

Teacher Supply and Leadership Pipeline - LSE and EPI Roundtable

12 March 2025, London

Summary Note

As part of a series of roundtables centred around the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill, the Education Policy Institute and London School of Economics and Political Science held a roundtable discussing how the Bill will impact the recruitment and retention of teachers and leaders.

EPI and LSE were joined by expert representatives from both Houses of Parliament, academia, and education, representing schools, multi-academy trusts (MATs), training providers, trade unions and sector bodies across the UK.

The roundtable was organised around a discussion of the provisions in the Bill most likely to affect teachers, including proposals relating to pay rules, qualified teacher status (QTS), and plans to recruit 6,500 more teachers. Participants reflected on how the sector could modernise and increase flexible working to promote retention and the status of the profession, and discussed what changes they would like to see made to the Bill.

Guiding Questions

Participants were invited to consider the following questions:

- Which elements of the Bill are most likely to affect school leaders' ability to recruit and retain staff? This could include:
 - The requirement for all teachers to be working towards QTS
 - The requirement for all schools to follow the School Teachers' Pay and Conditions Document (STPCD).
- Are some schools likely to be more affected by the changes? Which ones?
- Which provisions of the Bill do you think are likely to be the most beneficial to the teaching profession, and which are likely to be the most deleterious? How would you change the Bill's provisions to improve it?
- What supporting policies and funding changes might be required to ensure the Bill's provisions are a success?

Recruitment and Retention

Whilst participants largely welcomed the Government's intent in addressing the recruitment and retention crisis, many felt that the Bill is unlikely to make significant improvements. It was noted that the Government's flagship target to recruit 6,500 teachers overlooks a much larger crisis in retention, particularly among those at mid-career level. Enhancing the esteem of the sector was a point of focus, and it was noted that employers and leaders themselves play a big role in improving the system too. Several concerns and suggestions were raised about the Bill's recruitment proposals:

- It was noted that a target of 6,500 teachers is incredibly difficult to achieve and it is not clear where new teachers will be found.
- The Government has not taken into account the high proportion of teachers teaching out of their subject, which is negatively impacting teachers' professional experience and workload. It was highlighted that schools in highest receipt of pupil premium also have the highest proportion of non-specialist teachers and worse retention rates.
- Recent disparagement of our public services in politics and the media has harmed the status of schools, MATs, and teaching. A participant highlighted the contrast with European countries like Germany, where teaching is well-regarded and well-paid. It was noted that the Government has missed an opportunity for a narrative component in the Bill that focuses on raising the sector's esteem.
- One participant highlighted survey evidence showing that Gen-Z want "purposeful" careers - an opportunity the sector should use for recruitment.
- A shortage of good teachers at struggling schools is a pressing issue; one MAT leader noted the lack of incentives for teachers to move away from well-performing schools where work is easier. It was suggested that an extension of the "London Challenge", as well as a greater variety of incentives like job-share, TLR allowances, and better CPD in these schools could help. Principally, measures must help to "de-risk" the experience of moving schools.
- The Bill makes no reference to equality and diversity in recruitment, despite evidence that teachers from minority backgrounds are disproportionately less likely to be accepted into initial training or to progress into teaching or leadership.
- Recruitment should start more firmly at university to target graduates; a policy to offload tuition fees or student debt for those entering teaching was suggested.
- Encouragement of career changes also needs greater support. More flexibility, for instance accommodating those teaching part-time alongside other work, as is common in FE, could support this.

A participant commented that the Government had left the sector somewhat in the dark by not providing a white paper alongside the Bill. The MP noted that the breadth of issues included in the Bill meant a white paper was likely not needed. The Government is also waiting on other moving parts to conclude, including the curriculum review and potential headcount changes due to the increase in VAT on private schools.

