

2023



# Teacher Labour Market in England

Annual Report 2023

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We would like to thank TeachVac and Professor John Howson, who supplied us with key data on teacher vacancies, for their assistance with this research. TeachVac leverages unique cutting-edge technology to gather and process teaching and leadership vacancies from virtually all schools in England. Visit [www.teachvac.co.uk](http://www.teachvac.co.uk) for more details.





**“Schools need to see a clear strategy designed to address the teacher recruitment and retention challenges that have significantly intensified following the Covid-19 pandemic.”**

Jack Worth, NFER  
School Workforce Lead

## Introduction

The teacher recruitment and retention challenge in England has significantly intensified since the pandemic. Recruitment to initial teacher training (ITT) was considerably below target last year across a range of subjects and as of February 2023, this year's ITT recruitment is likely to be little better than last year, while teacher vacancies are significantly higher than the year before the pandemic. The recent trends in recruitment and retention affirm that addressing recruitment and retention should be an urgent policy priority in order to ensure schools have sufficient staff to provide a high quality education for pupils in England.

The aim of the National Foundation for Educational Research's (NFER) annual series of Teacher Labour Market reports is to monitor the progress the school system in England is making towards meeting the teacher supply challenge. The report summarises the key trends in teacher recruitment, retention and working conditions. The findings also point towards areas where policy actions are likely to have the greatest impact on addressing the challenges.

We use Department for Education (DfE) data on teacher training applications and registrations 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) and TeachVac teacher vacancies data.

Trends in recruitment and retention are primarily driven by the competitiveness of pay and working conditions in teaching compared to alternative jobs and careers. We therefore analyse trends in teacher pay, working hours, autonomy and well-being using data from the Labour Force Survey (LFS), UK Household Longitudinal Study (UKHLS) and Annual Population Survey (APS). Crucially, using these household surveys enables us to compare teachers and graduates in other occupations who are similar in age, gender and region. Further details about the data sources used and definitions are in a separate methodology appendix.



## Key findings and recommendations

UNDER EMBARGO UNTIL 00:01 AM ON THURSDAY 23 MARCH 2023

ITT recruitment in 2022/23 was **20 per cent lower** than in the year before the pandemic.

### Recruitment to ITT in 2023/24 is likely to be significantly below target, after historically low recruitment in 2022/23

Registrations to ITT courses last year fell by 20 per cent compared to the year before the pandemic. Both primary and secondary ITT registrations were below target, with 13 out of 17 secondary subjects under-recruiting relative to the estimated numbers of trainees needed to ensure sufficient staffing levels in schools.

ITT recruitment is likely to be 20 per cent or more below target this year for primary and **nine out of 17** secondary subjects.

Higher training bursaries in many subjects are leading to higher numbers of applicants this year in the subjects whose bursaries increased. Nonetheless, higher bursaries are unlikely to stimulate enough new recruitment this year to meet targets. Based on applications as of February 2023, primary and nine out of 17 secondary subjects are expected to be 20 per cent or more below target, while several other subjects are also at risk of not meeting their target.

The number of teacher vacancies posted by schools, an indicator of staff turnover, was 93 per cent higher in the academic year up to February 2023 than at the same point in the year before the pandemic.

Schools posted **93 per cent more vacancies** in 2022/23 compared to the year before the pandemic.

Falling retention rates and historically low teacher recruitment figures point to the deteriorating competitiveness of teaching compared to other occupations, in both pay and working conditions, which requires urgent policy action across the sector to address.

**The gap in real earnings growth between teachers and similar graduates has widened significantly since the pandemic.**

Median teacher pay in 2021/22 was 12 per cent lower in real terms than it was in 2010/11. This was 11 percentage points lower for teachers than for graduates similar in age, gender and region, and 17 percentage points lower than the real-terms growth in average earnings across all occupations.

In 2018/19, real earnings growth since 2010/11 was about four percentage points lower for teachers than for similar graduates. However, the gap has widened significantly since the pandemic, particularly for experienced teachers, driven by the 2021 teacher pay freeze and strong earnings growth outside of teaching.

The DfE's proposed 2023 teacher pay award involves an overall increase to teacher pay of 3.5 per cent, funded by a £2.3 billion uplift in school funding announced as part of the 2022 Autumn Statement. Pay rises of 7.1 per cent for early-career teachers will bring starting salaries to £30,000, with a three per cent increase for experienced teachers. Targeting more resource at early-career teachers is likely to continue to improve the competitiveness of starting salaries relative to the wider labour market, but smaller increases for experienced teachers will likely lead to pay continuing to deteriorate relative to other occupations.

Overall, the proposed pay increase of 3.5 per cent is less than the forecast for 2023 earnings growth in the wider labour market, which was revised upwards to 4.1 per cent by the Office for Budget Responsibility in March 2023. This means that it is unlikely to substantively narrow the overall earnings gap between teachers and the wider labour market. The DfE's 2023 pay award is therefore likely to have minimal impacts on improving recruitment and retention, relative to the scale of the challenge.

**Recommendation: Narrowing the gap between teacher pay and the wider labour market is key to supporting recruitment and retention. The 2023 pay award should therefore exceed the 4.1 per cent forecasted rise in earnings in the wider labour market.**

**Recommendation: The government should develop a long-term strategy for improving the competitiveness of teacher pay relative to other occupations, while ensuring that schools have sufficient funding to enact these pay increases without making cuts elsewhere.**

In 2021/22, real earnings growth since 2010/11 was **11 percentage points lower** for teachers than for similar graduates.



### Teachers' working hours and perceived workload have fallen since 2015/16, but remain higher than for similar graduates.

Teacher workload has been a policy priority in recent years because high workload was the reason most-often cited for teachers wanting to leave the profession. Teachers' working hours fell in the years prior to the pandemic and in 2021/22 were lower than pre-pandemic. However, despite the improvement, working hours and perceived workload remained higher in 2021/22 than for similar graduates, and the 2019 Teacher Workload Survey showed that teachers still felt they spend too much time on administration, data input, marking and lesson planning.

Teacher autonomy, a measure related to how manageable workload feels, has also been consistently lower for teachers than for similar graduates since 2010/11. Research shows that higher autonomy is associated with higher job satisfaction and retention.

**Recommendation: The Government should continue to remain focussed on reducing teacher workload by supporting schools in implementing the recommendations of the Teacher Workload Advisory Groups.**

In 2021/22, teachers worked on average **4.5 hours per week more** than similar graduates.

**The pandemic has led to a widespread adoption of remote working in the graduate workforce, but teachers' opportunities to work from home remain very limited.**

Pandemic-induced office closures led to a substantial increase in the proportion of graduates who reported that they worked mainly from home, while having no lasting effect on the prevalence of home working for teachers. In 2021/22, nearly half (44 per cent) of similar graduates worked mainly from home, up from 15 per cent in 2018/19.

Working from home is only one example of flexible working, and others such as part-time work, job-sharing or ad-hoc days off remain available to some teachers to varying degrees. However, the continued high prevalence of home working in many jobs in the wake of the pandemic indicates that it is a particularly attractive arrangement. The lack of availability of home working may therefore represent a threat to the relative attractiveness of teaching, but further research is needed to fully understand teachers' working preferences and how to maintain the attractiveness of working in schools.

Recommendation: The Government should fund further research to better understand teachers' flexible working preferences and use the findings to revisit the 2019 Teacher Recruitment and Retention Strategy, ensuring it reflects the new post-pandemic realities of working life.

Recommendation: Given the demand for flexible working arrangements, school leaders should explore what options may work for their schools.

In 2021/22, **44 per cent of graduates** of similar age, gender and region to teachers reported that they mainly worked from home

### ITT recruitment was significantly below target in 2022/23.

Data from the DfE’s ITT census shows that in 2022/23, overall recruitment to ITT reached 71 per cent of the target number of trainees the DfE estimates the school system needed to recruit last year to meet future staffing needs.

