



Teacher recruitment and career intentions during the COVID-19 pandemic



*A report for The Gatsby Foundation
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Teachertapp



Executive summary

Teacher recruitment is highly seasonal, with most resignation and hiring activity occurring in the months of March, April and May. Combining data from the Teacher Tapp panel survey and SchoolDash job advertisement analysis, this report shows that **teacher recruitment has been depressed throughout the 2020 and 2021 recruitment rounds, particularly in secondary schools.**

The 2021 recruitment season appeared to return to more normal activity in the primary phase, but with no 'bounce' to account for the missing promotions and job moves in 2020. The **market for school technicians currently seems to be more buoyant** than ever before, more closely reflecting current activity in other parts of the labour market.

Fewer teacher job moves bring the advantage of **greater stability**. This year, 53% of secondary teachers said there had been no resignations in their subject department, compared to 41% in a pre-pandemic year.

It appears to be a **buyer's market for teachers**, with many senior leaders saying they have more applicants for jobs than normal. There are signs that teachers remain unwilling or unable to consider moves to other types of jobs outside teaching. They are currently more likely to report they feel they will be teaching in 3 years' time and are less likely to be considering a move to teach overseas.

Schools in disadvantaged areas benefit disproportionately from this greater teacher supply, since they were the schools that previously found it most difficult to fill their posts. In 2019, 37% of schools in the highest quartile for free-school meals (FSM) said they were not confident in filling their job vacancies with suitable candidates, versus 27% of the most affluent state schools. In 2021, these figures showed a much smaller gap with 20% of high FSM schools reporting concern about filling posts, versus 17% in low FSM state schools.

Headteachers are clearly experiencing very high levels of stress and burnout during the pandemic, with one third reporting sustained feelings of burnout as early as mid-October (versus one fifth in 2019). However, greater numbers than normal have remained in their post throughout the pandemic and **the number of heads who say they are still likely to be in teaching in 3 years' time remains at or above pre-pandemic levels**. This does not mean that they are happy - greater numbers than ever say they would leave if they could find a job that matches their current salary. This serves as a reminder that crises in teacher retention only manifest themselves if teachers both have a desire to leave, and a place to go which provides them with sufficient income.

Depression in number of secondary school job adverts continues

Recruitment of teachers by schools in England is highly seasonal, peaking in March-May since those who wish to join a new school from September must usually give notice by 31st May. However, the 2020 and 2021 recruiting seasons have been dramatically affected by lockdowns and school closures associated with the COVID-19 pandemic. SchoolDash has been monitoring adverts placed by secondary schools for several years, so we are able to estimate the impact of school closures on recruiting activity.

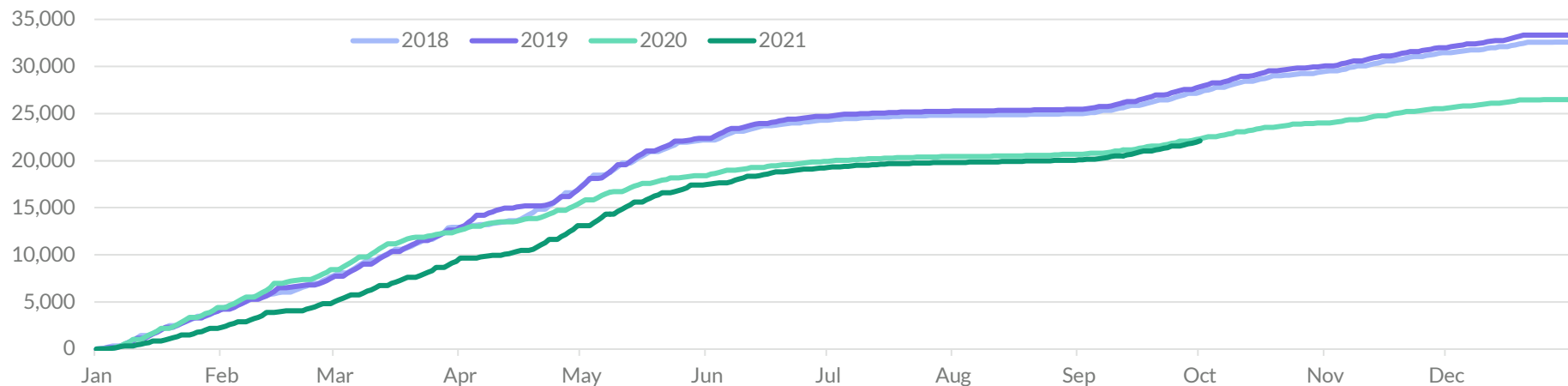
From March 2020 onwards, the number of teacher recruitment adverts posted by schools fell well below those seen in pre-pandemic years. By the end of August 2020, they were about 4,500 (14%) lower than might otherwise have been expected for that academic year.

The 2020-2021 school year showed an even bigger aggregate fall of more than 7,000 adverts (22%). So far, activity in the current 2021-2022 academic year is following more or less the same lower trajectory.

