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Teacher Labour Market in England

Annual Report 2025

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Teacher recruitment and retention in England is not improving and there are growing signs of shortages having a negative impact on schools and pupils. The Government now faces a critical 'now or never' moment for delivering on its pledge to address teacher shortages by recruiting 6,500 additional teachers by the end of the parliament.

Jack Worth, School Workforce Lead

Introduction

The latest data shows that teacher recruitment and retention in England remain in a perilous state and represents a substantial on-going risk to the quality of education. Recruitment to initial teacher training (ITT) has been persistently below target in most secondary subjects and primary since the pandemic and the latest data shows no change. Very little progress has been made on improving teacher retention or reducing teacher workload since 2019. The Government faces a critical moment for delivering on its pledge to address teacher shortages by recruiting 6,500 additional teachers.

The aim of the National Foundation for Educational Research's (NFER) annual series of Teacher Labour Market reports, funded by the Nuffield Foundation, is to monitor progress towards meeting the teacher supply challenge. Now in its seventh year, the report summarises new research and key trends in teacher recruitment, retention, pay and working conditions and points towards policy actions that are likely to have the greatest impact on addressing the challenges.

We use Department for Education (DfE) data on teacher training applications and enrolments to show how last year's ITT recruitment compared to target and what recruitment is likely to look like this year. We also explore trends in teacher retention using data from the DfE's School Workforce Census (SWC). Trends in recruitment and retention are driven by changes in the competitiveness of pay and working conditions in teaching compared to other jobs. We therefore also analyse trends in pay and working conditions, primarily using findings from the DfE's Working Lives of Teachers and Leaders (WLTL) survey, Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings (ASHE) and the Labour Force Survey (LFS).

The WLTL is a crucial source of sector-specific information on teachers' workload and perceptions of their working conditions while ASHE and the LFS enable us to compare teachers' pay and working conditions to graduates in other occupations with similar age, gender and region profiles. Further details about the data sources used and variable definitions are in a separate methodology appendix.



Key findings and recommendations

Postgraduate secondary recruitment was nearly **40 per cent** below target in 2024/25 while primary missed its target for the **third consecutive** year

At least 7 out of 17 secondary subjects are forecast to under-recruit in 2025/26

In 2022/23, **9.6 per cent** of teachers left state-sector teaching, slightly higher than pre-pandemic.

The Labour Government's pledge to recruit 6,500 additional teachers comes against the backdrop of a teaching workforce that has failed to keep pace with pupil numbers over the last decade.

Secondary pupil numbers grew by 15 per cent from 2015/16 to 2023/24 while the number of secondary teachers grew by three per cent. This disparity is linked to the worsening secondary teacher supply challenge over the last decade.

Recruitment into postgraduate secondary initial teacher training (ITT) courses has remained substantially below target since the pandemic, and our forecast suggests under-recruitment will continue into 2025/26.

Secondary ITT recruitment in 2024/25 reached 62 per cent of what the DfE estimated it needed to meet the demand from schools. This was slightly higher than the previous year, however the increases were mainly due to bursary changes in some shortage subjects, rather than a widespread increase in interest in teaching. Twelve out of seventeen subjects recruited below target last year, continuing the post-pandemic trend of severe under-recruitment for secondary.

For postgraduate primary, recruitment reached 88 per cent of target, the third consecutive year of under-recruitment for primary and the start of a worsening trend.

This year's postgraduate applications data, up to February 2025, suggests that under-recruitment in both secondary and primary is likely to continue in 2025/26. Overall secondary recruitment this year is forecast to reach two-thirds of assumed targets, with primary around 86 per cent of target.

Teacher leaving rates have remained persistently high since the pandemic.

In 2022/23, 9.6 per cent of teachers left teaching in the state sector. This was slightly lower than the previous year but marginally higher than the year before the pandemic.

The leaving rate for early-career teachers (ECTs) is higher than the average leaving rate for all teachers. The latest retention data and recent NFER evaluation evidence from the early roll-out suggest that the impact of the Early Career Framework (ECF) on retention may be, at best, modest.

There are growing signs of teacher shortages in schools, which risk impacting the quality of education for pupils.

Teacher under-supply can impact schools and pupils in a number of different ways. For instance, schools may carry more unfilled vacancies for teaching staff as they find themselves unable to hire new teachers to respond to growing pupil numbers or to replace teachers who have left. Data shows that the number of teaching vacancies in schools per thousand teachers in service has doubled since before the pandemic.

Schools may also increase class sizes when insufficient high-quality teachers are available to be employed. Since 2015/16, overall secondary class sizes have increased by 10 per cent while the proportion of secondary pupils in a class exceeding 30 pupils in size has increased from 10 to 15 per cent.

Worsening teacher shortages also impact how schools deploy their existing teachers. Schools have become more reliant on unqualified teachers to fill gaps in their workforce, while non-specialist teachers teaching maths and physics has become more common.

The impacts of teacher shortages tend to be more acute in schools serving more deprived pupils.

Leaving and vacancy rates in the most-deprived schools are higher than in the least-deprived. Similarly, the proportion of English and maths teaching hours that are taught by subject specialists is around 10 percentage points lower in the most-deprived schools than in the least-deprived.

Policy measures designed to improve teacher supply can therefore play a role in the Government's wider social mobility objectives. More broadly, these differences also underscore the vital need for clear, granular data to understand the specific nature of teacher shortages in areas where they may be better or worse than others.

In 2023/24, **15 per cent** of secondary pupils were in classes of more than 30, up from 10 per cent in 2015/16.

The proportion of physics teaching hours taught by physics specialists has fallen by **three percentage points** over the last six years

The proportion of maths teaching hours taught by maths specialists is **12 percentage points** lower in the most-deprived schools than the least-deprived.

Last year's 5.5 per cent pay rise, coupled with the previous Government's introduction of £30,000 starting salaries, have returned starting salaries to 2010/11 levels in real terms.

However, teacher pay growth at all scale points has lagged behind pay growth in the wider labour force, leading to a loss of competitiveness against the wider UK labour force, particularly for more experienced teachers.

The DfE's proposed 2.8 per cent rise for 2025/26 is similar to Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR) forecasts for earnings growth in fiscal year 2025/26. This would lead teacher pay to grow in line with average earnings next year, which would avoid a further loss in competitiveness next year but also be a missed opportunity to make further gains on teacher pay. The DfE have indicated that next year's pay award may also not be fully funded by the Government, which would add significant additional financial pressure, increasing existing deficits and pushing more schools into a deficit.

Over the longer term, the OBR indicates that average earnings are forecast to rise by 6.1 per cent from 2026/27 to 2028/29. Total teacher pay growth will therefore need to exceed 6.1 per cent by the end of the parliament to continue improving competitiveness.

NFER research suggests that, while it would be possible to meet the 6,500-teacher recruitment target with pay increases alone, the cost to do so may be unlikely to offer the best value for money. Research shows that financial incentives targeted at subjects and areas facing the greatest challenges, such as bursaries and early career retention payments (ECRPs), are cost-effective policy tools for improving teacher recruitment and retention alongside pay rises, since they can be targeted where action is most needed.

Recommendation 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. The Government should also ensure that the Spending Review delivers rises in the Schools Budget necessary to increase teacher pay by at least 6.1 per cent from 2026/27 to 2028/29.

Recommendation 2: The Government should supplement pay rises with increases in spending on financial incentives targeting shortage subjects.

In 2024/25, real-terms growth in starting salaries since 2010/11 was **6 percentage points** lower than for average UK earnings.

For experienced teachers, it was **15 percentage points** lower.

Teacher pay will have to rise by **6.1 per cent** between 2026/27 and 2028/29 to match forecast average earnings growth by the end of the current parliament.

There have been some small reductions in teacher workload over the last decade. However significant gaps remain between teachers and similar graduates in other jobs.

Policymakers should continue to focus on improving the attractiveness of non-pay factors such as workload. High workload is a key influence for teachers' decisions to leave the profession and research shows that reducing teacher workload may improve retention with low financial cost.

The LFS shows that teachers' working hours and perceptions of their workload have improved slightly since the mid-2010s. However, teachers on average still have longer working hours and more negative perceptions of their workload compared to similar graduates working in other jobs.

The Government's ambitions for other education policy reforms, such as changes to the inspection framework, Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) system and national curriculum and assessment arrangements, involve risks of increasing workload and worsening retention, especially when changes are first implemented. Rolling out policy reforms without losing sight of further reductions in teacher workload will therefore be important for policymakers to consider.

The WLTL survey suggests that administration and lesson planning are key contributors to teacher workload. Evidence from a recent NFER study suggests that generative artificial intelligence (AI) tools like ChatGPT can save teachers time by helping with lesson planning, with no evidence of negative impacts on the quality of materials or teachers' sense of autonomy or creativity.

Recommendation 3: The Government should develop a teacher workload reduction strategy to improve retention that is fully integrated with the wider policy reform agenda.

Recommendation 4: Schools should consider whether and how generative AI tools such as ChatGPT could help improve teachers' planning workload.

During term time in 2023/24, the average teacher worked **five hours per week** longer than similar graduates in other jobs.

Teachers who used ChatGPT to help with their lesson planning spent, on average, **30 per cent** less time on lesson planning than teachers who did not.

Pupil behaviour has become one of the fastest-growing contributors to teacher workload since the pandemic.

Teachers' and leaders' perceptions of pupil behaviour in their school have worsened considerably since 2021/22, while the proportion of teachers who say they spend too much time responding to pupil behaviour incidents has increased substantially.

The drivers of worsening pupil behaviour are complex and multi-faceted, and are likely to be linked in part to pupil mental health and the wider challenges facing the system for supporting pupils with SEND. NFER's 2023 review of teacher workload found that 'more support from outside agencies for specific pupil needs such as SEND support, mental health and safeguarding' was seen by teachers as a key enabler of workload reduction.

A lack of access to flexible working arrangements may be contributing to teachers leaving the profession.

Hybrid and flexible working arrangements continue to remain a common feature of the graduate labour market outside teaching since the pandemic. It is not realistic that teachers will work remotely to the same extent that graduates working in other jobs might be able to. However, flexibilities such as part-time working for those who want it, allowing teachers to use planning, preparation and assessment (PPA) time flexibly at home, or having access to ad-hoc days off, are generally available to some teachers. WLT data suggests that a lack of access to these types of flexible working arrangements may be pushing some teachers out of the profession.

Recommendation 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.

Recommendation 6: School leaders should consider adopting a wider range of flexible working practices in their schools to improve teacher retention.

The proportion of teachers rating pupil behaviour in their schools as 'good' or 'very good' has fallen **13 percentage points** since 2021/22.

The proportion of teachers spending 'too much time' responding to behaviour incidents has increased by **10 percentage points** since 2021/22.





Policy context

The policy context for this year's report is very different from last year's, published in March 2024. The July 2024 general election returned a Labour Government. The party's manifesto recognised the challenge of 'shortages of qualified teachers across the country' and pledged to 'recruit 6,500 new expert teachers in key subjects' (The Labour Party, 2024). It promised to 'get more teachers into shortage subjects, support areas that face recruitment challenges, and tackle retention issues', but did not set out a detailed definition of how this supply target would be measured or delivered. Nonetheless, making the pledge so prominent in its messaging signals that improving teacher supply is a high political priority for the Government.

NFER's December 2024 report '*How to recruit 6,500 teachers?*' concluded that, while assessing how challenging the Government's target is to achieve depends crucially on how it is defined, achieving it appears to be ambitious and not trivial given the current state of teacher supply (Worth and Tang, 2024). Further, achieving the target will require new policy measures that are additional to business-as-usual.

The Government has a significant opportunity at the upcoming Spending Review to secure the resources necessary to deliver this promised improvement in teacher recruitment and retention. Teacher supply policy actions typically take at least a year or two to influence schools' staffing experience. This year is therefore a critical 'now or never' moment for the Government's ability to demonstrate by the end of the parliament that it has delivered this pledge.

The Government also faces choices about what policy actions to prioritise, given the constraints on the public finances. It should aim to prioritise policy actions that are backed by the research evidence to have a positive impact on recruitment and/ or retention, are significant enough in scale and scope to deliver the pledge, and that represent good value for money.

Finally, the Government needs to ensure that its efforts to improve teacher supply are not inadvertently undermined by delivery of its other policy priorities. Both the Curriculum and Assessment Review and the Government's and Ofsted's proposed reforms to school accountability and inspection have the potential to increase teacher workload and worsen retention if not carefully implemented.

Likewise, the Government is also embarking on significant reforms to the special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) system, with a focus on helping more pupils with SEND to have their needs met in mainstream schools. While the reforms could increase support for teachers and improve retention in the long term, they also run the risk of demanding more from teachers to support an increased complexity of pupil need in mainstream classrooms, thereby increasing workload and worsening retention, if rolled out without due care.

Amid the major strategic decisions and substantial policy changes, the regular drumbeat of annual policymaking also continues. The STRB has been asked to give recommendations on teacher pay in 2025/26 to Government, which will be influenced by the current state of teacher recruitment and retention that this report outlines.