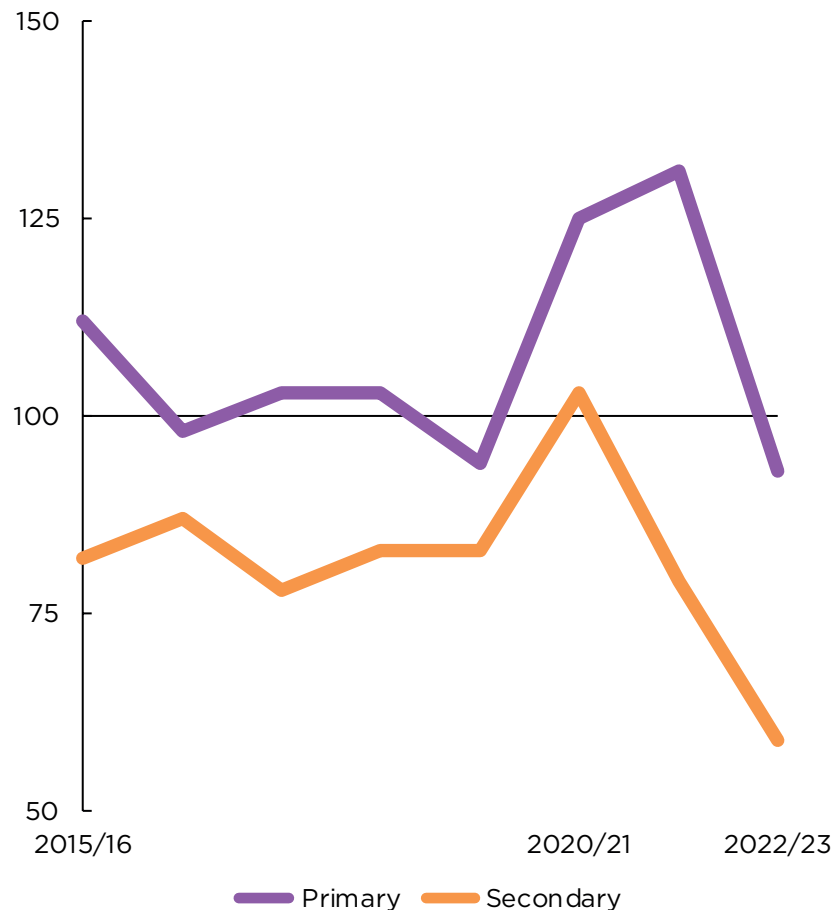
Under-recruitment of teachers has been a significant challenge in England over the last decade, particularly affecting secondary schools. However, the 2022/23 recruitment figures show that the boost to teacher recruitment driven by the pandemic was only temporary and that the underlying recruitment challenges have returned as the effects of the pandemic have receded.

A small contributor to the scale of last year’s under-recruitment was an increase in the overall recruitment target, which was five per cent higher than the previous year. However, the main driver of under-recruitment was a significant drop in the number of new trainees placed on ITT courses compared with previous years. The data shows that 23,224 trainees were recruited into teaching in 2022/23, which was 20 per cent lower than in 2019/20, the last pre-pandemic year.

Under-recruitment was particularly acute for secondary, which reached 59 per cent of its target number of trainees and varied considerably across individual subjects. Secondary recruitment was also lower than pre-pandemic, as the overall number of secondary recruits was about three-quarters of the number of recruits in 2019/20.

Primary also under-recruited last year, reaching 93 per cent of target. Historically, primary recruitment has tended to be close to target, and over-recruited during the pandemic. The fact that the number of primary trainees was below target therefore demonstrates the high degree of recruitment challenge currently facing the teaching profession.

Postgraduate ITT recruitment vs target 2015/16 - 2022/23 (%)



Source: Department for Education ITT census



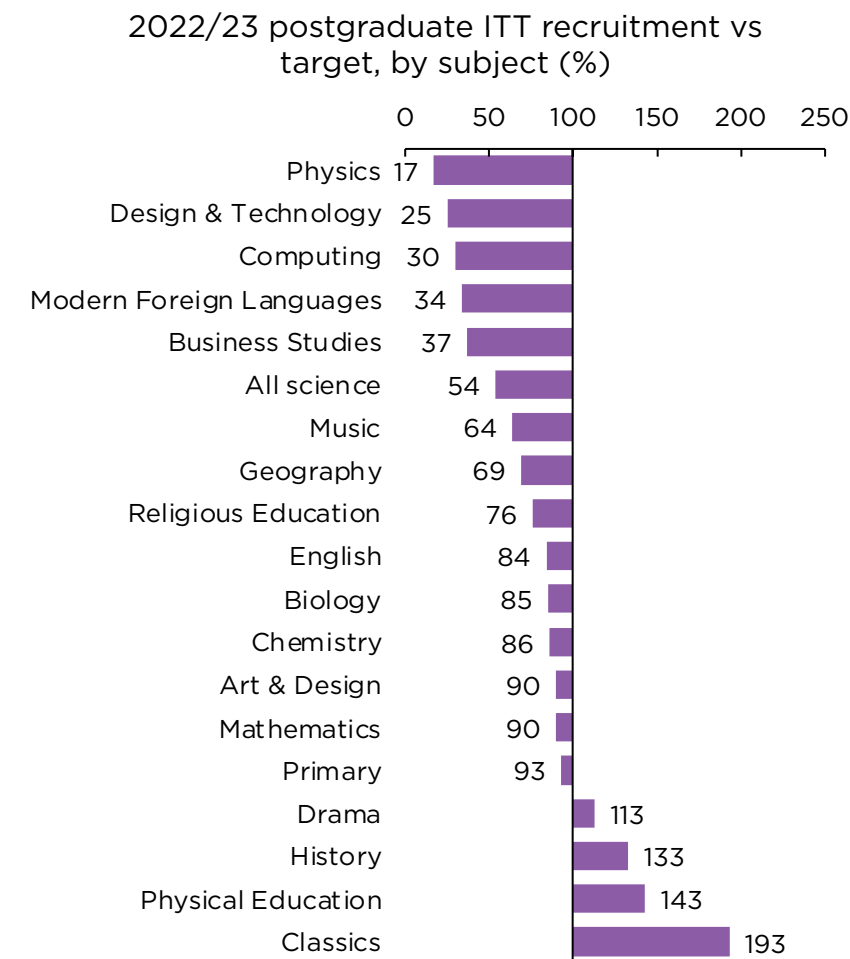
**Thirteen out of 17 secondary subjects missed their recruitment targets in the 2022/23 cycle.**

The number of trainees recruited for most secondary subjects in 2022/23 was below their respective targets. Under-recruitment was most substantial in physics, design & technology and computing, which recruited less than a third of their respective targets.

Part of last year’s under-recruitment was driven by a change in the way that the DfE calculates recruitment targets. Since 2021/22, the DfE has calculated its targets using the Teacher Workforce Model (TWM), which, unlike its predecessor the Teacher Supply Model (TSM), takes account of previous under-recruitment in setting the target. Targets for subjects which previously struggled with recruitment have been increased to better reflect accumulated teacher shortfalls from historical under-recruitment. Physics, which is often the subject with the lowest recruitment relative to target, has had its target nearly double since 2020/21, which is part of the reason why physics recruitment relative to target was so much lower last year than in previous years.

In response to the trainee over-recruitment in 2020/21, the DfE substantially scaled back the bursaries available for 2021/22. In most subjects the same bursaries from 2021/22 carried over into 2022/23, except for increases in modern foreign languages (MFL), geography, design & technology and biology. Previous research has shown that increases in training bursaries are associated with increases in ITT applications (NAO, 2016; Worth and Hollis, 2021). Bursaries for many subjects were lower than they were in 2018/19, which therefore contributed somewhat to the under-recruitment of secondary teachers last year.

Last year’s under-recruitment of subject specialists is likely to further contribute to teacher shortages in subjects which schools already find it difficult to recruit for. Recent NFER research has shown that this leads to schools relying on strategies to mitigate against teacher shortages, such as relying more heavily on non-specialist and supply teachers to teach specific subjects, which have the potential to impact the quality of education for pupils (Worth and Faulkner-Ellis, 2022b).