Flexibility, Pay and Conditions

There is a growing gap between teachers and average graduate pay driving retention issues, and teaching can be less flexible than other graduate jobs. The Bill has, however, drawn attention to flexibilities for MATs, and participants had several comments regarding changes to the STPCD made in the Bill and the need for further modernisation:

- It was noted that the Bill should include powers to kickstart a comprehensive review of teacher's and leader's pay and conditions; teachers' pay currently lags well-behind earnings growth.
- It was noted that a common reference point around pay and conditions, serving all schools, is needed and that flexibility mechanisms should be built into the STPCD.
- It was noted that the introduction of a "floor but not ceiling" for all schools in the STPCD was only clarified through a recent amendment to an original clause, which created confusion.
- Further clarification on what the Bill means by "flexibility" is needed.
- Many schools are struggling with deficits and will require support for pay increases.
- A Trade Union leader highlighted the erosion of teachers' pensions noting that, given pensions are legally deferred pay, they must also be subject to legal minimums.
- It was noted that although teaching is less flexible than other jobs, more schools are innovating with arrangements such as the 9-day fortnight. More thought is needed into how teaching can modernise to become more competitive.

Workload

The intensive workload and excessive responsibilities expected of teachers, whilst supporting pupils experiencing rising poverty and SEND, were noted as large drivers of leaving rates. There was concern that well-meaning parts of the Bill add to workloads:

- Excessive accountability adds significantly to workloads and Ofsted's new framework does not appear to relieve this.
 - It was added that the Bill does not address Government's relationship with accountability. Given current scrutiny of Ofsted, this is a good time for the Government to more seriously question Ofsted and, particularly, the TRA.
- Provisions around safeguarding, breakfast clubs and attendance will intensify workloads. Whilst these measures were welcomed by participants, it was highlighted that their delivery must be properly supported. The MP present recognised the added workload.
- It was suggested that a full workload impact assessment should be conducted.
- It was suggested that a list which frames the responsibilities of schools could help to clarify expectations of their additional responsibilities; a similar framing was included in the ultimately withdrawn Schools Bill 2022.

Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) and Training

Participants generally welcomed the principle of extending QTS and professionalising the sector, however several concerns were raised about QTS' new statutory footing:

- Measures could have unintended consequences for SEND schools where many do not have QTS.
- Whereas original requirements applied to “new” teachers, updated legislation refers to those joining new schools. It was noted that experience is more valuable to teaching than QTS; a participant shared a case study about a recent candidate who lacked QTS or a degree but was sector-leading in their subject; they chose to work in the private sector instead due to uncertainty over QTS reforms.
- It was suggested that QTS be offered to all in the profession, not just new teachers.
- One participant felt that the Bill was not the right time or place to address teacher training.
- There are currently five different routes to teaching; it was suggested that a better organised system would offer improved provision to teachers.

Career Progression

Participants discussed the problems with career progression in teaching as another driver of recruitment and retention issues.

- Participants agreed that career trajectories for teachers can be static; there was a call for more creative thinking about what progression could look like, and how this could link with pay structure and flexible working.
- It was highlighted that TLR offers progression opportunities, but taking on more responsibilities is not always attractive given excessive workloads. It was suggested that progression could be rethought to reward experience, but not necessarily add responsibility.
- It was felt that reforms to career progression should be developed by and within the sector, not established by the Bill, but that Bill should create room for its development.

Further Recommendations:

Outside of the core discussion around recruitment and retention, attendees mentioned several priorities when asked what they would like to see amended in the Bill:

- **Maintaining the flexibility around the national curriculum**, because struggling schools value this, and calls by some for **dropping the need for MATs to meet the national curriculum from the Bill**.
- **Overhaul of the Teacher Regulation Agency**, which practitioners believe is currently failing, and has never been properly assessed on whether it provides reliable judgements.
- **Provisions of Free School Meals, to include lunch as well as** breakfast clubs.

- **Radical reform of the training system to emphasise leadership skills and mentoring**, alongside its focus on curriculum and teaching; good leadership is critical to the success of schools and careers of teachers.
- **Scrapping of school uniforms altogether**, in line with countries in Europe and the USA and trends in the workplace towards relaxed dress codes. It was noted that this would positively benefit the culture of schools.