

LEARNING LESSONS

FIXING THE TEACHER RETENTION
CRISIS

Joe Dromey and Marcus Johns
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report explores the escalating teacher retention crisis in England, focusing in particular on the state secondary sector.

Some 39,000 full time equivalent teachers left the workforce in England in 2024/25, representing one in twelve teachers. Attrition has increased in recent years and is particularly high among newly qualified teachers. Nearly one in four (24 per cent) teachers who qualified in 2022 had already left the profession after three years, up from one in five (20 per cent) who qualified in 2009. Attrition is high by international standards: the rate of teachers leaving the sector in England is significantly higher than the OECD average, and three times higher than France or Ireland.

Attrition rates look set to remain high. Our workforce survey found that seven in ten (71 per cent) teachers had considered leaving the sector in the last year and nearly half (45 per cent) said they are likely to leave in the next three years.

This crisis is symptomatic of deep challenges in the education system that must be tackled if we are to address teacher attrition:

- **Workload** – high and unsustainable workloads are the biggest driver of attrition. Secondary teachers in England work 49 hours a week, with primary teachers working 51 hours. Teacher hours in England are high compared with those in other graduate professions, and with teachers in most advanced economies. Teachers do not have enough planning, preparation and assessment (PPA) time, which adds to work intensity and undermines work-life balance.
- **Behaviour** – pupil behaviour has deteriorated in recent years. Poor behaviour is adding to teacher workloads, causing stress, and driving teachers to leave the sector.
- **Stress and poor wellbeing** – teachers face very high levels of stress. Eight-six per cent say they experience stress at work, with 57 per cent saying this impacts their mental health. Yet many teachers do not feel their school provides adequate wellbeing support. Teachers who leave the sector are half as likely to say that they find their new job stressful as those who remain.
- **Flexibility and work-life balance** – while the prevalence of flexible working in education has increased, it has not kept pace with other

sectors, and this is a growing driver of attrition. Teachers who are able to work flexibly are more likely to stay. However, just 22 per cent of teachers say they would feel comfortable requesting flexible working.

- **Assessment and inspection** – despite recent changes to the inspection framework, Ofsted remains a major driver of attrition. Many teachers lack faith in Ofsted and feel that inspections add to stress and workload.
- **Feeling listened to and valued** – just 7 per cent of teachers say policymakers listen to their views. This feeling of being undervalued and ignored is a key driver of attrition. However, there has been progress since the change of government.
- **Pay** – teacher pay fell significantly during austerity. The recent real terms pay rise delivered by the Labour government has helped improve perceptions of pay, but there is a long way to go. Median pay for a classroom teacher in a state school in England remains £3,900, or 7.7 per cent, lower in 2025/26 than 2010/11 in real terms.

The teacher retention crisis has serious implications for our education system. With recruitment failing to meet targets and a large number of teachers leaving, last year we saw a decline in teacher numbers for the first time in eight years, and vacancies are nearly four times higher than 2010/11. Class sizes – which are among the largest in advanced economies – have been rising. Teacher turnover can lead to disruption for children and to poorer outcomes. And teacher attrition is costly. We estimate that the total cost of training primary and secondary school teachers who leave within the first five years was £1.4bn in the last parliament. Just reversing the increase in early leavers that we've seen over the last decade would save £45m annually in teacher training costs.

The Department for Education should develop a comprehensive recruitment and retention strategy, with measures to address the drivers of teacher attrition. This should include:

- **Managing down workloads** – the government should develop a workforce reduction action plan and harness ed-tech to reduce workload. PPA time should be increased to at least 15 per cent, funded by the upcoming reduction in cohort sizes.
- **Improve teacher wellbeing support** – the DfE should encourage all schools both to have a health and safety trade union rep, and to invest in occupational health support.
- **Tackle poor behaviour** – the government should develop a new behaviour strategy and roll out a national 'Respect' campaign.
- **Rethink inspection** – DfE should review the impact of recent changes to the framework, and consider further measures to minimise stress, workload and attrition. Ofsted should include a

specific ‘staff workload and wellbeing’ category, to ensure schools focus on this crucial area.

- **Widen access to flexible working** – in support of flexibility, the government should introduce an absolute right to part time work for parents returning from maternity leave. DfE should pilot a sabbatical programme, giving teachers the right to a term off every five years.
- **Increase financial incentives and pay** – retention bonuses should be increased and extended to all teachers, at a cost of £256m. The government should also continue to reverse the decline in pay since 2010, with real terms increases and fully funded pay settlements.

1. INTRODUCTION

A happy, well-trained, and motivated workforce is crucial both to the success of our education system and to outcomes for young people.

However, the education system is experiencing a retention crisis, which has intensified in recent years. Schools are increasingly struggling to retain the skilled teachers they need to deliver an outstanding education.

There is growing recognition of the scale of this crisis. The School Teachers' Review Body has acknowledged the challenge, describing the loss of experienced teachers as a 'significant concern'.¹ Nearly nine in 10 (86 per cent) teachers in our workforce survey agreed that there is a teacher retention crisis, with two in three (63 per cent) saying that their workplace faces a retention crisis.

This report explores the teacher retention crisis. We focus primarily on teachers in the state secondary system in England. However, the challenge with retention and the drivers of workforce attrition are common to other parts of the education sector and other parts of the UK.

We start by exploring the scale and nature of the crisis before examining its drivers and consequences. Finally, we set out recommendations to government and schools to tackle the teacher retention crisis.

The report was based on a literature review, data analysis, expert interviews, a workshop with education staff and a survey of 304 education staff.²

2. THE TEACHER RETENTION CRISIS

There is a growing teacher retention crisis in England, with large numbers of early-career teachers leaving the profession every year³.