Source: Department for Education ITT census

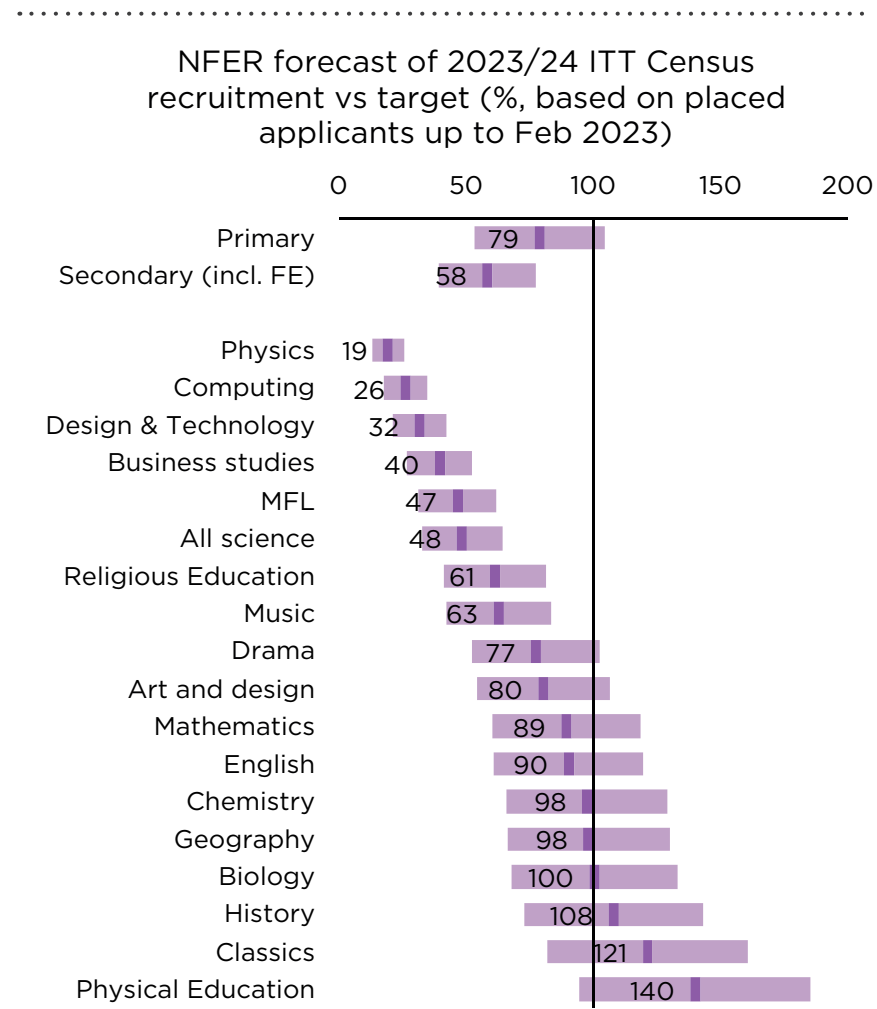
**Placed ITT applicants as of February 2023 are slightly lower than at the same point last year. At the current pace, primary and nine of 17 secondary subjects are expected to be 20 per cent or more below target this year.**

In response to last year’s unprecedented under-recruitment of teachers, the DfE increased the bursaries available to trainees in physics, mathematics, computing, English, biology, geography and MFL training courses. Bursaries for mathematics, physics, chemistry and computing rose to £27,000 and design & technology to £20,000, which were the most generous bursaries (in nominal terms) these subjects have ever received.

While it is still early in the application cycle, the bursary increases appear to be having a somewhat positive effect on those subjects. As of February 2023, placed applicants in subjects that received a bursary increase were 13 per cent higher than the previous year. Placed applicants in subjects which did not receive a bursary increase were 10 per cent lower than the previous year.

However, ITT recruitment last year was historically low, so a slight increase in placed applicants in some subjects this year does not necessarily imply that this year’s targets will be met. Indeed, ITT recruitment this year is likely to be little better than last year, based on current recruitment levels and historic recruitment trajectories, meaning last year’s unprecedented under-recruitment is unlikely to have been only a temporary aberration driven by pandemic recovery.

The DfE have not yet published their recruitment targets for the 2023/24 cycle, so forecasting ITT recruitment this year is based on last year’s targets and thus subject to some level of uncertainty. It is also still relatively early in the application cycle and recruitment numbers could change significantly in the coming months. Nonetheless, given current application numbers, primary and nine secondary subjects (physics, computing, design & technology, business studies, MFL, religious education, music, drama and art and design) are expected to be 20 per cent or more below target. Other subjects such as mathematics, English, chemistry and geography are also at risk of under-recruiting this year, while biology, history, classics and physical education are likely to be at, or slightly above, target.



Note: Based on targets for 2022/23. Forecasts represent the central estimate, with the shaded bands showing the 95 per cent confidence interval on the prediction.

Source: NFER analysis of DfE Apply and UCAS data

**Maths recruitment relative to target has been improving since the pandemic, but this mostly reflects a significant fall in its recruitment target.**

Historically, maths has tended to recruit below its target – the number of maths recruits reached 70 and 65 per cent of target in the two years before the pandemic. However, recruitment relative to target has improved since 2020/21. Last year, the number of recruits reached 90 per cent of the target, and our forecast of recruitment to teacher training in 2023/24, based on applications to February 2023, suggests that this year is likely to be similar.

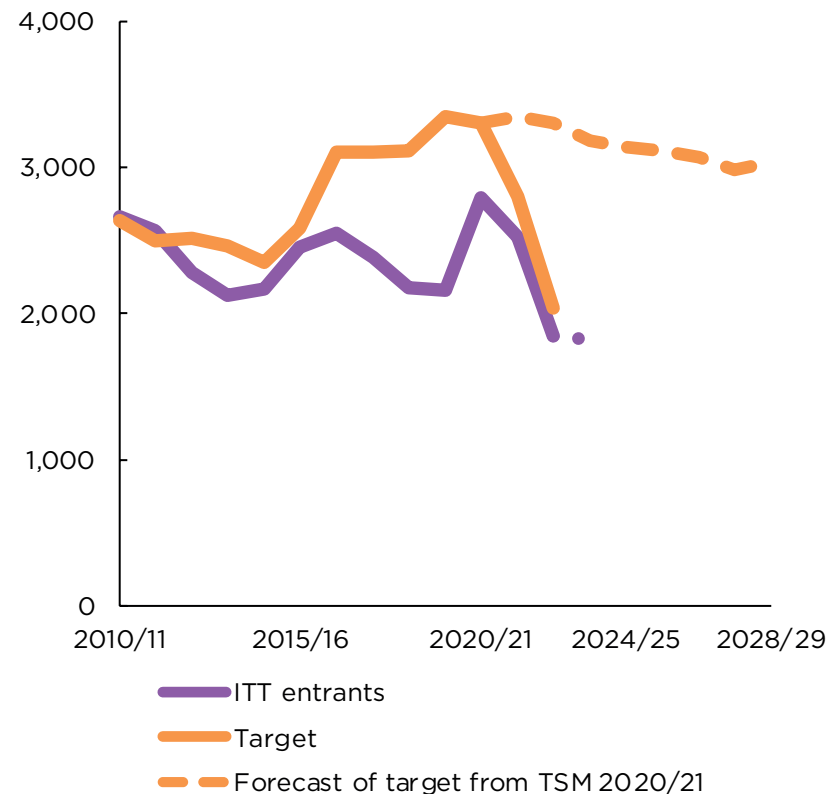
The improvement in maths recruitment does not, however, reflect an increase in the number of trainees, which have steadily fallen since the pandemic. Rather, it is mainly driven by a steep decrease in the maths recruitment target, which fell by 39 per cent from 2019/20 to 2022/23.

Recruitment targets set by the TWM are supposed to increase if a subject has substantially under-recruited in previous years. However, despite persistent under-recruitment, the maths target has fallen since the pandemic, deviating substantially from the forecast of future need estimated in the predecessor TSM. Little explanation has been provided by DfE as to why the target has fallen so dramatically when targets for other similar subjects have increased.

