



ASSOCIATION
OF COLLEGES

2021/22 Staff Vacancies

AoC Survey
January 2022

Staff Vacancies – AoC survey December 2021 – January 2022

The Association of Colleges (AoC) represents 90% of the 232 colleges in England incorporated under the Further and Higher Education Act 1992.

Colleges have faced ongoing challenges in staff recruitment for years. In some teaching areas, such as construction and engineering, this is a well-documented problem, due to the disparity between the FE sector pay scales and what could be earned within industry. In Autumn 2021, AoC received feedback from members that the vacancy rates were rising across numerous college roles. In response, we conducted a survey of members on staffing vacancies to gain an insight into the size of the challenge.

Headline Findings

- There are currently 3,293 vacancies being reported from the 48% of colleges which responded. This is within the context of 105,000 FTE roles within the sector as a whole
- A mean of 30 vacancies per college was reported with a maximum of 162 for one college
- 1404 vacancies were reported in curriculum, with high levels of persistent vacancies in construction, engineering, health and social care and science and maths
- 1853 vacancies in support areas, with high levels of persistent vacancies in learning support roles, student services and facilities and estates roles.
- 96% of respondents report that the current level of vacancies is creating increased pressure on existing staff, 61% that vacancies have a significant impact on agency fees

Responses

111 colleges responded to the survey, representing 48% of the total population. Comments (but not numbers) were included from the 3 other organisations where relevant. Colleges had 3 working weeks to respond to the survey. The deadline was 7 January 2022.

Type	Number of responses	Number of colleges in England	Percent within type
General further education college	92	163	56%
Sixth form college	8	45	18%
Specialist college	11	24	46%
Total England*	111	232	48%
Other	3		
Total survey responses	114		

Region	Number of responses	Number of colleges in region	Percent within region
Eastern region	11	22	50%
East Midlands	7	13	54%
Greater London	15	33	45%
North East	7	14	50%
North West	19	41	46%
South East	17	36	47%
South West	14	22	64%
West Midlands	13	24	54%
Yorkshire and the Humber	8	27	30%
Total England*	111	232	48%

* Excludes Other (Independent Specialist Colleges)

Total number of full-time equivalent (FTE) staff at the college	Number of responses	Percent
0-99	1	1%
100-199	8	7%
200-299	10	9%
300-399	21	19%
400-499	19	17%
500-749	31	28%
750-999	12	11%
1,000-1,249	5	5%
1,250-1,499	2	2%
1,500+	2	2%
Total	111	100%

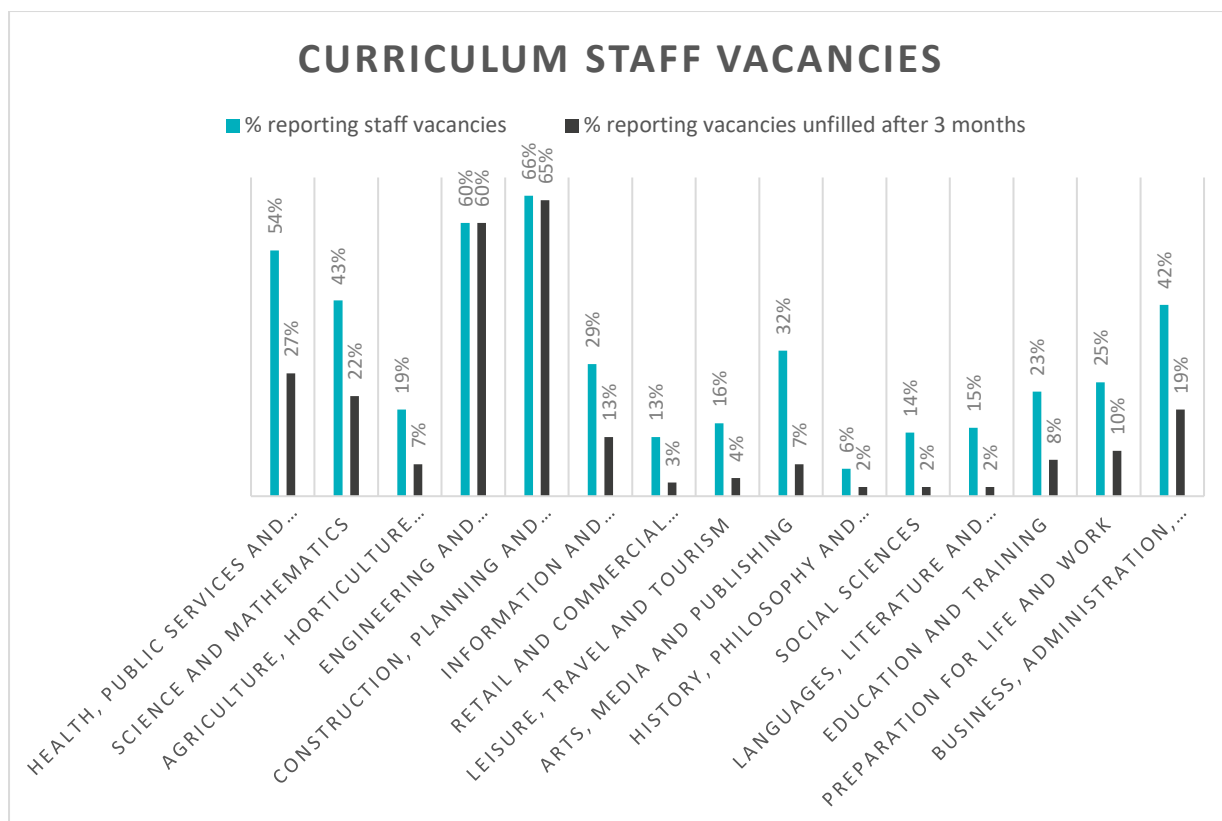
17% of respondents reported 0-299 staff, with the majority (64%) reporting between 300-749 staff and 19% reporting over 750 staff employed,

