

Summary of roundtable with teachers and school leaders held on Thursday 19th October 2023

On Thursday 19th of October 2023, the Education Committee met with teachers and school leaders to discuss issues around teacher recruitment, training and retention, as well as recommendations for change. The following themes emerged from the discussion.

Recruitment issues

Financial barriers

- Participants felt that a teaching career was no longer financially attractive, or even viable, for graduates or career changers thinking about getting into teaching.
- In the case of graduates, participants felt that teaching was no longer competitive with other employment options. This was particularly felt to be the case for graduates of STEM subjects: *"if you've got a maths degree, why choose to be a teacher at the moment, there's plenty of other options, plenty of things you could do."*
- In the case of those who do start teacher training, participants observed that they then struggle with the cost of living while on the course: *"we've got a number of trainees that we know that are struggling just to afford to be on the course: cost of living, cost of accommodation and so on."*
- In the case of career changers, participants raised the issue of the lack of salaried routes into teaching (other than those that exist for specific subject specialisms): *"career changers can't afford to come into teaching because they can't give up the job for a year for PGCE, and there aren't sufficient bursaries for them."*

Lack of knowledge about options

- Participants mentioned a lack of visibility of the range of routes into teaching. For those not already "in the system" or who don't have a friend or family member in the teaching profession, participants felt that the current recruitment landscape was producing confusion about options and what routes might be best: *"So there is support there from .gov, it's pointing people in the right direction, but they're also confused by the different routes - SCITTs, employment route, PGCE."*
- In terms of options, a participant mentioned that the lack of part-time options for teaching was affecting both recruitment and retention but noted that they did not think most schools were in a position to support part-time contracts given the pressure they were under to fill timetables.
- However, one participant suggested that the range of options was a positive, and that while they would like to see routes better advertised, they thought that the assessment-only route was one that might attract more subject specialists.

Recruitment and retention of ethnic minority teachers

- A participant raised the issue of a lack of *"black and brown teachers and leaders"* and a concern that teaching staff in diverse areas did not match local demographics in this

regard. They cited research conducted by UCL¹ that found that 46% of schools in England had no teachers from ethnic minority backgrounds, and work by the Runnymede Trust detailing racism and discrimination faced by BAME teachers in England².

Retention issues

Retention of trainees and Early Career Teachers (ECTs)

- Some participants felt that retention was an issue even during training. One participant described training as *"a war of attrition – can you get through it?"*
- Other participants reported that ECTs were dropping out due to the workload and pressure of the timetable once they started teaching. A participant cited examples of an ECT in their school who felt unprepared by their training: *"On the new framework, my new ECT came in and she felt that the training year was not rigorous enough. It didn't prepare her for the workload."*
- A participant gave the example of an ECT who had trained during the COVID lockdowns and the inadequate preparation that this provided: *"When he came into school, he could not cope with the behaviour, could not cope with the workload. He's now left teaching a year in."*
- A participant spoke in negative terms about training they received under the new ECT framework: *"90% of the time, the people delivering the seminars were unprepared and reading off the PowerPoint in front of them and couldn't expand upon it. Linking onto that point as well, the content was not relevant, so I remember having done my training year and two years working as a teacher I got delivered a seminar on how to ask a question which I just thought was ridiculous, as if at this point three years into teaching I've never asked a question, where that's all I do 100 times a day."*

Workload

- Participants emphasised that workload was a key factor affecting teacher motivation and retention overall: *"I conducted a survey this week of over 100 teachers in my borough, asking how many were considering leaving and for what reasons. 94% said they were considering leaving - by far the highest reported reason was workload, followed by stress, followed by pay."*
- Participants spoke about early starts and full schedules which left little time for planning let alone taking breaks. They felt that this was leading to low morale and even burnout in many cases.
"I get up at 5:45 in the morning. I have a meeting before school. I do duty, I teach, I run a club, I teach, I do duty. Between 8:00 AM and 17:00, I am basically in front of kids or in meetings the entire time and then planning, marking assessment, calling home, following up on safeguarding, following up on behaviour issues."

¹ Tereshchenko, A; Mills, M; Bradbury, A; (2020) Making progress? Employment and retention of BAME teachers in England. UCL Institute of Education: London, UK.

² Runnymede Trust, NASUWT and Act for Racial Justice (2017) Visible Minorities, Invisible Teachers.

"the amount of free time, non-contact time for teachers... has a major impact on the amount of time planning etc... you're really struggling to actually teach and get your job done. I think that then leads to people who are leaving teaching and then that leads to shortages."

