential skills (maths, English, employability) programmes to groups of students, and provide 1:1 advice and guidance to support student progress. Some Progress Tutors deliver this role alongside teaching groups of students.	Learning Mentor
Quality Assurance Manager*	Managerial role with quality assurance oversight.	Quality Assurance Manager
Functional Manager*	Managerial role providing support.	Functional Manager
Support Staff*	Supporting roles.	Teaching Assistant roles, Learning Facilitator, Learning Support, Learning Support Assistant, SEN Co-ordinator, Sports Coach
Trainer*	Teach practical courses to groups of students.	Trainer

Source: Adapted from York Consulting to map to job roles recorded in the FE workforce data collection (Cowen and Wilson, 2022)
*Not identified in original York Consulting mapping

Figure 1: Mapping job sub-roles to York Consulting roles



Source: FEWDC
Notes: 2022/2023 data

2.1.1. To what extent do staff combine roles in the FE workforce?

The FEWDC collects information about the different sub-roles an individual can perform within the same employer, up to a maximum of five. This indicates that around six per cent of the workforce has more than one role within the same provider[15]. This highlights that combining roles within the same provider is relatively rare.

Among staff who are combining multiple roles, most of these involve combining teaching roles with other responsibilities. The most common combinations of roles are Teacher and Programme Leader (22 per cent of those with multiple roles), Course Leader and Teacher (18 per cent), and Teacher and Support Staff (14 per cent).

2.2. Not all the colleges report having all the roles

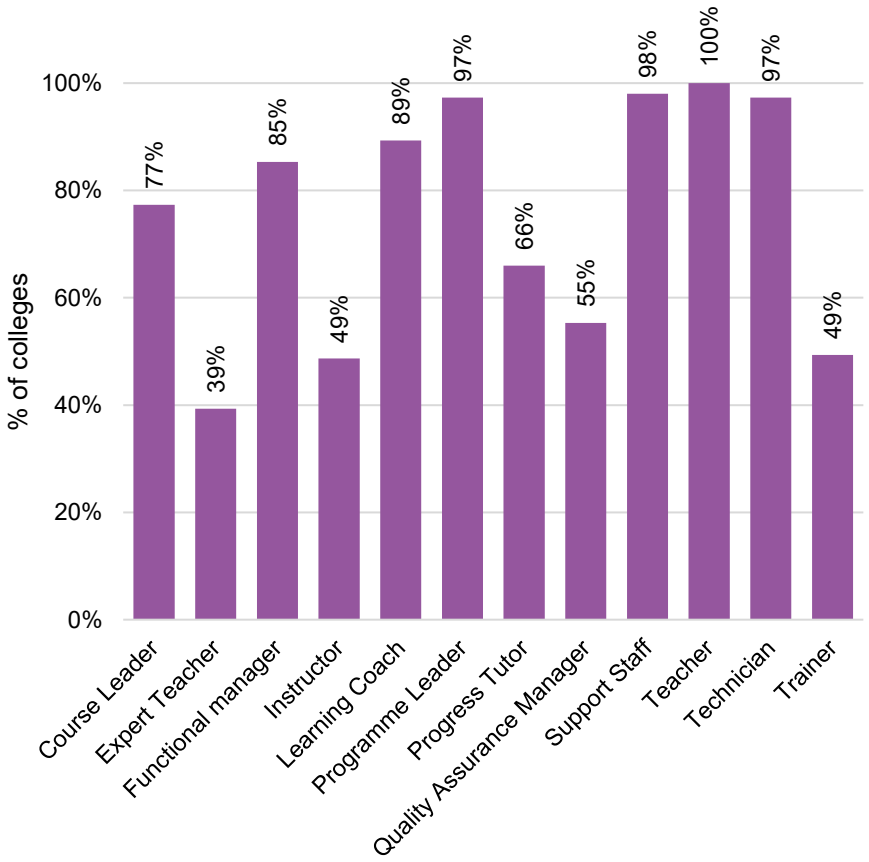
Figure 2 presents the proportion of colleges with at least one staff member recorded in each role. While almost all colleges have recorded Teachers, Support Staff, Technicians and Programme Leaders, the figure shows that there is a wide variability in the other roles recorded between General FE colleges. For instance, only 77 per cent of colleges recorded having a Course Leader. Similarly, Trainers are only recorded in half (49 per cent) of colleges.

As shown in Figure 3, there are also large differences when we compare the reported use of sub-roles across colleges. For example, Tutors (at 54 per cent), Advanced Practitioners (at 39 per cent) and Practitioners (at 22 per cent) are not recorded in all colleges.

One factor contributing to these differences is likely to be the recording discrepancies or errors. This is likely to reflect the fact that the FEWDC is a new data collection, and ongoing refinements are still being made. For example, all settings should have a staff member who fulfils the role of a SEN Co-ordinator (regardless of their job role), but some do not have one recorded. In addition, while all colleges are likely to have Support Staff, the small proportion of colleges who have not recorded any staff in these roles are likely to have done so in error. Further, as staff on variable or zero hours contracts are excluded from our data, this may also contribute to differences. The differences in roles recorded across colleges may also partly reflect the range of subjects and qualifications offered by different providers (see Section 2.3). However, none of these explanations can account for the scale of differences in roles reported across colleges suggesting there may be potential for streamlining how such roles are recorded.

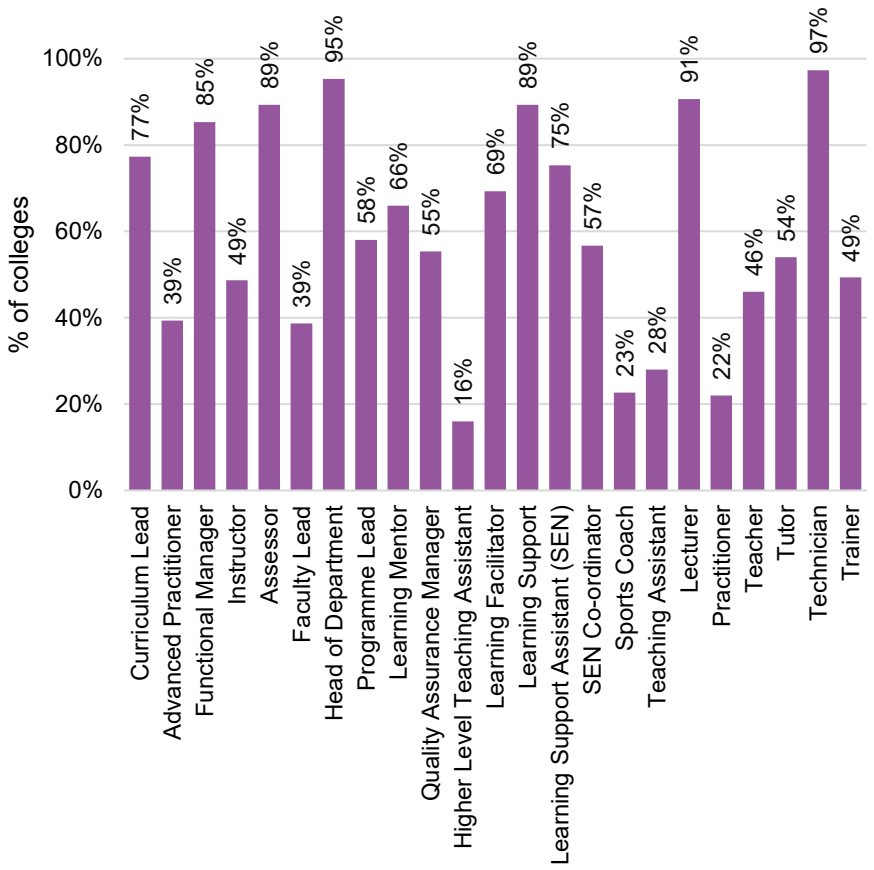
[15] The data available does not allow to identify which individuals combine roles across different providers. We are only able to identify individuals with multiple roles within the same provider.

Figure 2: Proportion of York Consulting roles reported in colleges



Source: FEWDC
Notes: Data from 2022/23. There are 150 colleges in our data in said year

Figure 3: Proportion of sub-roles reported in colleges as recorded by the FEWDC



Source: FEWDC
Notes: Data from 2022/23. There are 150 colleges in our data in said year

2.3. All subjects are mainly taught by FE Teachers

Figure 4 shows what proportion of each subject is taught by staff by job role. It highlights that all subjects are mainly taught by FE Teachers (at least 85 per cent of the teaching across all subjects in terms of job roles).

There are nonetheless some differences across subjects. 'Agriculture, Horticulture and Animal Care' and 'Engineering and Manufacturing' are the subjects with the highest proportion taught by other roles. 'Agriculture, Horticulture and Animal Care' is taught by a relatively large proportion of Instructors (nine per cent), whilst Engineering and Manufacturing Technologies, and Other[16] have a higher proportion of Trainers (six per cent). Instructors and Trainers teach across other subjects too, although these are mainly non-academic subjects.

This evidence may be taken to suggest that the differences in job roles and sub-roles reported across colleges (as outlined in section 2.2) are unlikely to be driven by differences in subject offering across providers.