There is considerable uncertainty as to whether last year’s maths recruitment target accurately reflects the education system’s need for maths teachers. This is particularly the case given the Prime Minister’s recent announcement on the Government’s ambition for all children to study some form of maths to age 18. A large number of additional specialist maths teachers would be required to deliver this ambition. However, England has not recruited enough maths teachers to meet the target since 2011/12 and 12 per cent of maths lessons are currently taught by a teacher without a relevant degree-level qualification in the subject (DfE, 2022b).

The DfE should publish the TWM in full to provide transparency on how the targets have been estimated and ensure stakeholder and public faith in the target-setting process.

Number of postgraduate teacher trainees in maths



Note: Purple dotted line represents NFER’s forecasted maths recruitment for 2023/24.  
Sources: ITT Census, Teacher Supply Model 2020/21, NFER analysis of DfE Apply data.

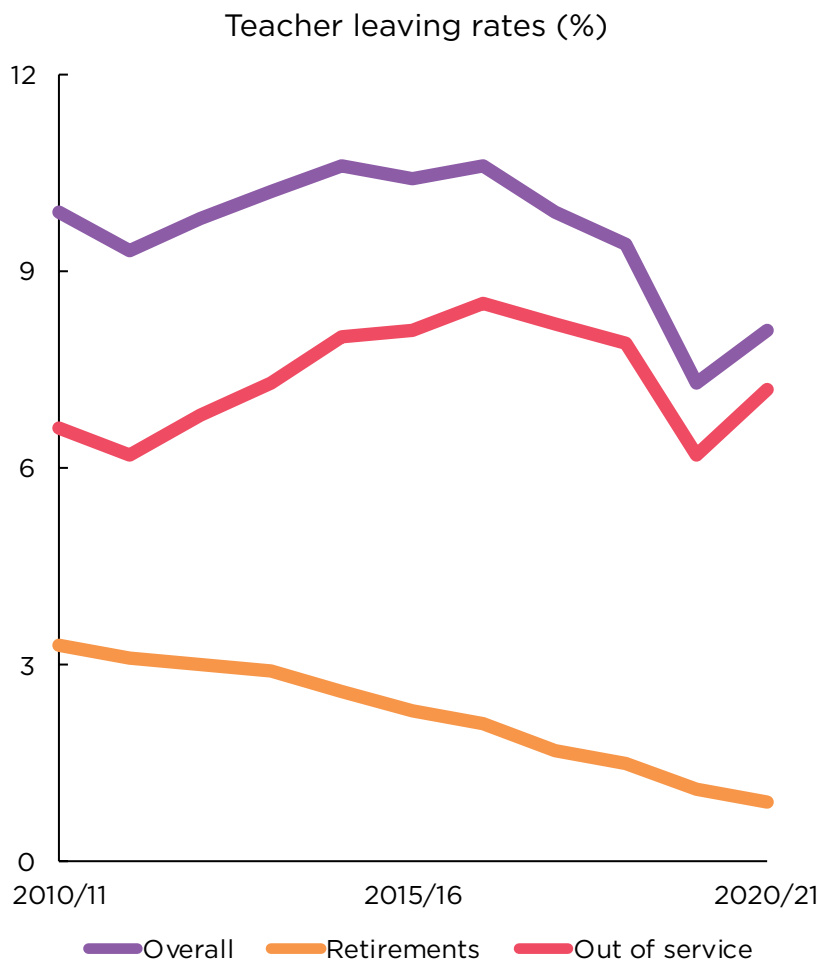
**Leaving rates for teachers fell significantly during the pandemic, but had been trending downwards in the years prior to the pandemic.**

High teacher leaving rates exacerbate the teacher supply challenge by increasing the need to recruit and train new teachers in the system to replace those leaving. Retaining more teachers in the system would therefore help lower recruitment targets and ease the teacher supply challenges. During the mid-2010s, the proportion of the full-time equivalent (FTE) workforce that left teaching each year, either due to retirement or working-age teachers leaving the state sector, was around ten per cent. The school system therefore needed to replace about ten per cent of its workforce each year just to maintain existing staffing levels, particularly for secondary schools, which tended to have higher leaving rates than primary schools.

Leaving rates fell between 2016/17 and 2018/19, driven by a long-term fall in retirement rates and a drop in those leaving state-sector teaching. The fall in working-age teachers leaving in particular likely reflects small reductions in workload and the slowing pace of government policy change over this period (Worth, 2023).

The pandemic led to leaving rates falling even further, as some teachers who might otherwise have left teaching likely put off their decision to leave due to reduced job opportunities in the wider labour market. Lower leaving rates accompanied higher recruitment into teaching to somewhat improve the teacher supply situation during the pandemic.

In the 2020/21 academic year, leaving rates increased slightly compared to the previous year to eight per cent, with primary slightly higher than for secondary. This was driven almost entirely by an increase in the number of working-age teachers leaving state-sector teaching, as the number of retirements was not substantively different from pre-pandemic. While overall still lower than pre-pandemic leaving rates, this was an increase compared to the previous year, when the effects of the pandemic on the labour market were at their peak. Retention rate data from 2020/21 represents the situation as of autumn 2021, when the pandemic was still having a significant effect on the wider labour market. While it is the most recent data available, it is however unlikely to fully reflect how the post-pandemic labour market recovery has impacted on teachers' leaving decisions.



Source: Department for Education School Workforce Census

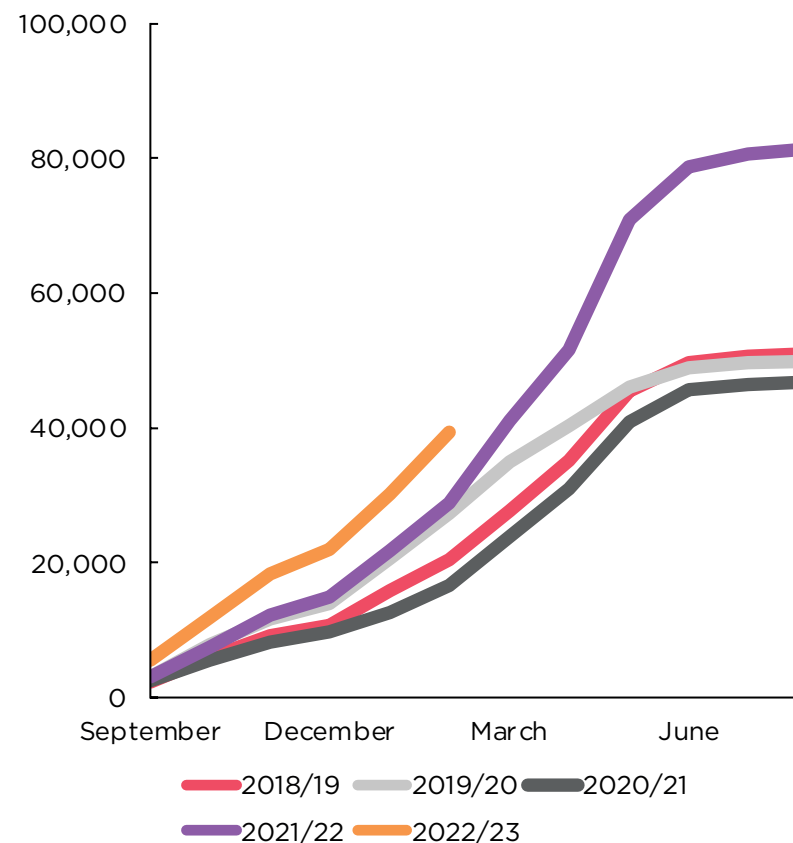
**The number of teacher vacancies posted by schools this academic year is substantially higher than before the pandemic, indicating that leaving rates have likely increased this year.**

The number of teacher vacancies posted by schools offers an up-to-date glimpse of how leaving rates may have changed during the post-pandemic period. Data on teacher vacancies collected by TeachVac, a teacher job board and data scraping service, shows that in the 2021/22 academic year the number of job vacancies for primary and secondary classroom teachers posted by state-sector schools in England was significantly higher than in previous years. By the end of the year, schools had posted a total of 81,468 job vacancies for teachers, which was 59 per cent higher than in 2018/19, the last year before the pandemic. This trend has continued into the 2022/23 academic year. In February 2023, teacher vacancies were 93 per cent higher than at the same point in the year before the pandemic and 37 per cent higher than in 2021/22.