During 2020-2021, reductions of more than 10% were seen in every subject area, but English (31%; 1,400 adverts), maths (27%; 1,300 adverts) and science (25%; 1,600 adverts) showed the largest declines.

It is therefore clear that the secondary teacher recruitment market in England remains deeply affected by the pandemic even as schools and the rest of society open up.

Annual cumulative secondary school job adverts

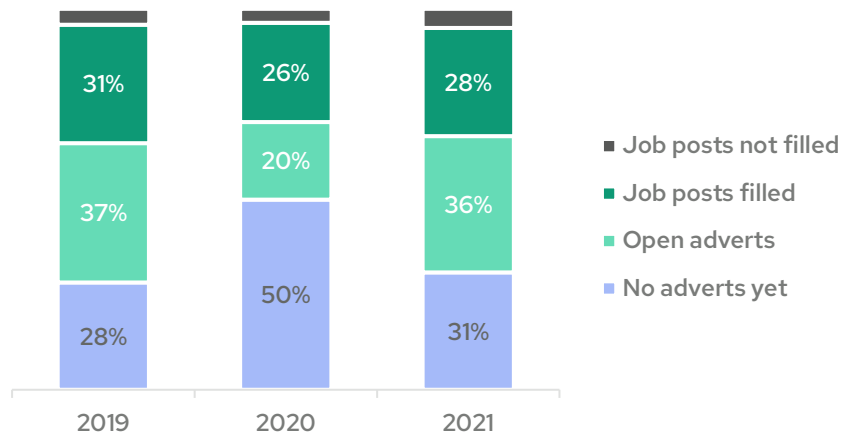


Primary school advertisement rates back to normal levels

SchoolDash secondary school job advert data mirrors survey responses about job vacancies given by Teacher Tapp panellists across all school phases. We asked teachers about current teacher recruitment at their school in mid-May during 2019, 2020 and 2021. Just 5% of senior leaders said recruitment was disrupted in 2021, versus 25% when asked in April 2020. Lack of management time appears to be the greatest continuing barrier to allowing normal recruitment to proceed.

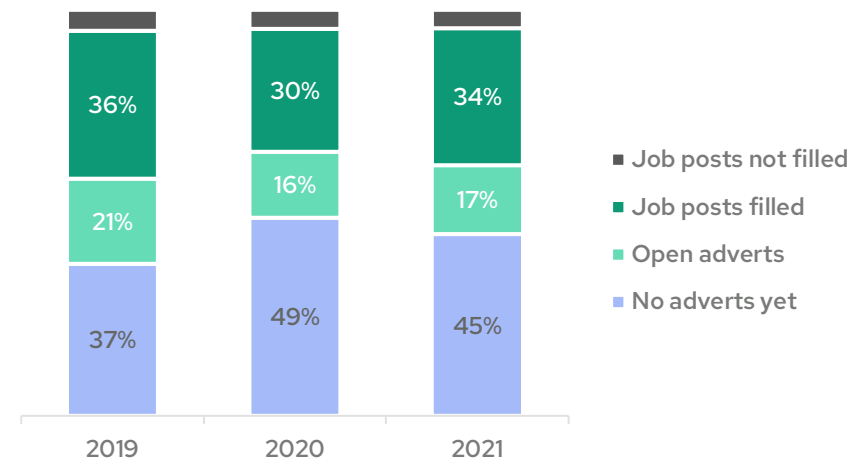
Primary schools are small enough to reliably ask teachers about resignations and advertisements across their entire school. We see that the proportion advertising a teaching role this year has risen back to normal levels of about 7-in-10 primaries (compared to just 5-in-10 during 2020).

Primary schools releasing and filling normal levels of adverts



Secondary schools are too large to ask teachers about their whole school, so we ask them about their department or faculty. The proportion of teachers who say their department has advertised this season does not seem to have quite returned to normal 2019 levels. 45% of teachers said there were no adverts in their subject department by mid-May this year, which is a little lower than the 49% who reported this during the 2020 recruitment season but higher than the 37% who said the same in 2019.

Secondary school departments saw a less pronounced fall in adverts



Greater number of job adverts for lab technicians

SchoolDash also collects information about the number of adverts for art, science, technology and other technicians posted by secondary schools. During the 2020 pandemic year, there was a sharp fall in the number of adverts for these positions.

