

ASCL Cymru written evidence - Teacher recruitment and retention – June 2025

Barriers to recruitment:

1. [Declining numbers ITT secondary](#)
 - Significant shortage subjects' maths, science and Welsh
 - But also, music, MFL, IT
2. The average number of applicants per vacancy has more than halved since 2011
 - Less candidates are applying for each role
 - Rurality, areas of challenge and Welsh medium being most effected
 - ASCL Survey on teacher shortages states
 - 95% of those responding were experiencing difficulty in recruiting teachers.
 - 42.8% were experiencing severe difficulty in recruiting teachers.
 - With 90.8 % receiving small numbers of applicants and 69.4% receiving no applicants at all for some posts
3. Candidate quality, anecdotally, has lessened meaning fewer appropriate candidates, in an already smaller recruitment field are appointable
4. Other job markets are seen as more attractive to the best graduates providing
 - Flexible working
 - A better work life balance
 - Access to higher salaries with less stress and workload
5. Perception of education
 - Negative perceptions of the media can discourage entry to the profession and contribute to teacher burnout, making recruitment and retention more challenging
 - The role of education in communities has been skewed and, in some cases, lost, as other services reduced their offer, and schools have had to mitigate and adapt to fill the gaps.
 - Pupils and community behaviours are seen a worsening
6. Routes into teaching
 - Current routes into education are failing to address the recruitment issues and wider, more flexible routes need to be found

Factors affecting retention

7. This includes a focus on priority subjects, Welsh medium, secondary schools and the effectiveness of early career support).
8. [Annual Education Workforce Statistics 2024](#)
 - 76% of that cohort retained after 5 years
 - 57.5% of that cohort retained after 10
9. [Ninety per cent of teachers considering leaving teaching in 2023/24](#) cited high workload as a factor, and pupil behaviour has become one of the fastest-growing contributors
10. Limited opportunities for flexible working arrangements

School Leaders- specific factors affecting recruitment and retention of school leaders

11. Educational leadership roles remain unfilled. A survey of headteachers conducted by the ASCL found that.
 - 72.4% of respondents did not feel that they had an acceptable work/life balance,
 - 47.7% believe their workload to be unmanageable.
 - More than half of the survey respondents said that they were considering leaving the profession.
12. Accountability
 - From pupils, parent, communities, local authorities and the inspectorate. School leaders expect and want accountability, but accountability that is proportionate and supports sustained school improvement activity
 - Personal and organisational accountability
 - Lack of understanding of context and its impact, meaning those successfully leading in challenging contexts often have their impact and value added discounted
13. Leadership recruitment is impacted by the role leaders are seen to play by other practitioners in the school. Their role is seen as:
 - Workload extreme - school leaders regularly and consistently working over 50 hours weekly, during a normal week. In a challenging week this can be in excess of 60 hours. This workload is the norm and the impact that recent reforms have had on it is seen to be extreme
 - Accountability - other practitioners see the high levels of personal and public accountability to which school leaders are held and how this is often negatively portrayed on social media and in the press.
 - School leaders are seen to no longer have the support of parents and communities and this is seen as societal change that is unlikely to change. Issues previously discussed in private are now discussed in social media; naming, ridiculing and often defaming school leaders publicly
 - Due to [this fewer middle leaders](#) are aspiring to be senior leaders
14. Over the last decade, the number of [applicants per senior leadership vacancy](#) has varied widely across secondary and all-age schools in Wales, with some indications of a relation between rurality and shortage of candidates.
 - A relatively low number of candidates and a significant percentage of vacancies unfilled.

- Welsh-medium vacancies are consistently harder to fill.
- Other factors that were mentioned as potential barriers to progression into senior leadership included a lack of representation, a lack of confidence, and negative perceptions of senior leadership roles.
- The main challenges reported were high workloads, poor work-life balance, a sense of isolation in leadership roles, excessive bureaucracy and administrative responsibilities, limited funding, the roles negatively impacting on the health and well-being of senior leaders, training and development not being sufficient to prepare senior leaders for the challenges of the roles, and uncertainties around retirement and pensions.

