

## NEWSLETTER 2: KEY ISSUES RELATING TO TEACHER RETENTION IN THE UK

### Short description of methodology

We conducted a literature review using a systematic search for 'Teacher Retention' and 'UK' within the British Education Index, constrained by date from 2004 (the date of latest literature review on the topic published in the UK). This review gave us access to a synthesis of earlier references). We also used Google Scholar using a number of relevant search terms to gather extra relevant material. To collect our first hand data, we followed the project's proposed methodology and templates with some adaptation. It was impractical to gather sufficient information through focus groups given the constraints placed on the work by the timescale and the varied nature, timetables and size of the partner schools. Consequently we designed and administered an online survey using open-ended questions which gained sufficient quality responses from each group. We received responses from 10 new teachers, 15 senior teachers, and 4 school managers from schools in the Exeter region. We then discussed the findings with a steering group of School Managers and Senior Teachers generating further information and intelligence on the research questions and helping us to focus our findings on the key issues and emerging themes. The challenging issues were largely concerned with generating sufficient high quality intelligence to allow accurate analysis. It took longer than expected to produce sufficient survey results but this only delayed the project slightly.

### Main trends and conclusions

The information described below draws on both a review of the UK literature and data collected for this project, synthesised for each of the 5 dimensions. In England, a perceived crisis in teacher retention led to a spate of research into these issues in the early 2000s, with teacher turnover reaching a peak in 2001 and particular problems identified in the retention of new teachers, with a high percentage leaving within the first 5 years. Since then, issues of teacher retention have been seen as generally less problematic, with turnover falling to around 10% in 2006 (Passy & Golden, 2010) and no general perception of imminent crisis (Gorard, See, Smith, & White, 2007). However, despite this general picture, UK teacher retention remains problematic in relation to specific elements, including shortage subjects (Barmby, 2006), men in primary teaching (Szwed, 2010), the recruitment and retention of ethnic minority teachers (Basit & McNamara, 2004), retention of teachers in schools in disadvantaged areas (Allen, Burgess, & Mayo, 2012), and retention of teachers in certain regions of the UK (such as London) (Barmby & Coe, 2004). Our data also suggests that recent significant changes in school structure and management in England have the potential to impact teacher retention, with real dilemmas for school leaders about how to manage conflicting demands in supporting, developing and retaining quality staff.

### Reasons for leaving or staying in the teaching profession

In the early 2000s, a series of reports commissioned in response to the perceived crisis in teacher retention explored teachers' decisions to leave teaching or move to other posts outside the state-funded sector. The main reasons identified for teachers leaving were categorised as: excessive workload, seeking a new challenge, the school situation (including school management and pupil behaviour), salary, and personal circumstances (Smithers and Robinson, 2003). These findings were confirmed by Barmby and Coe (2009) who identified workload and pupil behaviour as key issues. Elsewhere, a decline in public respect was seen as important (Webb, 2004). In these studies, different groups of leavers (characterised by age, geographical area, gender, subject/phase and purpose of move) tended to cite different reasons for making a change. For example, retention was found to be particularly problematic for early career teachers and teachers close to retirement age, but new teachers tended to cite 'salary' and 'personal circumstances' in comparison with older teachers' citing 'workload' (Smithers & Robinson, 2004).

Our findings reflect this literature, suggesting that many of these issues remain endemic in the teaching profession. In particular, workload and poor pupil behaviour, and the resultant stress, featured highly as



reasons teachers would consider leaving the profession: *'Workload, low pay to work ratio and stress levels are the main reasons for teachers dropping out of the profession' – School Leader, England.* A number of issues relating to the particular political circumstances of the profession resulting from a number of changes in education policy and therefore school structure and management also featured strongly in the data. This was most apparent in the data from senior teachers rather than novice teachers. These factors included: constant monitoring and accountability moving the focus away from pupils as individuals and towards grades and metrics; the introduction of performance related pay; 'breakdown of the profession' resulting from, for example, the fact that new state-funded schools may employ unqualified teachers; and a prescriptive curriculum. *"However, the present government have had a significantly negative impact on the profession. The constant introduction of new initiatives that have not been thought through properly and are not given time to embed before another one is brought in seriously increases workload for teachers and leads to many feeling that they are not able to support the students and help them to achieve the best that they can."* – Senior Teacher, England.