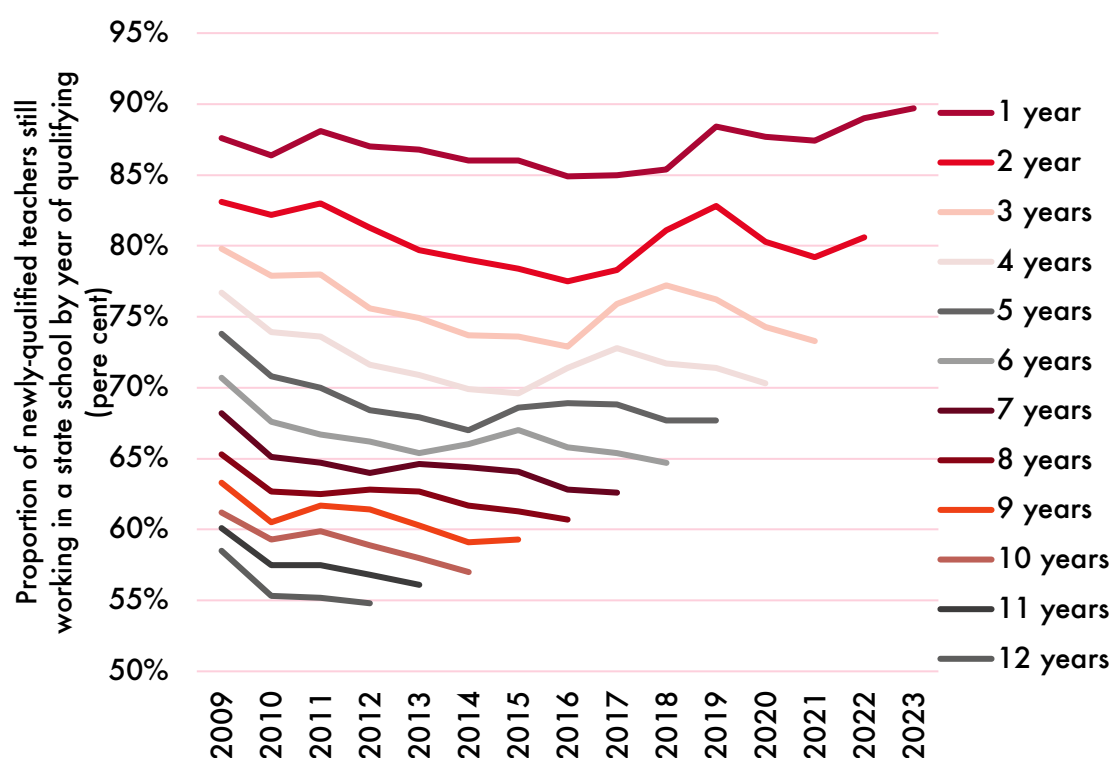
Department for Education (DfE) data shows that 38,600 full time equivalent (FTE) teachers left the workforce in England in 2024/25. This represents 1 in 12 (8 per cent) of all qualified teachers leaving the workforce that year alone.⁴

This has contributed to a marked shift in how teachers leave the profession, with a decline in the number retiring and an increase in those moving 'out of service'. During the first five years of the last decade (2010/11-2014/15) 67,000 teachers retired, while 149,000 teachers moved 'out of service' – ie changed careers or moved to another education sector. This meant just over two teachers moving out of service for every one teacher retiring during this period. In the first five years of this decade (2020/21-2024/25) the number retiring fell to 21,000, with the number moving out of service increasing to 179,000. As a result, nearly eight teachers moved out of service for every teacher who retired⁵.

Newly qualified leavers

Rates of attrition are particularly high among newly qualified teachers. Nearly one in four (24 per cent) teachers who qualified in 2022 had already left the profession after three years. This represents an increase in levels of attrition in recent years. Just one in five (20 per cent) teachers who qualified in 2009 had left the profession within three years.

FIGURE 1: TEACHER RETENTION RATES HAVE DECLINED IN RECENT YEARS



Source: DfE, School workforce in England, 2025

International comparisons

England seems to face higher levels of teacher attrition than other comparable countries.

In England, one in 10 (9.5 per cent) of fully qualified teachers from pre-primary to upper secondary education left the profession in 2022/23, compared to an attrition rate of 6.5 per cent across the 19 OECD countries where comparable data is available. The attrition rate in England is three times that of the rate recorded in France and Ireland.⁶

The proportion of teachers who resign – rather than retire – is particularly high by international standards. In England, resignations from teaching in 2022/23 accounted for nine in ten (91.5 per cent) of those leaving the sector. By comparison, over half of qualified teachers leaving the sector in France (85.1 per cent), Belgium (67.4 per cent) and Ireland (60.5 per cent) retired.⁷

Future retention challenges

There is evidence to suggest that the teacher retention crisis will continue in the years to come, as a very large proportion of teachers are considering leaving the sector.

The Working Lives of Teachers is a longitudinal study of secondary school teachers, carried out on behalf of DfE. The latest wave found that three in ten teachers⁸ (29 per cent) in 2025 were considering leaving the state school sector within the next 12 months.

Similarly, our survey found a very large proportion of workers in the education sector were considering leaving the sector. Seven in ten (71 per cent) of teachers had considered leaving the sector during the previous year. One in five (21 per cent) said they were unlikely to be in the sector in a year's time, with nearly half (45 per cent) saying they are likely to have left within three years.⁹

3. THE DRIVERS OF THE CRISIS

In this chapter, we explore the key drivers of the teacher attrition. Addressing these factors is essential if we are to tackle the crisis.

