

NAHT Cymru response – Teacher Recruitment and Retention

NAHT is the UK's largest professional trade union for school leaders. We represent more than 38,000 head teachers, executive heads, ALNcos, deputy and assistant heads, vice principals and school business leaders.

Our members work across: the early years, primary, special and secondary schools; independent schools; sixth form and FE colleges; outdoor education centres; pupil referral units, social services establishments and other educational settings.

In addition to the representation, advice and training that we provide for existing school leaders, we also support, develop and represent the school leaders of the future, through the middle leadership section of our association. We use our voice at the highest levels of government to influence policy for the benefit of leaders and learners everywhere.

Pay parity

NAHT continues to raise our concerns around the disparity in pay faced by the sector in comparison to other graduate professions, making teaching a less attractive career choice and the impact this has on recruitment and retention.

While NAHT welcomed the pay award of 5.5% last year, that only begins to address the entrenched issue. Prior to that, more than a decade of below inflation pay uplifts have eroded both the real value of teachers' and leaders' salaries and undermined the relative attractiveness of a career in teaching, as the competitiveness of salaries has declined.

Teaching professionals' salaries have fallen well behind other graduate occupations. Private sector earnings have grown at a much faster rate than the earnings of teaching professionals, as relative earnings for teachers and school leaders have fallen by 10%.

Notwithstanding last year's welcome uplift, the competitiveness of teachers' and leaders' pay has fallen markedly over a number of years by comparison to the whole economy, the wider public sector and other professional occupations.

The supply of teachers and leaders is now in such serious free fall that there is almost no area where recruitment is sufficient. Teachers' and leaders' pay remains in need of a major correction and with CPI inflation having run at very high levels in recent years, the uplift in pay has failed to prevent a further deterioration in the real terms value of salaries.

Moreover, teaching salaries deteriorated against other workers' earnings. As of January 2025, according to ONS, the annual growth in average weekly earnings is currently 5.6% - 4.1% for the public sector, and 6.0% for the private sector.

Despite the uplift, 'the competitiveness of teachers' and leaders' pay declined in the graduate marketplace, and the ongoing and longstanding pay erosion, that has rendered teaching unattractive to high quality applicants, has continued.

Overwhelming evidence confirms that the supply crisis affects recruitment and retention equally. It is not limited to a failure of the market in a handful of areas or subjects. The crisis

is evident across all almost all subjects, across all geographical areas, phases and specialisms, and affects aspiration to lead and leadership retention. The notion that such deep-seated problems can be resolved through flattening pay or targeting uplifts is unquestionably wrong.

The leadership pipeline and strain on the profession

Our evidence to successive remits to both the STRB and now the IWPRB has pointed to the damage caused to the pay framework by past 'differentiated' pay uplifts that have been 'targeted' in favour of early career teachers.

It has for several years now been a worrying trend that school leaders' roles and responsibilities are not being recognised, while still being expected to do more with less.

NAHT is deeply concerned that the gap between leadership and the main pay range (MPR) is continuing to narrow. Understandably, our members are angry and demoralised by this trend, especially given that the aim of devolved pay and conditions was to allow the Welsh Government the opportunity to reflect the specific needs of the education system in Wales.

NAHT has called on the Independent Welsh Pay Review Body (IWPRB) to recognise this within its response to the 6th remit.

In contrast to the other OECD countries, statutory teachers' salaries in Wales fell by around 10 per cent between 2007 and 2017.

For years, leadership throughout the whole Welsh education system has been cited consistently within Welsh Government policy (not simply formal leadership positions) – including within the Professional Standards for Teaching and Leadership.

Any continued differentiated pay uplift within Wales threatens to exacerbate the leadership recruitment and retention crisis and create a divided profession when collaboration and collective approaches will be required to realise Welsh Government policy aspirations for children and young people.

Once again, the Welsh Government has failed to take the opportunity to redress this issue.

Furthermore, it has exacerbated the situation when school leaders are under incredible pressure.

We continue to receive a high volume of calls from members looking to access their pensions early and prepared to suffer the financial penalties and accessing them before they have matured.

This action alone should ring alarm bells throughout the profession that there is a surge in school leaders taking early retirement, taking their experience and knowledge with them.

Workload

NAHT took industrial action in 2023 in the form of action short of strike over a host of concerns relating to the conditions of service of our members, including workload.

There was a commitment from the then Education Minister Jeremy Miles to tackle this issue and despite over a year's worth of discussion, there has been little change in the workload of school leaders.

While we accept efforts have been made to reduce the administrative burdens on leaders, particularly around grant reporting, additional pressure placed on headteachers who are taking on significant responsibilities far beyond the scope of education are having a detrimental impact on their workload.

School leaders tell us they spend a significant amount of time dealing with social services, HR, finance issues rather than leading teaching and learning.

Poor ALN support for schools exacerbates the issue.

This means that aspiring headteachers who are currently in middle leadership roles have no desire to take on headship, because of the workload implications.

Furthermore, the Welsh Government promised unions that every new policy or legislation coming through government following industrial action would be subject to a Workload Impact Assessment.

Again, over a year's worth of discussions has yet to result in such an assessment tool being produced, let alone come into force.