Teacher vacancies have followed a similar trend in the wider labour market. The Office for National Statistics (ONS) reported that overall job vacancies in the labour market were significantly above pre-pandemic levels throughout autumn and winter 2022/23 (ONS, 2023b). This means that the wider labour market has tightened over the last year, leading to improved employment prospects outside of teaching, which may have enticed teachers to leave this year if they had previously put off the decision to do so during the pandemic.

Teacher vacancies do not only reflect teachers who leave the profession. Schools may post vacancies to fill posts left by teachers who moved school, or due to generally higher demand for staff driven by, for example, increased pupil numbers. Nonetheless, teacher vacancies are at least somewhat related to previous trends in leaving rates. In 2020/21, when leaving rates were low and recruitment into teaching was high, teacher vacancies dipped slightly compared to pre-pandemic. The increase in teacher vacancies since spring 2022 therefore suggests that leaving rates are likely to have increased significantly in the last year. Along with substantially lower recruitment into teaching, higher leaving rates will exacerbate existing teacher shortages, and likely mean that many schools will continue to struggle with recruitment challenges this year.

Cumulative number of classroom teacher vacancies in state-sector schools in England, 2018/19 - 2022/23



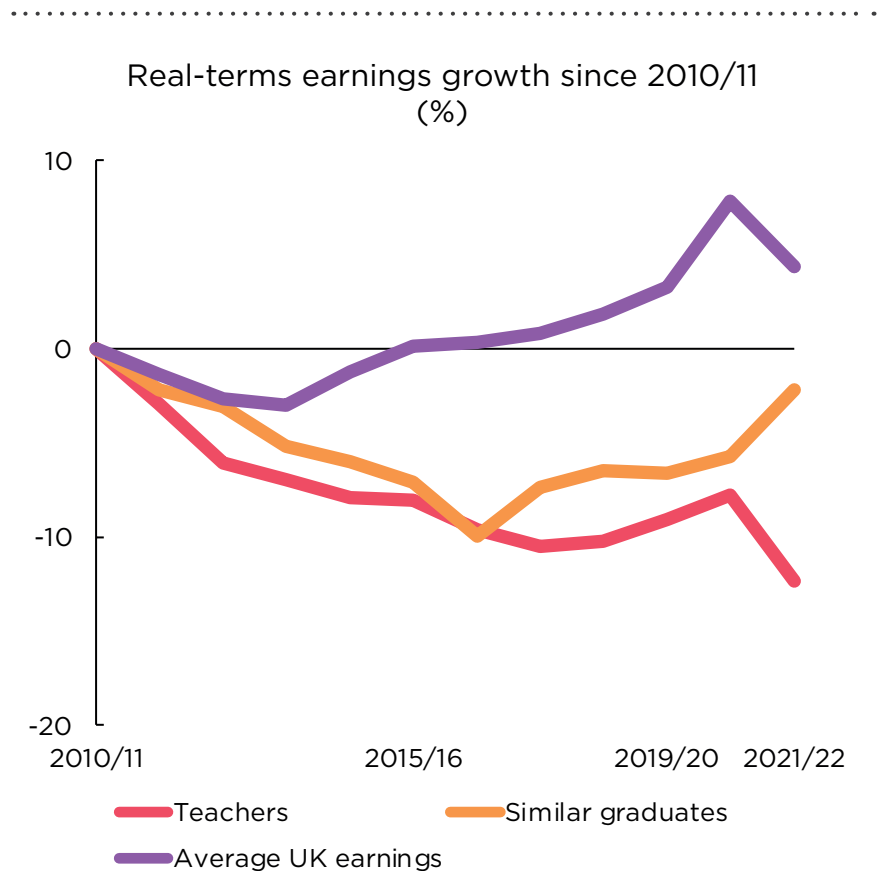
Source: TeachVac

**Teacher pay has deteriorated in real terms since 2010/11 and has lost competitiveness compared to average earnings and similar graduates.**

As a result of several below-inflation pay awards throughout the 2010s and the 2021 pay freeze, real earnings for teachers in 2021/22 were 12 per cent lower in real terms than in 2010/11. Rather than the absolute level of teacher pay, existing evidence shows that it is changes in the gap between the pay of teachers and other professions that drives changes in retention and recruitment (Hansen, et al, 2004; Dolton and van der Klaauw, 1999). As the gap widens, teaching becomes relatively less competitive compared to other occupations, which is likely to exacerbate recruitment and retention challenges.

Comparing the change in teacher earnings since 2010/11 to graduates similar in age, gender and region (see methodology appendix) provides a useful benchmark to contextualise how the competitiveness of teacher earnings have changed over time. While the earnings of similar graduates have also fallen in real terms since 2010, teacher pay has fallen by more. In 2018/19, the last year before the pandemic, the gap between real earnings growth for teachers and similar graduates was four percentage points. By 2021/22, the gap had widened - real earnings growth since 2010/11 for teachers was 11 percentage points lower than for similar graduates, driven by the 2021 teacher pay freeze and strong earnings growth for graduates outside of teaching.

Graduate occupations are also not the only useful benchmark with which to compare teacher earnings. Previous NFER research has shown that a considerable proportion of teachers leave teaching for lower-paying non-professional jobs (Worth and McLean, 2021). Average earnings across the entire labour market, which includes all non-professional and non-graduate jobs, rose in real terms by about five per cent between 2010/11 and 2021/22, reflecting high proportional earnings growth for those working in low-paying occupations. This meant that real earnings growth for teachers was 17 percentage points lower than the wider labour market, which was larger than when compared just to graduates.



Source: Department for Education School Workforce Census, NFER analysis of Labour Force Survey data.

**The DfE’s proposed 2023/24 pay award may improve the competitiveness of pay for early-career teachers but not experienced teachers.**

The gap in real earnings growth between teachers and other occupations is not uniform across the pay scale. Since 2017/18, DfE has flattened the teacher pay scale, to provide higher earnings growth for early-career teachers (ECT) to incentivise recruitment and retention (STRB, 2022). This meant that, despite the 2021 pay freeze, cumulative nominal pay growth for ECTs between 2017/18 and 2022/23 has almost kept up with average nominal earnings growth in the wider labour market. Nominal pay growth for experienced teachers, however, was just over half what it was in the wider labour market during the same period.

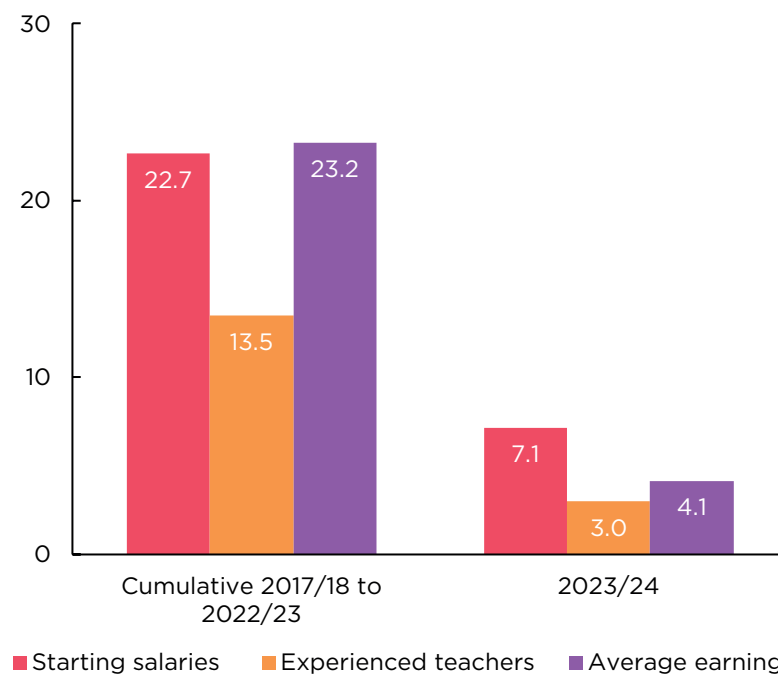
In its November 2022 Economic and fiscal outlook, the Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR) forecasted average earnings in the UK economy for fiscal year 2023 would rise by 3.5 per cent in nominal terms compared to the previous year (OBR, 2022). In line with these forecasts, in its 2023 evidence to the STRB the DfE has proposed that average teacher pay in 2023/24 rise by the same amount (DfE, 2023a). However, it proposes higher pay rises for ECTs (seven per cent) than experienced teachers (three per cent).