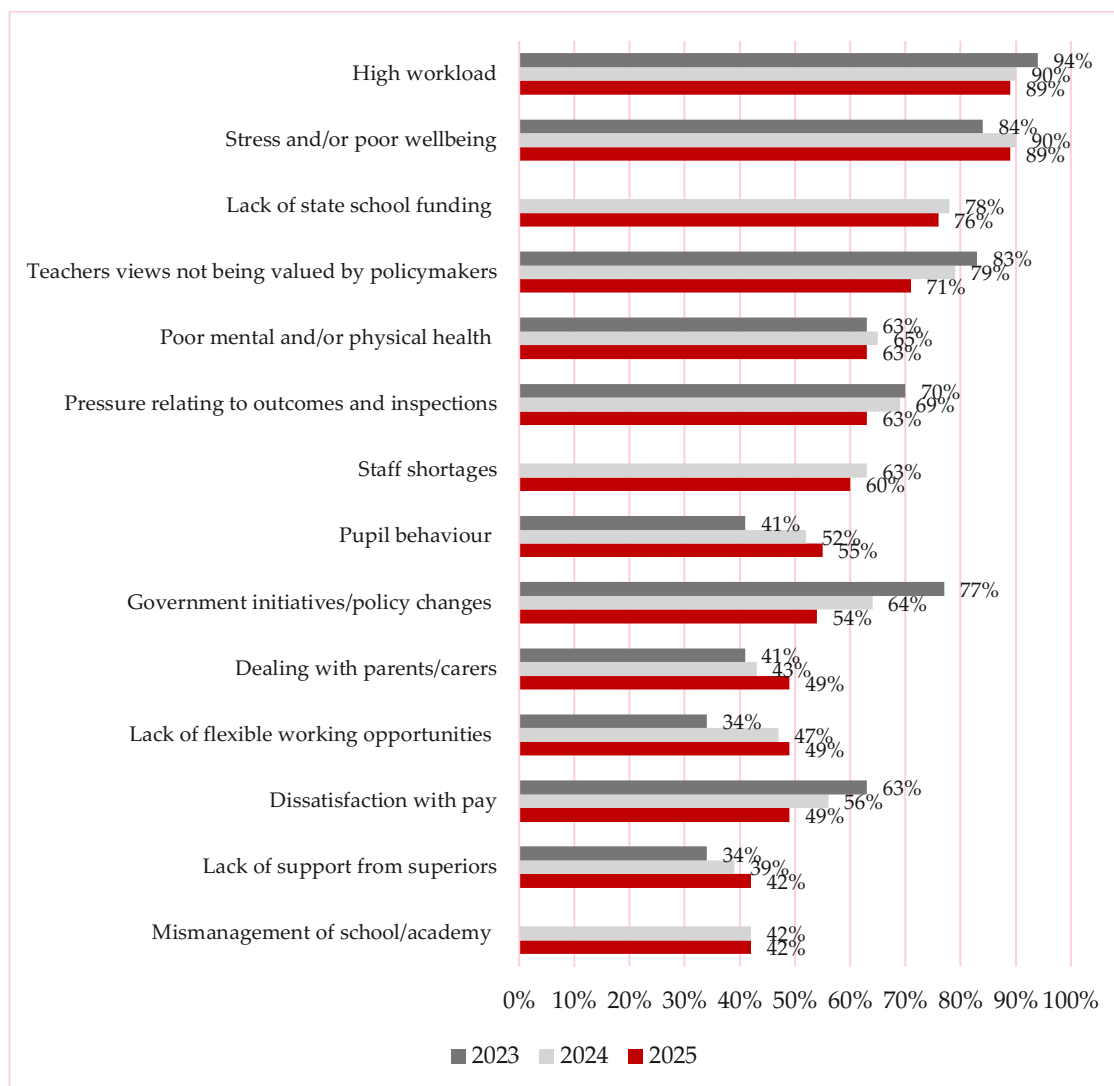
What are the factors that influence teacher retention?

The Working Lives of Teachers study provides the best evidence of the factors driving teacher attrition. The survey asks teachers in the state education whether they are considering leaving the sector, and the factors that lead them to do so. Figure 2 below shows, the most prominent factors driving teacher attrition.¹⁰ High workload and stress and/or poor wellbeing were by far the most commonly cited factors, with both highlighted by nine in ten (89 per cent) of teachers.

The survey also asks teachers who have recently left the sector what factors contributed to this decision. Again, workload (74 per cent) and stress/poor wellbeing (73 per cent) are the most commonly cited factors among those who have left the sector.

The findings of this survey were consistent with the findings of our education workforce survey. Workload was cited as the most significant factor driving teachers to leave the sector, with 72 per cent saying this had a large impact. This was followed by stress and poor wellbeing (66 per cent), and poor behaviour (66 per cent).

FIGURE 2 - WORKLOAD AND STRESS AND POOR WELLBEING ARE THE MOST COMMON REASONS FOR TEACHERS CONSIDERING LEAVING THE STATE EDUCATION SECTOR



Source: DfE, Working lives of teachers and leaders: Wave 4 2025

Workload

High workloads are one of the main drivers of teacher attrition in the education system in England. This was cited by nine in ten (89 per cent) teachers who are considering leaving the sector, and three in four (74 per cent) of those who had left the sector.¹¹

Teachers in England tend to have particularly high workloads. In 2025, the average full time primary teacher worked 51.4 hours, with secondary teachers working 49.3 hours.¹²

Workloads for teachers are high compared to other professions. In 2023/24, the average teacher worked 5.2 hours more per week than the average

graduate in other roles.¹³ Workloads are also high compared to teachers in other countries. In 2018 – the last year we took part in the OECD’s international TALIS survey – working hours for full time teachers in England were a fifth (19 per cent) longer than the OECD average.¹⁴

Teachers are – unsurprisingly – very dissatisfied with workloads. Our survey found that just one in five (21 per cent) of teachers are satisfied with their workload, with three in five (59 per cent) being dissatisfied.

High workloads are driven not by contact time, but by other activities such as marking and feedback; lesson planning; data management; administrative responsibilities; and external accountability.¹⁵ Indeed, teachers in England work the highest level of non-teaching hours of all teachers in the OECD. This is evident in the fact that three in four (74 per cent) teachers feel that they spend too much time on general administrative work.¹⁶

Lesson planning is crucial for high-quality education.¹⁷ However, despite the importance of well-planned lessons, teachers in England have very limited protected time for planning. Teachers are entitled to planning, preparation and assessment (PPA) time equivalent to 10 per cent of their teaching time.

The lack of PPA time contributes both to work intensification, and to a large amount of this work spilling over into evenings and weekends. This undermines work-life balance and contributes to stress and burnout for teachers.

Teacher workloads are also being driven by increasingly complex needs of children and families, and the lack of support available.