The teaching workforce in England has been growing in size for more than a decade but lagged behind the growth in secondary pupil numbers.

The size of the teaching workforce has grown over the last decade, with the total number of teachers in state-sector primary and secondary schools in England rising by about five per cent between 2010/11 and 2023/24. Most of this growth has been in primary, which increased roughly in line with the increase in primary-age pupils during the early 2010s (DfE, 2024h).

However, primary teachers have tended to be easier to recruit than secondary teachers. As this bulge of primary-age pupils moved into secondary, the size of the secondary teacher workforce has not grown at the same rate as secondary pupils. Secondary pupil numbers (adjusted to full-time equivalents (FTE)) grew by 15 per cent between 2015/16 and 2023/24 (DfE, 2025) while the number of FTE-adjusted secondary teachers grew by only three per cent. This disparity is linked to the worsening secondary teacher supply challenge over the last decade.

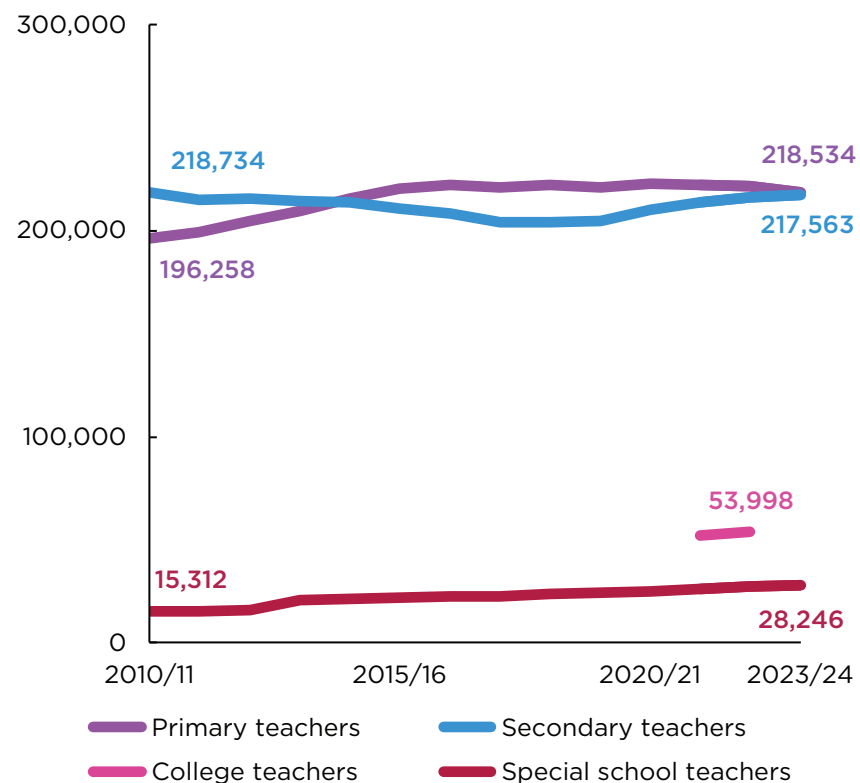
The number of teachers in special schools has grown substantially since 2010/11. However, this is against the backdrop of rising demand for special needs education and significant challenges in teacher supply in the special needs sector (Scott, 2025).

Similarly, teachers in further education (FE) and sixth-form colleges (which are also part of the Government’s 6,500 teacher pledge) (Hansard and UK Parliament, 2025) have also grown between 2021/22 and 2022/23 (the only years of data we have for FE teachers). The bulge of pupils currently moving through the secondary phase will soon move into FE. Projections from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) show that the number of 16-18 year olds in England is forecast to increase by 12 per cent between 2023 and 2028 (Office for National Statistics, 2025b). However, the FE sector is already grappling with its own recruitment and retention challenges (Flemons *et al.*, 2024), making it potentially ill-equipped to accommodate this increase in students without policy attention.

Adding 6,500 additional teachers to the size of the existing workforce of state-sector school and FE teachers would therefore provide a welcome boost, representing a roughly one per cent increase in the size

of the workforce compared to 2022/23 levels. Overall pupil numbers are set to fall over the next five years, suggesting that the ambition to increase teacher numbers over the same period is welcome recognition that previous under-recruitment shortfalls need reversing. While the pledge would be unlikely to fully resolve under-recruitment in all phases and subjects if delivered, it is appropriately stretching and ambitious given the context (Worth and Tang, 2024).

Size of the teaching workforce in England



Note: The number of primary and secondary teachers are FTE-adjusted while for college teachers it represents a headcount.

Source: SWC (2010/11 - 2023/24) and FEWDC (2021/22 - 2022/23)

There are persistent shortfalls in overall postgraduate secondary initial teacher training (ITT) recruitment alongside worsening primary postgraduate recruitment since the pandemic.

Overall, in the 2024/25 cycle, 23,107 teachers were recruited to an ITT course. This was below the 33,355 target number of trainees that the DfE estimated the school system needed to recruit in 2024/25 to meet future staffing needs. Secondary recruitment reached only 62 per cent of target and primary 88 per cent. This continued the trend of consecutive years of severe under-recruitment for secondary and marked the emergence of a new trend of worsening recruitment for primary.

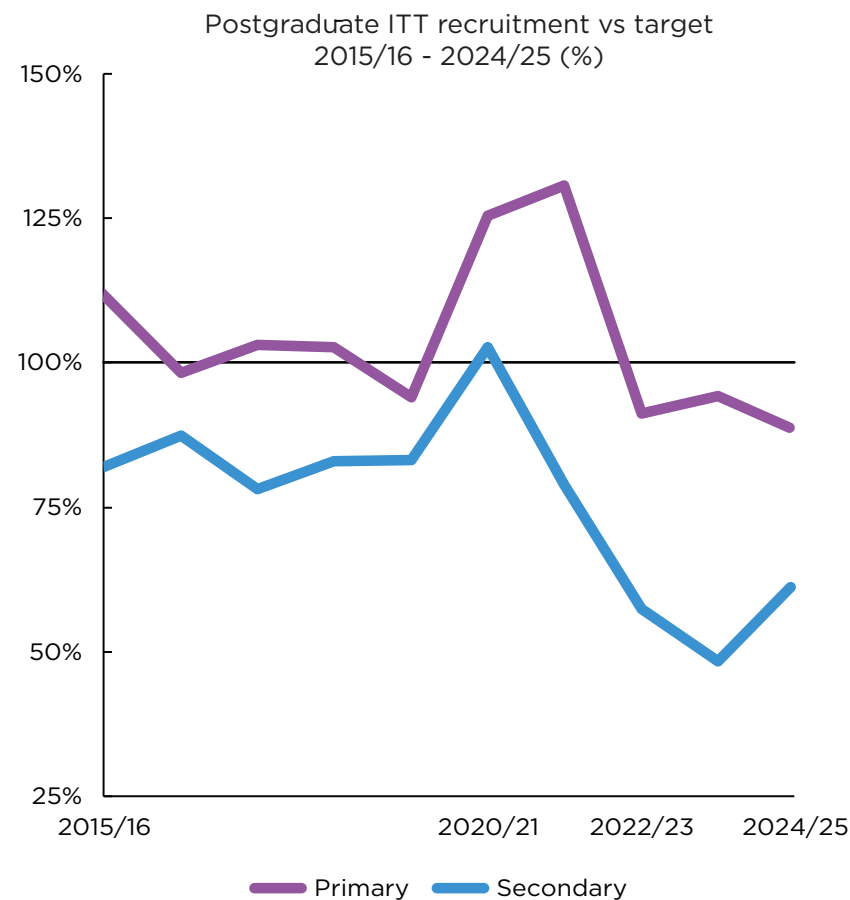
In secondary schools alone, the extent to which the target was missed exceeded the Government’s recruitment pledge. An additional 6,500 secondary recruits would represent a 44 per cent increase in 2024/25 recruitment, but this would only have brought overall secondary recruitment to about 90 per cent of its target.

Despite still being below 100 per cent, 2024/25 secondary recruitment as a proportion of its target was higher than in the previous year. The increase was driven by both higher recruitment (trainee numbers were 16 per cent higher compared to 2023/24) and a fall in the total secondary target (nine per cent lower than 2023/24).

The reduction in the secondary target was driven by more favourable forecasts of the number of returners and teachers new to the state-funded sector, alongside improved retention of secondary teachers (DfE, 2024e). Changes to the DfE’s pupil projections also contributed to this decrease – with the latest forecasts for secondary suggesting that pupil numbers are expected to grow more slowly than previously thought.

For primary, the scale of under-recruitment relative to target in 2024/25 was less severe than in secondary. However, it marked the third year in a row that the primary recruitment target was missed, and by a larger margin than any year since the pandemic.

This was because primary recruitment in 2024/25 fell by about four per cent from the previous year, while the primary recruitment target increased by about two per cent. Despite a projected fall in primary pupil numbers, the DfE increased the primary recruitment target due to lower primary teacher retention than expected.



Postgraduate ITT recruitment for all except five secondary subjects was below target in 2024/25.

While postgraduate ITT recruitment to some secondary subjects was better in 2024/25 than in previous years, most subjects missed their targets, including in the subjects likely to be of particular policy focus for the Government.

The Government’s 6,500 teacher pledge explicitly mentions a focus on ‘key subjects’. While undefined, ‘key subjects’ could refer to science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) subjects, which are often of policy focus and tend to be more challenging to meet recruitment targets.

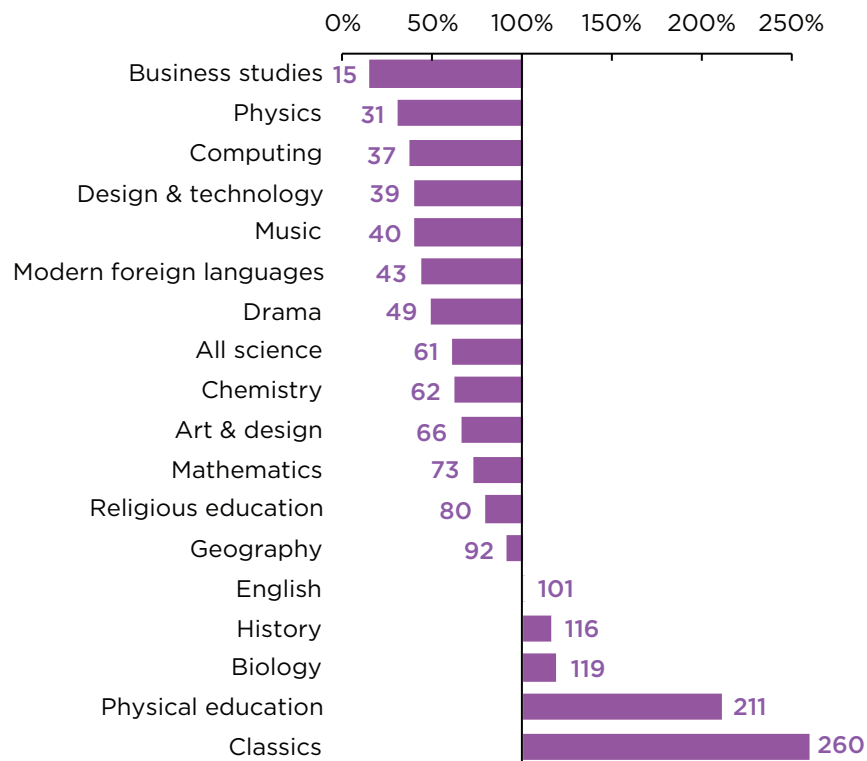
Indeed, in 2024/25, STEM subjects including physics, computing and chemistry, were among those that were the furthest from meeting recruitment targets. The exception to this was biology, which historically tends to recruit well, and which exceeded its target last year. In aggregate, science subjects reached 61 per cent of the total target in 2024/25.

Not all under-recruiting subjects are STEM subjects. Modern foreign languages (MFL) also tend to face significant under-recruitment most years and reached only 43 per cent of their target in 2024/25. Similarly, business studies, which attracts no training bursary, reached only 15 per cent of its target, and design & technology 39 per cent of target.

Compared to 2023/24, some subjects saw an increase in recruitment, such as religious education, geography, art & design, physics, music, design & technology, MFL and mathematics. This was likely driven in part by increased bursaries in each of these subjects (except geography and MFL).

The DfE also made adjustments to its recruitment targets last year, with targets for half of all subjects going up and half going down. The DfE notes that the fall in recruitment targets last year in these subjects was driven by several factors, including expectations of higher numbers of returners and new entrants entering the state sector (DfE, 2024e). Additionally, fewer English, physics and classics teachers left teaching than expected last year.

2024/25 postgraduate ITT recruitment vs target, by subject



Source: DfE ITT census (2024/25)

ITT applications data for 2025/26 suggests postgraduate ITT recruitment this year is likely to be similar to last year, with at least seven out of 17 subjects forecast to under-recruit compared to assumed targets.