The pay proposals will be covered by the additional £2.3 billion in funding schools will receive over the next two years, announced as part of the 2022 Autumn Statement. Accordingly, the DfE regards the pay rises as likely to be generally affordable for most schools. However, the increased headroom must also account for all other financial pressures that schools face, including higher energy costs, and cannot be directed solely to funding increased teacher pay.

The higher pay rise for ECTs delivers on the Government’s commitment to raise starting salaries for teachers to £30,000 by 2023, and is likely to continue to improve the attractiveness of teachers’ starting salaries compared to other occupations. However, this year’s proposals are unlikely to improve the competitiveness of experienced teacher pay, which has deteriorated significantly since 2017/18, compared to the wider labour market. This is particularly since, in March 2023, the OBR revised its forecast of 2023 average earnings growth upwards to 4.1 per cent (OBR, 2023).

Next year’s overall proposed pay rise is therefore likely to have a minimal effect on recruitment and retention, unless it exceeds the 4.1 per cent expected average earnings growth. Targeting more resource at ECTs, who are likely to be more responsive to additional pay, may have a positive effect on ECT retention. However, this may be counterbalanced by experienced teachers, who could be more likely to leave teaching as their earnings continue to deteriorate relative to the wider labour market.

Nominal earnings growth, teachers vs. UK average earnings (%)



Note: Based on DfE proposed 2023/24 pay increases and OBR’s March 2023 forecast nominal earnings growth.

Source: Department for Education Evidence to the STRB 2023, School Teachers’ Pay and Conditions Document, Office for Budget Responsibility

**Working hours for full-time teachers remain higher than for similar graduates in other occupations, but are lower than before the pandemic.**

High workload is an often-cited reason for why teachers leave the profession (DfE, 2017), and reducing workload has, accordingly, been a policy objective for government. The DfE’s Teacher Workload Advisory Groups published their findings in a series of reports in 2018, and workload reduction featured prominently in the 2019 Teacher Recruitment and Retention Strategy (DfE, 2019).

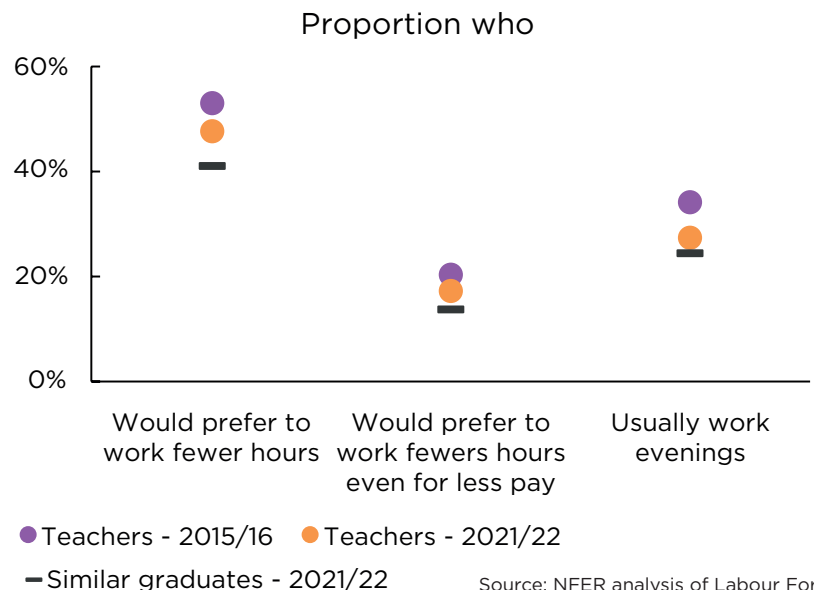
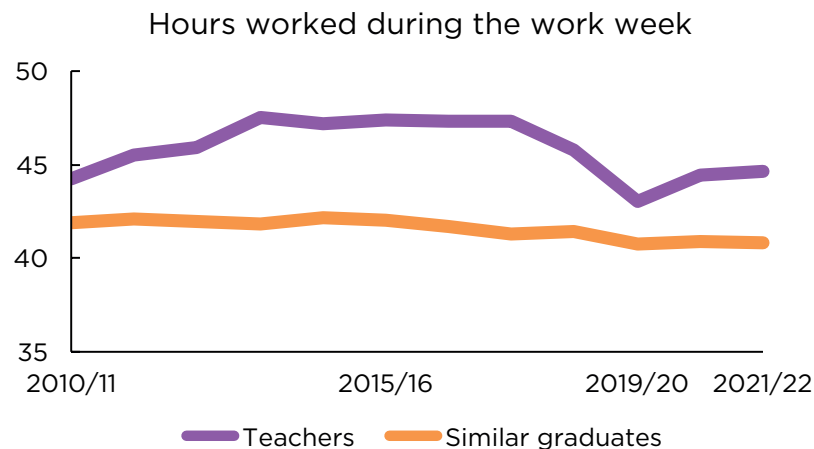
Data from the Labour Force Survey (LFS) shows that the number of hours full-time teachers worked during a typical working week (excluding holidays, which are longer for teachers than many other occupations) has been falling since 2017/18 and fell further as schools closed due to the pandemic. Working hours in 2021/22, the first year uninterrupted by school closures, were about three hours per week less than in 2015/16 and one hour per week less than in the year before the pandemic. The proportion of teachers who reported that they would prefer to work fewer hours, fewer hours even for less pay (a proxy for preferring to work part time) or who usually work evenings have all fallen since 2015/16.

While some progress appears to have been made in reducing teacher workload in recent years, teaching still involves more working hours in a typical working week than for similar graduates in other occupations. In 2021/22, teachers worked on average 4.5 hours per week more than similar graduates and were more likely than similar graduates to prefer to work fewer hours, fewer hours even for less pay and to usually work evenings.

Schools have continued to make progress on reducing teacher workload post-pandemic. Results from the June 2022 wave of the School and College Panel survey show that most teachers and leaders reported that their school had taken action to reduce workload over the past year. The most common actions involved reviewing workload related to marking, consulting with staff about ways to reduce workload and promoting teacher support schemes (IFF Research, 2022).

Nonetheless, teachers still felt that they spend too much time on administration, data input, marking and lesson planning, according to

the 2019 Teacher Workload Survey (Walker, Worth and Van den Brande, 2019). While there have been improvements to workload since the mid-2010s, to support teacher retention, the Government should continue to remain focussed on supporting schools with implementing the recommendations from the Teacher Workload Advisory Groups.





**Improvements in workload have led teachers to feel more satisfied with their amount of leisure time.**

Data from the UK Household Longitudinal Study (UKHLS) shows that, alongside reductions in working hours over the 2010s, teachers' satisfaction with their amount of leisure time, a proxy for satisfaction with work-life balance, has risen to be comparable to similar graduates. Over the 2010s, around three-quarters of teachers reported that they were satisfied with their job overall, which was comparable to similar graduates. Overall job satisfaction was higher in 2020/21 as a likely result of teachers' relatively high job security during the pandemic.