Reducing teacher workload has been a priority for government since 2019, and was a central part of the last teacher recruitment and retention strategy.¹⁸ There appears to have been some progress, with average weekly hours for full time secondary teachers and primary teachers falling 1.9 hours and 1.8 hours respectively since 2022.¹⁹ The proportion of teachers citing workload as a reason for considering leaving the sector has also come down a little.²⁰

However, while the number of hours teachers work has declined, there is evidence to suggest that work intensity has increased over the same period.²¹ Moreover, despite working hours declining slightly, they are still far too high and remain one of the biggest drivers of attrition.

Pupil behaviour and dealing with parents

There is evidence to suggest that pupil behaviour in schools has deteriorated in recent years, particularly in the period following the pandemic. Pupil suspensions and expulsions have increased, with repeated disruptive behaviour acting as a common driver.²² A 2024 survey by Education Support found that 57 per cent of school staff felt that pupils had become more disruptive, with 51 per cent saying they have become more verbally abusive and 29 per cent saying they have become more physically abusive.²³ The proportion of teachers reporting pupil behaviour as 'good' or 'very good' in their school declined from 58 per cent in 2023 to 46 per cent in 2025.²⁴

We heard about a number of factors seen as driving this decline in behaviour. This included a significant increase in young people with mental health issues, the rise in young people with SEND needs, and support services failing to keep up with growing demand. We also heard about the impact of the pandemic on young people and increasing screen time.

There are very high levels of dissatisfaction with behaviour among teachers. In our survey, three in five (60 per cent) were dissatisfied with behaviour, with just one in five (19 per cent) being satisfied.

This deteriorating behaviour is having a growing impact on teacher retention. The proportion of teachers considering leaving the sector who cited behaviour as a factor has risen rapidly from 41 per cent in 2023 to 55 per cent in 2025. This is the joint second largest increase among all the factors driving teacher attrition. Behaviour was also cited by half (47 per cent) of recent leavers, having risen more than any other factor over the last two years.²⁵

The growing challenges with pupil behaviour are also contributing to other drivers of teacher attrition:

- **Workload** – Worsening behaviour in schools is putting pressure on workloads. Six in ten (60 per cent) teachers feel they spend too much time responding to pupil behaviour incidents, up from five in ten (50 per cent) in 2021/22.²⁶
- **Stress and wellbeing** – Poor behaviour causes stress for teachers, and the evidence strongly indicates it is one of the most harmful to teacher's wellbeing and self-esteem²⁷

Evidence from the USA shows that teachers are more likely to leave schools when there is high or increasing levels of behavioural offences. Poor behaviour has a particular impact on newer teachers²⁸.

Alongside growing challenges with pupil behaviour, teachers are facing increasing issues with parents. Half (49 per cent) of teachers say they spend too much time communicating with parents/guardians, up from one in three (35 per cent) in 2022.²⁹ This was echoed in stakeholder interviews, which highlighted a perceived decline in engagement and support from parents.

Stress and poor wellbeing

Excessive workloads and challenges with pupil behaviour are contributing to worrying levels of stress among the workforce.

A staggering 86 per cent of teachers say that they experience stress at work, with 57 per cent saying that their job negatively affects their mental health.³⁰ Our survey found that over half (53 per cent) said that they felt stressed often or always, with nearly two thirds (63 per cent) saying they felt exhausted.

Despite the endemic levels of stress and its impact on mental health, many schools are not providing sufficient support for teachers. Two in five (40 per cent) teachers say that their organisation fails to effectively support employees who have a mental health problem, and nearly one in five (17 per cent) say their school fails to provide access to staff wellbeing programmes.³¹ Many feel their school is making things worse. Half (51 per cent) of teachers say their organisation's culture had a negative effect on staff mental health and wellbeing.³²

High levels of stress appear to be contributing to an increase in teacher sickness absence. In 2024/25, some 2.6m working days were lost due to sickness in state-funded schools in England, equivalent to 13,700 full time teachers. This has been driven both by a significant increase in the proportion of teachers taking some sickness absence over that period (from 55 per cent in 2014/15 to 62 per cent in 2024/25), and by a small increase in the average number of days taken off by each teacher who was off sick (from 7.6 days to 8.1 days).³³

Depressingly, leaving the education sector appears to have a very positive impact on stress levels. Teachers who have recently left the sector (39 per cent) are less than half as likely to say that they experience stress at work compared to those who are still in the sector (86 per cent).³⁴

Flexibility and work-life balance

The relative lack of flexible working has become an increasingly prominent factor undermining retention in education. Half (49 per cent) of teachers who were considering leaving the sector in 2025 cited the lack of flexible working opportunities, up from just a third (34 per cent) three years earlier.

This was the biggest increase of any factor driving teacher attrition over this period. The lack of flexible working opportunities was also cited by four in ten (42 per cent) of those who left the sector.³⁵

This increase is not because work in the education sector has become less flexible. Indeed, there has been a moderate increase in flexible working in education in recent years. The proportion of teachers doing PPA time off-site increased from 12 per cent in 2022 to 19 per cent in 2025, and the proportion of workers starting late or finishing early has doubled.³⁶

However, over the same period, the prevalence of flexible working outside of the sector has surged. The proportion of graduates outside of education who primarily worked from home tripled from just 13 per cent prior to the pandemic, to 44 per cent in 2023/24.³⁷ This profound shift, has made teaching appear far less flexible in comparison.

Our survey found that teachers were very dissatisfied with opportunities for flexible working. Half (51 per cent) were dissatisfied, with just one in five (21 per cent) being satisfied.

Staff in education are relatively pessimistic about the opportunities to access flexible working. Just one in five (22 per cent) of teachers say that they would feel comfortable requesting flexible working, with three in ten (62 per cent) disagreeing. Similarly, just one in three (32 per cent) teachers feel that flexible working is compatible with a career in teaching, compared to over half (55 per cent) who disagree.³⁸

There is also evidence to suggest that many teachers are leaving the sector to secure more flexible work. Seven in ten (71 per cent) teachers who left state education in 2025 for another sector were in flexible work in their new role, compared with five in ten (51 per cent) of those still working in the sector.³⁹

Access to flexible working can be a powerful driver of retention among teachers. Recent analysis found that teachers who go on maternity leave and return to work full time are slightly more likely to leave their job in the following four years, with 45 per cent leaving their role. However, among those who return part time after maternity leave, just one in three (32 per cent) leave within the next four years. This rate of attrition is actually lower than the average among the profession as a whole.⁴⁰

Assessment and inspection

An effective school inspection and support system is vital in ensuring accountability and enabling school improvement. However, despite recent changes to the Ofsted regime, there remain deep concerns about the approach to assessment and inspection.