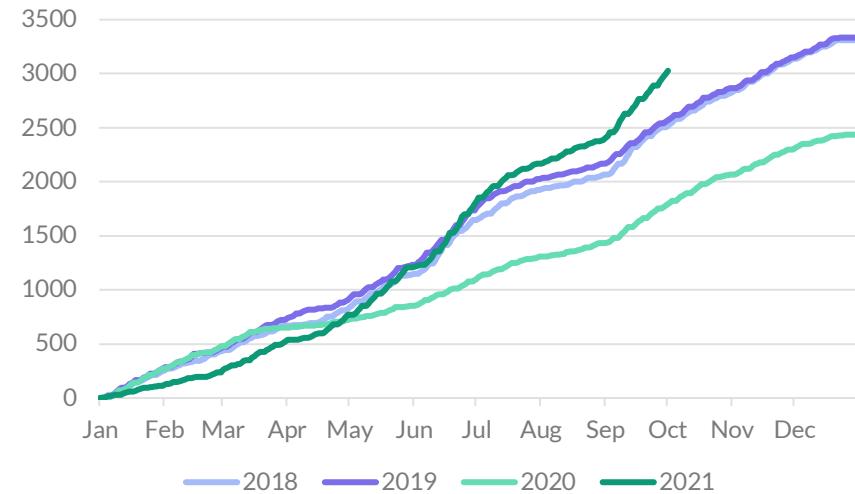
There are at least two reasons why this may have happened. There could have been fewer technicians leaving their roles due to disruption in the wider job market. In addition, the need for school technicians may have fallen during the time when schools reduced student movements and sharing of equipment.

However, since early summer 2021 there has been a strong recovery in the number of technician job adverts, especially in subjects such as Computing and Design and Technology. Indeed, adverts have exceeded pre-pandemic levels, mirroring demand for workers that we see in other parts of the economy.

It seems likely that schools are competing with other sectors for these types of workers, and it is possible that a real shortage of technicians emerges as wages rise for alternative job opportunities.

That said, we currently know relatively little about what the career options or intentions of school technicians are.

Annual cumulative number of technician job adverts

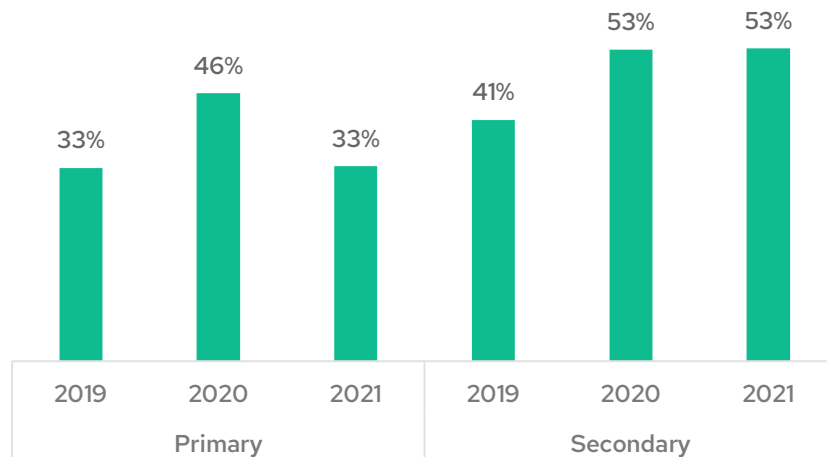


Greater stability in teacher appointments continues

Most teachers remain in post from one year to the next, but the COVID-19 pandemic has greatly affected the number who have, for whatever reason, decided to do this. One upside is that schools have experienced greater stability in their staffing.

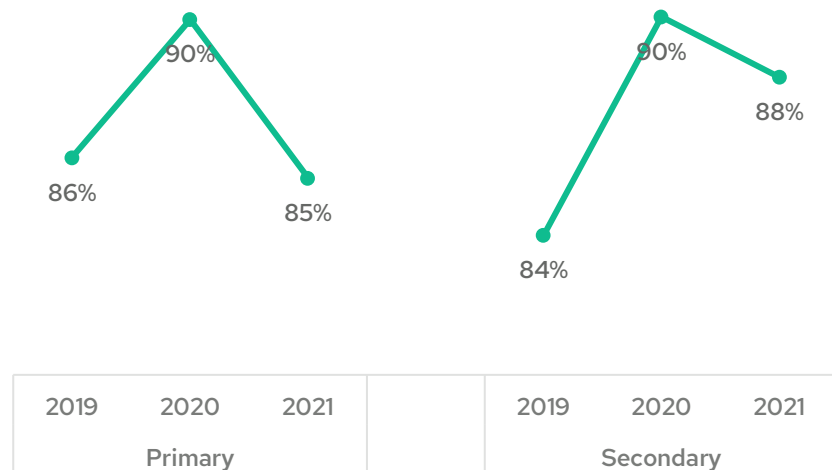
In secondary schools, lower teacher turnover has persisted in 2021. 53% of teachers reported that no teacher had resigned in their subject department this year, compared to 41% in the pre-pandemic 2019. In primary schools, staff movements appear to have resumed at more normal levels, with 33% saying that no teacher has resigned in their school, compared to 46% in 2020 during the height of the pandemic disruption.

Proportion reporting that no teacher has resigned in their school (primary) or department (secondary)



Similarly, the proportion of primary teachers who said they were staying in their existing school in summer 2021 returned to pre-pandemic levels of 85%. However, greater stability persists in the secondary sector where 88% of secondary teachers said they were staying put, compared to 84% in 2019.