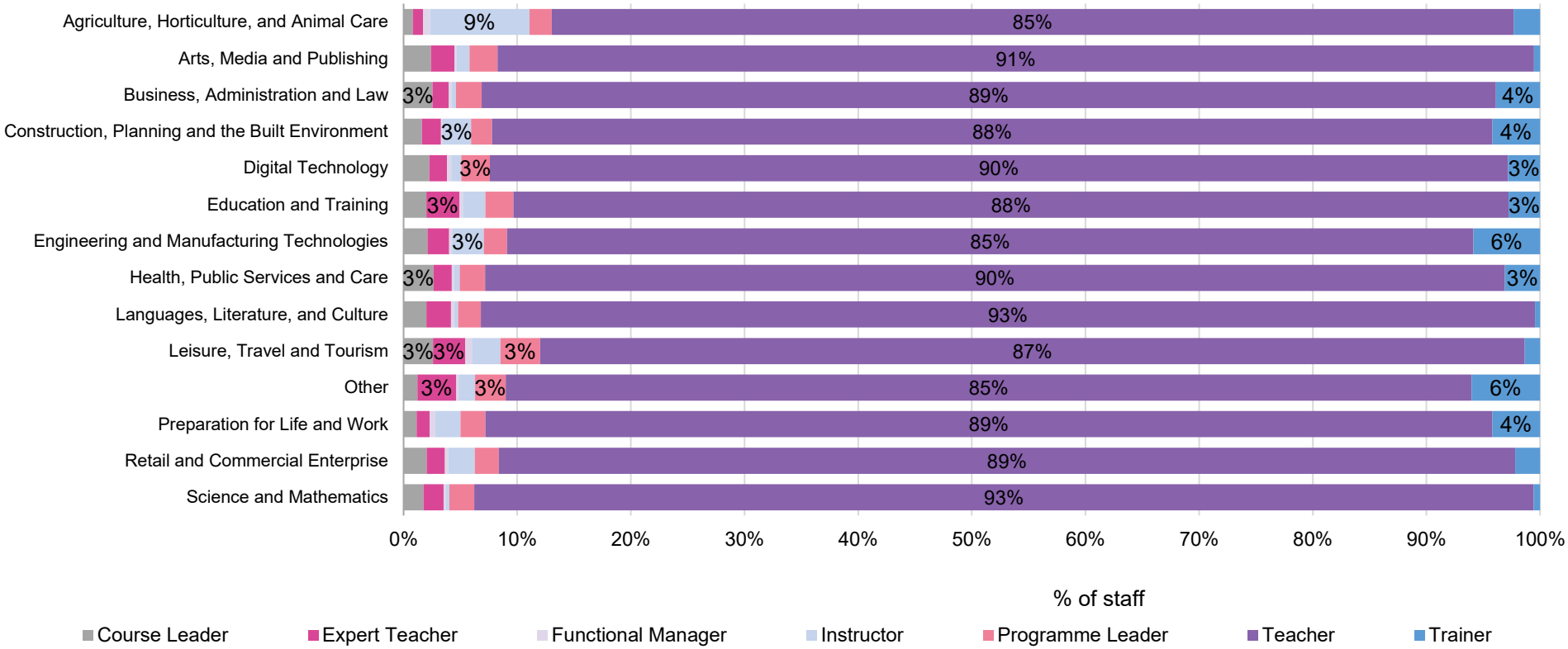
2.4. Conclusions

While Teachers are the largest staff group working in colleges, there are a wide range of roles and sub-roles reported. This appears to reflect wide variability in staffing structures across colleges. While most settings are likely to require staff who fulfil similar functions and these patterns do not appear to be driven by differences in subject offering across providers, this points to the potential to have more consistency in how job roles are structured and described across the sector.

[16] Subjects were grouped into the 15 SSA tier 1 categories plus an 'Other' category as per DfE subject definitions. To avoid suppression due to low counts 'History, Philosophy, and Theology' and 'Social Sciences' were classified under the 'Other' category.

Figure 4: Teaching distribution by York Consulting role and subject

Source: FEWDC



Notes: Data from 2021/22 and 2022/23. Quality Assurance Manager has been excluded from the analysis due to insufficient observations. Labels for values less than three per cent have been omitted for legibility

3. What are the characteristics of individuals in different job roles in the FE workforce?

This section explores the characteristics of individuals across different job roles in the FE workforce using descriptive statistics. This enables us to explore how the composition of the FE workforce differs between roles, and where possible, establish how this compares to the school workforce.

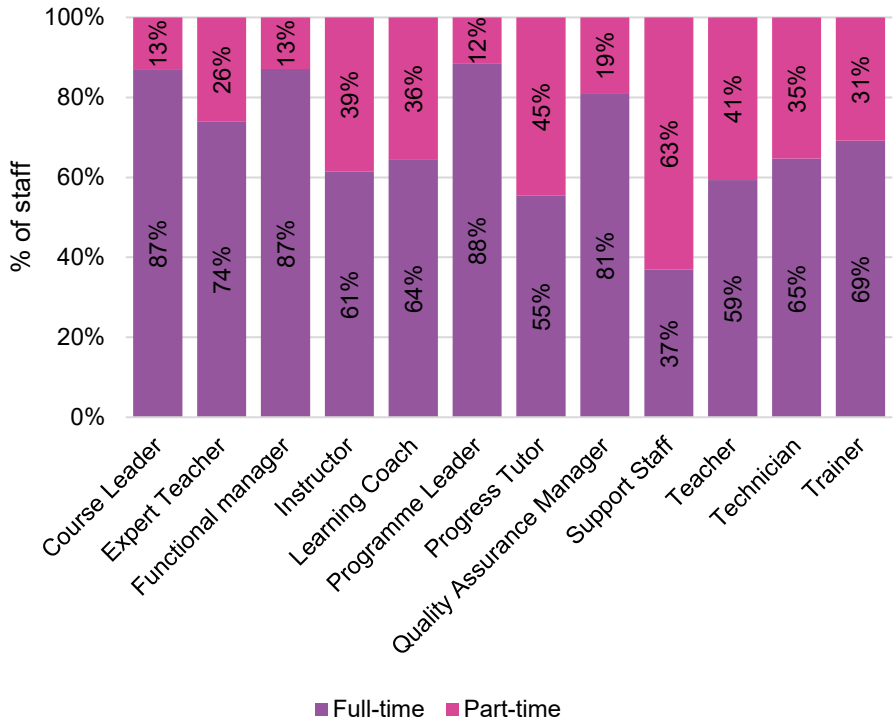
3.1. Two-fifths of FE Teachers work part-time

Figure 5 presents the working pattern (full-time or part-time) of staff in the FE workforce as identified within our analysis sample. It shows that part-time working is common across most roles in the FE workforce with 41 per cent of Teachers working part-time. These statistics include both individuals with one role and individuals holding multiple roles within a provider.

In general, staff in middle management roles, such as Course Leaders (at 13 per cent), Quality Assurance Managers (at 19 per cent) and Programme Leaders (at 12 per cent), were less likely to be working part-time than Teachers (at 41 per cent). In contrast, staff in support staff roles were more likely to be working part-time (at 63 per cent).

In comparison to the FE workforce, the secondary school teaching workforce is much less likely to be working part-time at around one in five classroom teachers (GOV.UK, 2025). This may partly reflect the fact the teachers in FE are more likely to combine their teaching roles with jobs in industry, and that part-time working may be more difficult to timetable in a school setting. Equally, our analysis cannot identify staff contracted to more than one provider (which may be more common in FE workforce than in schools).

Figure 5: Working patterns distribution by York Consulting role



Source: FEWDC
Notes: Data from 2021/22 and 2022/23

3.2. The FE workforce has a slight female majority

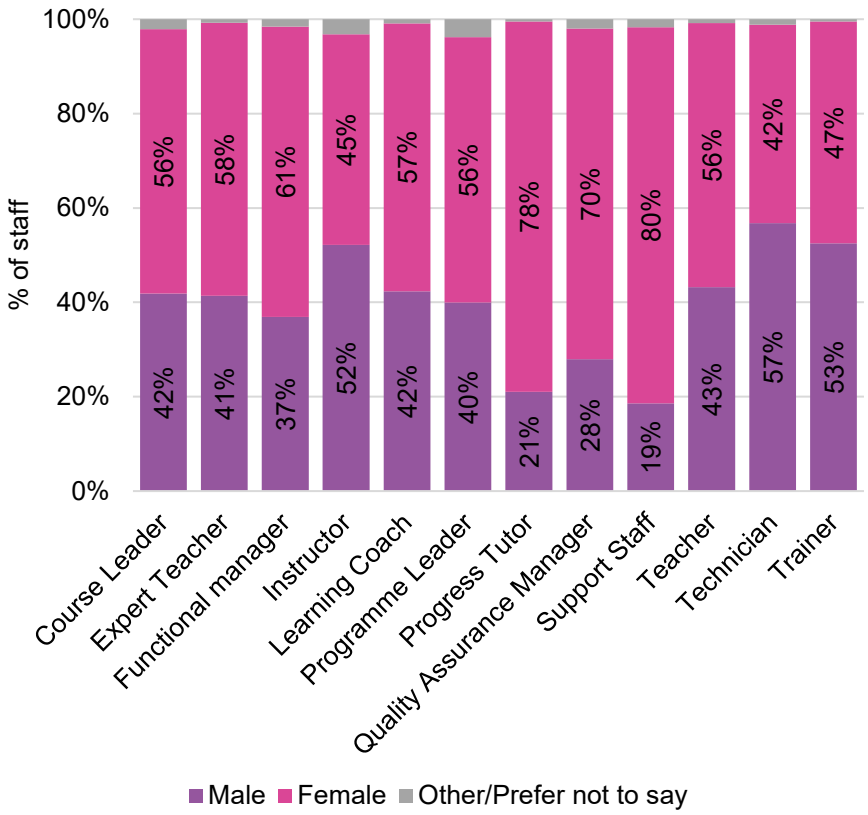
Figure 6 presents the gender distribution of staff in the FE workforce. Most roles have a slight female majority, including teaching and middle management roles, such as Teachers (56 per cent), Course Leaders (56 per cent), Programme Leaders (56 per cent) and Expert Teachers (58 per cent). This suggests that neither gender are any more likely to progress from teaching to middle leadership roles.