Our survey found just one in five (19 per cent) teachers agree that school inspection provides a fair assessment of school performance, with over three in five (64 per cent) disagreeing.⁴¹ Ofsted inspections were highlighted in both our interviews and workshop as a major driver of both teacher workload and stress.

Concerns around assessment and inspection affect teacher retention. Among teachers considering leaving, over half (53 per cent) cited pressures relating to inspection (e.g. from Ofsted).⁴²

There have been two changes to the Ofsted inspection regime in recent years – with the latest framework introduced in November 2025. In part, this has been prompted by the tragic case of Ruth Perry, the headteacher who took her life after an inspection. These changes appear to be having an impact. The proportion of teachers who cite inspections as a reason for leaving has declined by 16 percentage points in two years, the largest such drop of any factor.⁴³ However, it still remains a cause for concern and there is more work to do here.

Feeling listened to and valued

Slightly less tangible, but nevertheless hugely important, is the extent to which teachers feel listened to and valued. Shockingly, just 7 per cent of teachers say policymakers listen to their views, with 82 per cent disagreeing. The picture is slightly better in terms of feeling valued by society, but still only 15 per cent of teachers feel that the profession is valued by wider society.⁴⁴

The sense of not feeling valued was highlighted both in stakeholder interviews and our focus group. In these, we heard that restrictive management and excessive inspection were undermining the sense of professional autonomy among the teaching workforce.

This sense of not feeling listened to or valued is a driver of teacher attrition. Seven in ten (71 per cent) teachers who are considering leaving the sector cited not being valued by policymakers, with a further 36 per cent highlighting negative public perceptions.⁴⁵

There has been significant progress on both these measures between 2023 and 2025, which suggest that teachers are more positive about the extent to which the current government values and listens to them. However, there remains a long way to go here.

Pay

Pay is an important factor both in terms of attracting workers to a sector and retaining them.

Teacher pay improved significantly under the last Labour government, contributing to a change in perception of the profession. However, from 2010, teacher pay fell significantly behind both average wages and inflation as a result of austerity. While there have been some more generous pay rises for the sector in recent years, median pay for a classroom teacher remains £3,900 – or 7.7 per cent – lower today in real terms than in 2010/11.⁴⁶

Satisfaction with pay has improved significantly in recent years. Net satisfaction with pay increased from -49 percentage points in 2023 to -11 in 2025. This is largely due to the above inflation pay increase of 5.5 per cent delivered by the new Labour government in 2024

Pay is an issue in driving attrition within the sector. Half (49 per cent) of teachers who are considering leaving the sector point to dissatisfaction with pay as a factor. Interestingly, far fewer – just one in four (25 per cent) – of those who leave the sector highlight pay as a motivating factor.⁴⁷

Pay appears to be more salient for younger or early career teachers compared to later career teachers who have invested consistently in their teaching skills and are less likely to switch jobs due to pay alone⁴⁸. This is particularly an issue for young teachers in STEM subjects, who can often earn significantly more in other professions⁴⁹.

4. THE CONSEQUENCES OF THE CRISIS

The increase in attrition among the teaching workforce should represent a serious concern for policymakers. In this chapter, we explore some of the consequences of the teacher retention crisis.

Teacher numbers and shortages

After a gradual expansion of the workforce in recent years, the number of full-time equivalent teachers in state-funded schools in England declined by 457 in 2025/26, the first decline since 2017/18.⁵⁰

This has partly been driven by teacher recruitment which has fallen below target in recent years.⁵¹ However, the stall in growth of the workforce is also due to large numbers of teachers leaving the sector.

As a result of a combination of recruitment falling below target and high rates of attrition, the sector has seen growing teacher shortages in recent years. There were 1,615 teaching vacancies in state-funded schools in 2025/26, representing 0.4 per cent of all teaching roles. The number of such vacancies has increased by 257 per cent since 2010/11.

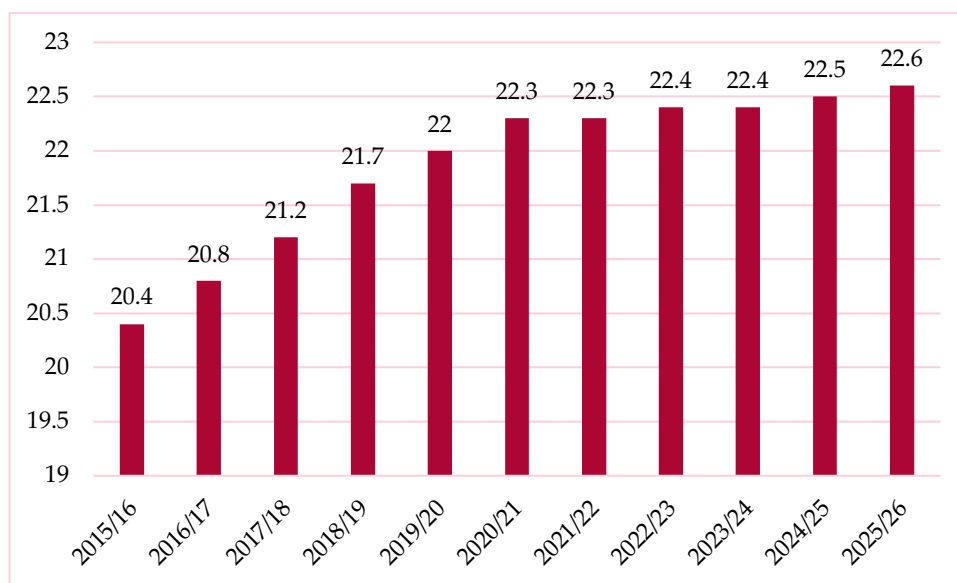
High levels of teacher attrition and teacher shortages have led to the growing use of supply teachers.⁵² This can have a negative impact both on value for money and on educational continuity. Schools in England spent £1.25bn on supply teachers in 2022/23, with much of the funding retained by supply agencies.⁵³ This is equivalent to the cost of 17,100 classroom teachers.⁵⁴

Class sizes

High levels of attrition, below target recruitment, and a demographic bulge of students moving through the system have together contributed to rising class sizes in recent years.