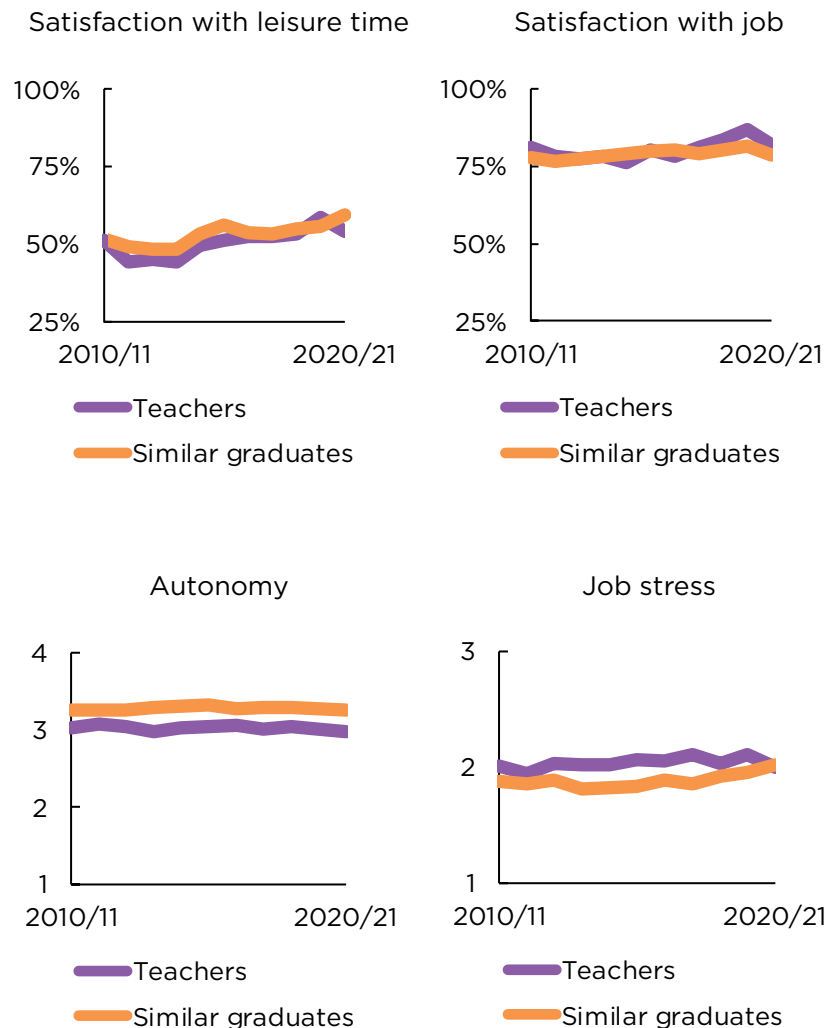
Teachers reported that their job-related stress, a summary measure of how uneasy, worried and depressed teachers felt about their job, was about two on average, on a scale from one to five (with one representing low stress, and five high stress). This was slightly higher than for similar graduates throughout the 2010s, but the difference was small. Job-related stress has been rising since 2017/18 for graduates, leading to teachers' being generally comparable with similar graduates in other occupations in 2020/21.

**Teachers have consistently reported lower workplace autonomy than similar graduates in other occupations.**

Teacher autonomy is a facet of workload, reflecting how much influence teachers feel they have over their working patterns and day-to-day tasks and therefore how manageable workload feels. Previous NFER research (Worth, 2020; Worth and Van den Brande, 2020) has shown that teacher autonomy is strongly associated with job satisfaction and retention.

Workplace autonomy is recorded on a four-point scale, with four corresponding to 'a lot' of influence, and one corresponding to 'none'. From 2010/11 to 2020/21, teachers' have consistently reported around a three on the scale, corresponding to 'some' autonomy. The pandemic has broadly not had a significant impact on teacher autonomy, but it is lower than for similar graduates, who feel that their overall workplace autonomy is higher than for teachers.

The UKHLS data is only available up to 2020/21 and therefore reflects trends in job satisfaction and autonomy before and during the pandemic. Data for 2021/22 will be released next year and will show how each of these factors have continued to evolve during the post-pandemic recovery.



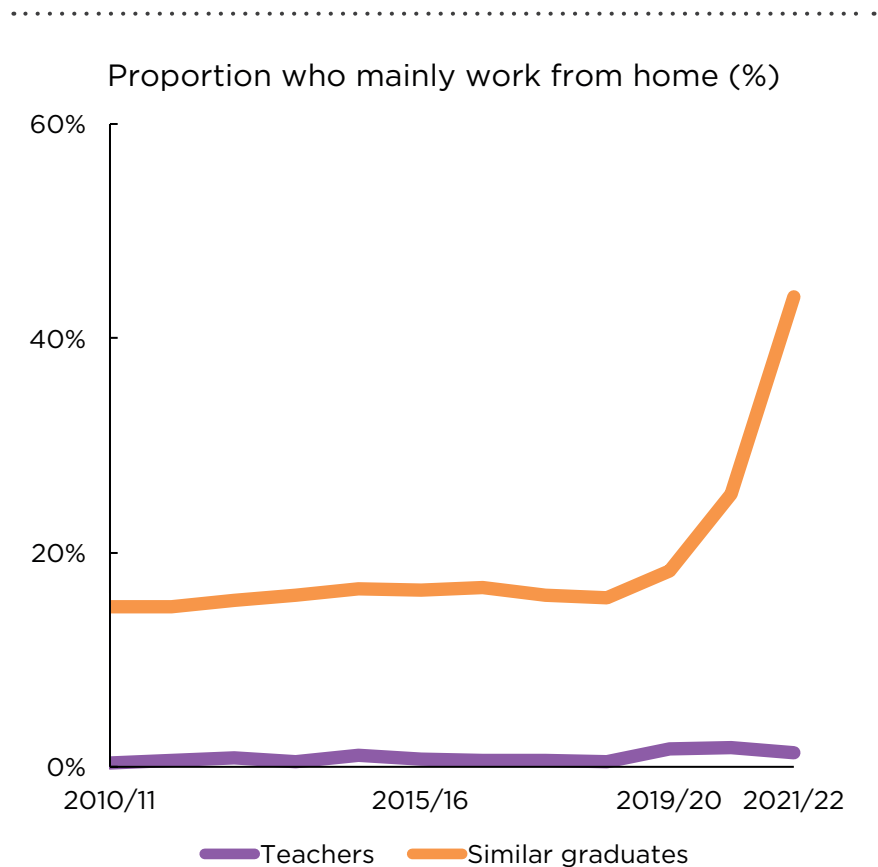
**Working from home has become increasingly prevalent over the last two years in the wider labour market, although teachers have limited opportunities to work from home.**

Flexible working arrangements have become increasingly prevalent in recent years, as widespread office closures during the pandemic led to the rapid adoption of home working across the labour market. However, while working from home may work well for many office-based occupations, it is much less well-suited to teaching. Data from the LFS shows that the pandemic did not substantively affect the prevalence of home working for teachers, while the proportion of similar graduates who reported mainly working from home increased rapidly from about 15 per cent up to 2018/19 to 44 per cent in 2021/22.

This is not to say that working from home is completely unavailable to teachers. Surveys of teachers and leaders in schools show that some teachers had arrangements with their school to do activities such as lesson planning, preparation and marking off-site (CooperGibson Research, 2020). Flexible working is also broader than just working from home and includes other arrangements such as part-time working and job-sharing, ad-hoc days off and ad-hoc early or late starts or sabbaticals.

Nonetheless, flexible working, and working from home in particular, is less available in teaching than in other occupations. This is partly due to the needs of the job. However, teachers' perceptions of how flexible working would impact their careers were also negative - research has shown that some teachers were concerned that working part time would negatively affect their chances to be considered for middle leadership or a Teaching and Learning Responsibility (TLR) payment (CooperGibson Research, 2020).

Further research is needed into teachers' working preferences to understand how the lack of flexible working could be a further competitive threat against teaching. The Government should use these findings to review the 2019 Teacher Recruitment and Retention Strategy and ensure that it reflects the realities of post-pandemic work.



Source: NFER analysis of Labour Force Survey data.

**Teachers’ perceptions of their personal well-being, life satisfaction and motivation are comparable to similar graduates in other occupations.**

During the pandemic lockdowns, teachers reported that their anxiety increased, and life satisfaction decreased (Worth and Faulkner-Ellis, 2022a). However, data from the Annual Population Survey (APS) shows that this decline in well-being was temporary. When asked ‘how happy did you feel yesterday?’ and ‘how satisfied are you with your life nowadays?’, teachers responded with average scores around eight out of ten. Each of these measures, were in line with pre-pandemic years and comparable to similar graduates in other occupations. When asked ‘how anxious did you feel yesterday?’, teachers responded with an average score of 3.3, which was slightly higher than in 2018/19, the last pre-pandemic year, but comparable to similar graduates in other occupations.