NFER’s forecast for postgraduate ITT recruitment in the current cycle (2025/26), based on applications made up to February 2025, suggests that the pattern of under-recruitment in primary and most secondary subjects is likely to continue this year. The numbers of accepted ITT applications made so far this cycle are only slightly different from the same point last year.

For secondary, applications are nine per cent higher than in February 2024, and two per cent lower for primary. This is likely to lead to broadly similar end-of-cycle recruitment this year as last year, but with a slight improvement for secondary (forecast to reach around two-thirds of target) and perhaps a slight worsening for primary (forecast to reach 86 per cent of target).

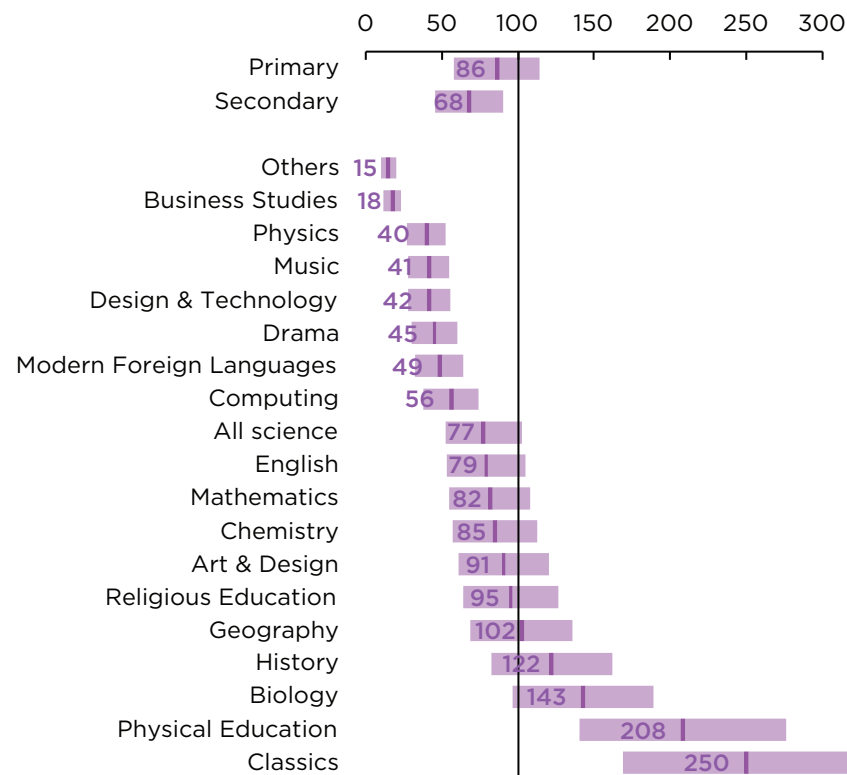
Some subjects appear to be on track for improvements in recruitment this year, such as art & design, chemistry, computing and religious education, which are forecast to be 15 percentage points or more closer to hitting their respective target this year. Biology is also on track for a similar increase and is forecast to exceed its target this year. Meanwhile, business studies, design & technology, history, MFL, mathematics physics and geography are forecast to make modest gains towards their targets, while recruitment for English and physical education is forecast to decline slightly.

There are some uncertainties inherent in this forecast. First, it is based on applications to February, which is still early in the application cycle. This uncertainty is represented by the error bars in the chart. Any policy changes or change to typical application patterns that happen later in the year have the potential to change the outcome. Second, the analysis is based on the 2024/25 targets rather than the targets for 2025/26, which are due to be published in April. Any target changes could alter the picture for affected subjects.

Despite these uncertainties, the applications data suggests we may expect only a modest improvement in overall secondary recruitment this year, with primary and a significant number of secondary subjects still forecast to recruit to levels below their likely targets. Seven subjects are

highly likely to be below target, while four subjects and primary have a reasonable chance of recruiting below target. Only five subjects have a reasonable chance of recruiting at or above target. Recruitment for all science teachers across the three individual subjects is likely to be around 77 per cent of target in 2025/26, which while still below target, would be a significant improvement since 2023/24 when recruitment reached 42 per cent of target.

NFER forecast of 2025/26 ITT Census recruitment vs target (% , based on applications to Feb 2025)



Note: Forecasts represent the central estimate, with the shaded bands showing the predictions’ 95 per cent confidence intervals.

Source: NFER analysis of DfE Apply and UCAS data

Recent recruitment improvements are likely to have been driven mainly by bursary increases in those subjects.

A key tool available to policymakers to support recruitment in shortage subjects is training bursaries. Bursaries are tax-free grants available to recruits starting an ITT course who meet specific criteria, with a higher value bursary available in subjects where shortages are the most acute.

NFER research shows that bursaries are a crucial way to improve ITT recruitment, with a £5,000 bursary increase leading to, on average, a 15 per cent increase in trainees. Bursary recipients are also no more likely to leave the profession than other teachers, so this recruitment boost tends to lead to higher teacher supply over the long run (McLean, Tang and Worth, 2023).

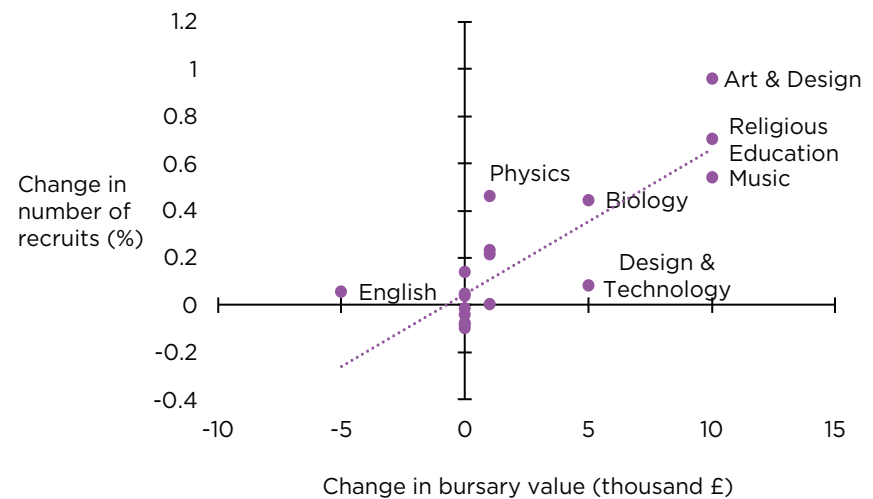
Due to the scale of secondary under-recruitment in recent years, the DfE increased bursaries this year for nine out of 17 secondary subjects (DfE, 2024b). The largest bursary in 2025/26, with a value of £29,000, is available for eligible trainees in physics, mathematics, chemistry and computing. Conversely, the bursary for English trainees was reduced this year, from £10,000 to £5,000, following another £5,000 cut in 2024/25. Business studies trainees continued to be ineligible to receive any bursary at all, despite chronic under-recruitment.

The impact of bursaries is clear in the data. In subjects that received a bursary increase in 2025/26, application numbers up to February 2025 were 20 per cent higher than they were at the same point in 2024, while in subjects that received no increase or a cut, application numbers fell by two per cent.

Indeed, bursaries are likely to have driven most of the growth in secondary recruitment numbers over the last few years. ITT recruitment data for 2023/24 and 2024/25 shows that subjects where bursaries increased by more tended to gain a bigger boost in recruitment, while subjects with no bursary increase or a bursary cut faced little change in recruitment. The best-fit line on this chart appears to run almost exactly through zero on the vertical axis, suggesting there is little evidence of any increase in recruitment explained by factors other than bursary changes.

Bursaries therefore continue to be an important targeted policy tool, increasing recruitment in subjects where it is most needed. However, stagnant growth in recruitment outside of bursary-supported subjects raises questions about whether supporting recruitment entirely with financial incentives is sustainable, particularly as the maximum value of bursaries for shortage subjects approaches the starting salary for teachers.

Change in recruitment vs. change in bursary value (by subject; 2023/24 vs. 2024/25)



Note: Line of best fit excludes physics and MFL due to changes to bursary policy in these subjects that impacted 2023/24 numbers.

Source: NFER analysis of ITT Census data

ITT trainees from outside the UK accounted for about six per cent of the 2024/25 training cohort.

The Conservative Government introduced policies that encouraged more recruitment of international trainees to supplement shortfalls in domestic supply. From spring 2023, foreign nationals applying for physics and languages ITT courses were made eligible for training bursaries. This policy change led to a sharp increase in prospective teachers domiciled outside the UK applying for ITT programmes in England, with the proportion of non-UK domiciled applicants doubling between 2022/23 and 2023/24. This increased even further in 2024/25, with non-UK-domiciled applicants accounting for over 11,000 of the total 52,000 ITT applicants that year, with a similar pattern continuing in 2025/26.

Growth in non-UK-domiciled applicants was mainly in physics and MFL. In 2024/25, 65 per cent of ITT applicants in physics, and 34 per cent of applicants in MFL, were non-UK-domiciled, compared to 24 per cent of all other applicants.

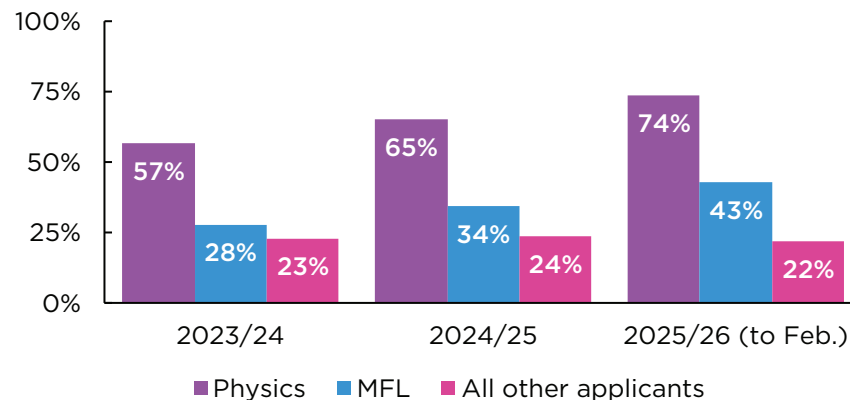
The growth in non-UK applicants was driven mainly by countries outside of Europe. The countries that were the biggest sources of non-UK domiciled candidates in 2023/24 included Nigeria (41 per cent of non-UK-domiciled candidates), Ghana (21 per cent), Pakistan (five per cent) and India (four per cent).

However, the impact of international recruitment on the size of the teacher workforce has been more muted than application numbers might suggest. This is primarily because non-UK-domiciled applicants tend to experience much higher rejection rates than domestic applicants. Data shows that in physics and MFL, the rejection rate for non-UK candidates was almost double that for UK candidates in 2024/25. For applicants to all other subjects, the difference was even higher. Candidates can be rejected for a variety of reasons, including foreign degree qualifications not being recognised as equivalent, the candidate not having sufficient teaching experience or problems obtaining a visa, which can pose barriers to international candidates.

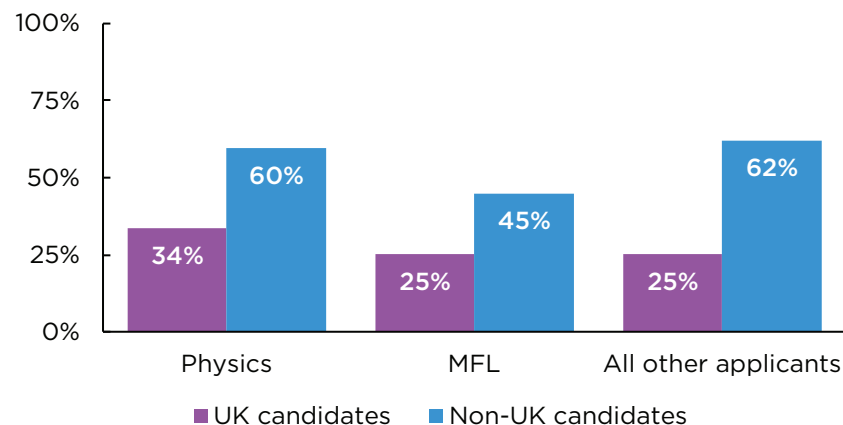
Nonetheless, 1,385 non-UK applicants accepted an offer of a place on an ITT course in 2024/25, around six per cent of the total number of accepted applicants that year. This was a slight increase from 1,314 in 2023/24. The number of international applicants accepting places so

far in 2025/26 is 21 per cent higher than it was at the same point in the 2024/25 cycle. International recruitment should therefore be sustained, as it can be expected to add a small but meaningful number of teachers to the system each year in key subjects.

Proportion of applicants non-UK domiciled



Proportion of applicants rejected



Fewer teachers who qualified in other countries are joining the profession in England since the Brexit referendum.

