



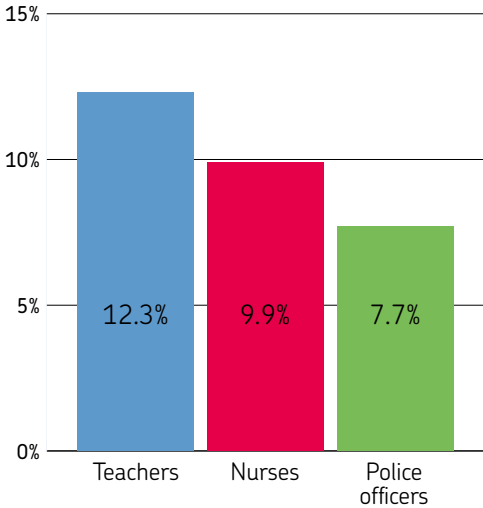
CASE STUDY

RECRUITING AND RETAINING TEACHERS

What *Understanding Society* data
tells us about the teaching workforce

Teachers have a higher rate of leaving the profession than nurses and police officers

Rate of full-time staff leaving their profession (average 2009/10 - 2015/16)



The supply of teachers in England is a major policy issue, with pupil numbers rising, increasing numbers of teachers leaving the profession, and shortages of trainee teachers.

The Department for Education’s figures suggest that pupil numbers in secondary schools will rise by 19% between 2017 and 2026¹, making this sector a particular concern. Policy makers and school leaders clearly want to fill vacancies, but meeting demand for teachers across types of school, age groups, subjects and different geographical areas is complicated.

All concerned, therefore, need a good understanding of the supply of teachers in order to address the challenge. With funding from the Nuffield Foundation, the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) used *Understanding Society* as one of the data sources for its report, *Teacher Workforce Dynamics in England*, exploring teacher retention, turnover and people returning to the profession.

It suggests that the government has tended to focus on recruiting teachers, while the National Audit Office, the House of Commons Education Select Committee and NFER itself have called for more emphasis on improving retention. The report sets out some of the factors driving teacher retention and turnover, and suggests ways that school leaders can retain teachers – and how government policy can help.

Since the report came out, the Department for Education has published a Teacher Recruitment and Retention

Strategy, which drew on the research findings and places a greater emphasis on developing policy to improve teacher retention.

RESEARCH METHODS

NFER used *Understanding Society* alongside two other datasets: the School Workforce Census and the Labour Force Survey. They used the first seven waves of *Understanding Society*, gathered between 2009 and 2016, and identified 1,205 individuals who were teachers in a state-funded school in England at some point across the seven waves.

Of these, 761 people were teaching in the state sector at each point they were observed in the data. At some point across the seven waves, a further 444 people were recorded as having previously been a teacher. (For 435 of them, we also know what job they went into the year after they left teaching.) The researchers used longitudinal sampling weights to take account of unequal selection probabilities, differential non-response, and potential sampling error.

They used *Understanding Society* data in particular to study teachers’ labour market behaviour – including the external and personal factors that influence that behaviour – and what they did after leaving teaching. They used a fixed effects regression model to estimate changes in a range of outcomes (such as monthly pay and working hours) before and after leaving.

The researchers also compared teachers’ experiences with those of nurses and police officers. These jobs were chosen

because they are also in the public sector, and comparable in terms of the sense of mission which often motivates people to take them up². They are also easily identified in our data, and the samples are large enough for robust analysis.

FINDINGS

The research generated a number of findings from its three data sources, and made policy recommendations based on each of them. These include:

The rates at which teachers leave the profession and move school have both risen since 2010. This gives schools more vacancies to fill each year, more staffing uncertainty to cope with, and greater costs for recruiting replacements. NFER recommended that the government “give greater attention to the impact of teachers moving around the profession and develop policies to support schools which are disproportionately affected”.

Some subjects are affected more than others. Maths, science and modern foreign language teachers have above-average leaving rates, and the number of new teachers being recruited into these subjects over the last five years has been running below the government’s targets. The report suggests that the government should provide financial incentives to encourage retention in the first few years after training.