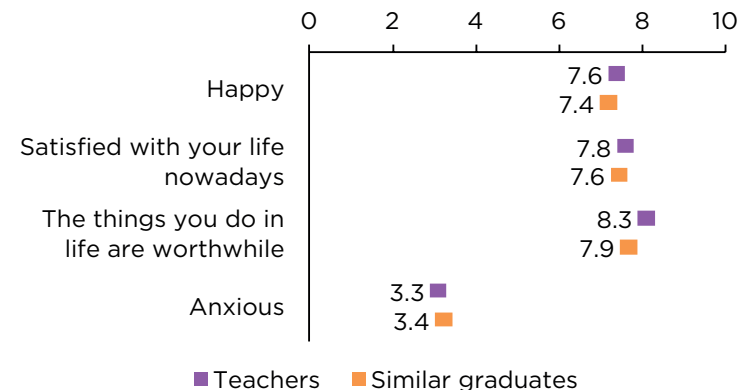
When asked ‘to what extent do you feel the things you do in life are worthwhile?’, teachers responded with an average score of 8.3. This was about half a point higher than similar graduates, likely highlighting how many teachers feel their work is intrinsically rewarding and purposeful.

**Teachers report that they feel they have better career progression opportunities, but are less involved in workplace decision-making, compared to similar graduates.**

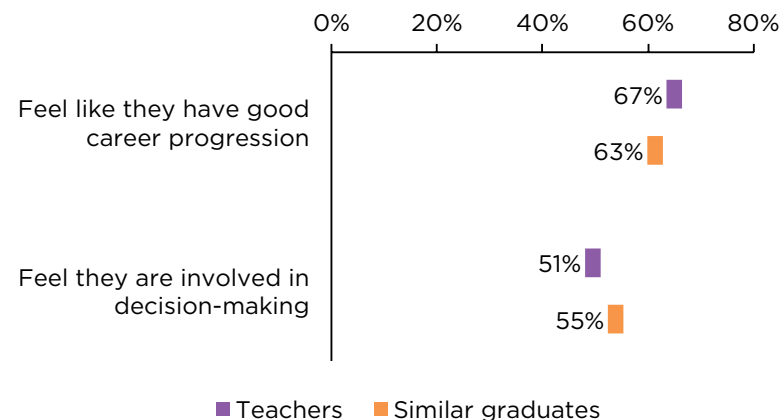
Teachers had favourable impressions of their prospects for career advancement. Specifically, two-thirds of teachers (67 per cent) agreed that their ‘job offers good opportunities for career progression’, which was higher than the 63 per cent among similar graduates in other occupations.

However, when asked ‘how good are managers at your workplace at involving employees and their representatives in decision-making?’, 51 per cent responded ‘good’ or ‘very good’, which was lower than for similar graduates. This may reflect how teachers feel that they have relatively low influence over the decisions made in their schools.

To what extent do you feel:  
(2021/22; 0-10)



Proportion in 2021/22 who:





## Conclusions

Over the last academic year, the post-pandemic resurgence in the wider labour market has had a significant impact on recruitment and retention. The overall number of teachers recruited into the profession was 20 per cent lower than in the last year before the pandemic and recruitment to secondary ITT courses reached only 59 per cent of the estimated number needed to ensure sufficient staffing levels in secondary schools.

An increase in training bursaries seems to be leading to slightly higher numbers of placed applicants to teacher training in some secondary courses this year compared to last year. However, overall recruitment this year is likely to be little better than last year. Based on application numbers to February 2023, primary and nine out of 17 secondary subjects are expected to be 20 per cent or more below target this year and other subjects are also at risk of not meeting their target.

Maths recruitment is likely to reach 89 per cent of its target this year, similar to last year. Maths recruitment relative to target has improved since the pandemic, but this has been driven not by an increase in applicants but by a large fall in its target, despite persistent under-recruitment and a likely increased need for maths teachers to fulfil the Government's ambition to provide maths education to pupils up to the age of 18.

The number of teacher vacancies posted by schools, a proxy for teacher leaving rates, has also increased dramatically this year. This likely indicates that teachers who may have put off the decision to leave teaching during the pandemic are leaving now that the labour market is recovering. **Low teacher recruitment and rising leaving rates last year have contributed to significantly intensifying the teacher recruitment and retention challenge in England post-pandemic. This year's ITT recruitment numbers suggest that the scale of the recruitment challenge is likely to persist.**

A higher proportion of teachers than similar graduates generally report that they feel that what they do in life is worthwhile, indicative of teachers' pro-social motivations. Nonetheless,

recruitment and retention challenges are likely to persist unless policy action addresses the falling competitiveness of pay and working conditions in the teaching profession compared to alternative jobs and careers.

Teacher pay in 2021/22 was 12 per cent lower in real terms than it was in 2010/11, which was 11 percentage points lower for teachers than for other graduates, and 17 percentage points lower than average real earnings growth across all occupations.

The gap in earnings growth compared to other graduates was narrower before the pandemic. In 2018/19, real earnings growth since 2010/11 was about four percentage points lower for teachers than for similar graduates. However, the gap has widened significantly since the pandemic, particularly for experienced teachers, driven by the 2021 teacher pay freeze and strong earnings growth outside of teaching.

The DfE's proposed 2023 teacher pay award involves an overall increase to teacher pay of 3.5 per cent, funded by a £2.3 billion uplift in school funding announced as part of the 2022 Autumn Statement. Pay rises of 7.1 per cent for early-career teachers will bring starting salaries to £30,000, with a three per cent increase for experienced teachers. Targeting more resource at early-career teachers is likely to continue to improve the competitiveness of starting salaries relative to the wider labour market, but smaller increases for experienced teachers will likely lead to pay continuing to deteriorate relative to other occupations.

Overall, the proposed pay increase of 3.5 per cent is less than the forecast for 2023 earnings growth in the wider labour market, which was revised upwards to 4.1 per cent by the Office for Budget Responsibility in March 2023. This means that it is unlikely to substantively narrow the overall earnings gap between teachers and the wider labour market. The DfE's 2023 pay award is therefore likely to have minimal impacts on improving recruitment and retention, relative to the scale of the challenge.

**Recommendation:**  
Narrowing the gap between teacher pay and the wider labour market is key to supporting recruitment and retention. The 2023 pay award should therefore exceed the 4.1 per cent forecasted rise in earnings in the wider labour market.

**Recommendation:**  
The Government should also develop a long-term strategy for pay setting which reduces the gap in earnings with competing occupations, while ensuring that schools have sufficient funding to enact these pay increases without making cuts elsewhere.

Reducing teacher workload has been a significant policy objective in recent years and teachers' working hours and perceived workload has fallen over time. However, in 2021/22, working hours and perceived workload remained significantly higher than in other occupations. Workload remains a key reason why teachers consider leaving the profession, and teacher autonomy, one facet of workload related to how manageable workload feels, has consistently remained lower for teachers compared to similar graduates.

**Recommendation: The Government should continue to remain focussed on reducing teacher workload by supporting schools in implementing the recommendations of the Teacher Workload Advisory Groups.**

The pandemic has led to widespread changes in work routines. Nearly half of graduates in 2021/22 reported that they mainly worked from home, while the prevalence of home working arrangements for teachers remained very limited. While teachers did report the availability of other flexible working options, the lack of availability of working from home may constitute a further competitive threat against teaching. This is particularly the case given that teachers' earnings have fallen significantly behind similar graduates in real terms, meaning that teachers are not being compensated for the higher inflexibility over working arrangements compared to other occupations since the pandemic.

**Recommendation: The Government should fund further research to better understand teachers' flexible working preferences and use the findings to revisit the 2019 Teacher Recruitment and Retention Strategy, ensuring it reflects the new post-pandemic realities of working life.**

**Recommendation: Given the demand for flexible working arrangements, school leaders should explore what options may work for their schools.**





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**How to cite this publication:**

McLean, D., Worth, J. and Faulkner-Ellis, H. (2023). *Teacher Labour Market in England: Annual Report 2022*. Slough: NFER.

ISBN 978-1-912596-78-2

Published in March 2023 by  
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