

Dear Jayne and Clerks of the Children, Young People and Education Committee,

I am writing on behalf of the Royal Society of Chemistry. As Chair and Clerks of the Children, Young People and Education Committee I wanted to share with you the results from the recently published [Science Teacher Survey 2023](#).

A total of 2,932 teachers and technicians across secondary schools and FE colleges in the UK and Ireland responded to our questions. Out of these responses 117 were from Wales. We have written to the Minister with the findings and thought they would be of interest to the Committee. I've provided a summary of the Welsh results below:

Class-based and school-wide barriers and challenges

It has been a difficult time for teachers and technicians who are teaching science. While, like you, we are grateful for their work, it is hard to ignore how challenging their job has been of late, and these challenges have been articulated in this edition of the survey.

Teachers in Wales identified a number of challenges in their classrooms. The biggest challenge was student behaviour (80% of respondents picked this as a challenge they faced), followed by limited literacy (70%), limited numeracy (61%), insufficient classroom equipment (41%) and not enough technicians (35%).

70% of teachers identified insufficient funding as a school-wide issue, followed by poor pupil attendance (51%). To help meet these challenges, 71% of teachers suggested more non-contact time, and 72% suggested more funding.

Challenging student behaviour is a specific barrier to running practical work in science lessons. 66% of teachers identified this as the biggest barrier, followed by 58% of teachers citing a lack of time for practicals to be taught alongside theory. The lack of time in the curriculum was also a major challenge identified in the 2022 edition of the survey.

Challenges experienced by teachers extend to their own professional development. 74% of respondents in Wales who teach any level of chemistry did not access any subject-specific professional development (SSPD) in the last 12 months. 57% of teachers who teach any level of chemistry felt the amount of SSPD they received was insufficient or somewhat insufficient. The RSC provides high-quality SSPD, which is often free. However, teachers need more funding, time and cover to access these opportunities available to them.

Subject-specific professional development has a role to play in tackling teacher shortages. While enabling teachers to develop their expertise for the benefit of student learning, it also has the potential to improve teacher retention. By tackling issues such as unmanageable workload and prioritising ongoing professional development, we believe the need for short-term financial incentives to attract new teachers will be reduced.

The school workforce

Our survey shows pressures with the teaching and technician workforce. 29% of respondents reported their department was understaffed in chemistry, and 52% understaffed in technicians. Perhaps suggesting an ageing workforce in Wales, 27% of respondents are planning retirement in the near future, with a further 27% planning to leave the state sector (to move into the private sector or for a career change). Worryingly, amidst these workforce challenges, 36% of respondents indicated having low wellbeing. However, on a positive note for fostering Welsh identity, the ability to teach in Welsh was a more significant factor in school choice than pay or the workload policy of the school.

Teachers' working conditions (including excessive workload) and the declining appeal of teaching as a profession must be addressed, both to help attract new chemistry teachers, and to stem the flow of experienced teachers leaving the profession. We want to see long-term solutions to make teaching a more desirable profession that can withstand population and economic fluctuations. That requires a balance between getting the right financial incentives and making teaching a job people want to do because they enjoy it.

Preparing young people for their next steps

There are positive signs from our survey around the confidence of teachers in providing young people with context in the curriculum and advocating for possible future pathways for learners when deciding on their next steps. 76% of teachers are confident in linking the curriculum to real-life contexts, and 73% confident in linking to careers.

The full UK and Ireland Science Teacher Survey 2023 results can be found [here](#). I hope the results are of interest and as ever I'm more than happy to provide more information and to link you up with colleagues in our education policy team.

Kind regards

Niall

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