



Vacancies and Viruses: Teacher Recruitment in the Time of a Pandemic

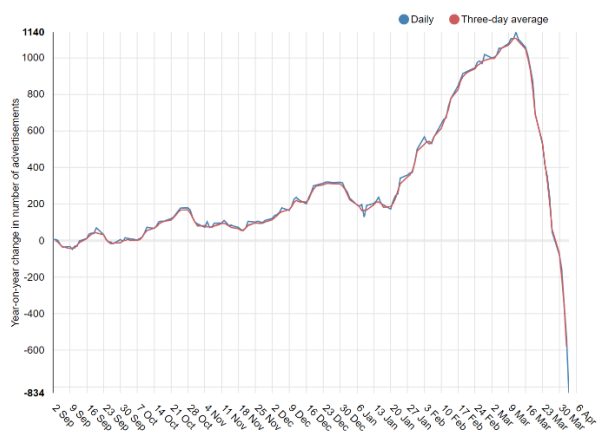
The COVID-19 pandemic is a global threat with wide-reaching consequences for all parts of social and economic life. In response, on 20th March, the UK government took the unprecedented step of closing all schools “until further notice”, with teachers expected to deliver distance learning and run key worker childcare hubs.

Teacher recruitment is highly seasonal as teachers must resign by the end of May in order to begin a job in September. Job adverts usually peak in April, either side of Easter. With teachers and leaders focused on the pandemic disruption, much of this activity has now ceased.

In this research brief, we use two data sources to understand the extent to which the teacher recruitment market has been affected by COVID-19. We use records of job advertisements on secondary school websites to measure changes in recruitment activity overall. We also use a survey of around 7,000 primary and secondary teachers, conducted on Monday 30th March, to enquire as to why recruitment has slowed.

The current state of recruitment

Cumulative year-on-year change in number of secondary-school teacher recruitment advertisements in England



Sources: Secondary school, sixth-form college and FE college websites; SchoolDash analysis.

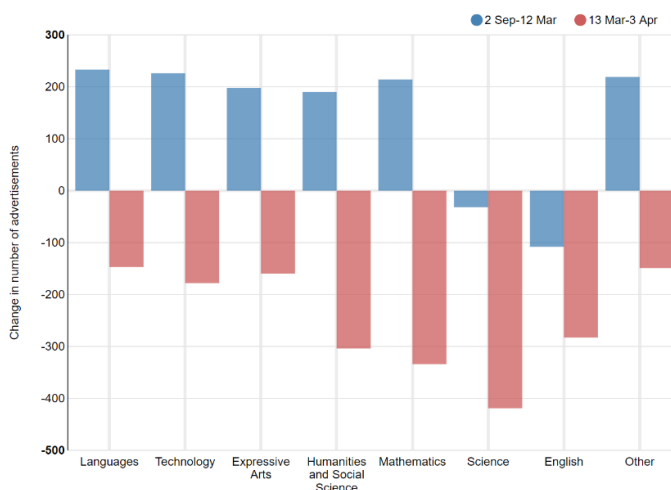
Recruiting activity at English secondary schools, as measured by posts advertised on their websites, fell suddenly in mid-March and is currently down by about 50-60% compared to the same period last year.

This fall took place against a backdrop of an extremely buoyant recruitment market until early March. A month ago, the cumulative number of adverts for the year was *up* by more than 1,000 on last year. It is now *down* by more than 800 on this time last year.

This job adverts data, which is only available for secondary schools, shows that all regions and all types of schools are affected.

All subject areas have fallen substantially, with maths, science and English falling the most. By 3rd April, two weeks after school closures, these year-on-year variances amounted to about 2,000 fewer teacher vacancy advertisements than is usual for this time of year.

Year-on-year change in number of advertisements by subject



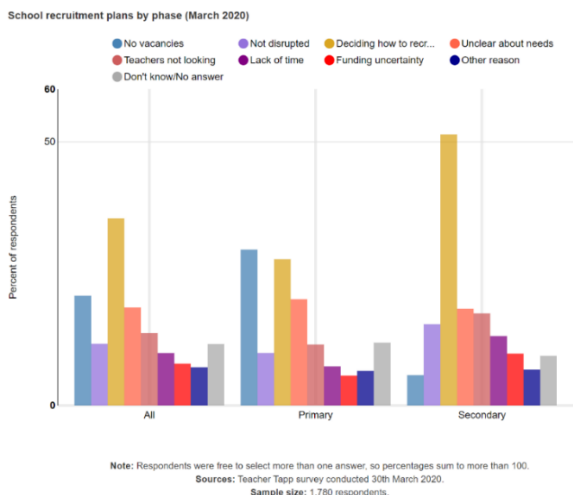
Notes: 'Expressive Arts' include Art, Drama and Music. 'Technology' includes Design & Technology and Computing. 'Humanities and Social Sciences' include Geography, History, Economics, Sociology and Religious Studies. 'Other' subjects include Physical Education, Business and Media.

Sources: School websites; SchoolDash analysis.