- A career changer said that in comparison with their previous experience, *"teaching is intense. It's not work like in the corporate world. It's intense. You're on performance in front of kids the whole time."*

Teaching assistants and support for SEND

- Several participants observed that SEND support needs were increasing in their schools and many felt that the system was not adequately dealing with this need. Some participants felt that this was particularly an issue in primary schools. They mentioned that schools were struggling to recruit and retain teaching assistants to provide SEND support due to low pay and the challenging support needs that teaching assistants were expected to deal with in mainstream settings. This in turn, participants said, is affecting morale in schools:

"Teaching assistants... are very low paid, but then they are appointed to children with complex needs. We really find it difficult to fill that as a system. And that's what we see and the impact it's having, it really does lower morale. When we see children – we're all there for the children – who just aren't getting their needs met, I think it's pulling down the morale of teachers and headteachers."

- As to why there were increased SEND support needs in mainstream schools, participants cited a lack of specialist provision available and delays in identification and assessment of needs:

"I have a child who by the time they get a specialist place will have waited 18 months for a space in a specialist provision."

"The early identification isn't happening, so they're coming into school with needs that should have been identified pre-school, but that's not happening. We have to work with them for two or three years before we even get EHCPs in some cases, and that again impacts on teacher workload - and why would you stay in the job when you've got five children in your class that need lots and lots of support that the adults can't give?"

Working environment

- One participant felt that the culture in schools was affecting retention: *"They're very top-down. They're closed cultures where teachers aren't feeling comfortable to speak up and say what they think. There's quite a bit of fear in schools. It's a very authoritarian system."*
- Relatedly, a participant noted an uptick in hostile attitudes of parents towards teachers, extending to social media as well as "scattergun" complaints to Ofsted, DfE and MPs: *"it feels quite relentless if you're in the middle of that."*

Impact on teaching and learning in certain subjects

"We have teachers who are trained and they become a body in a room and they are not a specialist, so therefore the quality of teaching that pupils are getting is suffering"

- While many participants expressed the view that teacher recruitment and retention issues were negatively affecting the standard of education they felt they could provide, participants raised issues affecting particular subjects where there were ongoing teacher shortages. Participants mentioned Computing, Maths, Physics and MFL in particular as subjects where specialists were lacking in schools, and one participant from the FE sector cited Law and Economics as subjects facing specialist shortages. One participant reported: *"We had to collapse a GCSE group last year, we just didn't have a teacher to teach the GCSE Computing."*
- Representatives from MFL reported that they were experiencing a decrease in specialist MFL teachers since Brexit. For those remaining in the profession, this now means teaching outside of their specialist language, which for students means that they are not getting the benefit of a specialist teacher. A participant also noted that certain subjects were being deprioritised in their school, again meaning that due to teacher shortages in more popular languages they were having to teach languages in which they were less proficient.
- A Physics teacher shared their experiences of teaching in a shortage subject: *"I'm a Physics teacher and ever since I started teaching fifteen years ago, I have mostly been the only physics teacher in my school. I currently have a colleague who has a sports science background who teaches A-level Physics with me because we have such a shortage... Physicists must teach three subjects, two of which are not Physics. It's like asking someone with a History degree to teach Religious Education and Geography because they're humanities up to GCSE level."*
- Another participant commented that physicists were now opting to teach Maths instead to avoid the workload of teaching other Science subjects.

Other issues raised

- Primary teachers not being given Teaching and Learning Responsibility (TLR) payments for subject lead positions
- Lack of progression for teachers unless they want to go into management. One participant mentioned the Advanced Skills Teacher position as something that provided progression for these teachers but was concerned that these positions had become rarer, especially in MATs, and non-management progression routes were being closed down
- Decreasing real value of pay and pensions
- Teaching no longer viewed as a vocation, with younger staff leaving for roles in other sectors.

Recommendations

- A participant suggested that there should be teaching stands at careers fairs, including promotion of teaching courses by universities in the region

- Several participants supported the idea of 'golden handcuffs' in the form of forgiveness of student debt for every year in teaching
- One participant suggested shortening the school year to make teaching more attractive: *"I do think the school year is something that could be shortened. I think it's shortened in the independent sector. I think it's shortened in the international sector. I certainly have lost teachers to those sectors because that's more attractive. Of course, there's the issue then of what about the students and the loss of learning. But again, there are alternative things that could be done over the summer to build up cultural capital: camps would be one example of that."*
- A participant suggested that developing a resource of pre-built lesson plans would encourage people into the profession due to a reduced workload: *"It is stopping teachers coming in because this resource is not available, and they're frightened of the lesson preparation workload"*. Other participants disagreed strongly with this suggestion, one remarking that *"you might as well put a robot in front of the room"* and another asserting that this approach amounts to *"basically accepting that we have these strains on workload and instead of addressing those by increasing funding, making classes smaller, you're having a race to the bottom where we're providing all the same lessons and depriving teachers of the autonomy to shape their own practice. We should be addressing the problems with workloads, so that teachers do have the time to be creative and to find meaning in their work."* Another participant suggested that this sort of approach was common in MATs.

January 2024