Proportion staying in their existing school for the next academic year



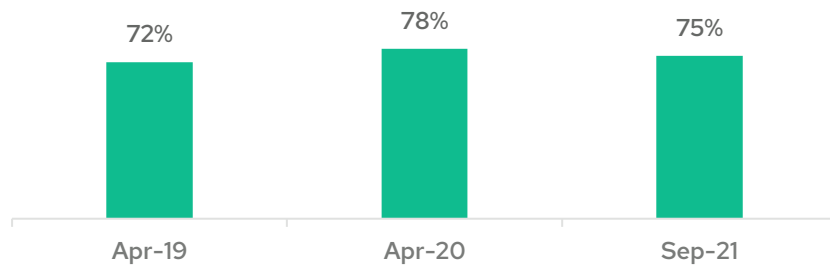
Still a buyer's market?

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought considerably uncertainty to people's lives across the country, and so whilst it has been difficult at times for the teaching profession, it is also understandable that teachers want to remain in secure employment during this period.

Senior leaders report that it has been easier than normal to recruit suitably qualified staff. In May 2021, 43% of senior leaders who had issued job adverts said they had more applicants than in a normal year, versus 25% saying they had fewer. Similarly, the proportion of senior leaders who expressed concern that they would not be able to fill all vacant posts with a suitably qualified candidate fell from 30% in 2019 down to 18% in 2021.

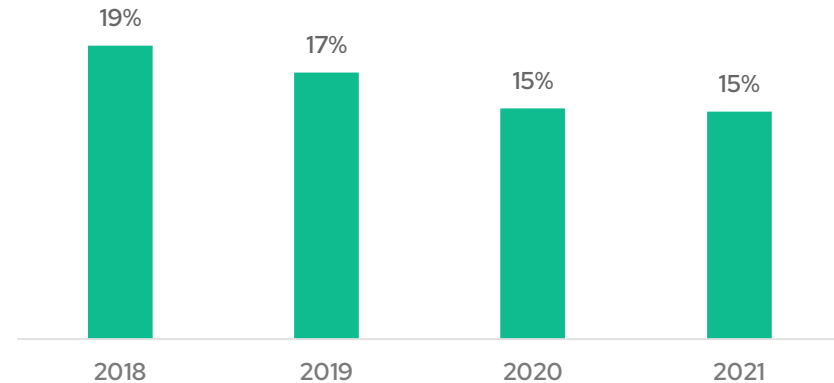
During the height of the initial lockdown, 78% of teachers said they thought they would remain in the profession for at least 3 years, up from 72% in 'normal' times. Whilst this figure has fallen back to 75%, it is still higher than the 2019 figure.

Proportion who feel 'likely' to still be teaching in 3 years' time



We know from other surveys that teachers often leave to work in alternative education-related professions or to teach overseas. Some other jobs in the sector, such as involvement in professional development or tuition, often involve self-employment or considerable job insecurity. Moreover, fewer teachers than normal say they are considering teaching in an overseas school in the next few years.

Slight fall in teachers actively looking to teach overseas in the next 5 years



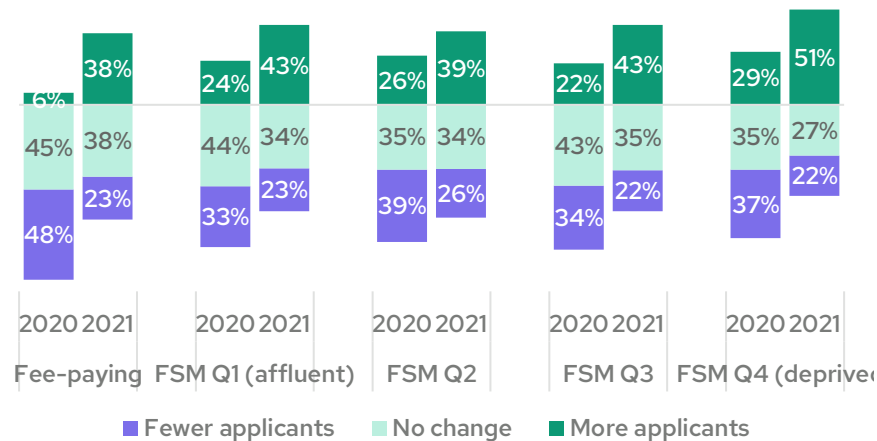
Overall, this analysis is an important reminder that, regardless of wellbeing or happiness, most teachers can only leave the profession if they have an alternative job opportunity.

More disadvantaged schools benefit most from greater supply of teachers

In normal years, research has shown that schools with high proportions of pupils eligible for free school meals tend to experience higher teacher turnover and find it more difficult to recruit suitably qualified teachers.

