

# What Matters in Education? Briefing Note #1

## Teacher recruitment, retention and development – rethinking policy and practice priorities

### Introduction

This first event in the **What Matters in Education?** panel discussion series, considered why governments have struggled to find effective and sustainable solutions to the teacher recruitment retention and development crisis. These are global concerns. Yet without clarity on the underlying issues, the solutions offered may risk making things worse.

### Key questions for the debate

What attracts teachers to join the profession?

What encourages them to leave?

What are the best ways to address the current staffing crisis in UK schools?

To address these questions, we asked our speakers to outline where things have gone wrong and how to put them right.

## A summary of the panel discussion

Opening topics	Speakers
Getting great teachers to challenging schools	<b>Rt Hon. David Laws</b> , Executive Chairman of the Education Policy Institute
Teacher recruitment, development and retention is a worldwide challenge	<b>Peter Kent</b> , President of the International Confederation of Principals
Asking the Right Questions about Teacher Retention: Where Teachers Stay and How They Thrive	<b>Qing Gu</b> , Professor of Leadership in Education, UCL Institute of Education and Director of The UCL Centre for Educational Leadership
Support not Surveillance: How to solve the teacher retention crisis.	<b>Mary Bousted</b> , Joint General Secretary of the National Education Union

Panel discussion co-convenors: **Professor Gemma Moss**, ESRC ERP Director;  
**Professor Lynn Ang**, IOE Pro-Director and Vice-Dean Research;  
**Dr Becky Taylor**, IOE Academic Head of Engagement and Impact.



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# What we heard: key challenges identified by our speakers

## Challenges in England

England faces a significant problem with recruitment and retention of the teaching workforce:

- recruitment into ITE 2022/23 was 20 per cent lower than in the previous year, with most secondary subjects not likely to meet the DfE targets ([NFER, 2023](#)).
- retention rates are now at their lowest level since the data was first published in 2010 (EPI, 2023)
- schools in disadvantaged areas experience higher teacher turnover, greater vacancy rates, more reliance on supply teachers, and fewer subject specialists ([EPI, 2020](#))
- Teachers in the UK have some of the highest working hours of OECD countries and are also the most monitored (Bousted, 2022).
- The combination of high work intensity with little professional discretion over how teachers do their job creates stress and burnout ([NFER, 2020](#))

## A Global Problem

Leaders and teachers feel burnt out by the pressures of Covid and the demands the return to face to face education poses the pressures are impacting upon health, well being, and basic family life

- the desire to readjust work-life balance is leading many staff to quit;
- human as well as structural factors must be taken into account.

## Retention first, recruitment second

The profession can't recruit its way out of the staffing crisis.

- 40% of newly qualified teachers in 2009 have left the profession 10 years later (DfE, 2019)
- The key to teacher retention is the quality of the school environment
- Good leadership invests in a supportive school culture
- This is a necessary condition if early career teachers are to develop and thrive; and mid-career teachers stay.

## Questions the audience raised

An infographic showing the aspects of the topic our audience thought mattered most:



## Ways to bring about change

In the discussion, panel members suggested the following priorities for policy, research and practice. These are tangible suggestions for how to make a difference going forward:

### Policy

#### To make a difference

- channel substantially more funding to schools in areas of highest disadvantage
- design pay policies that help recruit teachers in shortage subjects and encourage them to work in challenging schools
- make the existing accountability framework fairer to teachers and leaders who are teaching in areas of disadvantage
- reduce workload and improve working conditions, particularly in more challenging schools, where the work pressures are likely to be most intense.
- rebuild a family of support services around the school, linking education with social policy
- make reducing child poverty a policy priority



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## Research

### To fill knowledge gaps

- explore ways of developing a resilient school culture that supports the individuals within it
- bring evidence to bear on what motivates teachers to teach and which aspects of the working environment need to change to make teaching an attractive and interesting career
- develop better metrics to judge how well schools prepare young people with the range of skills and abilities they will need for the future
- track the impacts persistent child poverty has on education and wellbeing

## Practice

### To make schools a more attractive place to work

- invest in a sense of collective endeavour and collective agency at school level
- create a safe space for leaders and teachers to share common concerns and challenges
- build stronger connections between schools that encourage resource sharing
- encourage schools to respond at the local level to the local challenges that centralised policy directives cannot reach
- value teachers' professional agency and professional knowledge

## In brief

The discussion between panellists and audience teased out what needs to change if teaching is to become a more fulfilling and attractive career in its own right. Policymakers, researchers and practitioners can all make a difference here.

Author: Gemma Moss

Date: 2023

Funder: ESRC

Grant Reference number: ES/W004917/1

## References

To find out more about these issues, follow these links

[https://www.nfer.ac.uk/media/5286/teacher\\_labour\\_market\\_in\\_england\\_annua...](https://www.nfer.ac.uk/media/5286/teacher_labour_market_in_england_annua...)

<https://epi.org.uk/publications-and-research/teacher-shortages-in-englan...>

[https://www.nfer.ac.uk/media/3874/teacher\\_autonomy\\_how\\_does\\_it\\_relate\\_to...](https://www.nfer.ac.uk/media/3874/teacher_autonomy_how_does_it_relate_to...)

<https://committees.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/120453/pdf/>

<https://blogs.ucl.ac.uk/ioe/2023/06/27/looking-at-teacher-recruitment-and-retention-in-a-new-light/>

<https://d2tic4wvo1iusb.cloudfront.net/documents/Teacher-quality-recruitment-and-retention-lit-review-Final.pdf?v=1686184225>

To watch the panel debate visit our 'What Matters in Education?' Briefing Notes page:

<https://www.ucl.ac.uk/education-research-programme/briefing-notes-what-matters-education>