Diversity of the workforce

- It is important to consider whether the current and future workforce reflects the diversity of the Welsh population including gender, race and ethnicity and disability.
- Recent statistics demonstrate that diversity in the workforce does not reflect the [population of Wales](#)

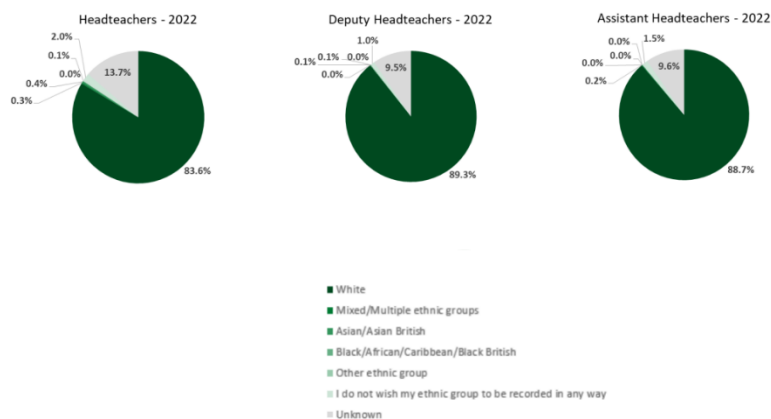
Table 2.6: Number of registered school teachers who have made a declaration regarding their disability.

	2020		2021		2022		2023		2024	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Yes	215	0.6	256	0.7	310	0.9	369	1.0	415	1.2
No	34,956	99.4	34,510	99.3	34,946	99.1	35,468	99.0	35,450	98.8
Total	35,171	100	34,766	100	35,256	100	35,837	100	35,865	100

Table 2.4: Number of registered school teachers by ethnic group.

	2020		2021		2022		2023		2024	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
White	32,075	91.2	31,847	91.6	32,421	92.0	33,086	92.3	33,167	92.5
Mixed or multiple ethnic groups	189	0.5	182	0.5	195	0.6	214	0.6	240	0.7
Asian or Asian British	176	0.5	189	0.5	226	0.6	254	0.7	288	0.8
Black, African, Caribbean or Black British	64	0.2	68	0.2	73	0.2	82	0.2	89	0.2
Other ethnic group	40	0.1	40	0.1	51	0.1	58	0.2	63	0.2
Does not wish to record ethnic group	447	1.3	467	1.3	472	1.3	463	1.3	454	1.3
Unknown	2,180	6.2	1,973	5.7	1,818	5.2	1,680	4.7	1,564	4.4
Total	35,171	100	34,766	100	35,256	100	35,837	100	35,865	100

- Our workforce is predominantly white and able bodied.
- At a leadership level this is emphasised



- Although the workforce is female heavy this is not seen in school leadership within secondary schools where the number of female headteachers is significantly lower than males

	Secondary Sector Working									
	March 2018		March 2019		March 2020		March 2021		March 2022	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Male	122	64.6	122	65.2	117	65.4	121	67.6	119	67.2
Female	67	35.4	65	34.8	62	34.6	58	32.4	58	32.8
Total	189	100	187	100	179	100	179	100	177	100

Impact on learners

20. The current position has a negative impact upon the delivery of education and on wider support for learners.
21. Without the staff to deliver the curriculum offer pupil outcomes and life chances will continue to be negatively impacted.
22. Those in the system who are mitigating for unfilled roles have disproportionate workloads, meaning they are likely to be less effective when fulfilling their primary role

Impact on delivering educational reforms: including the Curriculum for Wales. Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act 2018 and the Welsh Language and Education (Wales) Bill.

23. Without the staff to deliver the reform, it will be impacted.
 - ALN bill has increased workload in a depleted sector
 - Welsh Language and Education Bill is our greatest concern
 - There are not enough people in the current system to deliver this
 - There are not enough people training to give the system this capacity

Impact on teachers and wider workforce: including impact on the role of teaching assistants and support staff and the effect of schools' capacity to finance the use of supply teachers.