Explanations for the decline

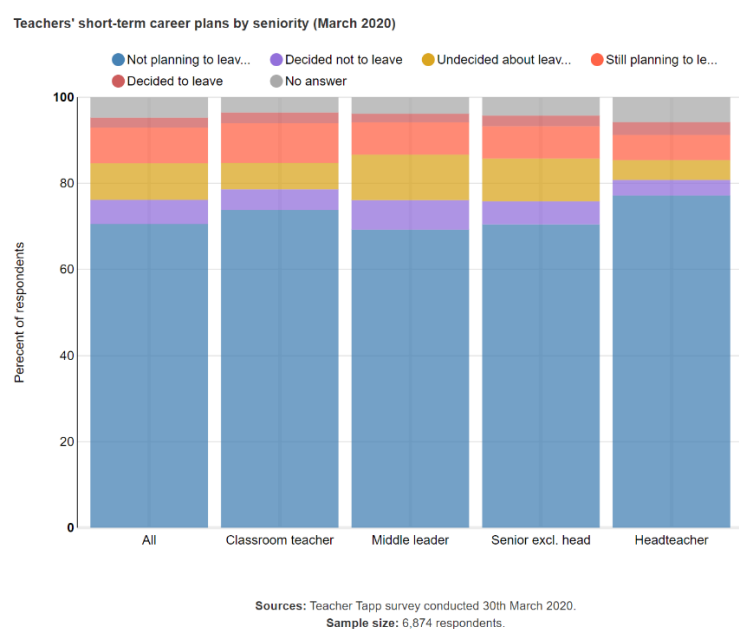
We use a Teacher Tapp survey of school leaders and teachers to explore why the sharp decline has happened, and whether the recruitment market is likely to fully recover by May.

Almost 1,800 school leaders provided explanations for the decline in job advertisements. They showed that, overall, many primary schools had no current recruitment needs. Primary school rolls are currently falling so overall demand for teachers is lower in this sector.



In the secondary sector, half of all school leaders said they had paused recruitment while they decided how to run an online interview system. However, a minority cited other factors, such as lack of time, uncertainty about staffing needs and a belief that teachers would not apply for roles in the current climate. Overall, this suggests that more job adverts could appear soon after Easter, once leaders have had the time to establish a new interview process.

The longer-term dynamics of the teacher recruitment market is likely to be determined by whether teachers decide to actively seek new roles for the next academic year. Economic uncertainty often causes employees to decide to stay put, rather than seek promotions or careers in other sectors. In a typical year, many state school teachers would seek work in UK private schools or international schools, but both these sectors are likely to be experiencing considerable economic shock at present. When searching for UK state school posts, teachers might perceive it to be risky to take on a new appointment at a school they cannot visit.



The Teacher Tapp survey conducted at the end of March corroborates the hypothesis that economic uncertainty will reduce flows of teachers between job posts in England. Many teachers who had previously been considering changing job this summer have since reconsidered. Unless this sentiment changes in the next few weeks, teacher turnover is likely to be lower this year than usual, which will reduce the number of vacancies that schools must fill.

Middle and senior leaders were the most likely to say they were previously thinking of leaving and are now staying (6 and 7%, respectively). They are also the group who are still most undecided (10 and 11%, respectively). It may be that they are reluctant to seek out a senior promotion in a school that they cannot currently visit.

Of course, most schools will still need to recruit at least some teachers to cover the 8% still planning to leave their post. Whilst they may find it harder to recruit teachers currently in state school posts in England, economic uncertainty means they may have a greater selection of teachers who wish to return from overseas positions or who have completed their training and now do not wish to take a break before starting work.

Further research

Economic uncertainty tends to increase teacher supply. However, the unusual nature of this recruitment period means the spread of vacancies and shortages, and to which schools they will accrue, is harder to gauge. Investigating this market as it unfolds will be critical to ensuring all schools are ready to open after the closures. Areas for future research include:

1. **Teacher movement:** By mid-April, what do revised teacher plans imply for (i) overall teacher supply; (ii) rate of movements between schools? What exactly is discouraging teachers from considering new appointments, and can anything be done to support them? Are newly qualified teachers and those joining the Teach First programme likely to be able to find appointments?
2. **Sub-market impact:** Is the decline in between-school moves affecting some schools more than others? Is it likely to produce shortages for particular job roles (e.g. senior posts) or in particular subjects?
3. **School leader opinions:** Secondary leaders are particularly trying to figure out how to do recruitment under social distancing. What are they concerned about? (Is it watching lessons?) And what could mitigate this? (Are they going to use supply teachers in the interim? Might they move to video interviews?)
4. **Wider economic impacts:** Prior Teacher Tapp research shows that teachers' working preferences can be driven by spousal income. How have teachers' families been affected by the wider economic situation, and is this felt equally in all regions and for teachers of all ages, genders and job roles?

Find out more

A blog post with full details on the data used accompanies this short report brief. It can be found at: <https://www.schooldash.com/blog.html#20200408>

This report has been written by Timo Hannay (timo@schooldash.com), Laura McInerney (laura@teachertapp.co.uk) and Becky Allen (becky@teachertapp.co.uk), with the support of Gatsby Foundation.

About the Gatsby Charitable Foundation

Gatsby is a foundation set up by David Sainsbury to realise his charitable objectives. We focus our support on a limited number of areas: plant science research; neuroscience research; science and engineering education; economic development in Africa; public policy research and advice; the Arts. To read more about its work in Education, please visit: www.gatsby.org.uk/education.