

NAO Podcast on Retaining and developing the teaching workforce

Hello and welcome to the NAO podcast.

In March 2016, the Department for Education set out its ambition to build on and extend its reforms to achieve educational excellence everywhere. Having enough high quality teachers underpins this ambition.

The NAO has just published a report that assesses the progress the Department, in conjunction with the education sector, has made to improve the quality of the teaching workforce and teacher retention, and to encourage trained ex-teachers to re-enter the workforce. This work follows on from the NAO report [Training new teachers](#), published in February 2016, which set out the Department's progress in ensuring the supply and quality of new teachers. I'm joined by Mark Parrett the Audit Manager who worked on the report. Thank you for joining us Mark.

1. Are teachers leaving early?

Well, our report looks at retention in the state funded sector in state funded schools, and we found teachers are increasingly leaving state-funded schools before they reach retirement.

The number of qualified teachers retiring fell by 1.5 percentage points between 2011 and 2016, but the number leaving for other reasons increased by just over 2 percentage points over the same period. So this meant that nearly 35,000 teachers left before retirement in 2016.

This does mean that there is a pool of trained teachers who potentially could be attracted back to the professions. The number returning has been increasing in recent years to around 14,000 in 2016.

2. Why are they leaving?

We found that the Department and the schools sector don't have enough information about why an increasing number of teachers are leaving before retirement. The Department has done a survey this year and the results are expected soon. But the evidence indicates that there are two phases in their career when teachers are most likely to leave: That's within a few years of qualifying, and then as they approach retirement.

There is, however, reasonable consensus that workload is a significant reason why teachers leave the profession. In our survey of school leaders found that workload was the most important of the factors listed: 67% of respondents reported that workload is a barrier to retention.

The National Foundation for Educational Research reported in November 2015 that just over half of teachers who leave remain within the schools sector. For example, they may become teaching assistants or take up a non-teaching role in a school.

3. Are there any areas that are particularly good or bad at retaining teachers?

Since 2010, the number of teachers in state-funded schools has grown as more teachers have joined the workforce than have left. Overall, the workforce increased by over 15,500 between 2010 and 2016. That's an increase of around 3.5%. However, what we found was a significant growth in the number of primary school teachers actually masks a fall in the number of secondary school teachers

So the number of teachers in primary and nursery schools increased by 26,000, that's about 13% over that period. Whereas the number of teachers in secondary school fell by 10,000, that's nearly 5% between 2010 and 2016.

4. How is this affecting education?

What we found is that schools are finding it increasingly difficult to fill posts with the quality of teachers they need, which may have implications for the quality of education. So the number of teacher vacancies has increased, but it is low as a proportion of the total workforce. What we found in our survey found that schools they only filled around half of their vacant posts during 2015/16 with qualified teachers with the experience and expertise required. Schools generally filled the remainder with less experienced teachers, or with teachers with different subject specialisms. However, in around one-tenth of cases, schools did not fill the vacancy at all.

In terms of improving the quality of teachers, the available data suggest that teachers are undertaking relatively low levels of training and development, with schools reporting that time and cost are quite significant barriers to improving teacher quality. Unlike many other professions, teaching does not set and regulate continuing professional development requirements.

5. Is the government doing anything about it?

The Department for Education considers that it can influence retention through national interventions on workload, pay and pupil behavior and has a number of programmes aimed at improving retention and indeed, the quality of teachers.

The Department's interventions to support the existing teaching workforce have been relatively small scale.

We estimate that the Department spent some £36 million in 2016-17 on its various programmes.

This included £91,000 on workload and pupil behavior interventions, and around £34 million in 2016-17 on programmes aimed at improving teacher quality. It plans to increase spending significantly to around £70 million on average each year between 2017-18 and 2019-20, including on new programmes such as the Teaching and Leadership Innovation Fund.

These amounts are relatively small compared with the £555 million that central government spent on training and supporting new teachers in 2013/14, and which we reported on last year.

The Department has limited evidence that its initiatives to retain and develop the teaching workforce are making a difference.

Our report recognizes though, the importance of the establishment of a Chartered College of Teaching which the Department is helping to support. In contrast to other professions, such as accountancy, law and medicine, teachers have lacked an independent professional body to support them in their work and the establishment of the Chartered College of Teaching is an important development. The college opened in January 2017. The Department is providing funding of up to £5 million over four years to support that.

6. What do you recommend?

We've made a number of recommendations in our report, aimed at helping to support and improve the quality of the teaching profession.

Firstly we said the Department should set out, and communicate to schools and other bodies in the sector, its approach to improving teacher retention, deployment and quality. This should include: details of its various programmes and the funding available; what outcomes it is aiming to achieve and by when, and how progress will be measured; and its assessment of how schools can retain and develop their teachers at the same time as making significant workforce efficiency savings.

Another recommendation we made is that the Department should work with the schools sector to understand why more teachers are leaving before retirement and how to attract more former teachers back to the profession. It should, for example, work with the sector on how to implement flexible working or provide refresher training to former teachers looking to return.

The Department should work with, and support, the Chartered College of Teaching, teaching schools and others in the schools sector to develop clearer expectations for teachers' continuing professional development.

Thank you for joining us Mark

If you would like to find out more about this report, the full report and an executive summary are available on our website, www.nao.org.uk. Or you can follow us on twitter @NAOorguk or on Facebook www.facebook.com/NAOorguk/