In May 2020 and 2021, we asked senior leaders whether response rates for job adverts were higher or lower than normal. In 2020, it was clear that applicant rates were down, with just 12% saying they had more applicants than normal, versus 35% who said they had fewer applicants than in a normal year. However, in 2021, the position is entirely reversed, with 43% saying they had more applicants than in a normal year, versus 25% saying they had less.

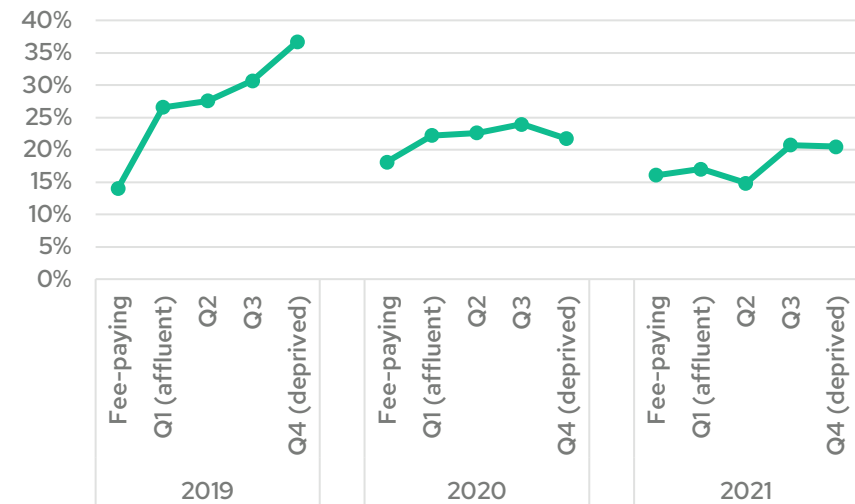
Most leaders say they have had fewer job applicants than normal for roles



While no school leader will be unhappy to have large numbers of applicants for jobs, this disproportionately benefits the schools who previously found it most difficult to appoint suitably qualified candidates.

Back in May 2019, 37% of teachers in the most disadvantaged schools felt uncertain about whether their outstanding job adverts would be filled. In 2020 and 2021, this year the figure for the same schools has fallen to just 23% and 20%, respectively.

Unconfident they can fill vacant job posts

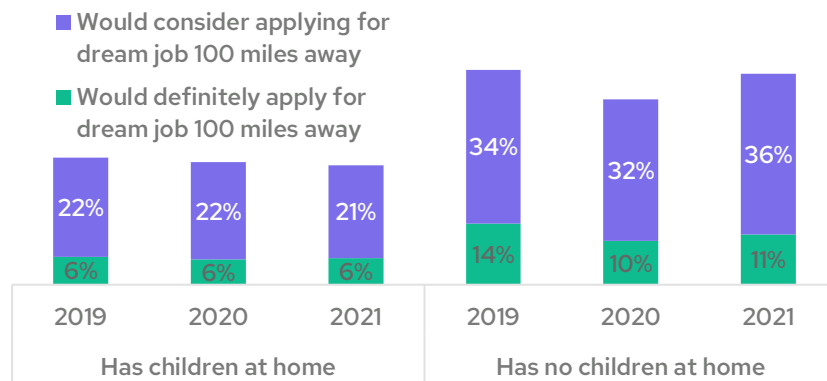


Teachers once again willing to consider house moves for work

Though most school moves tend to be local, the teacher labour market always relies on some teachers moving to a new house to take up more distant career opportunities. During the initial stages of the pandemic, teachers were particularly unwilling to move to a new house for a new job.

It seems that these declines in willingness to consider distant house moves have reversed. We asked teachers whether they would be willing to apply for a dream job 100 miles away in May 2019, 2020 and 2021. Throughout this period there was no change in response for those teachers with children. However, for those without children the figure fell from a pre-pandemic level of 48% considering a move down to 42% at the height of the pandemic in 2020, before returning to 47% in 2021.

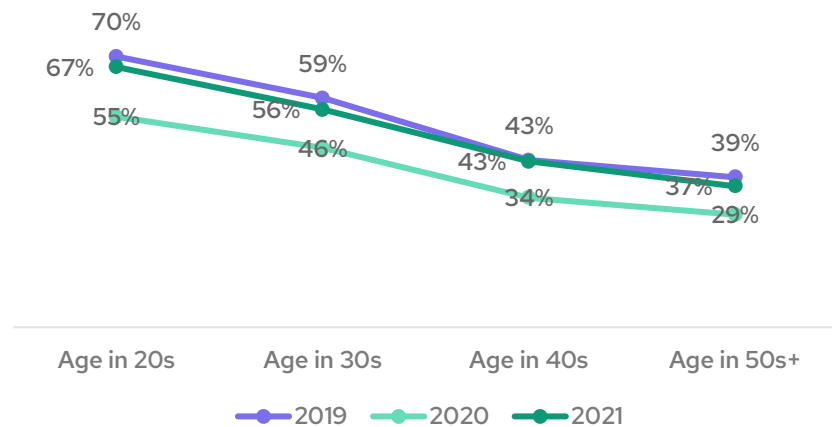
Teachers without children at home have declined in their willingness to move house for a dream job



We also asked a slightly different question to find out whether teachers would be willing to move 100 miles to a school with shortages in exchange for a £50,000 salary rise. There were large falls in teachers willing to consider this during the early stages of the pandemic, particularly amongst those in their twenties, who fell in their willingness from 70% down to 55% this year. However, by 2021 willingness to move has returned to pre-pandemic levels.