Key reasons for joining/remaining in the profession were similar in both the literature and our data. A sense of vocation, professional freedom and supportive colleagues were important (Smithers & Robinson, 2004). Barmby (2006) categorised teachers' reasons for joining the profession as intrinsic (such as 'mentally stimulating work'), extrinsic (e.g. salary), altruistic (e.g. imparting knowledge), flexibility (e.g. good holidays) and child-oriented (e.g. helping children to succeed), with intrinsic, altruistic and child-oriented motivations as more important. The findings from our questionnaires identified a love of the job, sense of vocation, sense of accomplishment in children's progress, a sense of responsibility for the students, good perks, variety in the job, financial security and good support as important reasons for staying in the profession. *"[There is a] personal fulfilment in being able to teach students. A varied and interesting day to day job"* – Novice Teacher, England.

### *Strategies and actions to integrate and hold/retain new teachers*

In Smithers and Robinson's survey of teachers during 2002, 40% of leavers said that nothing would induce them to stay. Of the others, reduction in workload, improvements to school management, better salary and improved pupil behaviour were cited as strategies that would improve retention (Smithers and Robinson, 2003). Other literature identified improving the quality of Newly Qualified Teacher induction and mentoring (Bubb, 2006; Haggarty et. al 2011) and flexible career ladders (HECD, 2012) as strategies to aid retention. At the time of the 'crisis' in teacher retention at the turn of the century, a number of initiatives with financial incentives were introduced, including repayment of early career teachers' student loans and 'golden hello' payments for teachers in shortage subjects. Evaluations of these schemes found them to have some impact (Barmby & Coe, 2004; Hopwood, 2004), although the range of factors influencing decisions to stay are complex. Our findings focused on strategies and actions that could be taken at school level, where teachers felt they or their managers had some agency in supporting new teachers. These centred around effective mentoring and coaching, with emphasis on the need for new teachers having opportunities to observe more experienced teachers, and for them to be observed in order to be coached in a non-judgemental manner separate from performance management. One new teacher encapsulated this, *"[I would like there to be] more onus on feedback of lessons than grading from lesson observations...allowing 'satisfactory' to be acceptable for novice teachers during their first year of teaching."* – Novice Teacher, England.

### *Issues and challenges in the teacher profession*

Not surprisingly, the literature suggests that more challenging schools have higher staff turnover (Allen et al., 2012; Smithers & Robinson, 2005). Our data highlighted similar issues to those identified in relation to dimension (a) as being particular issues and challenges for teachers, alongside specific recent changes in the English political context which are raising new issues and challenges. These include the move away



from national pay and conditions for teachers and the rapid rise in the number of state schools that are not under LA control; revision of Teachers’ Standards such that there is not a distinction between standards for the award of Qualified Teacher Status, Induction and the performance management of established teachers, locating mediation of these standards for career progression directly with school leadership; and the introduction of performance related pay. In our focus group discussion of the questionnaire findings with three school managers, an interesting finding was that confidence is not just an issue with novice teachers but increasingly so for more experienced teachers, who may lose confidence in their pedagogy in a very results oriented and change dominated school environment such as is found in England at present. Indeed, the new teachers seemed far more confident to try new ideas and be ‘innovative’, though they remain concerned about issues such as planning, workload and pupil behaviour.

**Suggested coping strategies and actions in relation to issues and challenges**

International research has moved away from ‘stress management’ and towards the development of ‘teacher resilience’ (Beltman, Mansfield, & Price, 2011; Gu & Day, 2007) through Initial Teacher Education (ITE), Continuing Professional Development (CPD) and teacher support networks (Day, Edwards, Griffiths, & Gu, 2011). Many researchers have placed a particular focus on the development of resilience at the Entry and Early Career stages (Castro, Kelly, & Shih, 2010; Hong, 2012; Bruce Johnson & Down, 2013; Bruce Johnson et al., 2012; Pearce & Morrison, 2011; Tait, 2008) and how this might relate to nurturing school leadership (Peters & Pearce, 2012). The concept is also being applied to specific subject disciplines such as Science Teachers (Doney, 2013). A focus on teaching as an emotional practice in which satisfaction and vocation play a key role is also advocated (Day, 2008; Demetriou, Wilson, & Winterbottom, 2009). There is a lack of research in relation to implications of recent changes to UK school contexts: this may be something that the RETAIN project could usefully explore.