The Government has since piloted schemes for linking bursary payments and student loan repayments to teachers staying in state-sector teaching.

“The report’s findings suggest there are chronic problems in the retention of teachers.”

Josh Hillman, Director of Education, Nuffield Foundation

Teachers work considerably longer hours during term time than nurses and police officers work in a normal working week, and may be working additional hours when schools are closed. Teachers have the lowest satisfaction with their amount of leisure time, compared to nurses and police officers – and have a higher rate of leaving their profession. The government launched a campaign with Ofsted and teaching unions in 2018 to reduce workload, and the report says this should continue. It also recommends that schools consider having a governor, trustee or member of the management team who is responsible for staff welfare.

Improving job satisfaction is a prime motivation for leaving teaching. Although 78% of teachers were satisfied with their jobs in 2015/16, for those who leave, job satisfaction declines in the years before, and increases considerably after they leave. NFER says school leaders should monitor satisfaction levels and act to support staff and reduce workloads when problems arise.

Pay is not the most important thing. On average, teachers who leave the profession earn 10% less than they did before – and their satisfaction with their income falls. This suggests that many teachers take a salary cut in favour of other benefits, such as improved job satisfaction or the opportunity to work part-time. More pay is likely to affect retention, the report says, but government policy should also consider workload, working hours and job satisfaction.

There are not enough opportunities for part-time working. 20% of full-time secondary teachers who leave teaching take up part-time work – and a lack of part-time and flexible working opportunities is one of the main barriers for people who want to return to teaching. NFER recommends that there are more chances for part-time working in secondary schools – as well as more research to understand how to support part-time working, and sharing of best practice.

The Government has since launched [resources, including guidance and case studies](#), to help to promote flexible working in schools.

Ofsted ratings influence teachers’ decisions. Teachers in schools rated ‘inadequate’ are more likely to leave or move school. The report recommends that school and system leaders need to do more to identify and support good teachers in these schools.

The challenge is greatest in London. There are considerably more teachers leaving the profession in London compared to other areas, including other large cities. The report’s final recommendations are that policy makers should look at how interventions such as housing subsidies could help to recruit and retain teachers in high-cost areas – and that more research into trainees’ geographical movements could inform new policies.

CONCLUSION

The report suggests that teacher retention is a significant issue, with the proportion of working-age primary and secondary teachers leaving the profession each year rising steadily since 2010. Teacher shortages are more acute in London, in certain subjects, in schools judged ‘inadequate’ and schools that serve more disadvantaged communities.

Based on the evidence it sets out, NFER also points out that most teachers do not decide to leave the profession for more pay and benefits, but are more motivated by concerns about workload, long hours and job satisfaction. The report makes some important recommendations about offering teachers more and better part-time and flexible working which could improve retention in the longer term, several of which have informed the Government’s strategy for meeting the teacher supply challenge.

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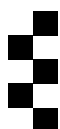


Understanding Society –
UK Household Longitudinal Study

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NOTES

1. [National Pupil Projections: July 2017](#)
2. Timothy Besley and Maitreesh Ghatak, [Competition and Incentives with Motivated Agents](#), *The American Economic Review*, 2005

[Teacher Workforce Dynamics in England](#) was produced by Jack Worth, Sarah Lynch, Jude Hillary, Connie Rennie and Joana Andrade at the National Foundation for Educational Research in October 2018. The research was funded by the Nuffield Foundation.

NFER is also using Understanding Society data to monitor the progress the school sector is making towards meeting the teacher supply challenge, through its [Teacher Labour Market in England – Annual Report 2019](#) and the Nuffield Foundation's [Teacher supply, shortages and working conditions in England and Wales project](#).

This case study is part of a series aimed at potential users of *Understanding Society* data, including policy makers, researchers and people in a position to influence social policy. If you would like to discuss how we can help to support and raise awareness of the policy impact of your research, please email policyunit@understandingsociety.ac.uk

Front cover image: Steve Riot/Pixabay