Domestic teacher recruitment can also be supplemented by the recognition of international teaching qualifications. The Teacher Regulation Agency (TRA), the public body responsible for regulating teachers, grants qualified teacher status (QTS) for teachers who earned a teaching qualification in selected foreign countries. This list has historically comprised mainly European countries, alongside Canada, Australia, New Zealand and the USA.

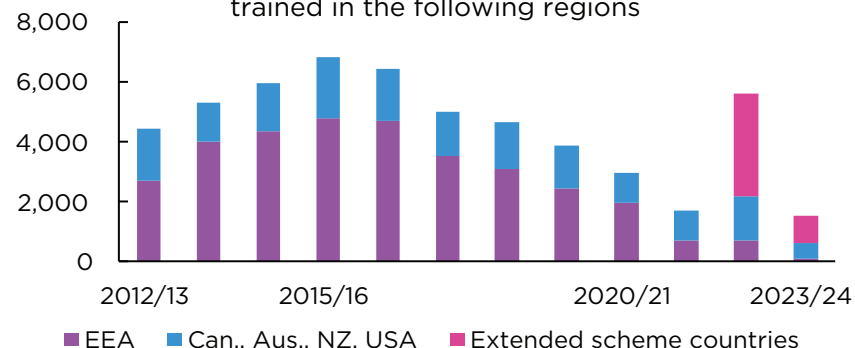
QTS recognitions were a much larger source of teacher supply in the early 2010s (although still relatively small: 44,000 teachers entered the state-funded school sector in 2023/24). In 2015/16, for instance, over 6,826 QTS recognitions were awarded. This has fallen over time. In 2020/21, 2,940 QTS recognitions were awarded and in 2023/24 it was 1,541, although this is provisional data that does not yet include all awards granted that year. Part of the reason for this decline may have been the impact of the Brexit referendum, as the number of QTS recognitions awarded to European Economic Area (EEA) nationals fell by 59 per cent between 2015/16 and 2020/21.

In 2022/23, the Government made changes to its QTS recognition requirements, also adding several new countries to the list of those whose foreign qualifications are recognised in England. These additional countries included Ghana, Hong Kong, India, Jamaica, Nigeria, Singapore, South Africa and Ukraine. The extension of qualification recognition to these countries led to a large increase in QTS recognitions awarded that year, although that was not sustained in 2023/24. The number of skilled worker visas granted by the Home Office for foreign teachers to come to England followed a somewhat similar pattern, with an increase in 2022/23 followed by a reversion to lower levels the following year.

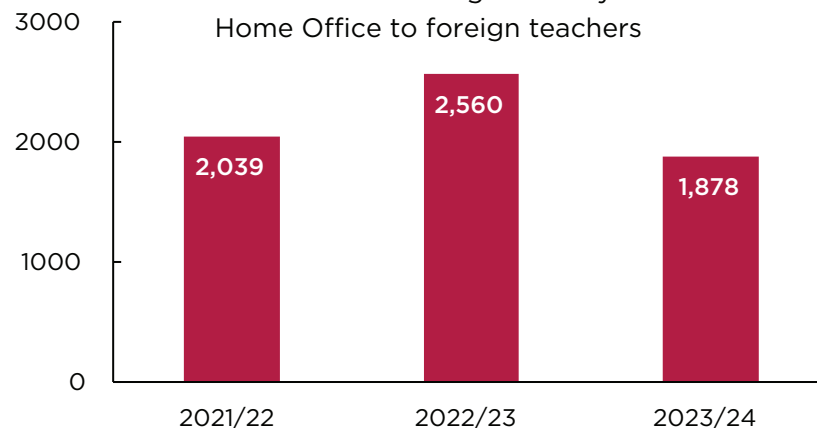
This policy change has mostly offset declines in the number of QTS recognitions awarded to European, Canadian, Australian, New Zealand and American nationals since the pandemic, but has led to a change in the composition of nationalities QTS recognitions are awarded to. In 2023/24, 60 per cent of QTS recognitions were awarded to nationals from one of the ‘extended scheme’ countries listed above, with six per cent awarded to nationals from European countries.

Overall therefore, QTS recognitions, like international ITT recruitment, are a relatively small source of teacher recruitment. Recent policy changes have helped to slow the fall in QTS recognitions awarded since the Brexit referendum and the pandemic. Future policymaking should sustain this, as international recruitment can be a small, but important, part of new teacher supply.

QTS recognitions awarded to teachers who trained in the following regions



Skilled workers visas granted by the Home Office to foreign teachers



Note: The 2023/24 QTS recognitions data is provisional and will be updated with additional new data later in 2025.

Source (top): TRA Annual Reports

Source (bottom): Home Office Immigration System Statistics

In 2022/23, 9.6 per cent of teachers left teaching, slightly lower than the previous year but still higher than pre-pandemic.

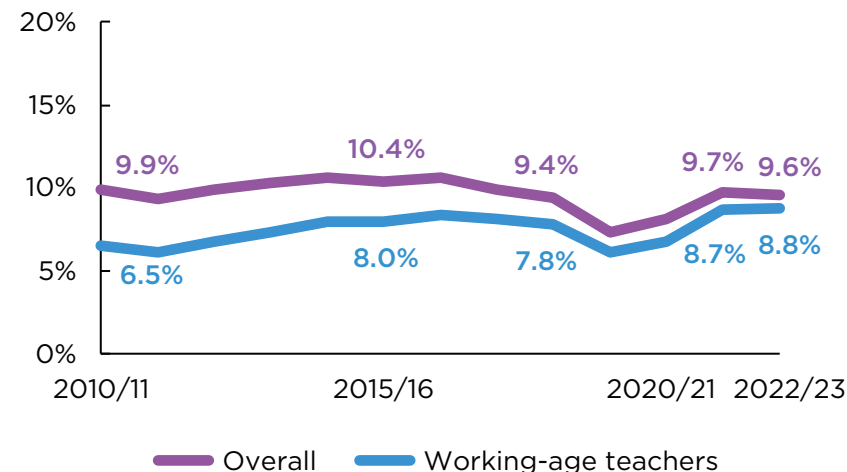
Persistent shortages and recruitment challenges mean that meeting the 6,500-teacher supply target will likely need a focus on improving retention alongside increasing recruitment. Indeed, Education Secretary Bridget Phillipson has stated that ‘the best recruitment strategy is a strong retention strategy’ (Phillipson and DfE, 2024).

The latest data shows that leaving rates are still relatively high in a historical context. The School Workforce Census (SWC) indicates that leaving rates rose through the early 2010s, due to rising workload pressures, real-terms cuts to teacher pay and implementation of a range of Government policy changes, peaking at 10.6 per cent in 2014/15 and 2016/17. The pandemic led to a significant fall in leaving rates, which has since rebounded, hovering slightly above pre-pandemic levels. Overall, in 2022/23, 9.6 per cent of teachers left teaching by the next year, similar to levels around 2012/13 and marginally higher than the year before the pandemic.

The leaving rate has also become more concentrated among working-age teachers. According to the SWC, after excluding retirements, 8.8 per cent of the teaching workforce left while they were still of working age in 2022/23, the highest rate that has been observed since 2010/11, when comparable SWC data became available.

This is partly because the teaching workforce has become younger over time (DfE, 2024h), so fewer teachers in 2022/23 are retiring than did earlier in the 2010s. However, persistently rising leaving rates of working-age teachers suggests that more must be done to support retention within this group.

Proportion of teachers who left teaching in the next year



Source: SWC (2010/11 – 2023/24)

The national roll-out of the Early Career Framework (ECF) may have had little impact on retention of early career teachers (ECTs).

The SWC data shows that leaving rates for ECTs – teachers in the first two years of their career – are higher than average. On average, 14.5 per cent of teachers who entered teaching between 2014/15 and 2017/18 had left teaching within one year, and 21.7 per cent within two years.

The ECF is a funded entitlement to a two-year package of support for ECTs. It was designed to improve ECT retention and was rolled out nationally in 2021/22. Last year’s SWC data was the first to provide two years of retention data for teachers involved in the ECF. However, comparing raw leaving rates across cohorts may not provide an accurate picture of the ECF’s impact as it may also pick up the impact of other factors changing over time, such as pay rises, which influence retention for all teachers regardless of ECF participation.

The data shows that, among teachers who entered teaching in 2021/22, 12.8 per cent had left within one year, 1.7 percentage points lower than the average for teachers who entered between 2014/15 and 2017/18. Among those who entered in 2022/23 (in the second year of the ECF roll-out), leaving rates were 11 per cent, four percentage points below the 2014/15 – 2017/18 average.

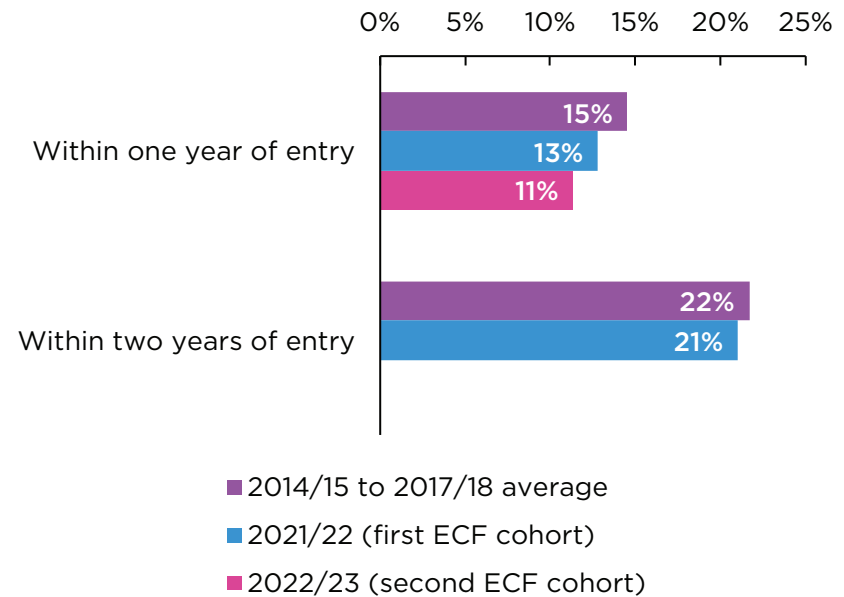
Two-year leaving rates were also lower for 2021/22 than the 2014/15 to 2017/18 average, but the gap was much narrower (less than one percentage point). This suggests that the ECF may be associated with improved retention rates for first-year ECTs, but only slightly after two years. The ECF national roll-out was accompanied by an extension to the period of assessment for completing induction from one year to two. This may provide an additional incentive for ECTs to complete their second year, and thereby their induction, perhaps accounting for why the ECF introduction appears to have had a big impact on end-of-first-year retention rates but less of an effect by the following year.

NFER’s recent evaluation of the ECF early roll-out – the initial pilot begun in 2020/21 – looked at retention of ECF participants. It provides a more robust indication of the impact of the ECF by comparing participants to an otherwise similar set of ECTs in the same cohort who did not participate in the ECF. The study found that ECF participants were no more or less likely to stay in teaching than teachers who

did not participate (Walker *et al.*, 2024). However, the findings may not be generalisable to the national roll-out as the early roll-out was implemented during the Covid-19 pandemic and changes were made to the design in response to feedback.

The evaluation highlighted other perceived benefits of the ECF, including that ECTs were more likely to have remained in their original induction school than non-participating ECTs and improvements in ECT’s teaching skills, self-efficacy, confidence and job satisfaction. However, the data we have so far indicates impacts on retention in the state-funded sector that may be, at best, modest.

Proportion of ECTs who had left teaching, by year of entry



Note: The 2018/19 – 2020/21 cohorts are excluded from this analysis due to the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Source: SWC (2010/11 – 2023/24)

Persistent, inadequate recruitment and stubbornly high teacher leaving rates lead to shortages of teachers and larger class sizes.

There is no single indicator that measures teacher shortages. The impacts of under-supply of teachers may be mitigated by school leaders in a number of different ways, including carrying more unfilled vacancies, increasing class sizes and deploying unqualified or non-specialist teachers (Worth and Faulkner-Ellis, 2022). DfE data collections provide several proxy measures that capture some of these factors and indicate how school operations may be affected by growing shortages.