As figure 3 shows, the average class size in a state-funded secondary school in England has risen from 20.4 in 2015/16 to 22.6 in 2025/26.

FIGURE 3: AVERAGE CLASS SIZES HAVE INCREASED IN RECENT YEARS



Source: DfE, Teacher workforce statistics, 2026

England now has large class sizes compared to other similar countries. Out of 33 advanced economies, England has the third highest pupil to teacher ratio in lower secondary education. The number of pupils to teachers is a third (35.3 per cent) higher than the OECD average.⁵⁵

FIGURE 4: PUPIL-TEACHER RATIOS IN THE UK ARE HIGH COMPARED TO OTHER ADVANCED ECONOMIES



Source: OECD, Pupil-teacher ratios, 2022

The increase in class sizes and pupil-to-teacher ratios is a cause for concern both in terms of teaching quality and future teacher attrition. Large classes are associated both with higher levels of teacher stress and lower levels of job satisfaction.⁵⁶

While teacher shortages, class sizes and pupil-to-teacher ratios have increased in recent years, this trend may reverse in the coming years due to falling school roles. Schools have experienced a demographic bulge which peaked in 2024. The number of pupils in state-funded secondary schools is projected to decline by 5 per cent by 2030, with a decline of 9 per cent in primary.⁵⁷ As a result, nearly half (45 per cent) of secondary headteachers anticipate a reduced headcount in the coming years.⁵⁸

However, falling pupil numbers offer the government a political choice: delivering savings in the school budget by reducing headcount or maintaining resourcing in order to increase per-pupil funding. Previously governments have taken different approaches. In the 1970s and 80s, the government chose to cut teacher numbers when pupil cohorts shrank. In the 2000s, by contrast, under the previous Labour government, teacher numbers increased significantly at a time when pupil numbers were falling, in a conscious effort to bring down class sizes.⁵⁹

Educational continuity, quality and outcomes

There is some evidence to suggest that high levels of teacher attrition can undermine the quality of education and outcomes for students.

Gibbons et al found that higher levels of teacher turnover in state secondary schools in England had a negative impact on student qualifications, due to disruption and lack of continuity. This was due to incoming teachers lacking 'school specific human capital', such as relationships with colleagues, or understanding of the school's routines and the needs of students.⁶⁰

Stakeholders in our research interviews argued that high levels of attrition risked undermining pedagogical coherence, pastoral relationships and behaviour cultures. There was a view that this could widen the attainment gap, if attrition is particularly high in struggling schools. Our survey also found significant concerns over the impact of the teacher retention crisis on outcomes. Over half (55 per cent) of teachers said that attrition had a negative impact on the quality of education in their organisation.

Cost of training

High levels of teacher attrition – particularly among newly qualified teachers – come at a substantial financial cost to the education system.

Training a teacher represents a significant investment of public funding. This includes fees for initial teacher training, bursaries, and costs for existing staff to mentor and support new teachers. The IFS estimated that the average cost to the state per trainee was £23,000 in 2016.⁶¹

We estimate that the total cost of training teachers in the state primary and secondary school system who leave within five years was £1.44bn over the last parliament.⁶²

Reducing the high levels of attrition in the teaching profession could significantly reduce the cost of this training. For example, one in three (32 per cent) teachers who qualified in 2019 had already left the profession five years later, up from just one in four (26 per cent) of those who qualified a decade earlier. If we reversed the increase in attrition seen over that period, we would reduce the number of newly qualified teachers leaving the profession by over 1,400 each year. This would save **£45m annually**.⁶³

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

The education system is experiencing a retention crisis which has escalated in recent years. This should represent a major concern for policymakers. In this section, we set out a series of recommendations to tackle attrition and promote teacher retention.

Teacher recruitment and retention strategy

The previous government set out a teacher recruitment and retention strategy in 2019.⁶⁴ While the strategy included well-evidenced and innovative measures, many of these were subsequently dropped.⁶⁵

There has been a steady increase in teacher attrition in recent years, and recruitment has been significantly below target. However, there is currently no comprehensive strategy focused on boosting recruitment, and addressing the worryingly high levels of teacher attrition.

Recommendation 1: Develop a teacher recruitment and retention strategy

The Department for Education (DfE) should work with teachers and education unions to develop a comprehensive recruitment and retention strategy. Below we set out a series of potential elements of this strategy, addressing the major drivers of attrition within the sector.

Manage down teacher workload

While there has been some progress in reducing teachers' hours in recent years, workloads remain unsustainable. Excessive workload is the single biggest driver of attrition in the sector, mentioned by nine in ten (89 per cent) teachers considering leaving the sector.⁶⁶ Two in three (68 per cent) teachers in our workforce survey said that reducing workloads would boost retention.

Recommendation 2: Develop a workload reduction action plan

The DfE should work with unions in the sector to develop a comprehensive action plan to tackle workload.

This strategy should seek to reduce both teacher workload and working hours in a way which does not undermine educational outcomes. The strategy should ensure practices around planning, marking and assessment, data collection and school assessment do not lead to excessive workload.

As part of this strategy, the DfE should establish a 'teacher workload test'. This would require an assessment of the impact of any change to DfE policy or Ofsted framework on teacher workload. Any changes which increase teacher workload would need to be justified by a substantial positive impact on educational outcomes.