Indeed, the proportion of those in their twenties willing to consider a move for £10,000 or less is actually higher than pre-pandemic levels (31% in 2021 versus 25% in 2019). This may reflect the relatively scarce job opportunities in the teacher labour market at present.

Large fall in proportion of teachers who would happily move 100 miles in exchange for a £50,000 pay rise

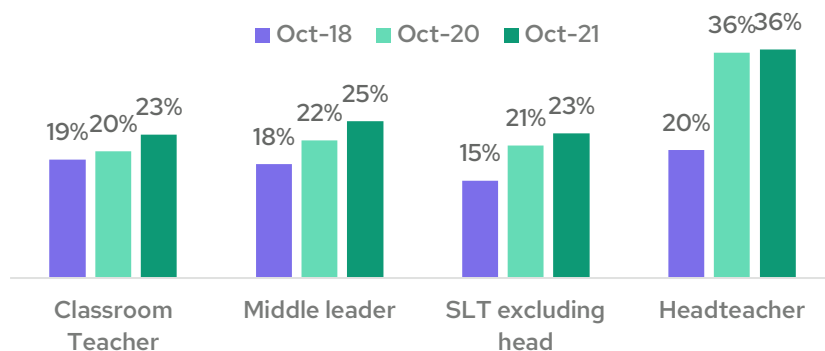


Will there be a headteacher shortage?

There is no doubt that the pandemic has been particularly difficult for headteachers, who have shouldered the burden of making complex daily decisions about how to keep education on track for their students. Other Teacher Tapp surveys show they have experienced very high levels of work-related anxiety – more so than any other teachers.

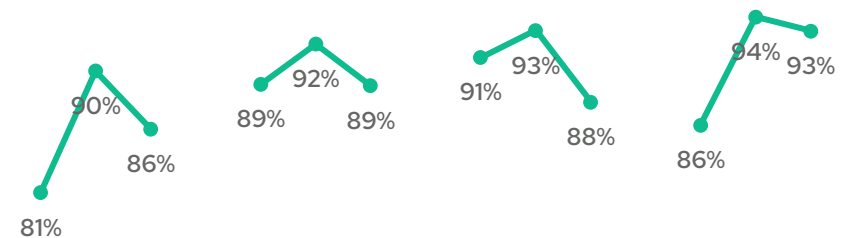
We asked teachers about their levels of burnout in October 2018 and repeated the question on the same date during the pandemic in 2020 and 2021. In a normal teaching year, the proportions who say they are feeling sustained burnout do not tend to vary a great deal by job role. However, this has markedly changed during the pandemic, where over a third of heads say they are feeling sustained burnout, even this early in the academic year.

Proportion feeling sustained burnout in October 2018, 2020 and 2021



It is therefore understandable some predict an exodus of headteachers from the profession. However, much evidence for these predicted exits comes from non-longitudinal and non-representative surveys. Our surveys show a more muted situation. So far, in summer 2020 and 2021 greater numbers of headteachers remained at their school than normal.

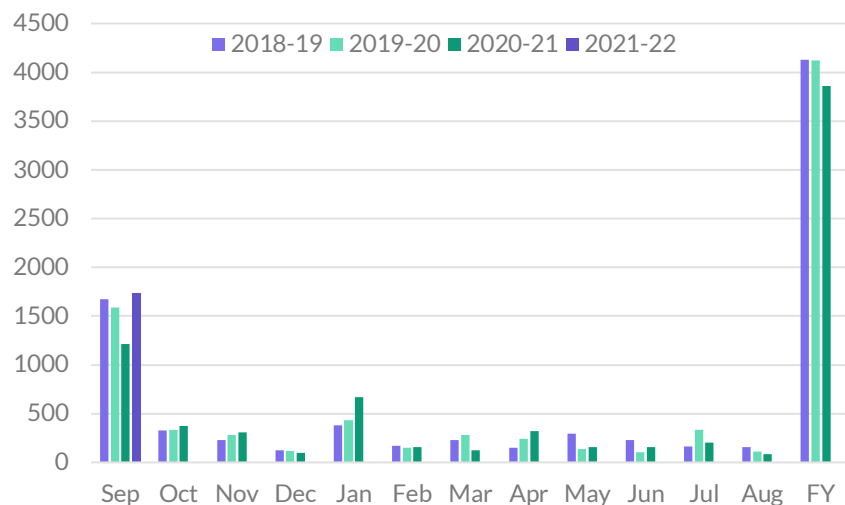
Proportion of teachers remaining in their existing school for next academic year



2019	2020	2021
Classroom Teacher		
Middle leader		
SLT excluding head		
Headteacher		

Similarly, SchoolDash analysis of changes in headteacher name in DfE databases shows that the lower number of headteacher movements during the pandemic have rebounded only modestly. Although there seem to be greater numbers of record changes at non-standard times of the year such as January and April, the number recording a change in head in September is still about the same as in pre-pandemic years.