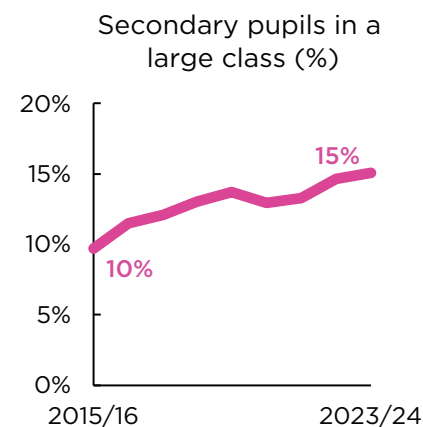
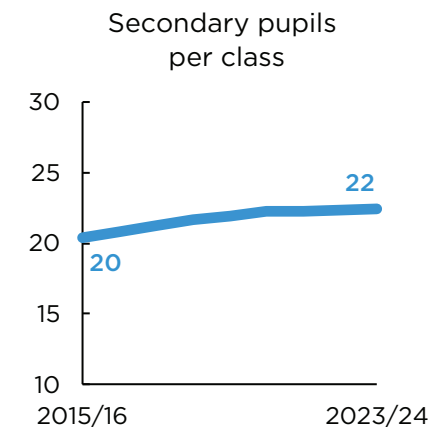
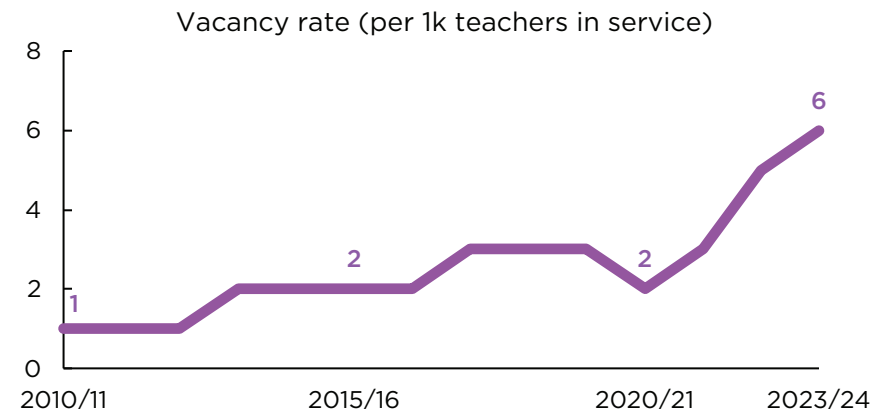
Vacancy rates are one of the clearest measures of schools' demand for teachers exceeding supply. Rising rates of unfilled vacancies reflect the impact of schools' inability to hire new teachers to respond to increased pupil numbers or replace teachers who have left.

The SWC data shows that the number of open vacancies in state-funded schools (expressed per thousand teachers in service) has significantly increased over time, particularly since the post-pandemic period when secondary recruitment has fallen substantially behind target. In 2023/24, there were six vacancies per thousand teachers in service, double the rate prior to the pandemic and six times higher than in 2010/11.

The vacancy rate estimated in the SWC measures unfilled job vacancies in November each year, which is an atypical time for schools to have vacancies. Nonetheless, the upwards trend is clear and consistent with ongoing and worsening challenges schools face in recruiting sufficient numbers of teachers.

Schools may also increase class sizes when insufficient high-quality teachers are available to be employed. Indeed, DfE data shows that while class sizes in primary schools have remained relatively constant over time, they have increased significantly in secondary schools. In 2023/24, there were 22 secondary pupils per class on average in England, up from 20 in 2015/16. Most of this increase occurred between 2015/16 and 2021/22, as the demographic bulge of primary-age pupils from earlier in the 2010s began moving into secondary schools.

The proportion of secondary pupils in a 'large' class (defined as being more than 30 pupils per class) has also increased over the same period, from 10 to 15 per cent.



Source (top): SWC (2010/11 - 2023/24)

Source (bottom): Schools, pupils and their characteristics (2015/16 - 2023/24)

Teacher shortages are linked to increased reliance on unqualified and non-specialist teachers.

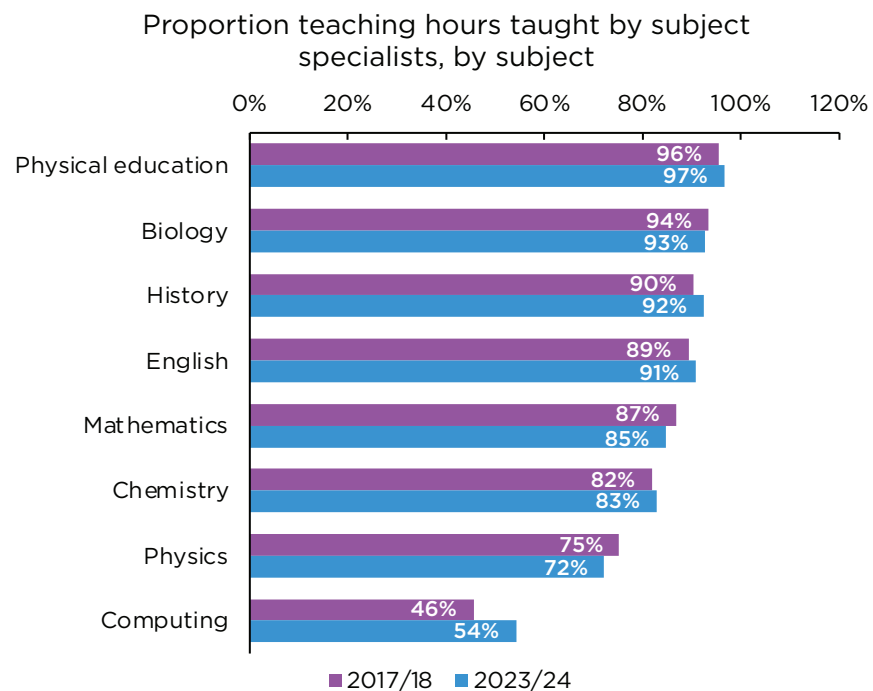
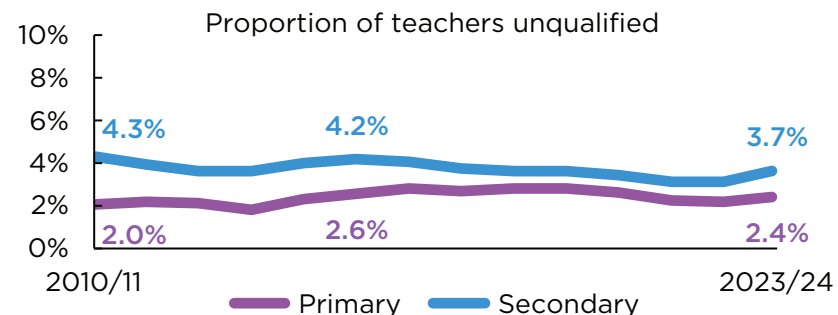
Worsening teacher shortages impact how schools deploy their existing teachers, for instance by becoming more reliant on unqualified teachers to fill gaps in their workforce. In 2023/24, the SWC data shows that 3.7 per cent of teachers in secondary schools were unqualified, the highest rate since 2017/18. This increase reversed a previous decline in unqualified teacher rates, bringing levels back to those seen in the mid-2010s, when teacher attrition was higher. In primary schools, 2.4 per cent of teachers were unqualified in 2023/24 which also marked a reversal of a previous decline but was less stark than for secondary (where recruitment tends to be most challenging).

Under-recruitment of teachers in key shortage subjects may also lead to secondary schools relying more heavily on deploying non-specialist teachers to teach shortage subjects, which is likely to impact on both teaching quality and pupil outcomes.

Indeed, the SWC data shows that the subjects where the most subject hours tend to be taught by a specialist teacher are those that recruit well (e.g. physical education, biology, English and history). Conversely, other subjects which have historically faced persistent under-recruitment, like physics and computing, are much less likely to be taught by specialist teachers.

Some chronic shortage subjects have also seen a decline in the prevalence of subject specialists. For instance, the proportion of physics and mathematics teaching hours taught by subject specialists fell by three and two percentage points, respectively, between 2017/18 and 2023/24.

One exception to this is computing, which has seen a significant increase in the proportion of teaching hours taught by specialists over the last six years, despite consistent under-recruitment. This may be influenced by schools gradually replacing specialists in the legacy information and communication technology (ICT) subject with computer science graduates, coupled with the significant growth in university graduates studying computer science (Worth, 2024). In contrast, subjects like physical education, history and English, which generally tend to recruit well, have recorded increases in teaching hours taught by subject specialists over time.



Note: Teachers are considered a subject specialist if they hold any post-A level qualification in a relevant subject.

Source: SWC (2010/11 - 2023/24)

The impact of teacher shortages has a bigger impact in schools with more pupils from deprived backgrounds.

The impacts of teacher shortages disproportionately affect more disadvantaged schools (where most-deprived schools refer to those in the top quintile for pupils eligible for free school meals (FSM)).

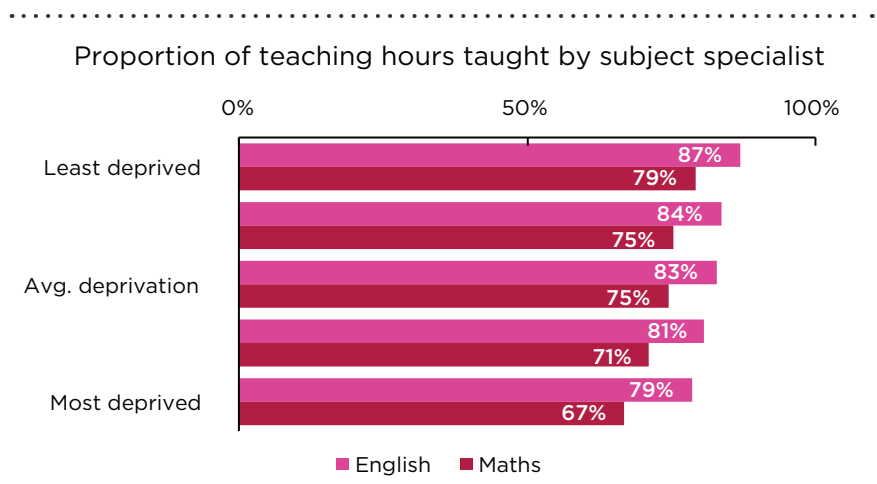
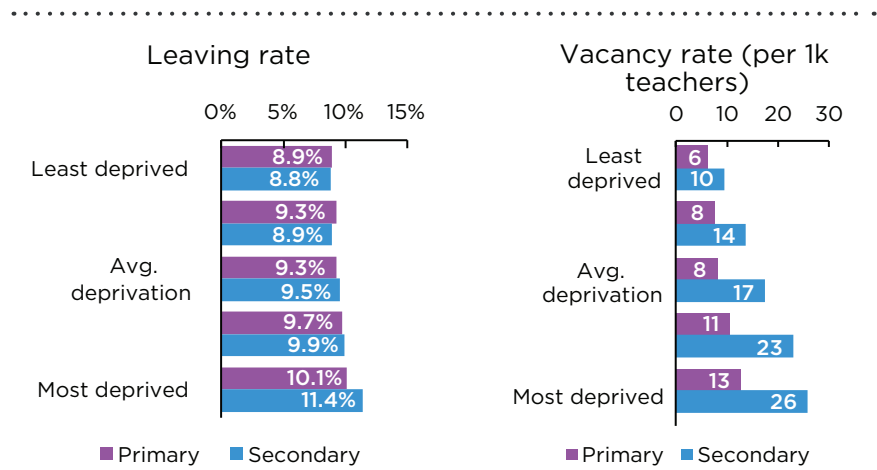
The SWC data shows that leaving rates in the most-deprived primary schools are about one percentage point higher than the least-deprived schools, and this gap is two percentage points in secondary schools.

Similarly, the rate of vacant and temporarily-filled teaching posts per thousand teaching staff is about twice as high in the most-deprived primary schools compared to the least-deprived. In secondary schools, it is nearly three times higher.

Schools with a more deprived intake also tend to rely more on non-specialist teaching staff. In the most-deprived secondary schools, 79 per cent of English teaching hours are taught by a subject specialist and 67 per cent of maths teaching hours. Meanwhile, in the least-deprived schools, it is 87 per cent for English and 79 per cent for maths.

This suggests that addressing teacher shortages is crucial for the Government’s social mobility and opportunity objectives. Ensuring there are sufficient numbers of teachers in the system will help ensure that pupils from deprived backgrounds have better access to subject specialists in the classroom, higher quality education and improved life chances.

More broadly, this also underscores the vital need for clear, granular data to understand the specific nature of teacher shortages in areas where they may be better or worse than others. These insights are essential for informing policy development, especially in the context of specific schools, regions or communities. To support this effort, NFER has recently published a newly-updated data dashboard (NFER, 2025) featuring a comprehensive set of indicators related to teacher recruitment and retention, now including data up to 2023/24. The dashboard offers clear evidence showing how the teacher supply challenge has evolved over time between local areas, subjects and types of schools.



Note: The differences in subject specialist indicators here and on the previous page are due to definitional differences in our analysis and the DfE’s. Subject specialism definitions are consistent across school FSM quintiles.

Source: NFER analysis of SWC data (2023/24)

Reversing the deterioration in teacher pay is likely to be key to addressing the persistence of the teacher supply challenge.

Pay is a key policy lever available for supporting teacher recruitment and retention. Research shows that the competitiveness of teacher pay relative to other jobs is linked to both recruitment and retention (Dolton and van der Klaauw, 1999). Public sector pay restraint during the 2010s led to real-terms cuts to teacher pay between 2010/11 and 2018/19. This likely contributed to rising leaving rates during those years, since average earnings in the wider economy grew faster than teacher pay.