Recommendation 3: Harness ed-tech to reduce workload whilst maintaining high-quality teaching

A significant amount of teachers' workloads relate to repetitive administrative tasks. Three in four (74 per cent) teachers feel that they spend too much time on general administrative work.⁶⁷

Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools have the potential to reduce this burden significantly, in a way which does not undermine teaching quality or outcomes. In countries like Estonia and Korea, automation has helped both reduced teacher workload and improved pupil experiences.⁶⁸

There is a lot of interest among teachers in using AI tools. Six in ten (60 per cent) teachers are positive or very positive about the use of AI tools to deliver personalised learning. However, only 44 per cent of teachers have used AI tools in this way.⁶⁹

The DfE and the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology (DSIT) should establish an 'ed-tech accelerator'. The accelerator should focus on the development and adoption of AI-powered technologies in schools in order to personalise teaching, improve education outcomes, and manage down workload. DfE should work closely with teachers and unions in the development, testing, and roll-out of these tools.

Recommendation 4: Increase PPA time

Effective planning is essential to delivering high-quality teaching. However, teachers in England lack sufficient planning, preparation and assessment (PPA) time. As a result, teachers spend a significant amount of time during evenings, weekends and holidays undertaking planning, preparation and assessment activities.

The DfE should seek to increase PPA time, so that teachers have protected time in which to do this vital work. Over time, PPA should be increased from 10 per cent of contact time to a minimum of 15 per cent.

Delivering this increase would cost a significant sum, which we estimate to be around £1.6bn across state-funded schools, based on the current workforce size.⁷⁰ However, increasing PPA time could be expected to deliver savings through reducing sickness absence and turnover. The increase could be delivered over time as school rolls fall. Lower school rolls will require fewer teachers, and this saving can be used both to increase PPA time and pay in the sector.

This section should be informed by both reviewing school processes, and engaging with school staff, and health and safety reps.

Schools that perform poorly on this measure should be required to produce a 'workload action plan', with meaningful steps to manage down workload. These action plans should be assessed at subsequent inspections to ensure the school is making progress in this crucial area.

Improve teacher wellbeing support

Alongside workload, stress and poor wellbeing are the major driver of teacher attrition. Despite endemic levels of stress and a worrying impact of work on mental health, too many teachers feel that their school lacks adequate support for staff wellbeing.

Robust action to address the other issues set out in this chapter – particularly workload, behaviour and inspection and assessment – would help to improve teacher wellbeing and reduce stress. But alongside this, there are other changes that could help promote healthy working environments, and support teachers who are struggling.

Recommendation 5: Promote health and safety reps and occupational health support

There is strong evidence to suggest that the presence of trade union health and safety reps helps make for healthier workplaces. Workplaces with health and safety reps tend to have fewer injuries, less work-related ill-health, and more positive safety cultures.⁷¹

High-quality occupational health support can be effective in promoting healthy workplaces and supporting people who have health or mental health problems at work.⁷² However, many schools still not have access to effective occupational health support.

DfE should strongly encourage schools both to have a health and safety rep and to provide occupational health support. Ofsted inspections should explore the measures schools have in place to ensure healthy working environments as part of the 'staff workload and wellbeing' focus (see below).

Tackle poor behaviour

Teachers deserve to be treated with respect by pupils and parents. However, there is growing evidence that behaviour in schools has been deteriorating. As well as being a barrier to learning, poor behaviour is also a major driver of teacher attrition. Many teachers considering leaving the profession and many who have already left, cite behaviour as a key factor.⁷³

In our workforce survey, action to improve pupil behaviour was the single most commonly cited factor to reduce attrition, highlighted by three in four (75 per cent) teachers.

Recommendation 6: Develop a behaviour strategy to tackle poor behaviour

The government said last year that they were considering developing a behaviour strategy,⁷⁴ but none yet has been forthcoming. Statutory guidance on behaviour has not been updated since the last election.⁷⁵

The government should work with teaching unions to develop a comprehensive strategy to improve behaviour in school. The strategy should include:

- Behaviour management training for early-career teachers.
- Investment in support roles – including counsellors, family support workers, and psychologists – to help create a 'team around the child' and to allow teachers to focus on teaching.
- Specialist behaviour support teams for schools facing problem behaviour to draw on.

Recommendation 7: Introduce a national campaign to improve parent and pupil behaviour

DfE should develop a nationwide 'Respect' campaign, focused on improving both parent and pupil behaviour.

The campaign should include messages targeted at parents both on starting at schools and at key transition points, setting clear expectations as to the

treatment of teachers and school staff, and the importance of their role in ensuring good pupil behaviour.

Rethink inspection to reduce pressure and stress, and drive positive practice

An effective school assessment and support regime is important both to ensuring high-quality education for all and providing accountability to the public. A well-designed assessment system can also drive positive practice at schools. However, the approach to school inspection in England has been a major source of pressure and stress for teachers, as well as a significant driver of teacher attrition.

There has been some progress in recent years, with recent changes to the Ofsted framework, intended in part to reduce the pressure of inspections on teachers and leaders. These appear to have had some impact, with the proportion of teachers citing Ofsted as a factor in considering leaving the sector declining.⁷⁶ But the full impact of the most recent framework is yet to be seen. More could be done both to reduce the stress and workload created by Ofsted and to ensure that the accountability regime drives positive practice.

Recommendation 8: Reduce pressure as a result of inspections

DfE should review the impact of recent changes to the inspection regime on teacher stress, workload, and attrition.

The government should consider further changes to inspections to reduce pressure on the workforce. This could include:

- Reducing the frequency of inspections for schools where there are no safeguarding or performance concerns.
- Shifting from intensive one-off inspections, to shorter, more regular and lower stakes visits.
- Reducing the preparation required, including through using existing work rather than evidence packs produced specifically for an inspection.

Recommendation 9: Increase the focus on workload and wellbeing in Ofsted inspections

The focus of the Ofsted inspection framework can play an important role in influencing school practices. In addition to reducing the impact of

inspections on workload and wellbeing, the government should seek to ensure that the framework drives good practice in this area.

There have been some positive changes as part of recent reforms to the Ofsted framework, including adding a focus on staff wellbeing and workload under the section on 'leadership and governance'. However, this remains a small part of the Ofsted inspection regime.