Support staff roles (at 80 per cent), Progress Tutors (at 78 per cent) and Quality Assurance Managers (at 70 per cent) are all particularly female dominated.

Conversely, men are in a slight majority in three roles: Instructor (52 per cent), Technician (57 per cent), and Trainer (53 per cent). This may reflect the subject mix of these roles: as discussed in Section 2.3, Instructors are disproportionately likely to teach Agriculture and Horticulture subjects, while Trainers are more likely to teach Engineering subjects.

In comparison, the secondary school classroom teacher workforce is more female dominated at 66 per cent in 2024/25 (GOV.UK, 2025).

Figure 6: Gender distribution by York Consulting role



Source: FEWDC
Notes: Data from 2021/22 and 2022/23. Some figures are rounded to maintain statistical disclosure control. Labels for values less than three per cent have been omitted for legibility

3.3. The FE workforce is much older than the school teaching workforce

Figure 7 presents the age distribution of staff in the FE workforce. It highlights that, across all roles, most of the FE workforce is aged over 30 (at 91 per cent of Teachers, ranging from 77 per cent of Technicians to 97 per cent of Course and Programme Leaders).

A significant proportion of the FE workforce is approaching retirement age with 14 per cent aged 60 and over. This is particularly the case for Trainers (19 per cent), Technicians (20 per cent) and Learning Coaches (22 per cent). As might be expected, younger staff members (aged 40 and below) are less likely to be in middle leadership roles.

As a comparison, in 2024, the classroom teacher secondary school workforce in England had only three per cent of staff aged 60 and over, and another 17 per cent in their fifties (GOV.UK, 2025).

These findings may reflect a deliberate strategy from FE colleges to recruit older workers with industry experience who might be looking for part-time roles. The fact that much more of the FE workforce is closer to the retirement age than the school workforce, highlights that, as the FE workforce retires, recruitment and retention challenges risk becoming increasingly acute particularly among Trainers, Technicians and Learning Coaches.

In addition, it highlights that while both the school and FE workforce are facing recruitment and retention challenges, different strategies are needed to address these.

3.4. Staff tend to be relatively new to their current positions

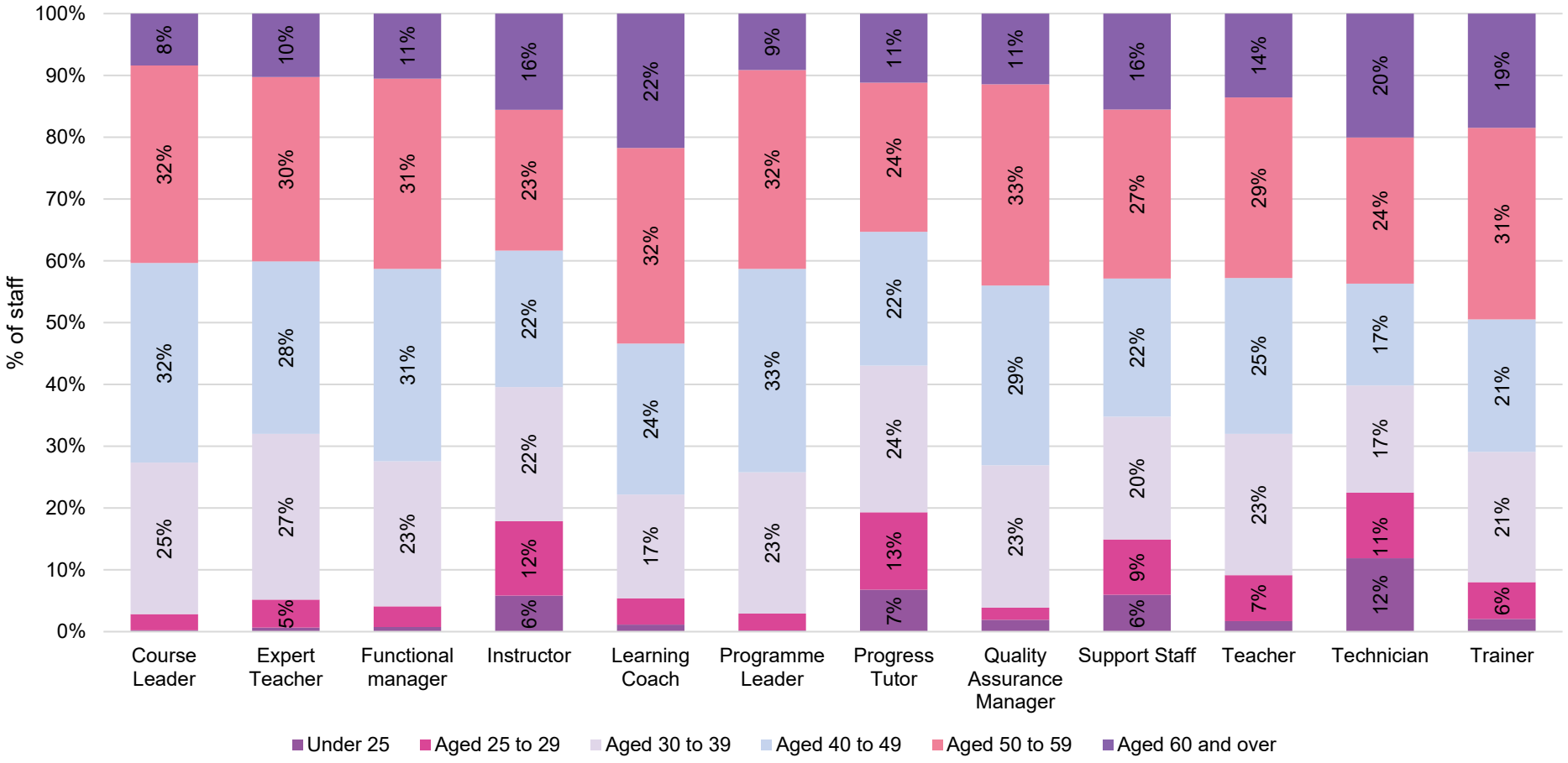
Figure 8 presents how long individuals have worked in their current position at their present provider. It highlights that most of the FE workforce is relatively new to their current role: 24 per cent of the staff have been in their position for less than a year, and another 33 per cent have been in it for one to three years. These two categories combined make up 57 per cent of the observations. Progress Tutors (34 per cent) and Trainers (30 per cent) have the highest rates of individuals with less than a year of experience in their current role.

This result is in line with wider concerns raised about retention challenges in the FE workforce, with more than half of staff staying in their roles for less than three years (ranging from 54 per cent of Teachers to 72 per cent of Progress Tutors). It is, however, important to note that a staff member progressing to a new role within their current provider – which would not present a retention concern – will equally appear to be new to their current role[17]. This further highlights the complexity of understanding FE retention challenges and the need for clear data to effectively understand the FE workforce.

,

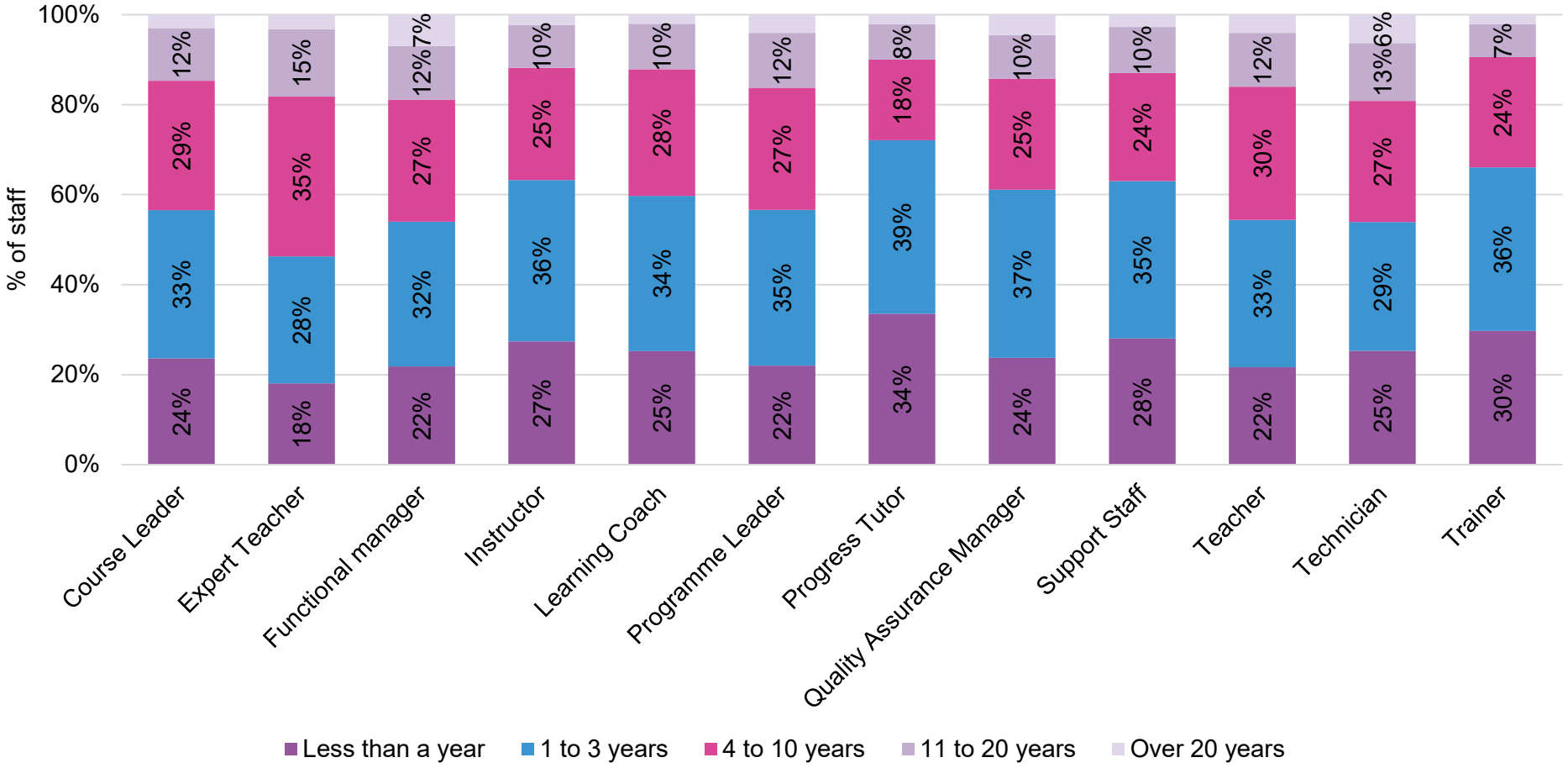
[17] It was not possible to identify these instances in the FEWDC data available for our analysis.