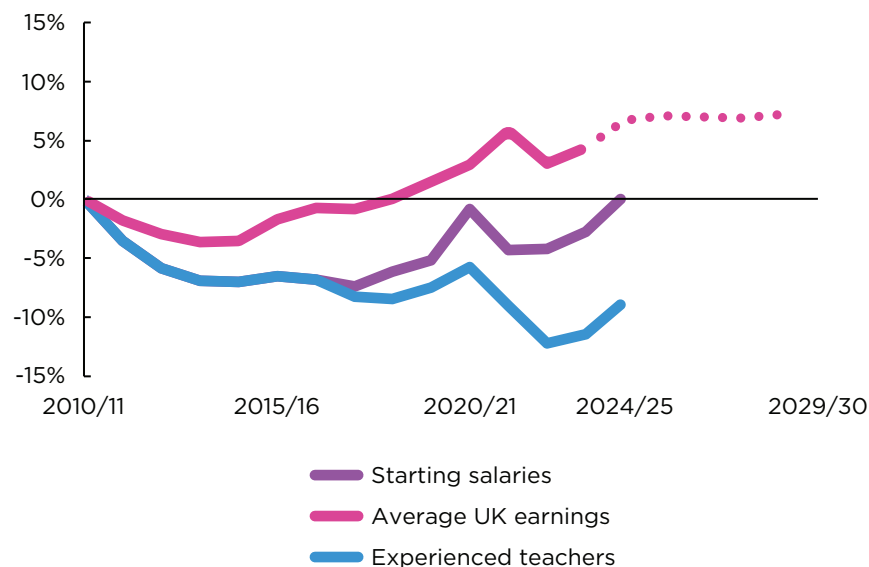
A number of significant pay rises have been introduced over the last six years. However, these pay rises have been targeted primarily towards ECTs (School Teachers' Review Body, Office for the Pay Review Body, and DfE, 2024), as ECTs are more likely than more experienced teachers to leave teaching. The introduction of £30,000 starting salaries in 2023/24 by the previous Government, coupled with the new Government's 5.5 per cent pay rise in 2024/25, have returned starting salaries to where they were in 2010/11 in real terms.

The same is not true, however, for the pay of more experienced teachers (teachers at the top of the upper pay scale), which has deteriorated to a much larger degree than for ECTs. Last year's 5.5 per cent pay rise helped to partially reverse prior deterioration. However, pay for experienced teachers was still nine per cent lower in 2024/25 than in 2010/11 in real terms.

Furthermore, while recent pay rises have helped to return starting salaries to where they were in 2010/11, teacher pay at all levels still lags far behind average earnings growth in the wider economy over the same period. Data from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) shows that between 2010/11 and 2023/24, average earnings in the UK economy grew by four per cent in real terms, with the Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR) forecasting continued growth in real-terms average earnings through 2025/26.

In 2024/25, average earnings are forecast to be 6.7 per cent higher than in 2010/11 in real terms, which is six percentage points higher than the real-terms growth in teacher starting salaries over the same period and 15 percentage points higher than the growth in experienced teacher pay. Teacher pay rises from the last two years (three years for starting salaries) have exceeded average earnings growth in the wider economy and therefore helped to improve the competitiveness of pay relative to the wider economy. However, this improvement has not completely reversed the accumulated loss in competitiveness since 2010/11 for all teachers.

Real earnings growth since 2010/11



Notes: 'Experienced teachers' refers to teachers at the top of the upper pay scale. Dotted line represents the forecast of real earnings growth based on OBR projections from October 2024.

Source: School Teachers' Pay and Conditions Document; Office for National Statistics; Office for Budget Responsibility

Teachers' position in the income distribution has fallen significantly since 2010/11.

Comparing earnings growth for teachers to average earnings in the wider labour market (as in the previous chart) is a useful benchmark to show how teacher pay compares to other jobs. However, part of the reason why average earnings in the UK have performed relatively well over the 2010s is because earnings growth has been faster at the lower end of the income distribution due to increases to the National Living Wage (Low Pay Commission, 2023). This may be less appropriate as a benchmark to understand teacher pay competitiveness, although research has shown that the salaries of teachers that leave for another job have a wide range, and tend to be lower on average (Worth and McLean, 2022).

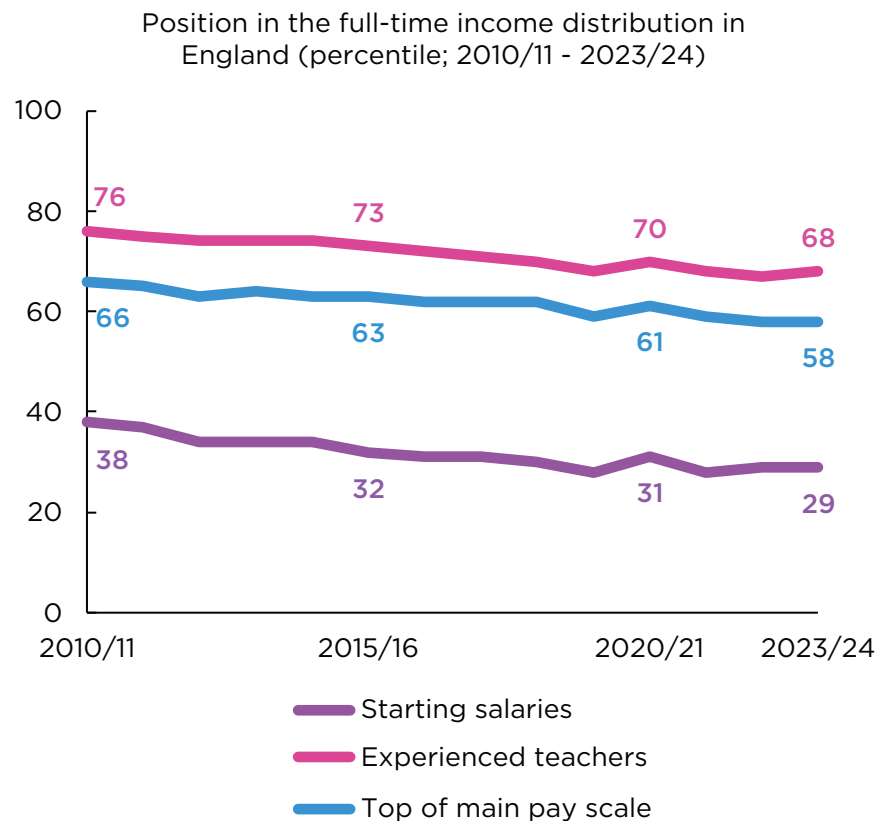
A different way to visualise the deteriorating competitiveness of teacher pay is by considering where in the income distribution teachers tend to be (i.e. how teacher pay compares to pay for full-time workers in other jobs), and whether this position has changed over time.

Data from the Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings (ASHE) shows that teachers' position in the income distribution for all full-time workers in England has generally fallen over time. In 2010/11, a teacher in their first year (earning a starting salary) would have found themselves in about the 38th percentile of income in England. In other words, a first-year teacher in 2010/11 would have earned more than 38 per cent of all other full-time workers in England. In 2023/24 however, a first-year teacher would have been in the 29th percentile, despite the introduction of £30,000 starting salaries that year.

A consistent pattern of deteriorating competitiveness is apparent across different parts of the pay scale. Teachers at the top of the main pay scale would have been in the 66th percentile of income in 2010/11 and the 58th in 2023/24. Similarly, teachers at the top of the upper pay scale would have been in the 76th percentile of income in 2010/11 and the 68th in 2023/24.

The most recent ASHE data available is for 2023/24, so it does not yet reflect the impact of last year's 5.5 per cent pay increase. Since this rise seems to have reduced – but not eliminated – the gap in pay

growth compared to average earnings, teachers' position in the income distribution for 2024/25 is very likely to still be below 2010/11 levels but may be higher than in the previous year.



Note: 'Experienced teachers' refers to teachers at the top of the upper pay scale.

Source: School Teachers' Pay and Conditions Document; NFER analysis of ASHE data (2010 - 2024)

The DfE’s proposed 2.8 per cent pay award for 2025/26 risks making no further progress at improving pay competitiveness.

In its 2025 Evidence to the School Teachers’ Review Body (STRB), the DfE set out its proposal and rationale for the 2025/26 teacher pay award. The DfE recommends a 2.8 per cent rise next year, which it suggests ‘would maintain the competitiveness of teachers’ pay, despite the challenging financial backdrop the Government is facing’ (DfE, 2024a).

A 2.8 per cent pay rise this year nearly matches the latest OBR forecast of three per cent average nominal earnings growth in the wider labour market, meaning the DfE’s proposed pay rise would indeed maintain the existing level of competitiveness of teacher pay. However, this would make no further progress at improving the competitiveness of teacher pay this year.

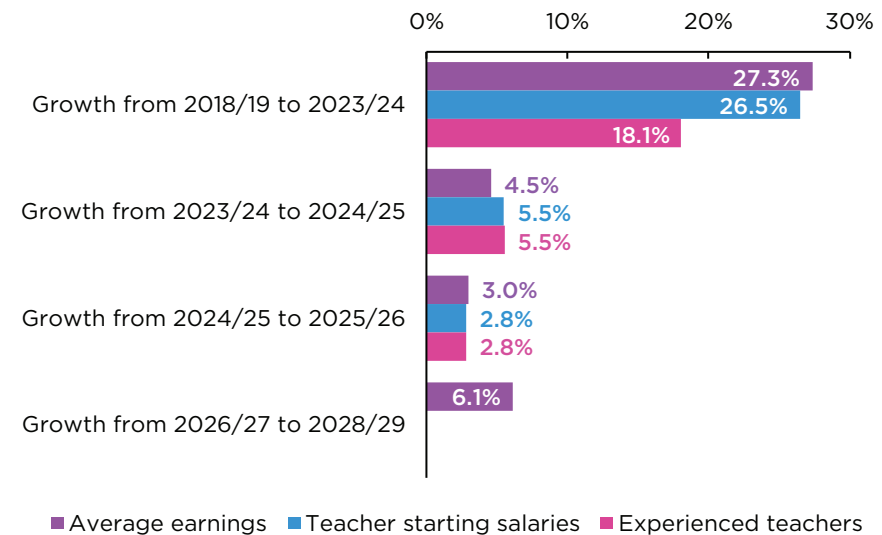
Given the pressure on public finances, the Government has also announced that this year’s pay rise may not be fully covered by additional funding from the Treasury, and ‘most schools will need to supplement the new funding they receive in [fiscal year] 2025-26 with efficiencies’ (DfE, 2024a). Many schools are currently facing budget shortfalls (Julius and Schwendel, 2024), so asking schools to fund pay rises partly from existing budgets would likely represent significant additional financial pressure, increasing existing deficits and pushing more schools into a deficit.

It is hard to see how this year’s pay proposal meets the scale of the ambition of recruiting 6,500 new teachers. NFER research published last year found that the Government could meet a target of 6,500 more secondary teachers (using a working definition that will certainly differ from DfE’s actual target, although we believe is largely in the spirit of the intended target’s framing) through pay increases alone, but this would involve ten per cent pay rises over two years, with a total estimated cost to the Government of £4.9 billion (Worth and Tang, 2024).

This is, of course, not the only option: lower pay rises could achieve the same outcome at a lower cost if accompanied by increasingly generous and targeted financial incentives (such as bursaries and early career retention payments (ECRPs)) and/ or other actions, such as reducing teacher workload.

Further details may emerge on the Government’s long-term thinking and plans on teacher pay after this year’s Spending Review. Over the longer-term, the OBR forecasts that average earnings will grow by 6.1 per cent between 2026/27 and 2028/29. Teacher pay growth will therefore need to exceed this in order to improve in competitiveness by the end of the parliament. The DfE’s pay proposal for this year, on its own, therefore, would represent a missed opportunity to make further progress in narrowing this gap.

Nominal earnings growth for teachers vs. average UK earnings



Note: ‘Experienced teachers’ refers to teachers at the top of the upper pay scale. Based on OBR earnings growth projections from October 2024.