Impact of government policy

One of the biggest challenges facing school leaders which has an impact on workload and therefore impact the recruitment and retention of school leaders, is new government policy.

While we appreciate that all governments have a responsibility to review policy and reform education for the benefit of learners, there has been a consistent lack of understanding about the impact such reforms have on the workforce.

One example would be the Welsh Language and Education Bill which did not, from the outset, appropriately consider how such a reform would impact workload and therefore the implications it may or may not have on recruitment and retention.

There was no Workforce Impact Assessment carried out on the new legislation so government and the education sector had no idea what this would mean for schools.

This has resulted in a lot of anxiety for the workforce, concerned about their own ability to deliver the legislation effectively.

NAHT has consistently supported the aims and ambitions of the legislation, but our concerns raised on behalf of our members about what it will mean for them have largely been ignored.

This means school leaders in particular are under immense pressure to deliver when no-one has even considered what support they may need to thrive.

Access to training, funding to cover staff released for that training, availability of support etc are just some of the things that haven't been thought through.

NPQH

NAHT is deeply concerned about the reform of NPQH and the process by which aspiring leaders are accepted onto the course.

Firstly, it was disappointing that reforming the previous NPQH offer meant a freeze on those being able to apply for over a year. While we appreciate reform was needed, the existing course could have continued until the new programme was ready. This in our view caused an unnecessary gap which has hampered the supply chain.

Secondly, while some of the reformed elements of NPQH are welcomed, we are unhappy with the way in which applicants are selected.

The Welsh Government has limited the number of applicants to around 35 per cohort for the whole of Wales. Given we know there is a recruitment and retention crisis, this seems completely inappropriate.

NAHT is still seeking clarity on how the applicants are chosen. There have been reports that Local Authority 'demand' is part of the criteria, with preferential treatment being given to those LAs who are either struggling to recruit leaders or who will have leadership vacancies in the near future. If this is the case, this means those aspiring leaders in Local Authorities who may have several people interested in NPQH but do not necessarily have the recruitment challenges as neighbouring LAs, are at a significant disadvantage.

Furthermore, this is very shortsighted given that leaders very often choose to move Local Authorities frequently and it is not inconceivable, particularly in South Wales, for aspiring headteachers from Cardiff or Newport, where there might not be such a demand for headteachers, could apply for roles in Blaenau Gwent, Torfaen, Powys and as far afield as Carmarthenshire and Pembrokeshire who may have significant challenges in recruitment.

While the government may say that a significant amount of middle leaders do not apply for headship, therefore there are people in the supply chain, the question of why they do not wish to be headteachers needs to be asked. The answer they given NAHT is down to workload, pay and the impact leadership has on the mental health and wellbeing of leaders.

If we want those with NPQH to move into senior leadership, we must address those key barriers.

Protected leave for school leaders

NAHT has consistently advocated for the School Teacher Pay and Conditions (Wales) Document to have a provision for protected leave for school leaders.

There is no provision for school leaders to have any non-contact time with school, unlike some of the protections afforded to teachers under the 1265 protected time provision.

The lack of such provision for leaders results in high levels of burn-out, with leaders being on call at weekends and during breaks. We know this has an impact on retention and will also have implications for those looking to step into leadership positions and step away from the protection of 1265.

We asked members whether they would support or oppose a proposal for an amount of guaranteed protected leave for school leaders.

Overall, 92% of NAHT Cymru members in Wales would support (either strongly support, or support) this proposal.

69% of members stated they would strongly support a proposal for an amount of guaranteed protected leave for school leaders.

Only 1% stated they would oppose this (strongly or otherwise), but 7% did report that they were not sure or didn't know.

Whilst members are looking for action to deal with what has become a workload and wellbeing crisis for school leaders, they do not believe this is a simple issue and must be dealt with nuance, understanding and respect for the existing terms and conditions of school leaders.

Firstly, members highlighted to us that the introduction of protected leave would not, of itself, reduce workload, which would remain the same and still have to be performed at a later date. A significant effort to reduce school leader workload would therefore be key to improving the wellbeing of members, alongside an opportunity for school leaders to fully disconnect.

Members expressed concerns about staff cover and the funding for this to be done. In many cases, members stated there are insufficient staff to take over key duties. Budget constraints mean that leadership teams are small, making it difficult to delegate responsibilities. Members further reported that proper funding would be required to ensure cover is available, yet school budgets are already overstretched. Without funding, the policy would be unworkable.

Leaders were also concerned with where the line would be for safeguarding and emergencies. Head teachers remain accountable for safeguarding within school at all times. Unexpected incidents such as child protection issues, emergencies, or urgent building maintenance often require their direct involvement.

Most importantly, members expressly stated that an additional condition or protected leave cannot undermine existing rights to holiday, free time and the right to disconnect from work. It must be clear in any policy that this would not mean head teachers and school leaders are available at all other times outside of this time period.

Finally, members report that councils, contractors and other agencies expect headteachers to be available 24/7, including holidays. This lies in what our members feel is a public

misunderstanding about a school leaders role and level of workload, with many assuming that “teachers get long breaks”.

We therefore believe that a condition for some kind of protective leave therefore would need to include a named authority figure to take responsibility. It must be accompanied by structural changes to funding, a cultural shift in expectations from councils, contractors and other agencies and better funding for schools.