Figure 7: Age distribution by York Consulting job role



Source: FEWDC.
Notes: Data from 2021/22 and 2022/23. Some figures are rounded to maintain statistical disclosure control. Labels for values less than five per cent have been omitted for legibility

Figure 8: Length of time in current position, by York Consulting job role



Source: FEWDC
Notes: Data from 2021/22 and 2022/23. Labels for values less than five per cent have been omitted for legibility

On the other hand, there is a substantial minority of staff who have remained in their current roles over a longer period: 15 per cent of the workforce have been in their current role over 11 years, and an extra four per cent over 20 years. Expert Teachers present the highest proportion of individuals in their position for 20 years or more across roles: 15 per cent is in this group, followed by Technicians (13 per cent).

While individuals are generally relatively new in their current positions, they typically have more experience working in FE as shown by Figure 9. However, data for time worked in FE needs to be treated with caution as there are a large number of missing responses (roughly a third of the sample), and it is not possible to tell how representative this data is of the wider FE workforce.

Figure 9 shows that, among those staff with information, roughly a third of the individuals have been in the sector from 4 to 10 years, and another third has been in it for 11 years or more. Additionally, there is relatively more variation across roles than there is in the current position data: Progress Tutors, Support Staff and Technicians have the highest proportion of staff with less than one year of experience (16 per cent), while only two per cent of Expert Teachers are on that same category. On the other hand, Quality Assurance Managers are much more experienced with 20 per cent of them having over 20 years of experience, and another 34 per cent having 11 to 20 years. Teachers are very similar to the overall average in every category, with the largest group being the four to ten years (33 per cent).

While data for length of time FE staff have been working in Industry is even more impacted by missing data issues, the data does indicate that while staff are generally new to their current positions, they tend to have also more industry experience.

Together, our analysis suggests that while retention is a challenge in the FE workforce and many staff are new to their current roles, it is still on the whole an experienced workforce.

3.5. Among staff where data is available, seven per cent of Teachers do not have a teaching qualification nor are working towards it

The FEWDC includes a set of questions about the qualifications of staff. However, these questions were not asked for every role, and response rates are poor[18]. Similarly to the data presented in section 3.4, data presented in this section should therefore be treated with caution as it is not possible to establish to what extent it is representative of the wider FE staff population.

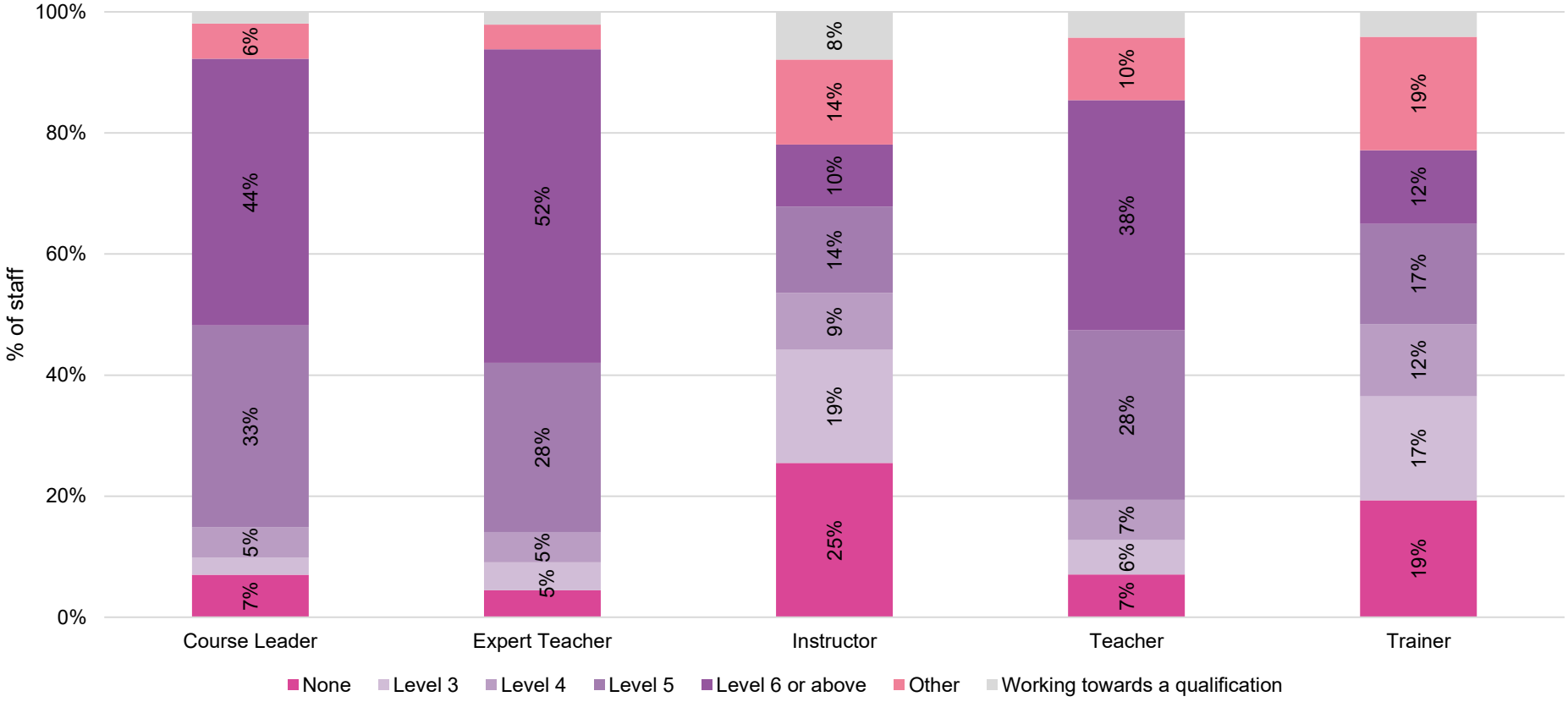
Figure 10 presents the highest teaching qualification achieved by job role. Among staff with data available, the figure shows that only seven per cent of Teachers do not have a teaching qualification at Level 3 or above or are currently working towards one. In contrast, 38 per cent of Teachers have a level 6 or above teaching qualification.

[18] For highest teaching qualification, just less than half of our sample (at 49 per cent) provided a valid response.

Figure 9: Length of time working in FE, by York Consulting job role

Source: FEWDC
Notes: Data from 2021/22. 'Unknown' answers represented 35% of the data and were excluded from the analysis. Labels for percentages under five per cent not presented

Figure 10: Teaching qualification by York Consulting job role



Source: FEWDC
Notes: Data from 2021/22 and 2022/23. Labels for percentages under five per cent not presented

Within the Teachers role, we do find variation: seven per cent of Lecturers, 34 per cent of Practitioners, six per cent of Teachers, and 13 per cent of Tutors do not have a teaching qualification nor are working towards one.

There is, however, substantial differences across roles. Among Instructors, a quarter of their workforce are without a Level 3 qualification nor working towards it. Similarly, this is also the case for one in five Trainers.

While a focus of the Government's commitments in the recent Education and Skills White Paper has been to reform the quality of FE qualifications and professional development support (HM Government, 2025), this data suggests that there may be a particular need to focus on the support and training available for Instructors and Trainers.

3.6. Conclusions

Our analysis highlights that the FE workforce has several distinctive characteristics: two-fifths of the workforce work part-time, a significant proportion of the workforce is approaching retirement, staff tend to be relatively new to their current roles whilst bringing wider experience to their roles. These features highlight the need for a tailored approach to addressing recruitment and retention in FE, as compared to staffing challenges faced by other groups (e.g., secondary school teachers).

4. How do salaries differ across the FE workforce?

In this section, we analyse how salaries differ based on staff characteristics and job roles. We first use descriptive statistics to consider how earnings vary across roles. Second, we draw on econometric analysis to consider the extent to which different factors including differences in job roles are associated with earnings controlling for a rich set of staff characteristics.