Source: School Teachers’ Pay and Conditions Document; Office for Budget Responsibility

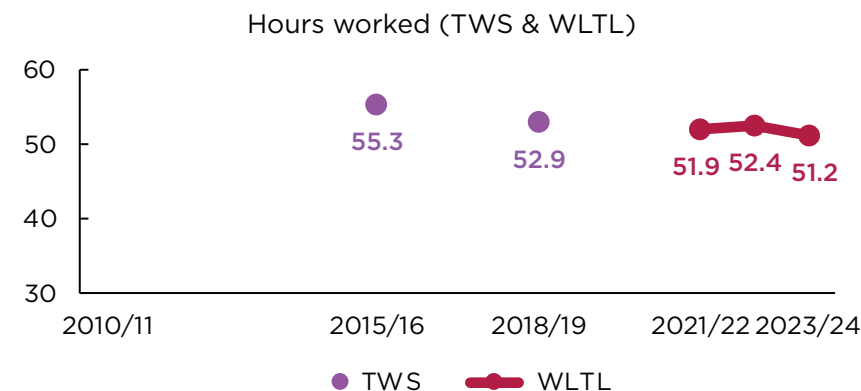
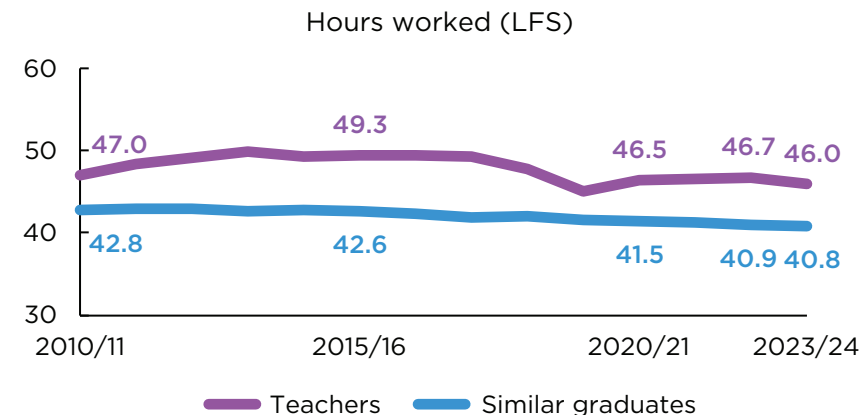
Teachers’ working hours fell slightly in 2023/24 but remained higher than working hours for similar graduates working in other jobs.

Unmanageable workload is a key driver of attrition. According to the Working Lives of Teachers and Leaders (WLTL) survey, 90 per cent of teachers considering leaving teaching in 2023/24 cited high workload as a factor. Reducing workload has long been a key policy priority for the Government, contributing to reductions in teachers’ working hours, particularly during the late 2010s.

Data from the Labour Force Survey (LFS) shows that, during term time, the average full-time teacher works longer hours than similar graduates in other jobs (i.e. graduates with similar demographic characteristics as teachers but who work outside teaching – see methodological appendix for a full definition). In 2023/24, the average full-time teacher worked 46 hours per full working week, about five hours per week more than for similar graduates. While teachers’ working hours fell in 2023/24, narrowing this gap slightly, the difference was not statistically significant. This means the gap in working hours has remained broadly consistent with other post-pandemic years.

The reliability of the LFS data has come under scrutiny in recent years, due to declining response rates, which have impacted data quality and the reliability of subsequent analysis (Corlett and Slaughter, 2024). However, the trend in average hours worked by teachers based on the LFS data follows a similar pattern to the WLTL, including a small decline between 2022/23 and 2023/24 to 51.2 hours per week. This is higher than our LFS estimate, but there has been a long-standing difference between LFS estimates and those for both the WLTL and its predecessor the Teacher Workload Survey (TWS).

The Government’s ambitions for policy reforms across the sector could undermine some of the slight improvements to teacher workload seen over the last decade. Proposed reforms to the Ofsted Framework or the Curriculum and Assessment Review for example could lead to increases in teachers’ working hours while changes are implemented. While these reforms may offer wider benefits to the education system as a whole, the Government should carefully assess their potential impacts on workload to ensure that further reductions continue to remain a policy priority.



Note: Representative of full-time teachers and similar graduates who worked a full week during the survey reference week.

Source (top): NFER analysis of LFS data (2010/11 – 2023/24)

Source (bottom): TWS (2016, 2019); WLTL (waves 1-3)

Teachers' perceptions of their workload have improved slightly over time, but teachers are still more likely to view their workload negatively than similar graduates.

Alongside a slight reduction in working hours last year, teachers' perceptions of their workload also improved slightly. The WLTL data shows that the proportion of teachers who said they have an 'acceptable workload' and those who report they 'have sufficient control over their workload' increased by five and four percentage points, respectively, between 2022/23 and 2023/24 (DfE, 2024i; IFF Research, 2024).

Despite these improvements, however, teachers' perceptions of their workload remain much more negative than those of teachers who left the profession for other jobs, where around three-quarters of ex-teachers report having an 'acceptable workload' and 'sufficient control over their workload' in their new job.

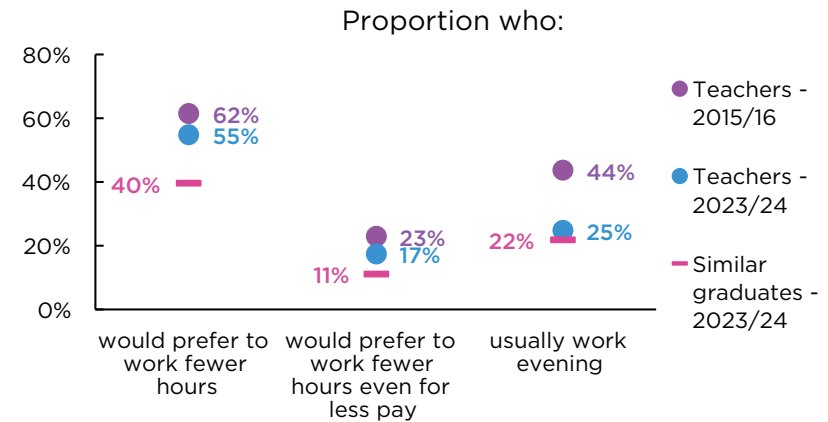
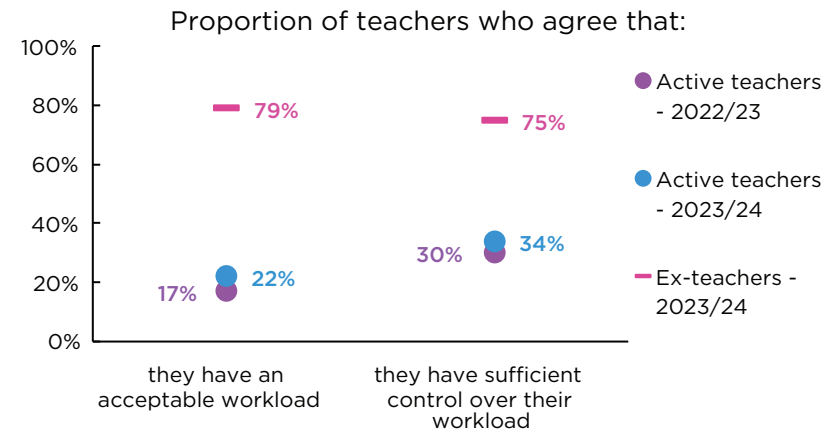
LFS data also shows an improvement in teachers' perceptions of their workload over time. In 2023/24, 55 per cent of full-time teachers reported that they would prefer to work fewer hours, seven percentage points lower than in 2015/16. Similarly, 17 per cent reported that they would prefer fewer hours even for less pay (a proxy for preferring to work part-time), which was a fall of six percentage points over the period.

Working in the evenings has also become much less common among teachers. In 2023/24, a quarter of full-time teachers reported that they usually work evenings – 19 percentage points lower than in 2015/16.

Despite these improvements however, gaps remain between teachers and similar graduates. In 2023/24, the proportion of full-time teachers who would prefer to work fewer hours and would prefer fewer hours even for less pay were still 15 and six percentage points higher than for similar graduates. The significant fall in the reported prevalence of evening working to 2023/24, however, meant that there was no statistically significant difference between teachers and similar graduates that year.

Taken together, this suggests that reductions in teachers' workload over the last decade have led to some small improvements in teachers' perceptions of their workload. However, significant gaps

remain between teachers and the wider graduate labour force. Large improvements in reported workload when teachers leave the profession indicate that high workload may continue to drive teachers to leave the profession for other jobs unless there is action to reduce it.



Note: LFS analysis representative of full-time teachers and similar graduates who worked a full week during the survey reference week.

Source (top): WLTL (waves 2-3)

Source (bottom): NFER analysis of LFS data (2015/16 – 2023/24)

In 2023/24, administrative activities continued to be a key contributor to teacher workload, although slightly less than in previous years.

The WLTL data highlights some of the main contributors to teacher workload and how perceptions of them have changed over time. Three waves of WLTL data are now available (for 2021/22 – 2023/24), and they show that, broadly, the main contributors to workload have tended to be relatively consistent across years.

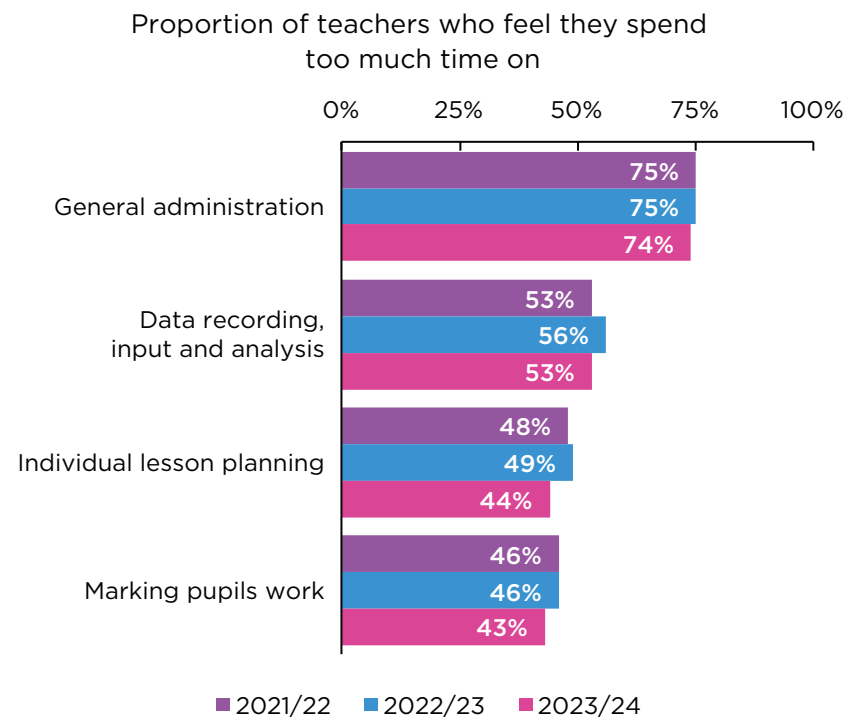
In 2023/24, 74 per cent of teachers said that they spent too much time on ‘general administration’ which, like previous years, was still the most-cited contributor to workload. The WLTL report notes that ‘general administration’ covers non-teaching tasks such as ‘communication, paperwork, work emails and other clerical duties’ that teachers undertake as part of their job (IFF Research, 2024).

Lesson planning and marking appear to have been slightly smaller contributors to workload in 2023/24 than the previous year. The proportion of teachers reporting that they spent ‘too much’ time on ‘individual lesson planning’ and ‘marking pupils work’ decreased by five and three percentage points compared to the previous year. Nonetheless, despite this decline, more than 40 per cent of teachers still felt they spent too much time on each of these tasks.

One way to help further reduce teachers’ workload could be with generative artificial intelligence (AI) tools, such as ChatGPT. A 2024 randomised controlled trial conducted by NFER shows that science teachers who used ChatGPT in their Year 7 and 8 lesson planning cut their preparation time by more than 30 per cent, on average, compared to teachers who did not. The study also found no evidence that ChatGPT use led to a reduction in the quality of materials and that teachers who used ChatGPT did not feel doing so had reduced their sense of autonomy or creativity (Roy *et al.*, 2024).

The findings show promise that generative AI could help significantly reduce the amount of time teachers spend on lesson and resource planning without compromising quality or teachers’ sense of agency.

Schools should explore how to integrate such tools effectively for their teaching staff. Existing guidance on using AI tools in the classroom, such as that used in the NFER trial, can help school leaders to most effectively roll out these tools. Government may also wish to consider its role in further supporting schools with its own high-quality tools and resources.



Source: WLTL (waves 1-3)

Deteriorating pupil behaviour appears to have become a bigger component of teacher workload since the pandemic.

Disruptive pupil behaviour is a key factor associated with teacher retention (Burge, Lu and Phillips, 2021) and a fast-growing contributor to teacher workload over the last three years. The WLTL survey shows that the proportion of teachers who reported they spent too much time on ‘behaviour incident follow-up’ increased to 60 per cent in 2023/24. This was three percentage points higher than in 2022/23 and ten percentage points higher than 2021/22.

Pupil behaviour also appears to be impacting more teachers’ decisions to leave. In 2023/24, 52 per cent of teachers who said they were considering leaving teaching cited pupil behaviour as one of the reasons why, 11 percentage points higher than in 2022/23.