Name of headteacher changed on DfE records, by month



Signs of an imminent exodus of heads from the profession, compared to normal years, seem to be quite muted. 70% of heads currently feel they are likely to still be in teaching in 3 years' time, which is slightly higher than pre-pandemic levels.

Indeed, teachers at more junior levels of seniority report a greater likelihood of remaining in teaching compared to pre-pandemic

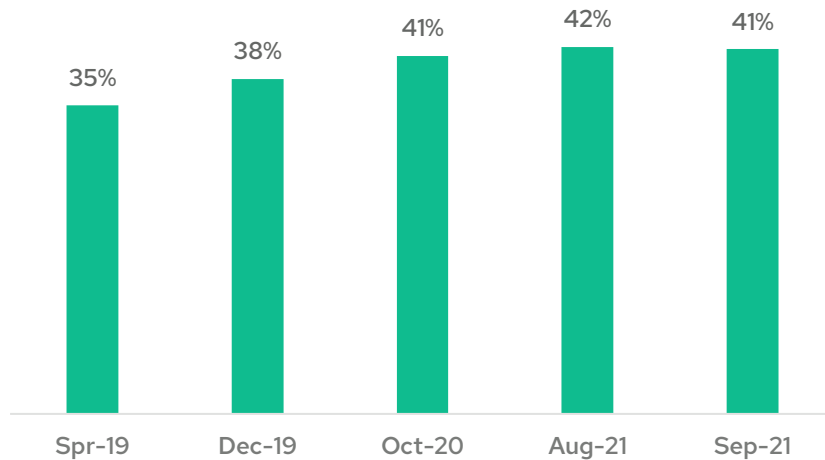
levels, presumably because it offers job security in uncertain times. This is an important reminder that teacher movements are driven not only by job satisfaction, but also by the availability of other career options.

Proportion who feel 'likely' to still be teaching in 3 years' time



Some life and career opportunities are still partially closed to experienced headteachers. There are restricted opportunities to travel or work in another country. Moreover, the market for professional development and training has been severely disrupted. We see larger numbers of heads who agree that they would leave their job if they could find another that could match their salary.

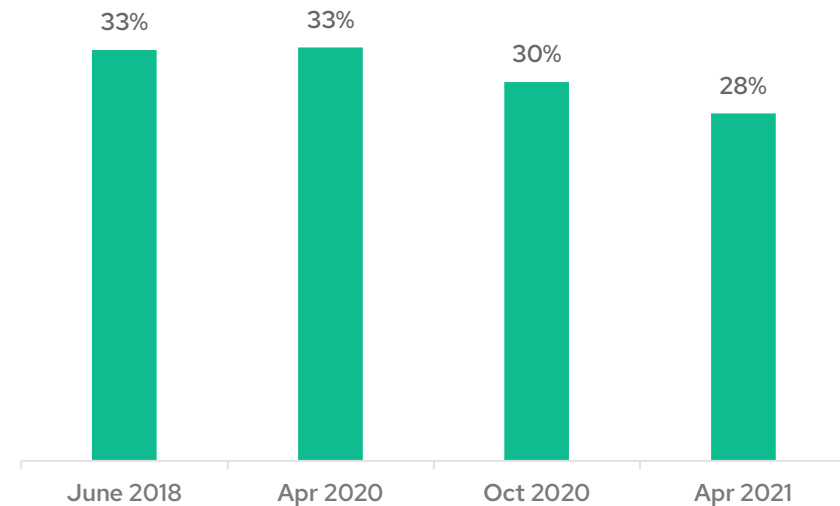
Proportion of heads who would leave their job if they could find another that matches their current salary



All this suggests that, whilst headteachers may be tired and burnt-out through the stress of running a school during a pandemic, there are not yet any strong signals that they will be handing in their resignations in much greater numbers than normal. However, one reason for this is that non-headship employment opportunities are currently restricted. If travel and employment opportunities increase soon, then there is a significant risk that this unhappiness will translate into resignations.

If headteacher vacancies rise, then how easily they are filled will depend on the willingness of the existing pool of teachers to apply for these roles. In the pre-pandemic period, we typically found that one-in-three teachers said they would like to be a headteacher themselves one day. This has now fallen to 28%, which is perhaps not as much of a decline as some might have expected.