4.1. There is variation in salaries within and across teaching roles

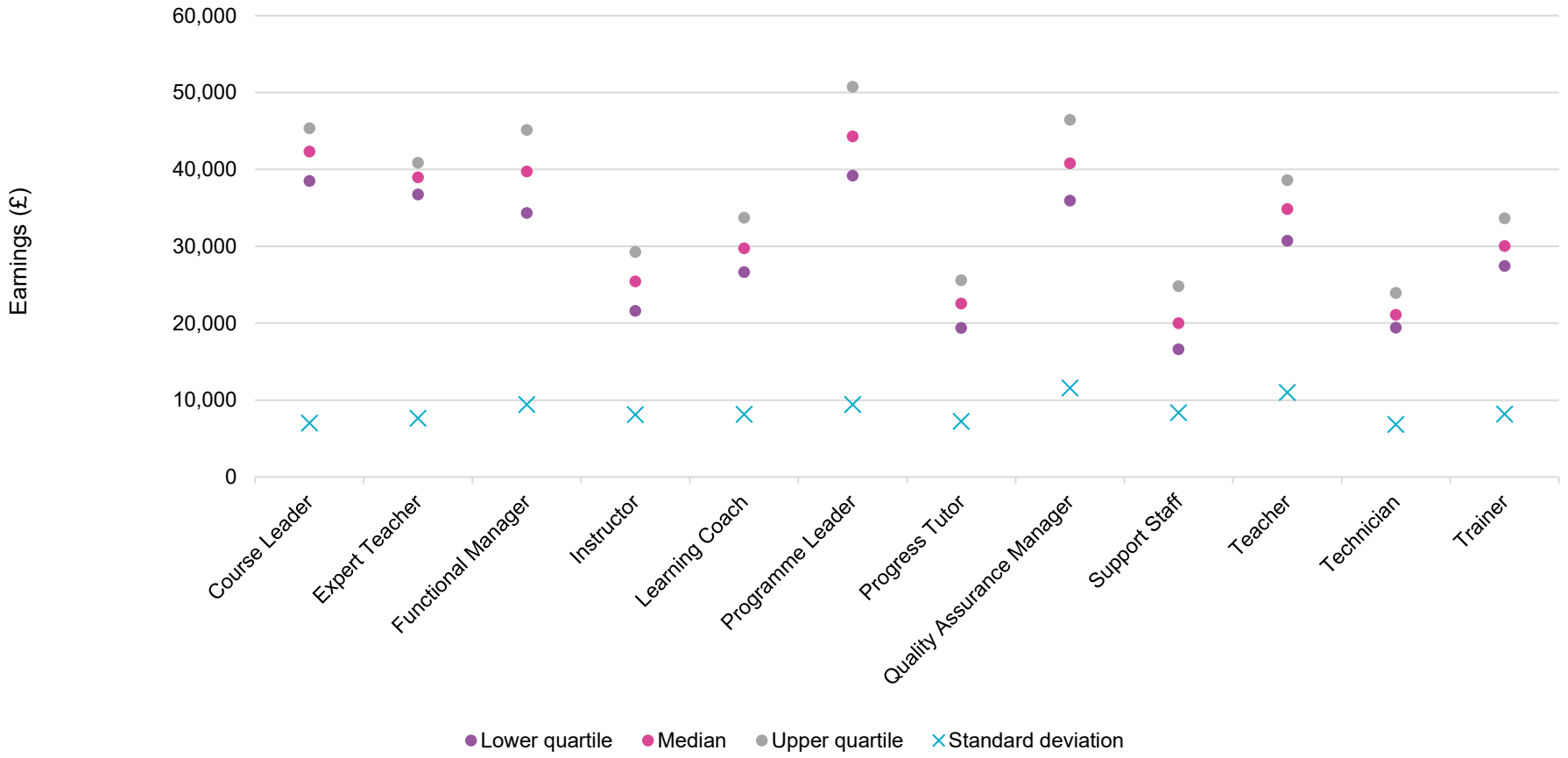
Figure 11 presents the distribution of earnings by role. All earnings are presented in 2022/23 prices. It shows there is variation in salaries both within and across roles. Across non-leadership roles, median earnings roles vary widely from Instructors (£25,452) and Progress Tutors (£25,594) to Teachers (£34,875). Median earnings for middle leadership roles range from Expert Teachers (£38,983) to Programme Leaders (£44,314).

This compares to median secondary school classroom teacher pay of £44,643 in 2022/23 (GOV.UK, 2024b), highlighting the large pay differential between the school and FE workforce.

A key reason for this differential between school and FE salaries is the large real terms fall in FE funding over the last decade (Sibieta and Tahir, 2023; Drayton *et al.*, 2025). In addition, the pay setting process differs between schools and FE settings. Whilst in schools, the Government sets pay for schools run by the local authority (LA), in practice many schools outside of local authority control also use Government pay scales. Unlike in schools, pay for FE college teachers is not set directly by Government. Instead, the Association of Colleges (AoC) provides recommendations on FE teacher pay to its member colleges based on the funding settlement, but colleges are responsible for setting pay scales themselves. These pay scales do not reflect the wide variety of roles in FE colleges but are rather streamlined across four categories: 'unqualified lecturer', 'qualified lecturer', 'advanced teacher and training' and 'leadership and management'.

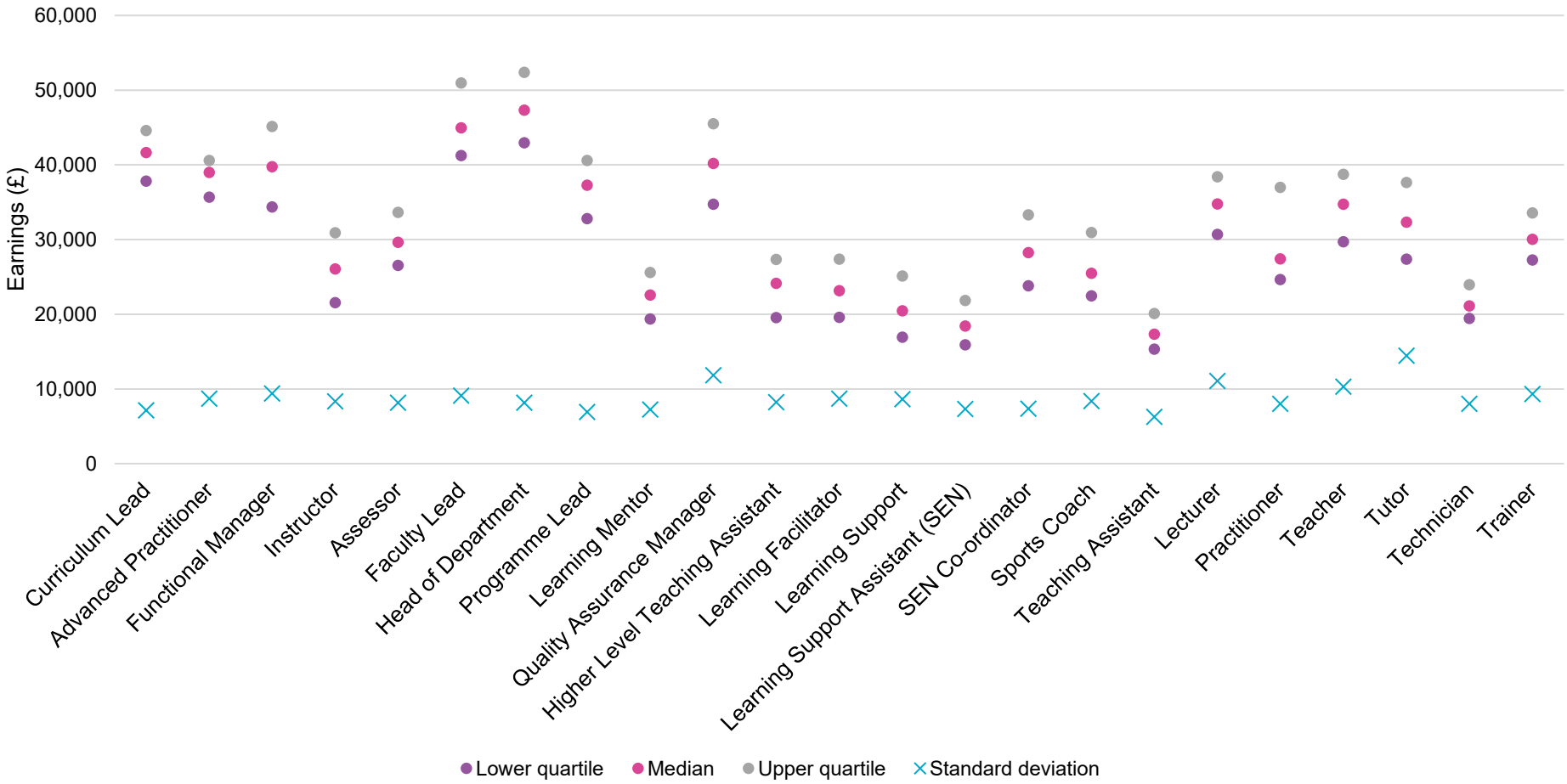
Figure 11 (and Table 1 in the Appendix) also highlights there exists a wide range of earnings, particularly for middle leadership positions. Programme Leaders, Functional Managers, and Quality Assurance managers have differences of over £10,000 between individuals located in the lower (25th percentile) and upper (75th percentile) quartiles of the earning distribution. Within other roles, Expert Teacher stands out as the role with the smallest difference (£4,125). Instructors, Teachers and Trainers have earning gaps of around £7,000 between individuals in the 25th and 75th percentiles. This suggests that staff in FE may have limited pay progression opportunities within certain roles (either having the same role in the same provider or moving to same role in another provider).

Figure 11: Median earnings by York Consulting role



Source: FEWDC
Notes: Data from 2022/23

Figure 12: Median earnings by FEWDC sub-role



Source: FEWDC
Notes: Data from 2022/23

At the sub-role level, as shown in Figure 12 (and Table 2 in Appendix B), we also find variation between and within positions. Focusing on the sub-roles that make up the Teacher role (Lecturers, Practitioners, Teachers and Tutors), Teachers (£34,718) have very similar median earnings compared to Lecturers (£34,757), which again suggests there may be scope for streamlining across sub-roles. Tutors have lower earnings (£32,347), whilst the lowest paid teaching sub-role is Practitioners (£27,405).