The Ofsted framework should be revised, to include 'staff workload and wellbeing' as a separate evaluation area, reflecting the crucial importance of this issue. This section should assess:

- The extent to which schools ensure manageable workloads for teachers and other staff.
- The support schools provide to their staff, including those facing work-related stress.
- The level of staff turnover in the school.

This section should be informed by both workforce data, reviewing school processes, and engaging with school staff and health and safety reps.

Schools that perform poorly on this measure should be required to produce a 'school workload action plan', with meaningful steps to manage down workload. These action plans should be assessed at subsequent inspections to ensure progress is made in this crucial area.

Widen access to flexible working

While flexible working has proliferated across the economy, it has expanded slowly in education. The lack of opportunities for flexible working compared with other graduate professions, has contributed to challenges with recruitment and retention in the sector. Conversely, there is evidence to suggest that teachers who do have flexible working arrangements are less likely to leave the sector.

Recommendation 10: Develop a flexible working strategy for education

DfE should develop a flexible working strategy for schools, which seeks to promote access to flexible work, in order to boost retention.

Developed in partnership with school leaders, unions and organisations such as Timewise, the strategy should:

- Highlight the benefits of flexible working.
- Identify and spread best practice.

- Produce practical industry-specific resources to support schools in offering flexible work.
- Engage unions and the workforce to raise awareness of flexible working opportunities.
- Monitor the uptake of flexible working.

Recommendation 11: A presumption in favour of flexible working

There is no good reason why the vast majority of roles in education should not be suitable for part time work or flexible working.

The DfE should require all schools to offer flexible working by default. Schools should only be able to reject a request for flexible working if they can demonstrate it would cause significant operational difficulties, or a negative impact on pupil outcomes. In such instances, schools should be required to seek the approval of Acas before rejecting an application for flexible working.

Teachers returning from maternity leave should have an automatic right to return to their role on a part-time basis, with no right for the employer to refuse.

Recommendation 12: Establish a job-share match-making site

Job shares can be an effective way of supporting flexible working in education. However, just 6 per cent of teachers in state secondary schools in England are in a job share, with no increase in the rate of job share in the last four years.⁷⁷

The previous government promised a 'Match.com' style site to support teachers to find job shares, but it was never implemented.⁷⁸

The government should establish a job-share portal as part of the Teaching Vacancies website, to help teachers access flexible working. The portal should enable teachers to express an interest in roles and their desired working pattern. This should then link teachers up with others who are interested in the role so that they can apply for the role jointly as a job share.

Recommendation 13: Increase flexibility to work from home

Schools can currently give permission for teachers to undertake their PPA off-site at home where this is feasible, subject to headteacher approval. Survey data shows that few teachers are confident in requesting flexible working or hopeful of positive responses these requests.⁷⁹

Teachers should be entitled to consolidate their PPA into a block and to work from home on a morning or afternoon to complete this work. This should be an entitlement, rather than something requiring the approval of the headteacher.

The vast majority of current staff meetings, CPD sessions, and INSET days are undertaken in-person on the school site. School leaders should consider when such activities could be organised as online or hybrid meetings. This would offer teachers greater flexibility.

Recommendation 14: Pilot a sabbatical scheme to support retention

The previous government committed to piloting a sabbatical scheme for experienced teachers to reduce attrition, but the pilot was not implemented.⁸⁰

The government should implement a pilot of a sabbatical scheme for teachers. The scheme should provide teachers with the right to take a term of sabbatical after every five years of continuous service. Teachers should be entitled to use this time to study or train, to work in a relevant sector or industry, or to work abroad.

Sabbaticals should be paid at the half the rate of their usual salary. As with maternity pay, teachers should be required to return to work for at least a term following their sabbatical, or they would have to repay any salary received during that period.

We estimate that the scheme would cost **£45m** per year in the state secondary system in England.⁸¹ The cost of pay for teachers while on sabbatical should be fully funded by DfE to avoid individual schools facing a shortfall.

Increase financial incentives for retention and pay

Pay has an important influence on recruitment and retention. Reversing the decline in pay seen since 2010, and improving targeted incentives to support retention, could be a powerful tool in tackling teacher attrition. This was the fourth most important measure to boost retention in our education workforce survey.

Recommendation 15: Increase financial incentives for retention

The rate of attrition among newly qualified teachers has increased significantly in recent years. One in three teachers who qualified in 2019 left the profession within five years, up from one in four of those who qualified a decade earlier.

Evidence suggests that retention payments can be effective at reducing the number of teachers leaving the profession, particularly for early career teachers. A recent evaluation of a retention incentive scheme focused on early career maths and physics teachers found that teachers were 23 per cent less likely to leave in the three years they were receiving retention payments.⁸²

However, the use of financial incentives within secondary education remains relatively limited in England. The 'targeted retention incentive payments for school teachers' scheme provides grants of just £3,000 - £6,000, paid five years after qualification, only to teachers in shortage subjects such as maths, physics, chemistry and computing.

The DfE should strengthen the targeted retention incentive payment for schools scheme. Entitlement to payments under the scheme should be broader, and the value of the scheme should be higher:

- £3,000 for all teachers, payable on completing five years in the profession.
- An additional £2,000 - £4,000 payment for the above mentioned priority subjects.

This scheme would cost an additional **£256m** per annum in the state secondary sector, relative to the current scheme.⁸³

Recommendation 16: Restore teacher pay over the medium term

Alongside strengthening retention incentive payments, increasing teacher pay overall will be important to improving both recruitment and retention, and to ensuring the workforce feels motivated and valued.

However, while increasing teacher pay overall would help boost retention, it comes at a far larger cost than targeted retention incentives.

The government should – over time – reverse the decline in teacher pay seen under the previous government, by delivering further real terms increases in future pay settlements. We estimate that restoring pay to the levels seen in 2010/11 in real terms would cost **£3.0bn**.⁸⁴

As a rule, pay increases should be fully funded by DfE rather than requiring schools to fund increases from existing budgets. Unfunded pay settlements risk leading schools to cut teacher and support roles. This could lead to increases in workload and stress among the teaching workforce, which could actually undermine retention.

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