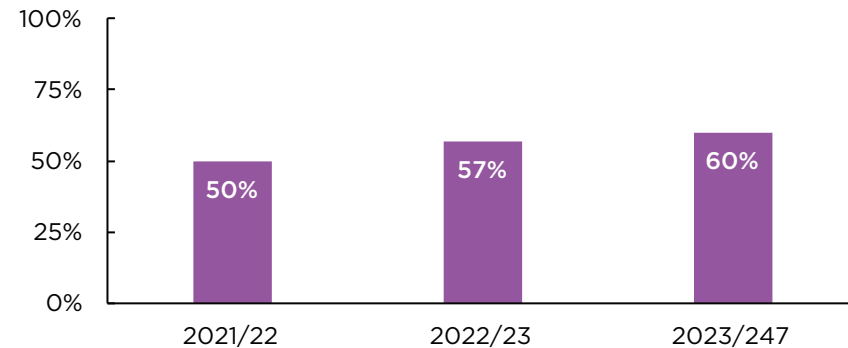
This aligns with teachers’ worsening views of pupil behaviour at their school. In 2023/24, 45 per cent of teachers said that behaviour at their school was either ‘good’ or ‘very good’, a 13 percentage point fall since 2021/22. School leaders, who typically have more favourable views of pupil behaviour than teachers, have also become more negative about pupil behaviour. The proportion of leaders viewing pupil behaviour in their school as ‘good’ or ‘very good’ has fallen by nine percentage points between 2021/22 and 2023/24.

The drivers of deteriorating pupil behaviour are complex and multi-faceted and include the role of pupil mental health and support for special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). Research shows that the number of children and young people with an education, health and care plan (EHCP) has increased by 71 per cent between 2018 and 2024 (Sibieta and Snape, 2024). Increased funding for SEND support, however, has not kept up with this growth.

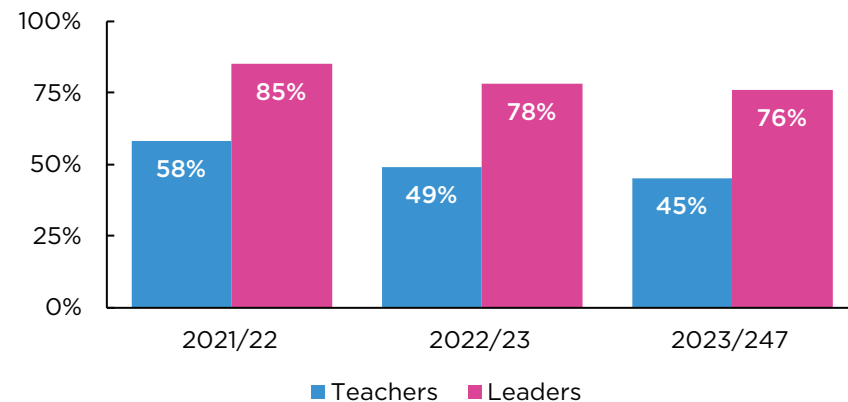
NFER’s 2023 review of teacher workload highlighted that ‘behaviour management and pastoral care’ was the top priority for workload reduction cited by teachers and that ‘more support from outside agencies for specific pupil needs such as SEND support, mental health and safeguarding’ was seen as a key enabler of workload reduction (Martin *et al.*, 2023).

Strengthening the availability of specialist support for schools to address pupils’ complex needs could enable teachers to focus on the core job of teaching, reducing their workload and improving their retention.

Proportion of teachers who feel they spend too much time responding to pupil behaviour incidents



Proportion who say pupil behaviour in their school is 'good' or 'very good'



Flexible working in teaching is becoming more prevalent, but perceptions about its availability and compatibility with teaching remain stubbornly negative.

WLTl survey data shows that the proportion of teachers working with a flexible arrangement in place, including part-time, PPA time off-site and ad-hoc days to start late or finish early, has increased between 2022/23 and 2023/24 from 40 to 46 per cent. This is a positive step given the evidence suggesting that flexible working approaches can contribute positively to recruitment, retention, wellbeing and job satisfaction (Harland, Bradley and Worth, 2023). The Government is encouraging more schools to allow teachers to use their planning, preparation and assessment (PPA) time flexibly at home.

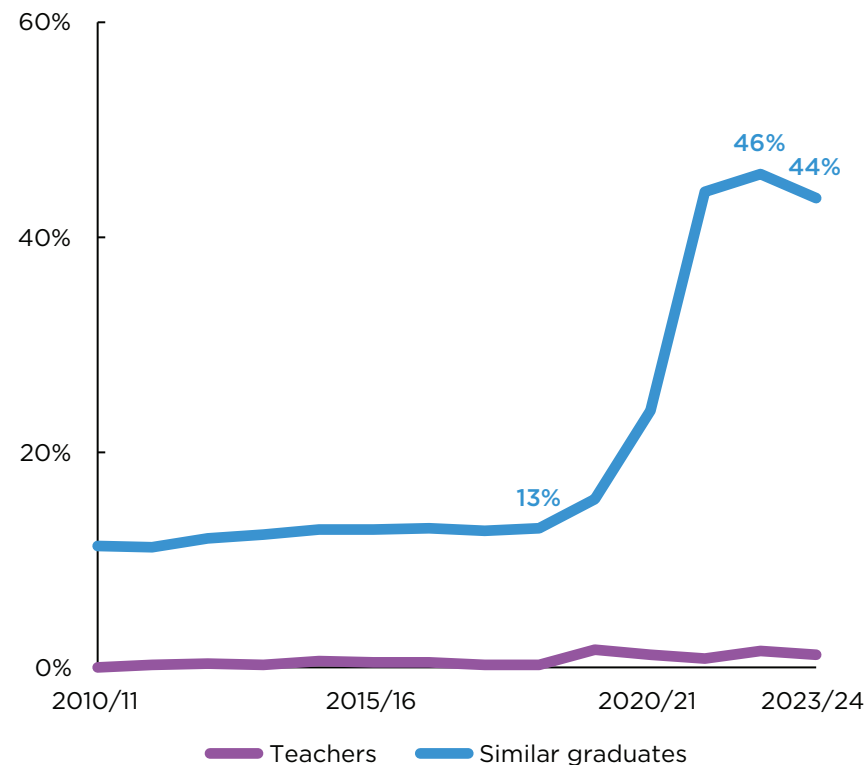
However, WLTl data also shows that teachers’ and leaders’ perceptions about how available flexible working is and how compatible it is with career progression remain negative. In 2023/24, only a fifth of teachers and leaders agreed that they would feel confident requesting flexible working arrangements and a fifth agree that choosing to work flexibly would not affect their opportunities for career progression. Only a third of teachers and leaders agree that flexible working is compatible with a career in teaching. None of these proportions has improved since 2022/23.

However, the growth in flexible working arrangements in the wider labour market has been much greater. Data from the LFS indicates that the proportion of similar graduates working mainly from home remains high in 2023/24 at 44 per cent, down slightly from the previous year due to some retrenchment in employer approaches.

Teachers understandably remain very unlikely to work from home and this is highly unlikely to change due to the nature of the job. Nonetheless, the greater availability of hybrid working in the graduate labour market represents an on-going competitive threat to teaching. WLTl survey data shows that teachers who leave teaching for another job are more likely than the average teacher to be working flexibly (62 per cent compared to 46 per cent in 2023/24). This suggests that a desire for flexibility that is unmet in teaching may be a factor in some teachers’ decisions to leave.

Further improving the availability of flexible working in teaching for those who need it is therefore likely to contribute to improved retention. Making teaching generally more attractive as a profession in other ways may also insulate teaching from the inherent challenges of making it more flexible.

Proportion of teachers and similar graduates that primarily work from home



Source: NFER analysis of LFS data (2010/11 – 2023/24)



Conclusions and recommendations

The Government's focus on recruiting 6,500 additional teachers is a welcome acknowledgement of the threat to educational quality posed by the worsening teacher supply challenge in England. However, delivering on this ambition by the end of the current parliament will require significant, focussed policy action. Policy measures also take time to lead to impact in schools, so the time for action is now. This year's Spending Review is, therefore, a crucial opportunity for the Government to provide the resources necessary to deliver its plan for 6,500 more teachers by the end of the parliament.

The scale of the teacher supply challenge is clear. Recruitment into secondary ITT has remained substantially below target since the pandemic, with forecasts showing likely significant under-recruitment for secondary subjects and primary continuing into 2025/26. While there were some slight improvements to recruitment last year, they were largely limited to a few chronic shortage subjects, driven mostly by higher bursaries rather than a widespread rise in interest in teaching.

At the same time, teacher leaving rates have not improved since before the pandemic and have become more concentrated among working-age teachers. The leaving rate for ECTs also continues to be higher than the average leaving rate for all teachers, despite the national roll-out of the ECF which recent NFER evidence suggests is unlikely to have improved ECT retention.

Sluggish recruitment and persistently high leaving rates have led to real impacts on schools and pupils. Insufficient numbers of teachers have led teacher vacancy rates in schools to double since before the pandemic, while secondary schools have increased class sizes by 10 per cent since 2015/16. Schools have also become more reliant on unqualified teachers to fill gaps in their workforce, while non-specialist teachers teaching secondary subjects like maths and physics have become more common. Teacher shortages tend to be more acute in schools with more deprived intakes, meaning improving teacher supply can play a role in the Government's social mobility objectives.

Improving teacher recruitment and retention involves improving the attractiveness of the profession, and pay is a key policy lever for Government. Last year's 5.5 per cent pay rise, coupled with the previous Government's introduction of £30,000 starting salaries, have returned starting salaries to 2010/11 levels in real terms. However, teacher pay growth at all scale points has lagged behind pay growth in the wider labour force, leading to a loss of competitiveness against the wider UK labour force, particularly for more experienced teachers.

The DfE's proposed 2.8 per cent rise for 2025/26 is similar to OBR forecasts for earnings growth in fiscal year 2025/26. This would lead teacher pay to grow in line with average earnings next year, which would avoid further loss in competitiveness next year, but also be a missed opportunity to make further gains on teacher pay. The DfE have also indicated next year's pay award may not be fully funded by the Government, which will add significant additional financial pressure, increasing existing deficits and pushing more schools into a deficit. Over the longer term, the OBR indicates that average earnings are forecast to rise by 6.1 per cent from 2026/27 to 2028/29. Total teacher pay growth will therefore need to exceed 6.1 per cent in order to improve competitiveness by the end of the parliament.

Recommendation 1: The 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. The Government should also ensure that the Spending Review delivers rises in the Schools Budget necessary to increase teacher pay by at least 6.1 per cent from 2026/27 to 2028/29.

NFER research suggests that, while it would be possible to meet the 6,500-teacher recruitment target with pay increases alone, the cost to do so may be unlikely to offer the best value for money. Research shows that financial incentives targeted at subjects and areas facing the greatest challenges, such as bursaries and ECRPs, are cost-effective policy tools for improving teacher recruitment and retention alongside pay rises, since they can be targeted where action is most needed.

Recommendation 2: The Government should supplement pay rises with increases in spending on financial incentives targeting shortage subjects.

Policymakers should also continue to focus on improving the attractiveness of non-pay factors such as workload, which is a key influence for teachers' decisions to leave the profession. The LFS shows that teachers' working hours and perceptions of their workload has improved slightly since the mid-2010s, but teachers on average still have longer working hours and more negative perceptions of their workload compared to similar graduates working in other jobs.

The Government's ambitions for other education policy reforms, such as changes to the inspection framework, SEND system and national curriculum and assessment arrangements, involve risks of increasing workload and worsening retention, especially when changes are first implemented. Rolling out policy reforms without losing sight of further reductions in teacher workload will therefore be important for policymakers to consider.

Recommendation 3: The Government should develop a teacher workload reduction strategy to improve retention that is fully integrated with the wider policy reform agenda.

The WLTL shows that administration and lesson planning are key contributors to teacher workload. Evidence from a recent NFER study suggests that generative AI tools like ChatGPT can help save teachers time by helping with lesson planning, with no evidence of negative impacts on the quality of materials or teachers' sense of autonomy or creativity.

Recommendation 4: Schools should consider whether and how generative AI tools such as ChatGPT could help improve their teachers' planning workload.

However, one of the fastest-growing contributors to teacher workload since the pandemic is deteriorating pupil behaviour. Teachers' and leaders' perceptions of pupil behaviour in their school have worsened considerably since 2021/22 and the proportion of teachers who say they spend too much time responding to pupil behaviour incidents has increased substantially.

The drivers of worsening pupil behaviour are complex and multi-faceted, although are likely to be linked to pupil mental health and the wider challenges facing the system for supporting pupils with SEND. NFER's 2023 review of teacher workload found that 'more support from outside agencies for specific pupil needs such as SEND support, mental health and safeguarding' was seen by teachers as a key enabler of workload reduction.

Recommendation 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.

Hybrid and flexible working have continued to remain a common feature of the graduate labour market outside teaching since the pandemic. It is not realistic that teachers will work remotely to the same extent that graduates working in other jobs might be able to. However, flexibilities such as part-time working for those who want it, allowing teachers to use PPA time flexibly at home, or having access to ad-hoc days off, are available to some teachers. WLT data suggests that a lack of access to these types of flexible working arrangements may be pushing some teachers out of the profession.

Recommendation 6: School leaders should consider adopting a wider range of flexible working practices in their schools to improve teacher retention.





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