However, there is a wide range of variability within sub-roles: Practitioners in the upper quartile of the pay distribution have earnings which are comparable to other teaching sub-roles, and this is due to the relatively wide range of salaries among Practitioners (which has the largest gap between the upper and lower quartile, £12,337). This could indicate that the job title 'Practitioner' may be applied to staff in relatively diverse and varied roles.

To account for the fact that differences in staff salaries across the FE workforce may reflect differences in staff characteristics (e.g., age) or role characteristics (e.g., contract type), we use regression analysis to compare how the salaries of different roles compare to Teachers, when a wide range of staff characteristics are accounted for. This allows us to compare salaries without the differences associated to the characteristics we can account for, which provides a more direct comparison.

Figure 13 shows that, compared to Teachers, all job roles have statistically different earnings[19] (where purple denotes that the earnings of the category are statistically significant at the five per cent level). For ease of interpretation, and since our dependent variable is the logarithm of annualised earnings in 2022/23, we do not present regression coefficients but an approximation of the difference in salary for a given role compared to the base category (Teachers)

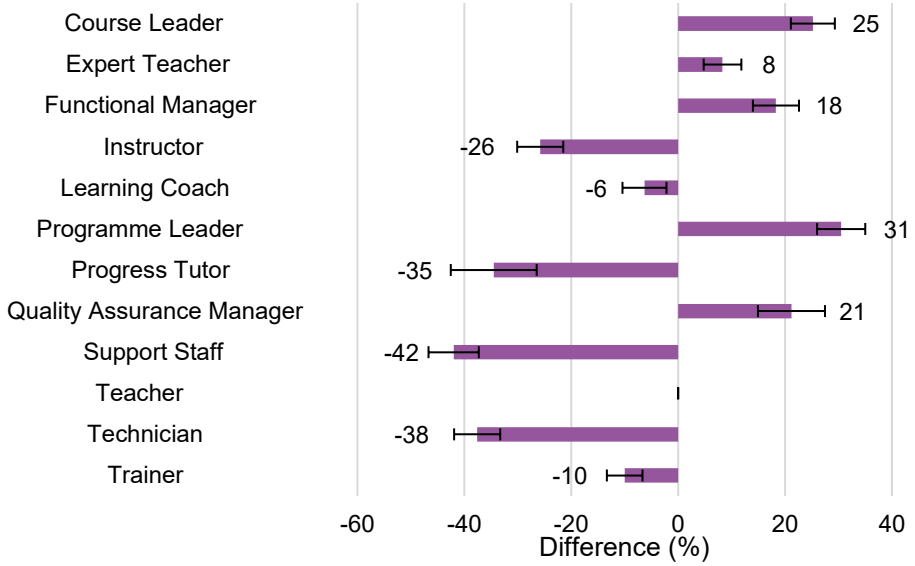
For example, the negative 10 per cent for Trainers shown in Figure 13 comes from a regression coefficient of -0.1, which can be approximated and interpreted as Trainers earning around 10 per cent less than Teachers, holding everything else constant. Similarly, and as might be expected, Instructors (26 per cent less) and Progress Tutors (35 per cent less) also have substantial negative earning gaps compared to Teachers.

On the other hand, roles with leadership or management responsibilities attract a premium: with Expert Teachers earning about eight per cent more than Teachers, Course Leaders earning around 25 per cent more and Programme Leaders earning around 30 per cent more.

The analysis of the sub-roles, shown in Figure 14, shows significant variation in salaries across sub-roles. For instance, within the Teacher role, Lecturers have similar earnings to Teachers, but Practitioners and Tutors earn significantly less.

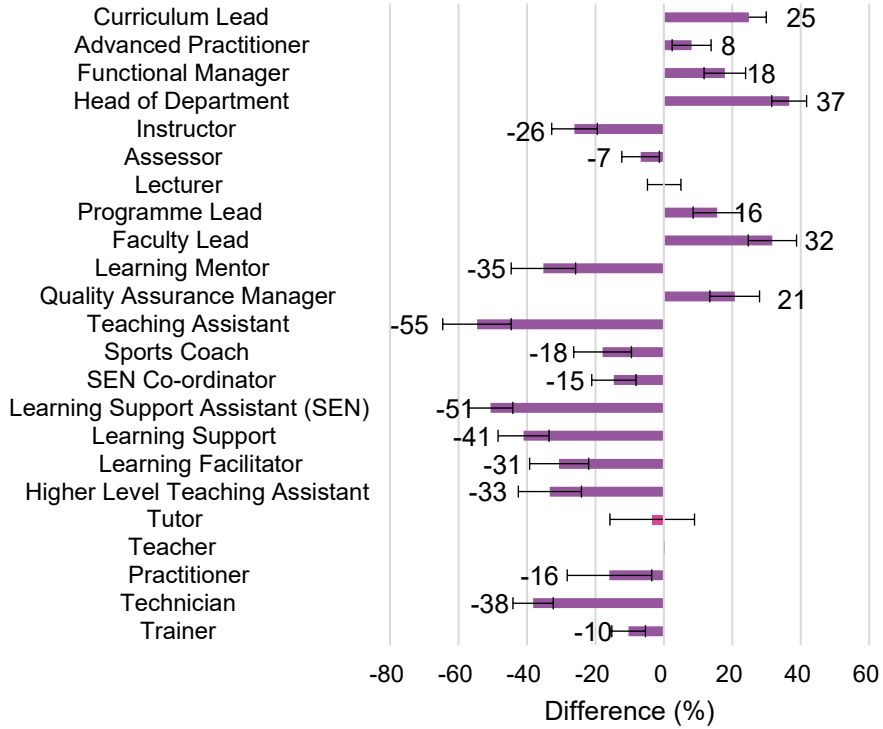
[19] We control for gender, age, highest qualification in English and maths, region, ethnicity, contract type, and teaching qualification. We exclude observations with more than one role.

Figure 13: Regression estimate of percentage difference compared to base category in salary by York Consulting role



Source: FEWDC
Notes: Data from 2022/23. Teacher is the base role. We exclude observations with more than one role. Errors clustered at the college level. Dark purple indicates significance at the five per cent level. Percentage difference estimated from regression coefficients

Figure 14: Regression estimate of percentage difference compared to base category in salary by FEWDC sub-role



Source: FEWDC
Notes: Data from 2022/23. Teacher is the base sub-role. We exclude observations with more than one role. Errors clustered at the college level. Dark purple indicates significance at the five per cent level. Percentage difference estimated from regression coefficients

Other sub-roles, as expected, have different salaries. Instructors earn almost 30 per cent less than Teachers, and Trainers earn 10 per cent less.

In turn, salary data shows a clear potential for streamlining between Teacher and Lecturer sub-roles. However, the salary differentials which exists across other sub-roles suggest that if consolidation across roles is pursued, careful consideration would need to be given to ensuring this is coherent.

4.2. The relationship between FE salaries and other teacher characteristics

This sub-section presents results based on regressions that only include roles with a teaching element and main subject taught (Expert Teachers, Teachers, Instructors, and Trainers). This enables us to explore the role that different staff characteristics may play in the differences in earnings across staff in their FE teaching role.

4.2.1. There is not that much variation between subjects, despite wide variation in recruitment challenges

Figure 15 presents differences in salaries by subject taught, as compared to staff teaching 'Health, Public Services and Care'[20]. It shows that there is not a statistically significant salary premium for teaching most subjects in the FE workforce with four exceptions: Engineering and Manufacturing Technologies (3.2 per cent); Construction, Planning, and the Built Environment (2.2 per cent); Arts, Media, and Publishing (3.4 per cent), and Preparation for Life and Work (4.3 per cent less).

Vacancy data collected in the FEWDC suggests that these results only partially align with the difficulty of filling certain positions, as outlined by Figure 16. The two subjects with the highest proportion of unfilled vacancies[21] in 2022/23 are Construction, Planning and the Built Environment (at 34 per cent of unfilled vacancies) and Engineering and Manufacturing Technologies (at 29 per cent). On the other hand, the lowest vacancy rate corresponds to Preparation for Life and Work (at 13 per cent). Arts, Media, and Publishing is also amongst the subjects with a relatively low proportion of unfilled vacancy (17 per cent).

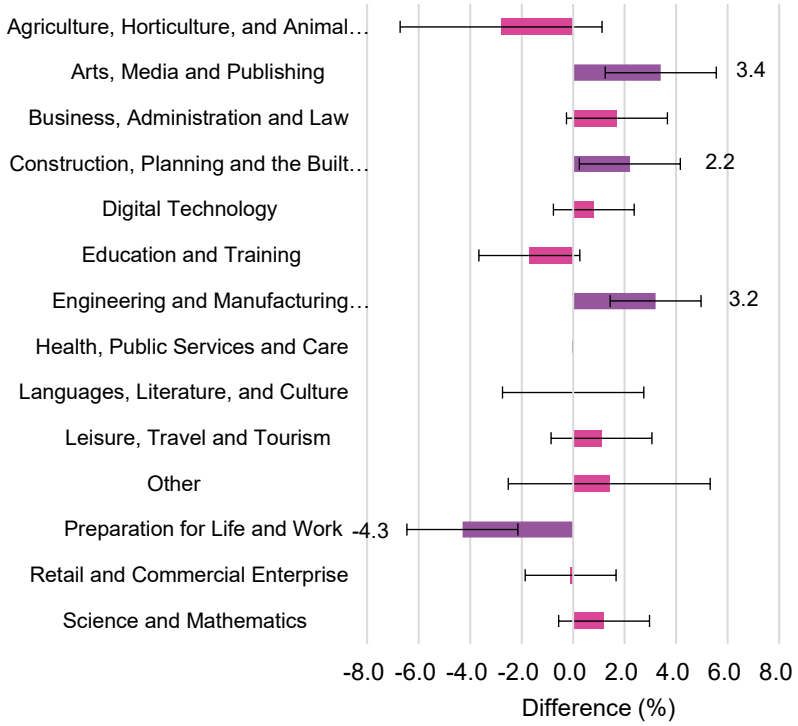
One explanation for why Arts, Media and Publishing salaries attract a premium relative to other subjects could be that it has a relatively greater mix of academic subjects (at 50 per cent) – such that there may be more of a need to compete with secondary teacher salaries. However, we do not observe a significant premium associated with other subjects that have a large proportion of academic subjects (e.g., Science and Mathematics).