Proportion of teachers (excl heads) who would like to be a headteacher themselves one day



Accompanying blog post

For further details on our analysis of teacher and technician adverts, as well as headteacher appointments, see the accompanying blog post on SchoolDash.com: <https://www.schooldash.com/blog-2110.html#20211021>

Notes on data and methodology

The SchoolDash job advertisements

The websites of all secondary schools, sixth-form colleges and further-education colleges in England were indexed each weekday night and compared to the previous day in order to detect new advertised teaching positions, excluding trainee positions. This process does not capture all relevant vacancies because: (a) not all positions are advertised on school websites, (b) even when they are, they are not necessarily presented in a way that can be automatically indexed, and (c) websites are sometimes unresponsive or otherwise unavailable. For this reason, the data presented should be thought of as being based not on a comprehensive list of all vacancies but on a subset. However, positions were detected for well over 90% of schools and these are broadly representative of the overall population of schools.

The Teacher Tapp panel

The Teacher Tapp survey panel comprises teachers across the state and private sectors in England who download a mobile app, provide valid teacher credentials and allow it to notify them of new questions at 3:30pm. Teachers are recruited to panel via social and traditional media, promotion at CPD events, and via word of mouth in schools. All questions asked are multiple and single response questions.

Calculation of Teacher Tapp panel weights

We apply post-stratification weights to the Teacher Tapp panel responses to ensure they reflect the demographic characteristics of teachers in England, using the following procedure:

1. We drop the results of all teachers for whom we cannot find a valid school identifier (Unique Reference Number) for the free text school name and postcode that they give us
2. We only retain teachers if they provide us with valid information on their gender, age and job post since these are the characteristics used for matching against the population in the School Workforce Census and Independent Schools Census
3. We calculate population shares in census data for 48 groupings of teachers who are allocated according to their phase, funding, region, gender, age and job post.

4. We calculate sample shares in the Teacher Tapp valid responses for each question, which yields sample weights as the ratio of population to sample share.

Survey questions asked

Many of the survey questions were crafted in responses to the COVID-19 pandemic, but others had been asked during the Spring 2019 recruitment season, thereby giving a one-year prior comparison point.

Survey question	Target	Date	Responses
What do you expect to be doing after next September?		01/06/2019	3225
		01/06/2020	7268
		01/06/2021	6592
Do you expect to be a teacher in three years' time?		18/04/2019	3225
		10/04/2020	6939
		20/09/2021	5715
Would you like to be a headteacher yourself one day?		12/06/2018	2626
		05/04/2020	6974
		30/10/2020	6190
		05/04/2021	7287
Will you be changing jobs at the end of this year?		09/06/2019	3261
		02/06/2020	7252
		31/05/2021	6604
How much do you agree with the following statement: "I would leave teaching if I could find a job that matches my salary."		13/04/2019	3126
		28/12/2019	5273
		28/10/2020	6427
		16/08/2021	4893
		29/09/2021	6057
How likely are you to teach in a school outside the UK in the next 5 years?		24/10/2018	2361
		09/11/2019	5379

		21/11/2020	5764
		29/09/2021	6057
Your dream job comes up in a school that is 100 miles away. Would you consider applying?		16/05/2019	3118
		29/05/2020	7230
		16/05/2021	6905
Has anyone in your school given notice that they intend to leave this summer? Tick all the apply.	Primary	03/05/2019	1475
		04/05/2020	2449
		05/05/2021	2145
Has anyone in your department/faculty given notice that they intend to leave this summer? Tick all the apply.	Secondary	03/05/2019	2275
		04/05/2020	5862
		05/05/2021	5098
Has your school already advertised for any jobs this season?	Primary	15/05/2019	1100
		16/05/2020	2194
		15/05/2021	2025
Has your department already advertised for any jobs this season?	Secondary	15/05/2019	2117
		16/05/2020	5468
		15/05/2021	4942
Suppose there is a school 100 miles away that is struggling to recruit. What is the minimum salary increment that would need to be offered (over your current pay) for you to consider applying to work there?		17/05/2019	3236
		17/05/2020	7639
		17/05/2021	6661
Think of all the teaching job adverts that your school currently has posted. How likely are you to successfully fill them?		24/05/2019	3223
		25/05/2020	7521
		25/05/2021	6601
Which of these statements [about burnout] most closely applies to you at the moment?		10/10/2018	2244
		10/10/2020	7011
		11/10/2021	6394
Have your school's teacher recruitment plans for this season (i.e. September start) been disrupted by COVID-19? (You may tick more than one response)	SLT	30/03/2020	2438
		30/03/2021	1732
	SLT	23/04/2020	1865

Which of the following statements most closely reflects your school's current teacher recruitment activities?		25/05/2020	1878
		25/04/2021	1542
		25/05/2021	1441
If your school has placed job advertisements recently, do you feel the response is higher or lower than normal?	SLT	18/05/2020	1944
		22/05/2021	1503