We grouped suggestions from our participant teachers into three categories: school level, group level and individual level. These suggestions are summarised in the table below:

	Novice	Senior	Leader
School level	Informal feedback Simpler data handling Clarity of systems Fewer emails Smaller classes	Coaching for Support not management Release time at ‘pinch points’ Create a culture that values staff Training and resources to Support admin tasks Cap class sizes Teach own subject only	Differentiate non-judgemental Support from ‘monitoring as support’ Work alongside new teachers to Support practice Extra time at pressure points Control workload ‘creep’
Group level	More model lessons More collaboration Induction training in administrative and data handling processes	Purposeful meetings Shared planning More collaboration and mutual Support A limit on change	Same as ‘whole school’ High quality leadership Clear workload expectations Induction, monitoring, Support Time management training Clear workload expectations
Individual level	Less performance pressure and use of data to exert pressure Better work/life balance Keep up to date with school procedures Freedom to change mentor	Personalised, specialised CPD More PPA time Better work/life balance Build positive staff relationships	Individual induction plans with clear expectations Flexible working arrangements Same as at school and group levels

**Inclusive and learning school environment**

Our literature review suggests that the development of a school-wide culture of professional development with an emphasis on pedagogical skills and the opportunity for new teachers to contribute to whole-school initiatives would be beneficial (Haggarty et. al 2012). The interplay between individual and school environment has also been identified as important (Jepson and Forrest 2006). Our findings suggested that

most teachers felt their schools were inclusive and promoted their learning and development. However, particular issues were noted. Managers felt that to fund CPD, it had to be in line with school development plans rather than focus on the needs or wishes of individual teachers. The lack of budget for CPD was cited as a barrier to supporting teacher learning. In relation to creativity and innovation, senior teachers (especially) and managers felt that there was less opportunity for this in recent years as the climate did not enable risk-taking. However, novice teachers were much more likely to indicate that creativity was valued. Innovation was promoted through sharing of good practice and with a supportive management team: *“Management will support creativity and innovation” – Novice teacher, England.* Factors preventing schools from being an inclusive and learning school environment were generally around issues of communication, either between staff or with parents. Participation and collaboration was mostly through meeting structures, but there was a sense from some staff that their voice was not acted upon and instead, most initiatives are top down in nature. One teacher noted that school managers are acting on external pressures and this prevents them being *‘collaborative as they might be’ – Senior teacher, England.*

A key theme within our data showed that school managers need to mediate the tension between monitoring staff performance and supporting and developing staff. They need to ensure that their school does well in relation to performance metrics as well as implementing policies such as performance related pay, but they also need to mediate this with their staff to maintain a supportive and collaborative working/learning environment. School leaders also need the skills to develop high quality induction, training new teacher mentors so that they facilitate their pedagogical skills as well as improve on behaviour management and learn the ‘rules of the game’ at that particular school.

Of particular interest was our finding that senior as well as novice teachers were suffering from a lack/loss of confidence due to the performance and change dominated school environment. School managers need to enable the building of mutual confidence in innovation and creativity between new and senior teachers. The newly qualified teachers need the opportunity and support to innovate safely and the senior teachers need to be a part of the process, supporting the changes both contributing and benefiting in terms of reinforcement of their own abilities and competences. Schools need to enable both novice and experienced teachers to feel confident and empowered to innovate and experiment with pedagogy in order to move forward. This is a challenge in the current political climate and would be a beneficial element to include in the toolkit.

The rate of institutional change in English schools can be extreme. This level of change is bound to impact on the teaching staff. A toolkit to help staff at all stages in their careers understand the drivers behind the changes would be of great value, and to manage change. The toolkit should help with success factors such as managing risk<sup>1</sup>, inclusivity in decision making, creativity, ensuring novice teachers are included within the processes, how to mediate between the top-down push for results with the need for bottom-up innovation and freedoms.