More generally, Figure 15 shows that despite the wide variability in the extent to which it is challenging to recruit for vacancies, salaries in the FE sector do not reflect this. That is, salary differentiation does not appear to be utilised for subjects proving more difficult to recruit to.

[20] All statistical models require a baseline comparison. 'Health, Public Services and Care' was chosen as a popular subject choice among learners.

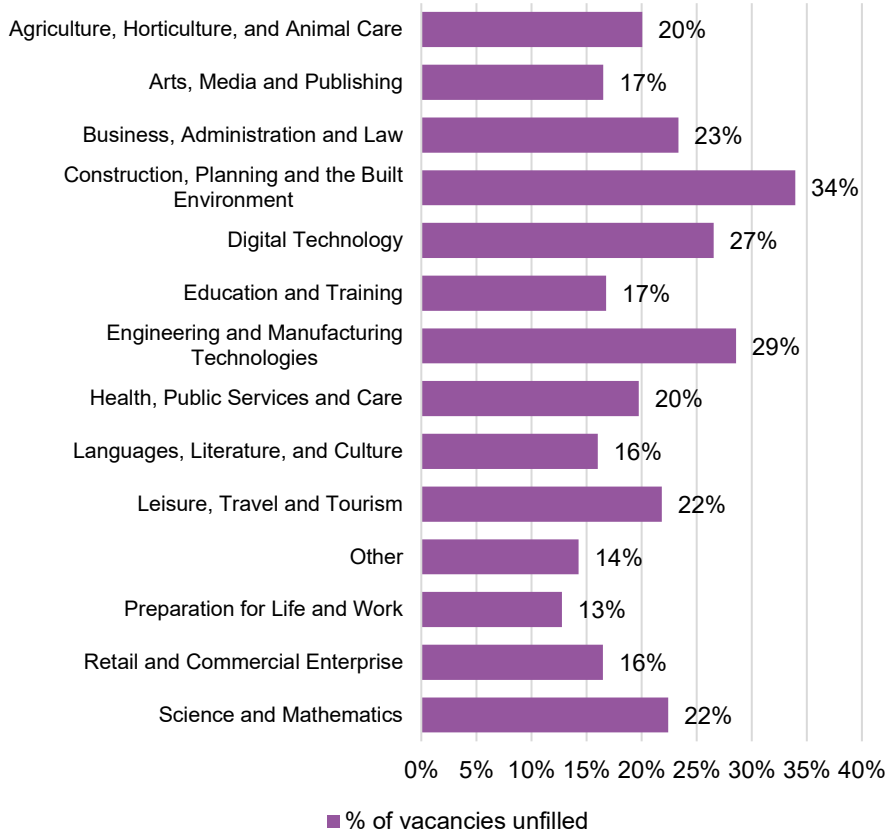
[21] Unfilled vacancies correspond to the number of teaching vacancies not filled at the end of the academic year per 100 teaching positions, as defined by the DfE.

Figure 15: Regression estimate of percentage difference compared to base category by subject



Source: FEWDC
Notes: Data from 2022/23. 'Health, Public Services, and Care' is the base subject. We exclude observations with more than one role. Errors clustered at the college level. Dark purple indicates significance at the five per cent level. Percentage difference estimated from regression coefficients

Figure 16: Vacancy rates by subject



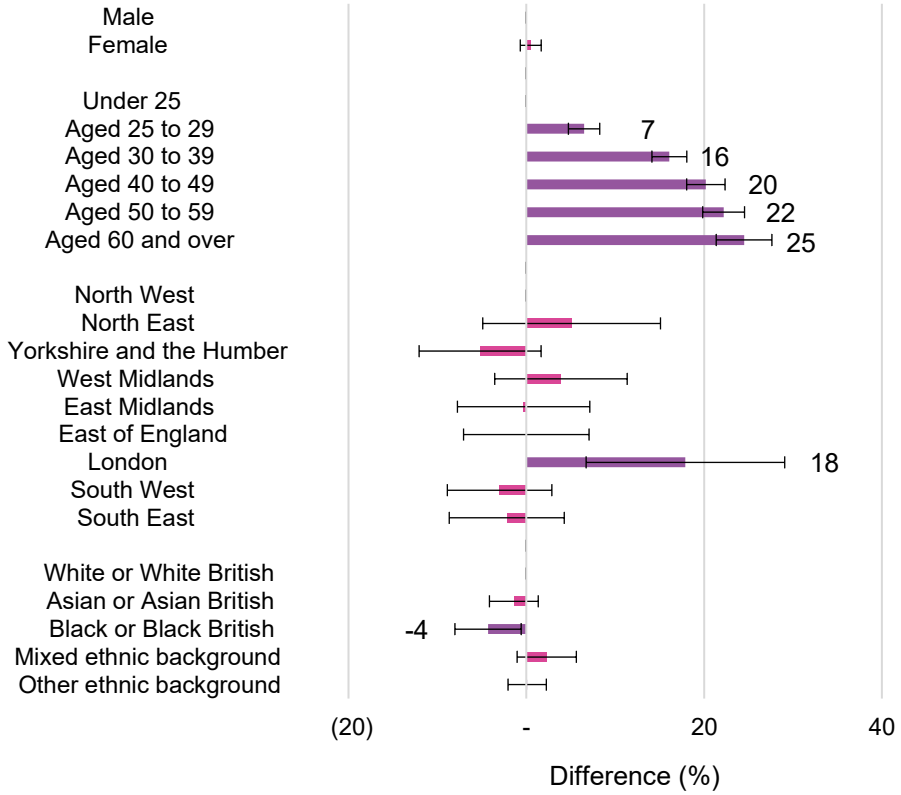
Source: FEWDC
Notes: Vacancy data from 2022/23

4.2.1.FE salaries do vary by other staff characteristics

Figure 17 presents regression estimates for differences across key staff characteristics for staff in teaching roles. It shows that:

- **Earnings increase systematically with age.** While the FEWDC does collect data on FE and industry experience, the coverage of the data is poor (as discussed in section 3.5) such that it could not be included in econometric analysis. In this context, age is likely to be acting as a proxy for experience (which might include both FE and/or industry experience). As compared to staff under 25 years of age, staff aged 25 to 29 had earnings which were approximately seven per cent higher, increasing to 16 per cent higher by age 30 and 20 per cent higher by age 40. The oldest group, aged 60 and over, are making 25 per cent more than their youngest colleagues. This suggests that FE staff do have scope for salary progression within teaching roles.
- **Only London (at 18 per cent higher) has significantly different earnings to the North West**. This is broadly in line with the London premium in the school workforce (at 20 per cent in inner London and 10 per cent in outer London premium compared to the North West (GOV.UK, 2025), reflecting the higher costs of living in London.
- **Women and men have similar earnings.** Women in the FE workforce have similar earnings compared to men, after controlling for a set of characteristics.

Figure 17: Regression estimate of percentage difference compared to base category by staff characteristics



Source: FEWDC
Notes: Data from 2022/23. Male, North West, White and under 25 are the base category. We exclude observations with more than one role. Errors clustered at the college level. Dark purple indicates significance at the five per cent level. Percentage difference estimated from regression coefficients

- **Earnings differentials between ethnicities warrant further investigation**. While Black Teachers earn more than their White counterparts on average, once subject mix, geography and other factors are accounted for, we find that black staff members earn significantly – all else being equal – less than their White counterparts. While this finding merits further investigation, given that Black staff in FE earn more on average before other factors are accounted for, it is more likely than not that this finding is being driven by other compositional differences between ethnic groups that have not been fully accounted for (e.g., it may be that Black staff working in London are more likely to be working in outer London areas). Nonetheless, further research is needed to explore this result.

4.3. Conclusions

Overall, this section shows that most of the differences in salaries are between roles and sub-roles in the FE workforce, rather than within roles. It highlights the clear scope for streamlining between certain sub-roles.

While there are differences across staff and subject characteristics, these are generally not large. Salaries do not tend to vary significantly by subject taught, despite differences in recruitment challenges across subjects. While salaries vary significantly by age (which is likely to proxy for experience) and London, we do not observe significant gender differences or significant differences in salaries between other regions.

5. Conclusions

Strengthening teacher recruitment and retention is a key challenge facing post-16 education.

Our analysis highlights that there are a wide range of roles and sub-roles reported across the FE workforce. While most settings are likely to require staff who fulfil similar functions, the extent to which colleges report having different roles points for the potential to have more consistency in how job roles are structured and described across the sector. Producing a clear and comprehensive set of job descriptions for roles in FE workforce could be a first step towards achieving this consistency.