Curriculum Staff Vacancies

Curriculum staff were defined as teachers, trainers, instructors and managers with a teaching allocation. Filling particular vacancies has always been a challenge, colleges are now reporting vacancies at critical levels in these areas, but increased vacancies across all curriculum.

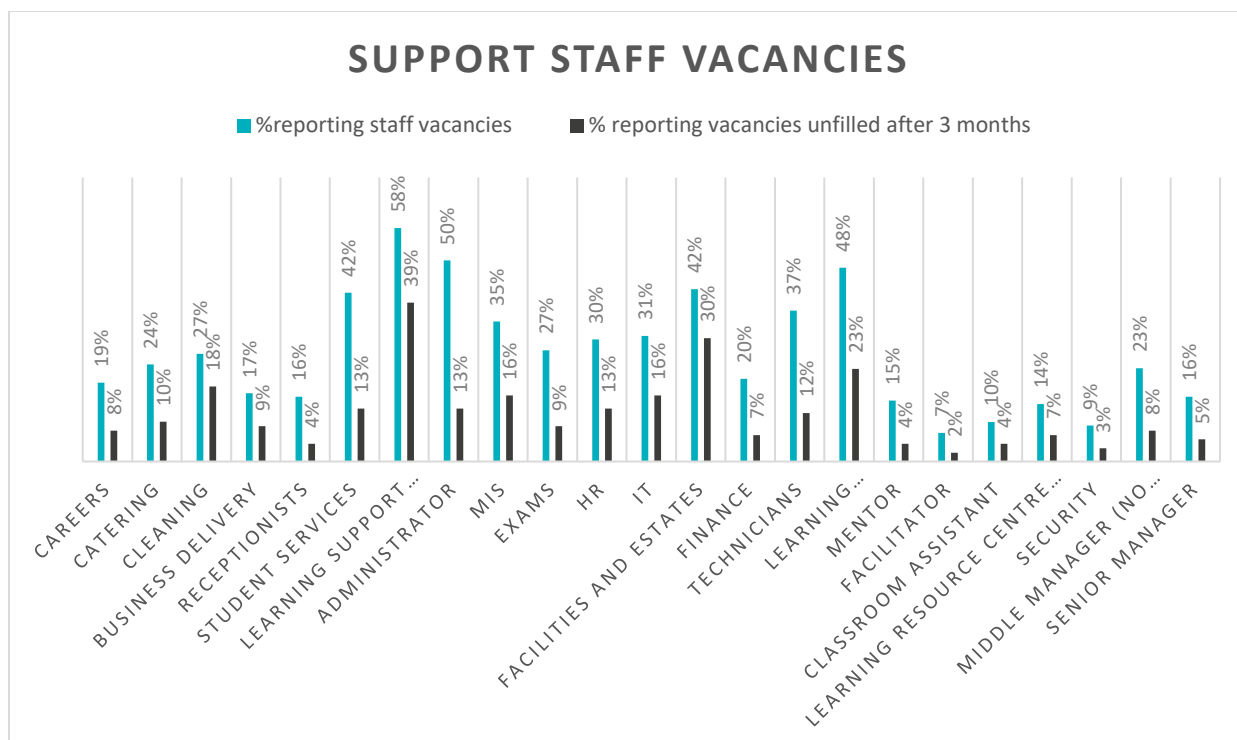
The curriculum areas with the highest proportion of vacancies, were unsurprisingly, construction (66%), engineering (60%), health and social care (54%) and science and maths (43%), with the percentage of those reporting persistent vacancy rates in these areas (defined as vacant for 3 months or more) being worryingly high.