### *Further reading:*

- Allen, Rebecca, Burgess, Simon, & Mayo, Jennifer. (2012). *The teacher labour market, teacher turnover and disadvantaged schools: new evidence for England (Working Paper 12/294 ed.)*. Bristol: Centre for Market and Public Organisation.
- Barmby, Patrick. (2006). *Improving Teacher Recruitment and Retention: The Importance of Workload and Pupil Behaviour. Educational Research, 48(3), 247-265.*

---

<sup>1</sup> A paper which discusses this as an element of Action Research may be a useful starting point. (Haggarty & Postlethwaite, 2003)



- Barmby, Patrick, & Coe, Robert. (2004). Evaluation of the Repayment of Teachers' Loans Scheme. *Evaluation of the Repayment of Teachers' Loans Scheme*, 113.
- Basit, Tehmina N., & McNamara, Olwen. (2004). Equal Opportunities or Affirmative Action? The Induction of Minority Ethnic Teachers. *Journal of Education for Teaching: International Research and Pedagogy*, 30(2), 97-115.
- Beltman, Susan, Mansfield, Caroline, & Price, Anne (2011). Thriving not just surviving: A review of research on teacher resilience. *Educational Research Review*, 6(3), 185–207.
- Castro, Antonio J., Kelly, John, & Shih, Minyi (2010). Resilience strategies for new teachers in high-needs areas. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 26(3), 622–629.
- Day, Christopher. (2008). Committed for life? Variations in teachers' work, lives and effectiveness. *Journal of Educational Change*, 9(3), 243-260.
- Day, Christopher, Edwards, Anne, Griffiths, Amanda, & Gu, Qing (2011). Beyond Survival: Teachers and Resilience (Key Messages from an ESRC-funded Seminar Series). Nottingham: Centre for Research in Schools and Communities.
- Demetriou, Helen, Wilson, Elaine, & Winterbottom, Mark. (2009). The Role of Emotion in Teaching: Are There Differences between Male and Female Newly Qualified Teachers' Approaches to Teaching? *Educational Studies*, 35(4), 449-473.
- Doney, Patricia A. (2013). Fostering Resilience: A Necessary Skill for Teacher Retention. *Journal of Science Teacher Education*, 24(4), 645–664.
- Engestrom, Yrjo, Miettinen, Reijo, & Punamaki, Raija-Leena (Eds.). (1999). *Perspectives on Activity Theory*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Gorard, Stephen, See, Beng Huat, Smith, Emma, & White, Patrick. (2007). What Can We Do to Strengthen the Teacher Workforce? *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, 26(4), 419-437.
- Gu, Qing, & Day, Christopher (2007). Teachers resilience: A necessary condition for effectiveness. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 23(8), 1302–1316.
- Haggarty, Linda, & Postlethwaite, Keith. (2003). Action Research: a strategy for teacher change and school development? *Oxford Review of Education*, 29(4), 423-488.
- Hong, Ji Y. (2012). Why do some beginning teachers leave the school, and others stay? Understanding teacher resilience through psychological lenses. *Teachers and Teaching: theory and practice*, 18(4), 417–440.
- Hopwood, Vicky. (2004). Evaluation of the Golden Hello Initiative (pp. 80): Department for Education and Skills, Nottingham.
- Johnson, Bruce, & Down, Barry (2013). Critically re-conceptualising early career teacher resilience. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, 34(5), 703-715.
- Johnson, Bruce, Down, Barry, Le Cornu, Rosie, Peters, Judy, Sullivan, Anna, Pearce, Jane, & Hunter, Janet. (2012). *Early Career Teachers: Stories of Resilience*. Adelaide: University of South Australia.
- Passy, Rowena, & Golden, Sarah. (2010). *Teacher resignation and recruitment survey: report no. 41*: National Foundation for Educational Research.
- Pearce, Jane, & Morrison, Chad. (2011). Teacher Identity and Early Career Resilience: Exploring the Links. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, 36(1), 48-59.
- Peters, Judith, & Pearce, Jane. (2012). Relationships and early career teacher resilience: a role for school principals. *Teachers and Teaching: theory and practice*, 18(2), 249–262.
- Postlethwaite, Keith. (2007). Boundary crossings in research: towards a cultural understanding of the research project Transforming Learning Cultures in Further Education. *Educational Review*, 59(4), 483-499.
- Smithers, Alan, & Robinson, Pamela. (2004). Teacher turnover, wastage and destinations (pp. 70): Department for Education and Skills, Nottingham.
- Smithers, Alan, & Robinson, Pamela. (2005). *Teacher Turnover, Wastage and Movements between Schools*. Nottingham: Department for Education and Skills.





- Szwed, Christine. (2010). Gender Balance in Primary Initial Teacher Education: Some Current Perspectives. *Journal of Education for Teaching: International Research and Pedagogy*, 36(3), 303-317.
- Tait, Melanie. (2008). Resilience as a Contributor to Novice Teacher Success, Commitment, and Retention. *Teacher Education Quarterly*, 35(4), 57-75.