Salary differentials between roles and sub-roles suggest there may be clear starting points for simplifying the structure of the FE workforce. However, they also highlight the careful thought needed to ensure coherence in any new structure. For example, while staff recorded as Teachers and Lecturers in the FEWDC have comparable earnings, Practitioners typically earn less although there is a wide range of salaries among individuals in this role. This suggests that there would be merit in further developing our understanding of how the Practitioner role varies across different providers.

Our analysis also highlights that salaries generally do not appear to differ greatly across staff characteristics. Despite substantial differences in the rates of unfilled vacancies between subjects, limited salary differentiation is used for subjects proving to be more difficult to recruit for. In addition, we do not observe significant differences by staff gender, or across regions (except for London). Although as might be expected, older staff (where age is likely to be acting as proxy for FE and industry experience) do tend to earn more.

This report also emphasises the distinct characteristics of the FE workforce: two-fifths of the workforce work part-time, a significant proportion of the workforce is approaching retirement, and staff tend to be relatively new to their current roles whilst bringing wider experience to their roles. These features highlight the need for a tailored approach to addressing recruitment and retention challenges in FE which takes into account the demographic profile of the workforce. The age profile of the workforce indicates that, without action, existing challenges may only be exacerbated.

Finally, whilst our report is among the first to draw on the novel FEWDC, our research has flagged key quality issues and limitations of the data. These include poor coverage of certain data fields, and the lack of complete data for all providers. It is crucial that these are addressed and prioritised going forward to support the Government's ambitions set out in the recent Post-16 Education and Skills White Paper.

References

Chantler-Hicks, L. (2025) 'The shapeshifting 6,500 teachers pledge', *Schools Week*, 4 July. Available at: https://schoolsweek.co.uk/the-shapeshifting-6500-teachers-pledge/ (Accessed: 4 March 2026).

Cowen, G. and Wilson, P. (2022) *Research into technical education teaching roles*. Available at: https://www.gatsby.org.uk/app/uploads/sites/2/2025/07/researchintotechnicaleducationteachingroles.pdf (Accessed: 4 March 2026).

Drayton, E. *et al.* (2025) *Annual report on education spending in England: 2024-25*. Available at: https://ifs.org.uk/sites/default/files/2025-01/IFS-REPORT-EDUCATION-SPENDING-2024-2025.1.pdf (Accessed: 4 March 2026).

Flemons, L. *et al.* (2024) *Building a stronger FE college workforce. How improving pay and working conditions can help support FE college teacher supply*. Available at: https://www.nfer.ac.uk/publications/building-a-stronger-fe-college-workforce-how-improving-pay-and-working-conditions-can-help-support-fe-college-teacher-supply/ (Accessed: 4 March 2026).

GOV.UK (2024a) 'Further education workforce: academic year 2022/23'. Available at: https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/further-education-workforce/2022-23 (Accessed: 4 March 2026).

GOV.UK (2024b) 'School workforce in England: reporting year 2023'. Available at: https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/school-workforce-in-england/2023 (Accessed: 4 March 2026).

GOV.UK (2025) *School workforce in England: reporting year 2024*. Available at: https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/school-workforce-in-england/2024 (Accessed: 4 March 2026).

HM Government (2025) *Post-16 education and skills*. Available at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/68f518ee06e6515f7914c7ce/Post-16_Education_and_Skills_white_paper_Accessible_Version.pdf (Accessed: 4 March 2026).

Sibieta, L. and Tahir, I. (2023) *What has happened to college teacher pay in England?* The IFS. Available at: https://ifs.org.uk/sites/default/files/2023-03/What-has-happened-to-college-teacher-pay-in-England.pdf (Accessed: 4 March 2026).

Smith, V. and Husband, G. (2024) *Teacher recruitment and retention challenges in the further education and skills sector: lessons and solutions from international perspectives*. Available at: https://sure.sunderland.ac.uk/id/eprint/17975/3/Guest%20editorial%20-%20teacher%20recruitment%20and%20retention%20v4.pdf (Accessed: 4 March 2026).

Technical Appendix

This research draws on the 2021/22 and 2022/23 waves of the Further Education Workforce Data Collection (FEWDC), which at the time of analyses were the only ones currently available in the Office for National Statistics' Secure Research Service. The database contains information at the individual level regarding college, staff, and position characteristics, including salary, contract type, and working pattern.

Our focus is on the staff working in General Further Education colleges (including tertiary), so we exclude all other types of establishments. Besides, we exclude from the analysis colleges that did not complete the survey[22], as they only have information at the college level but not for individual staff members. The rationale for focusing on FE colleges only is it enables us to compare roles across a similar set of providers as an initial step towards building a greater understanding of the FE workforce. General FE colleges are also the bigger employers in the FE workforce, as compared to other types of providers.

Due to data limitations, we also exclude staff with zero-hour, variable, or other type of contracts. Thus, we focus of individuals contracted under permanent or fixed-term contracts (around 87 per cent of records).

In the FEWDC, individuals can have up to five different job-sub roles. We classify each of them that are within scope to a York role based on their main sub-role.

Staff can be contracted to more than one provider, but due to a lack of trackable identification numbers, we cannot identify who these staff are or where else they might be working. We can only observe if they have more than one job sub-role with the same employer. For the same reason, we cannot use the data as a panel and instead we have two independent datasets (one for each year).

To analyse subjects taught in the Further Education sector, we classify subjects into 14 categories. The FEWDC data already contains classifications for the subjects in terms for vocational, academic, and other type. All subject group are in scope for our analysis.

Our main wage variable is the FTE-adjusted annualised payment, truncated to remove outlier observations. We used annualised and adjusted payments to account for part-timers, workers who only worked a fraction of the year, and hourly contracts to have a comparable measure of earnings.

There are some caveats regarding the use of FEWDC. Generally, while the response rate has increased over time, it is still not close to universal. In 2021/22, 75.6 per cent of the providers returned data, and 80.9 per cent in 2022/23.

[22] The response rate to the FEWDC in 2022/23 for General FE colleges including tertiary was 93.6 per cent (GOV.UK, 2024a).

At a more specific level, this data has some quality issues concerning a few indicators or variables as highlighted throughout the report. For instance, the DfE notes that the FE experience and industry experience variables were of poor quality as the responses were missing for a significant proportion of the observations.

In Section 3, we use regressions to better understand the differences in salaries across roles and sub-roles. The dependent variable (FTE-adjusted annualised payment) is transformed using logarithms, and the coefficients can be interpreted as an approximation for the percentage change in salary compared to baseline. These are presented in Figure 11 and Figure 12. Controls include gender, age, highest qualification in English and maths, region, ethnicity, contract type, and teaching qualification. To account for the fact that salaries are related within colleges, standard errors are clustered at the college level. To help compare salaries based on roles or sub-roles, we exclude observations with more than one role since we cannot distinguish how much of their salary comes from each role or sub-role.

Additional data tables

Table 1: Salary statistics by York Consulting roles

Role classification (York Consulting)	Lower quartile	Median	Upper quartile	Standard deviation
Course Leader	38,500	42,348	45,380	7,024
Expert Teacher	36,750	38,983	40,875	7,649
Functional Manager	34,360	39,733	45,132	9,451
Instructor	21,628	25,452	29,283	8,140
Learning Coach	26,645	29,745	33,739	8,145
Programme Leader	39,193	44,314	50,744	9,452
Progress Tutor	19,378	22,569	25,594	7,244
Quality Assurance Manager	35,936	40,805	46,450	11,597
Support Staff	16,621	20,018	24,845	8,379
Teacher	30,743	34,875	38,615	11,001
Technician	19,433	21,104	23,968	6,862
Trainer	27,456	30,052	33,654	8,207

Notes: Year 2022/23. Only individuals with one different role. Salary adjusted by FTE

Table 2: Salary statistics by job sub-role

Job sub-role	Lower quartile	Median	Upper quartile	Standard deviation
Curriculum Lead	37,816	41,649	44,611	7,161
Advanced Practitioner	35,671	38,981	40,581	8,719
Functional Manager	34,357	39,756	45,132	9,408
Instructor	21,568	26,086	30,917	8,363
Assessor	26,544	29,652	33,654	8,151
Faculty Lead	41,237	44,950	50,973	9,101
Head of Department	42,972	47,346	52,387	8,161
Programme Lead	32,800	37,286	40,587	6,914
Learning Mentor	19,378	22,568	25,594	7,251
Quality Assurance Manager	34,735	40,191	45,517	11,826
Higher Level Teaching Assistant	19,548	24,151	27,337	8,251
Learning Facilitator	19,591	23,155	27,391	8,719
Learning Support	16,924	20,459	25,133	8,634
Learning Support Assistant (SEN)	15,920	18,421	21,850	7,312
SEN Co-ordinator	23,815	28,253	33,304	7,370
Sports Coach	22,482	25,490	30,940	8,389
Teaching Assistant	15,334	17,328	20,110	6,286
Lecturer	30,688	34,757	38,400	11,072
Practitioner	24,663	27,405	37,000	8,025
Teacher	29,722	34,718	38,751	10,315
Tutor	27,379	32,347	37,662	14,468
Technician	19,433	21,104	23,968	8,008
Trainer	27,280	30,052	33,566	9,325

Notes: Year 2022/23. Only individuals with one different role. Salary adjusted by FTE

NFER
National Foundation for Educational Research

Evidence for excellence in education

Public

The Mere, Upton Park, Slough, Berks SL1 2DQ
T: +44 (0)1753 574123 • F: +44 (0)1753 691632 • enquiries@nfer.ac.uk

www.nfer.ac.uk

NFER ref. FEJT

ISBN: 978-1-916567-54-2