24. Each individual's workload increases as the number of posts unfilled increases
25. Each individual's workload increases as the number of posts that can be financed in a school are reduced
26. Education does not have a waiting list; our statutory functions must be met. This is achieved by a dedicated workforce who see their role as protectors, enablers and educators of children. This is a perfect storm where insufficient school finances increasingly reduce the number of staff that can be appointed and, in other situations posts remain vacant where staff cannot be recruited. We are creating a culture in education where a smaller workforce, working under unsustainable pressure, are doing more, risking their own health and wellbeing in so doing.

Addressing recruitment and retention:

27. This is a summary of some of the actions that are necessary to ensure the sustainability of the education workforce to address the current crisis of recruitment and retention.
28. Workload:
 - I cannot state strongly enough the workload crisis evident in schools across Wales
 - It is an absolute priority that this issue is addressed in the short term
 - Without addressing this issue, no incentives, no enticement and no routes into the profession will attract and keep the best teachers and leaders within our education system
 - In all phases, in all areas across Wales, school practitioners tackle a workload that is unrealistic and unachievable. This impacts on their physical and mental health, alongside their family life and relationships

- We see a workforce working excessive hours to just address their key role. There is perception that teachers work from 8am to 3pm during term time and have frequent, lengthy holidays. Currently just to stand still, not to develop or reform, educators work extended hours that put their health at risk.
- School leaders' workload is extreme. School leaders have no protected rights to weekends or holidays and this needs to be addressed in the STPCWD immediately. How do we expect to attract leaders into a role where their recovery time is not acknowledged let alone protected?
- The level of unnecessary bureaucracy must be reduced. Government workload reduction workstreams must identify more effective methods of impacting upon this.

29. PPA is not fit for purpose and needs to be addressed urgently

- Classroom practitioners receiving 10% of their allocated hour for PPA is insulting. It does not, in any way, meet the needs of their requirement to plan, prepare and assess and means there is no choice for teachers other than working well beyond their contracted hours
 - A small example:
 - A science teacher in a secondary school may teach 10 different classes
 - Each class contains 30 children
 - In 5 hours, every fortnight they must
 - Plan for 45 hours of teaching sessions
 - Plan to assess 300 children
 - Mark and give meaningful feedback in 300 books

30. Perception – a recognition of the vital role that teachers and school leaders play in the developing lives of children and young people. This includes parents and public perception as well as the media, and within the profession itself.

31. Pay has been eroded in real terms since 2010. It is essential that this deficit is adjusted so that the profession is remunerated appropriately.

32. Inspection and high stakes accountability activities must be reviewed and reduced where it is not evident that they have a direct impact upon improved learner outcomes

33. Targeted financial incentives can significantly improve teacher retention rates. Successful schemes typically offer incentives worth 5-10% of base salary, often focused on early career teachers in shortage subjects and disadvantaged areas.([Incentives to recruit and retain teachers in Wales - Education Policy Institute](#))

34. Educator must be given the same protections as other public services

35. In conclusion, the challenges surrounding teacher recruitment and retention in Wales are systemic, urgent, and worsening. Declining numbers of applicants, especially in key subjects and rural or Welsh-medium settings, reflect deeper issues within the profession; most notably, unsustainable workloads, poor work-life balance, and diminishing societal and media support. The perception of teaching as a high-stress, low-reward career deters potential candidates and drives current practitioners to leave. Leadership roles face even starker pressures, with high accountability, excessive hours, and a lack of support contributing to a dwindling pipeline of future leaders. Without immediate, bold, and coordinated action—reducing workload, improving pay and conditions, reforming

accountability, and genuinely valuing the profession—the ability to deliver vital educational reforms, ensure equity, and support the future of Wales’s learners will be severely compromised.

36. The sustainability of the education workforce must now be treated as a national priority.

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