When removing those providers who do not have a curriculum offer in some of the defined areas, the rate of vacancies becomes more acute in construction (76% reported vacancies, 67% persistent vacancies) and in engineering (64% reported vacancies, 57% persistent vacancies).



Support Staff Vacancies

Recruiting and retaining support staff has become increasingly difficult as the labour market has changed through Covid-19, with catering, warehousing and logistics employers increasing their hourly rate and offering signing and retention bonuses to attract staff. This has impacted particularly on staff in learning assistant roles (58% of respondents reporting vacancies, 39% confirming these are persistent), learning mentors (48% of respondents reporting vacancies, 23% persistent) and estates and facilities roles (42% reporting vacancies, 30% persistent).



Impact on the college of vacancies

The most significant impact reported by colleges around the level of vacancies was the pressure this placed on existing staff (96% identified this), with rising agency costs (61%) placing additional pressures on college budgets. Closely following these were lack of capacity (57%), poor student experience (48%) and increased staff sickness absence (43%).

What would you say were the biggest issues being caused by these staff vacancies?	Percent
Lack of capacity	57%
Agency costs	61%
Pressure on existing staff	96%
Increased staff sickness absence	43%
Falling behind on delivery and deadlines	38%
Poor student experience	48%
Loss of reputation	10%
Other	5%

Of the 5% of respondents identifying other impacts, the comments made were:

- Staff morale lower due to increased stress, staff wellbeing, HR being perceived negatively due to unable to or time taken to recruit to positions.
- Staff turnover
- Lack of skill set in engineering and construction struggling to attract on salary
- Lack of Quality Applicants
- Covering absence
- Increased mental health issues and increasing ER issues
- More parental complaints / reduction in staff morale

Recruitment Strategies

Colleges have not been passive when recognising that vacancies are becoming more difficult to fill, the responses to the question on what non-conventional methods a college has adopted to recruit staff were broad and imaginative:

- Golden Hellos (13)
- Open vacancies, advertising in different places to usual - targeting parent groups etc - being more flexible with hours
- Scarcity payment or market uplift (10)
- Promoting flexible working (eg compressed hours, considering part-time applicants for full time roles, more homeworking where possible) (6)
- Retention payment (5)
- Staff recruitment open events/ jobs fairs, tours and relationship building (5)
- Promoting the pension, leave and development opportunities (5)
- Diversifying where posts are advertised (trade jobs boards, local papers, big issue, local radio, community jobs boards) (5)
- Broadening the use of social media (4)
- Working in partnership with industry to offer specialist delivery (particularly NHS) (4)
- Engaging an agency to head hunt (4)
- Offering a relocation payment (4)
- Using taking teaching further or the levy to cover teacher training costs (4)
- Refer a friend scheme for staff (3)
- Future forces or signing the forces covenant (3)
- 'Grow you own' staff from drawing from a pool of completing students and developing and promoting existing staff (3)
- Simplifying application processes, reviewing essential criteria, removing closing dates and speeding up the recruitment process (3)

- Promoting jobs in FE to parents at student open events (3)
- Working more closely with JCP or local council (2)
- Hiring an in-house recruiter
- Offering accommodation
- Review of employer brand
- A dedicated microsite
- Paying job advertising sites a premium to keep roles at the top of the page.

Conclusion

It is clear that staff vacancy levels are reaching critical levels with unfilled positions having an impact on student experience, staff wellbeing and college costs. There are a variety of reasons for this challenge within the college sector, not least a very competitive job market, with ONS¹ identifying 460,000 more vacancies in Sept-Dec 2021 than in the quarter pre-covid (Jan-March 2020). This however, is compounding long standing issues within the sector rather than the root cause.

AoC makes national pay recommendations for FE colleges and, for five years, has been unable to go above a 1% or £250 national pay recommendation. Some colleges have chosen to pay more than this, but overall, funding has caused the sector to slip behind, both in terms of other sectors of education and in many cases, industry. In their 2020 report on college finances, the National Audit Office² explained that colleges were required to take “difficult decisions” to improve their financial health while coping with significant reductions to per student and total income.

Without significant investment in college funding the recruitment challenges that colleges face will continue to increase as pay falls behind industry, schools and universities.

Please see AoC College Staffing Challenge 2022 for further information.

Association of Colleges - February 2022

¹ ONS (2022). ONS Labour Market Overview, UK Jan 2022.

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/bulletins/uklabourmarket/january2022>

² NAO (2020). Financial Sustainability of Colleges in England summary.

<https://www.nao.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Financial-sustainability-of-colleges-in-England-Summary.pdf>


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